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The Syrian Church in India

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THE SYRIAN CHURCH IN INDIA

BY

A. John George

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts

Division of Graduate Instruction
Butler University
Indianapolis
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PREFACE

I have tried in this thesis to trace the History of the Syrian Church in India from the beginning to the present time. Many friends have pointed out to me the need of writing a thesis giving a connected account of Christianity in India from the time of the Apostle Thomas, who possibly preached the Gospel in India, to the present day. Many books, written by Europeans or Americans mainly, are inclined to treat the subject from a denominational point of view and usually skip over the fourteen centuries that intervened between the advent of the Apostle in India and the arrival of the Portuguese; wherever efforts had been made by them to touch upon this period of Indian Christian History, the authors had shown obvious antipathy towards Indian traditions, especially of Kerala, where the Church the Apostle Thomas founded has flourished to the present day. This is probably due to the authors' lack of familiarity with the traditions of South India.

Born and brought up in a family of Mar Thoma Syrian Christians in Kerala, tracing their origin to the Apostle Thomas, I have had the opportunity of studying the vital traditions of South India. The Syrian Church of South India is one of the most ancient Churches of Christendom and is by far the oldest Christian Community in India.

This thesis is specially concerned with the section of the Church now called Mar Thoma Syrian Church; it has therefore to leave out of consideration the various groups which live apart from that section, once the occasions of separation have been noticed. Thus we shall see

that the Syrian Church had a loose-knit unity until 1653; for the last fifty years of that period under Roman control. Then about half of the Christians became Jacobite in allegiance. The work of the Christian Missionary Society, missionaries in the nineteenth century, led the conversion of a few families to the Anglican faith and the formation of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church. We shall see more about this Church later on in this thesis.

With sincere gratitude I acknowledge the help that has come to me from Dr. McAllister.

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PART I. THE ORIGINS

CHAPTER I

THE HOME OF THE SYRIAN CHRISTIANS

This study is concerned with the Syrian¹ Christian Church in Kerala, the southern part of India, an area of some 15,002 square miles. This area forms the smallest state in India. In the recent general election (February 20, 1967), the Communist front party got the majority, and then once again they came to power in Kerala.² The total population of Kerala is about nineteen million people. The major religions are Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Chris-

¹The name Syrian is given to them not only because their liturgies and Scriptures are in Syriac, but also because they received reinforcements from Syria and Mesopotamia in the early centuries. For purpose of ecclesiastical jurisdiction they were subject to the patriarch of Babylon (as the Nestorian patriarch is called). J. Stewart, Nestorian Missionary Enterprise (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928), p. 102.

²In 1957, general elections brought the Communists to power in the Kerala state. When the Communist government took charge, a large section of the underprivileged people of Kerala felt a sense of greater dignity and importance than before. This awakening of some of the hitherto suppressed sections of the people was a positive factor working for the strengthening of democracy. But the Communist Party and the government often used this new consciousness of dignity and power among the poor people to bring in a spirit of class conflict and this in many cases led to excesses resulting in violent clashes. In the course of the Communist rule in Kerala many felt that the resources and power of the government were to a large extent used for the interest of the Communist Party at the cost of the common good. So in 1959, because of the popular agitation against the Communist government, the central government dismissed them from power. P. V. Devanadan, Christian Participation in Nation Building (Bangalore: The National Christian Council of India, 1960), pp. 28-31.

tianity is stronger in south India than elsewhere in the country although it is only a small minority. It is also much older and includes a certain proportion of persons of wealth and social standing. The largest number, and probably the most enlightened, of the Syrians dwell in Travancore. With Brahmans, Nayars, and other Hindu castes, the Syrian Christians share the picturesque territory of Kerala, and they have from time immemorial claimed to be in point of social precedence next to the Nayars.

The Syrian Church of south India is the oldest of all the Indian churches. Malankarai is the official designation of the Syrian diocese. In political geography the name of Malabar indicates the Malayalam-speaking area in south India which covers the Travancore-Cochin state and includes a part of the bordering state of Madras.

From the Sixteenth Century until the Eighteenth, Europeans used the name of "Malabar" for the Indians dwelling between the eastern and western coasts of southern India,¹ but those Indians living in the area comprising part of the Madras state, together with the whole Travancore-Cochin territory, called themselves (and still do so) Malayales. They speak Malayalam, which is one of the Dravidian languages.

Following the recommendations of the State Reorganization Committee, the political divisions of India have been considerably modified. These modifications have affected Malabar. The state of Kerala was inaugurated on November 1, 1956. It comprises all the Malayalam-speaking regions of the west coast. The name of Kerala - usually interpreted as meaning the "land of coco-nuts" - has been chosen on account of its antiquity and popular appeal. Trivandnem is the capital of Kerala.

¹Cardinal Eugene Tisserant, Eastern Christianity in India (Bombay: Orient Longmans, 1957), p. 1.

The outstanding feature of the landscape is the great waterway which runs from end to end of Kerala. It consists of a series of lakes connected with one another and separated from the sea by a belt of land. The banks are clothed with coconuts and palm trees and are studded with villages.

In the beginning of the Christian era the rulers of Kerala were Nayars who were subjected to the Nambudiris. The Nayars were treated well, and they formed the wealthy class of Malabar while the Nambudiris remained the virtual rulers and sacerdotal hierarchy. Both of the communities lived on cordial terms. However, at the time of Saint Thomas, the Nambudiris were the religious dictators of Malabar and the final authorities on social codes. Notions of caste were stretched to the extreme and Malabar was the most caste-ridden area in India. The distance a Nayar had to keep from a Nambudiri was an arm's length. Some of the outcasts had to keep away from the Nayars and Nambudiris as far as individual notions of pollution dictated.¹

The Syrian churches are prominent objects in the landscape in that they are so much larger than the houses in the villages where they are built. The architecture of the old churches is not very attractive: unadorned structures of brick and plaster, roofed with tiles and dimly lighted services greet the Syrian worshippers. No seats were provided in the church until the Twentieth Century and even now the churches in villages have no seats. All the people sit on the floor for worship services and revival meetings. At the western end of the church is a

¹P. Thomas, Christians and Christianity in India and Pakistan (London: George Allen and Unwin LTD, 1954), pp. 8-9.

gallery, part of which is divided into rooms for the accommodation of the bishop on the occasion of his visits. In one of the side walls - and far away from the chancel - is the baptismal font which consists of a hemispherical basin of hewn stone which is large enough for the baptism of infants by immersion. One unique ceremony of the Syrian Christians is known as "giving the peace" which is performed before the consecration of the elements. The deacon who carried the censer took from it a double handful of the smoke which he smelled, and then appeared to hand it to the priest who received it with both hands. Turning to the people he gave it into the hands of two or three of the nearest who put it on their faces and then proceeded to pass it on to the others until it went around the whole congregation.

The local head of the church is the bishop or metropolitan who has priests and deacons under him. In years past the metropolitan not only was the spiritual ruler of his people but also had, within certain limits, jurisdiction over them in civil and criminal affairs.¹

¹This information I received from my grandfather.

CHAPTER II

THE TRADITION OF SAINT THOMAS

The problem of the origins of Christianity in India is very closely connected with the evangelization of India by the Apostle Saint Thomas. While most of Jesus' disciples confined their activities to the Mediterranean region, Thomas chose as his field of labor the distant and little known East with its strange people and strange gods. Thus the origin of Christianity in India is traced to Thomas, the Apostle. This has been the constant tradition of the Syrian Christians of Malabar, and it has been believed in the West also that this apostle's sphere of work was in India. Unfortunately, however, we have no contemporary records to establish the matter beyond doubt.

We know very little about Thomas from the gospels. They do at least supply us with firm contemporary evidence that there really was such a person, and that he was one of those chosen by our Lord as one of his apostles. He was not an intellectual or of the calibre of Saint Paul who had studied at the feet of Gamaliel, but was a Galilean fisherman. Of his mission to India we have similarly no record dating from his own lifetime. As a matter of fact, there is no book or any inscription of the First Century to tell us of this. It is not until the Third Century that the ancient Christian writers begin to mention it. As a result there is much uncertainty about the actual history of Saint Thomas, and it is necessary to inquire what grounds there are for be-

lieving that he went to India and founded the church there.

The Syrian Church in India had held its foundation by Saint Thomas as an article for centuries, and in December, 1952, all Syrian Christians joined in celebration of the nineteen-hundredth anniversary of the Apostle's landing.¹

In this chapter, for the sake of convenience, we shall first consider the local Syrian Christian tradition, and then see what the early Christian writers have to say about the activities of Saint Thomas and the origins of Christianity in India. The chapter ends with the testimony of some modern writers.

The commonly accepted tradition² among the Syrians is as follows: Saint Thomas after visiting Socotra³ landed at Cranganore on the north of Cochin in about A.D. 52. The Apostle first preached his message to the Jews on Malabar. The advent of the long-awaited Messiah must have been welcome news to the sons of Israel living in Malabar in practical isolation. But it was not his own small community that interested the Apostle. Having gotten most of the Jews to accept his momentous message, Thomas boldly preached the gospel to the people of Malabar, and the response was astonishing. Traveling in the coastal region south he planted seven churches in seven places. Maliankara Palayur, Paravur, Gokamangalam, Niranam, Chayan and Quilon are four of the places where Syrian churches still exist.⁴ He further is said to have ordained priests for the church

¹L.W. Brown, The Indian Christians of St. Thomas (Cambridge: The University Press, 1958), p. 43.

²E.M. Philip, The Indian Church of St. Thomas (Nagercoil: L.M.S. Press, 1950), pp. 15-16.

³An island in the Arabian sea off the northeast coast of Africa.

⁴Brown, op.cit., p. 51.

from four Brahman families called Sankarapuri, Pakalamattam, Kalli and Kaliankal.¹

The identification of these seven churches varies from writer to writer, but it is generally accepted as of apostolic foundation. Most of these places are on the Peryar river estuary.

Malinkara, from which the church is often called the Malankara Syrian Church, is the place where Saint Thomas is supposed to have landed. It is an island now, with no church, but the next village is significantly named Pallippuram or "church town." The town Cranganore was very close to Malinkara: it is now silted up with only one old Portuguese tower remaining to show any sign of former greatness. The modern name is Kotunallur.² Quilon shared with Cranganore the distinction of being a famous Christian center and indeed, until land registration was recognized at the beginning of this century, Christians were always described in official documents as belonging either to Cranganore or Quilon.³ The ancient church of Pasavur is said to have been damaged or destroyed by Tippu Sultan. Goka Mangalam is in the same place and still is a Christian center. Niraham church⁴ has been rebuilt, but many stones of Saint Thomas's connection with it are cherished locally. Palayur near Caukkat in Malabar, formerly connected with the sea by a canal and with the site of a former Jewish settlement not far from the church, is still a great pilgrimage center. In the churchyard can be seen images formerly belonging to a Hindu temple, and adjoining it are sacred tanks. The exact whereabouts of the last church, Chayan, is not

¹C.B. Firth, An Introduction to Indian Church History (Mysore: The Wesley Press, 1960), p. 3.

²Brown, op.cit., pp. 53-54.

³Ibid.

⁴I have visited this church many times.

known.

We shall now turn to consider the tradition which places the death of Saint Thomas at Mylapore, near Madras. After establishing these churches he is said to have crossed over to the east coast and to have traveled east from there to Malacca and even to China, winning many for Christ. Finally he returned to Mylapore, now part of the city of Madras. But when he returned he had so much success in his work that the Brahmans of the district were filled with envy and with anger, and in a sudden riot, one of them pierced him with a lance, and he won a martyr's crown.¹ Farguhar thinks there is reason to believe that the Apostle Thomas sailed from Alexandria with Habban, the merchant of King Gundaphar, to the Hindus and reached the king's capital Taxila (in what is now known as Punjab) probably about A.D. 48 or 49, that he left Taxila when the Punjab and its capital were seized by the Indo-Saythian Kushans from China. About A.D. 50, he went to Muziri on the Malabar coast via Socotra, reaching Muziri A.D. 51-52 so tradition asserts.² Farguhar describes Thomas' coming as follows:

We must think of Thomas as carrying on evangelizing work in the island for some three months. Then finally, the month of June arrived, and soon the S. W. Monsoon was blowing hard against the island, and people began to watch for the big vessels from Egypt bound to south India. Two or three ships under full sail, driven hard by the monsoon, sailed past, but the next turned towards the island and entered the harbour. Thomas said goodbye to his Socatra friends and went abroad. In some five or six weeks the coast of Kerala, green with glorious forest, appears ahead, and within a few hours the ship is in the great harbour.³

The date of Saint Thomas' death is given as A. D. 72 and the place of burial as Mylapore, a few miles from Saint Thomas Mount where actual

¹Firth, op.cit., pp. 4-5.

²J. N. Farquhar, The Apostle Thomas in North India (Manchester: University Press, 1926), pp. 19-23.

³J. N. Farquhar, The Apostle Thomas in South India (Manchester: University Press, 1927), pp. 9-10.

martyrdom is stated to have taken place. His remains were, it is claimed, removed from Mylapore to Edessa at a very early date.¹ This was the tradition found among the Christians of Malabar by the Portuguese when they arrived and settled in India in the Sixteenth Century.²

The supposed grave at Mylapore is still on view. It is in the nave of the new Roman Catholic cathedral there completed in A. D. 1896, and is visited by large numbers of pilgrims from different parts of south India and particularly those from the Malabar coast.³

A Malayalam poem compiled by one Maliakkal Thomas towards the close of the Sixteenth century from older works and the oral traditions of Malabar give a graphic account of the martyrdom of the Apostle at Mylapore. The subject matter of the poem is the advent of Saint Thomas and his activities in Malabar and elsewhere. The author says that it is the summary of an ancient work written by a disciple of the Apostle when he claims as his forty-eighth ancestor. The following is a free rendering of that portion of the poem, given in Thomas, which deals with the martyrdom of the saint:

Mar Thoma, who had established the way in several countries and regions of the earth, and whose laws were faithfully followed by the leaders and followers of the communities he had founded, was, in the early hours of the third day of July, 72, going on a journey and happened to pass by Il's Mount in Mylapore. Here stood a temple of Kali, and the priests of the temple, the bitter enemies of the Apostles, furiously issued forth from the temple and stood the saint. "No man," said they, "shall pass this way without worshipping at the shrine; hence come with us and worship the goddess. If you do this, not only shall we let you pass this way unmolested but shall feed you sumptuously on delicacies."

¹Edessa, an ancient city in Mesopotamia, on the site of modern Urfa, Turkey.

²A. E. Medlycott, India and the Apostle Thomas (London: David Nutt, 1905), pp. 132-133.

³John Stewart, The Nestorian Missionary Enterprise (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928), pp. 103-104.

"What?" replied Mar Thomas, "am I to sell my soul for a morsel of rice, and worship the devil? But if you insist I shall do your bidding and you shall see how your goddess will run away from her shrine and the temple itself be destroyed by fire."

"Do not utter blasphemy," cried the priests, and they forced him to go to the temple. As the saints approached the temple, a splendrous light shone forth and Kali ran out of the temple, and the temple itself was consumed by fire. Thereupon, the infuriated priests fell upon Mar Thoma like mad animals. And one of them, taking a long spear, thrust it cruelly into the heart of the Apostle. After doing this evil deed, they ran away from the place for fear of the people. Mar Thomas then knelt on a stone and prayed. Angels on wings carried news of the tragedy to the king and to the worthy Bishop Poullose. The king and the bishop with a great following immediately reached the spot and saw the Apostle in a pool of blood with the fatal wound still fresh and the spear stuck to his side. Bishop Mar Poullose removed the spear, and as they were about to take the Apostle in their car for treatment, Mar Thomas spoke to them in a faint voice: "No treatment is necessary for me now. The day of my great happiness is come." He then spoke to the people who stood near him weeping, and three Malikas¹ before sunset, the great Mar Thoma, alas!, passed away.²

In Malibar the advent, labors and martyrdom of the Apostle constitute a living tradition and the rich folk lore, songs, and dances of Malabar Christians describe in vivid detail the work of the Apostle in South India.

Another account of the tradition is contained in the words of a song sung on soci-religious occasions like marriages. This is called the Thomma Parvam or Thoma's Song and describes "the coming of the way of the Son of God to Kerala."³

¹A Nalika is a time division of Malabar equivalent to twenty-four minutes.

²P. Thomas, Christians and Christianity in India and Pakistan (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1954), pp. 17-18.

³Italian translation of this song published at Rome in 1938 by Fr. Rocca in 'la leggende de s. Tomaso Apostalo,' *Orientalia Christiana*, xxxii, 89, pp. 169 ff; published in Malayalam for the first time in 1916 in Mar Thomma Kristyanikal (The Mar Thoma Christians) by Fr. Bernard, part 1. Zaleski, *The Apostle St. Thomas in India*, gives an account of the song sung in 1912. Mss. of the song are in the Mannanam monastery. T.K. Joseph says that the first known use of the song was by one Vargese of Palayur, in 1892. The song is said to have been composed for use in the Church of Niranam by Thomas Ramban in 1601 who claimed to base it on a prose account handed down for forty-eight generations from his ancestor, Maliyekkal Thomas Ramban. Brown, op.cit., p. 49.

It says that Thomas left Arabia and reached Malankara in December, A. D. 50. Many people became Christians by his preaching. The king also became a Christian and was given the name of Andrew, and his nephew Keppa was ordained as a priest. Thomas later went South and preached the gospel for a year in Quilon, where he baptized fourteen hundred persons and set up a cross for them to worship. Then Thomas went to the territory of the Cala king, where at Mylapore he gave away money paid him by the king to build a palace, and was about to be killed by the angry king, when the king's brother rose from the dead and described the splendid palace built by Thomas for the king in heaven. Thomas then returned to Travancore and visited the churches he had established, and preached the gospel in other places as well. It is said that Saint Thomas won over seventeen thousand souls because of the supernatural virtue which shone in him. An exact account is given of his converts: 6,850 Brahmans, 2,590 Kshatnyas, 8,780 Vaisyas and 4,280 Sudras. Two kings were converted and became metropolitans; seven Namputiri Brahmans, heads of villages, became gunis or bishops and four became monks. According to this tradition Thomas was asked by the Brahmans to worship their god Kali, but he refused, making a sign of the cross. The angry Brahmans stabbed Thomas with a spear so that he died on July 3, 52.¹

Another record of the local tradition is contained in a letter written in Syriac in 1721 by Mar Thomas IV (1688-1728) to a Dutch scholar of Leiden who had asked for some account of the Malabar Church.² The Bishop tells the story of an Indian king who wanted a palace built and sent Habban, his major domo, to Jerusalem in search of a descendant of

¹ Ibid.

² A. Mingana, The Early Spread of Christianity in India (Manchester: University Press, 1926), pp. 48-50.

Solomon's builders. He was met by our Lord who miraculously brought Thomas from Edess by the ministry of an angel and handed him over to Habban. Saint Thomas arrived in India and converted the king and many Indians, giving them baptism and the priesthood, and building seven churches. Then he went to Mylapore, where he was speared to death in A. D. 52 and his body was carried to Edessa.

A certain priest Mathew wrote a Syriac letter in 1725 which mentions the arrival of the Apostle at Malankara from Mylapore, his foundation of the churches and his death at Mylapore.¹

There is, however, other evidence which must be taken into account in any consideration of Mylapore's claim to be the place where Saint Thomas was martyred and buried. Marco Polo, who was in south India in 1288 and again in 1292, found the tomb there, in Malabar, at a certain little town having no great population, with little merchandise, and said it was a place of pilgrimage for both Christians and Muslims. At any rate it was there that certain Portuguese, in 1517, who had come across, saw an old chapel carved with crosses, and were told by a Muslim that it was built over the place where Saint Thomas was buried.²

John of Monte Corvino visited Mylapore at the same time as Marco Polo and spoke of a church of Saint Thomas there. In 1324 Odoric speaks of fifteen houses of Nestorians living beside the church. The Franciscan John Mangarola of Florence spent fourteen months at Quilon, remaining there because of acute dysentery (April, 1348 to August, 1349). He then returned to Europe via Mylapore, Ceylon and the Persian Gulf. He maintained that the Saint Thomas Christians are much more numerous than the

¹Mingana, op.cit., pp. 42-48. The letter is translated by Mingana.

²Firth, p. 4.

Mohammedans. As papal legate, he had received large gifts from the Christians.¹

Nicolas de Conti visited India several times between 1415 and 1438. He said there were thousands of Nestorians living in the city who worshipped the body of Saint Thomas, whereas the other Christians were spread here and there all over India. Conti was the last traveler to leave any account of Christianity in India before the arrival of the Portuguese.² The earliest witness from a shrine of Saint Thomas in this country is a certain Theodore in the Sixth Century, probably a traveling Syrian Christian who told Gregory, Bishop of Tours in France, of a monastery and a fine church in that part of India where the Saint was originally buried, which he professed to have seen himself. Gregory of Tours wrote in A. D. 590.³

Diego Fernandez from Portugal went to Mylapore in 1517, and he visited the tomb of Saint Thomas. He said that the people living there had been afraid to meddle with the tomb, but it was eventually opened and some bones and a lance head were found. These were reverently placed in a coffer and are now venerated in San Thoma Cathedral at Mylapore.⁴

Brown argues that the identification of the Mylapore tomb as the burial place of Saint Thomas the Apostle, and the ascription are of special sanctity to various places in the locality. Saint Thomas's Mount and the Little Mount were entirely the work of the Portuguese. Their known attitude towards the saints and eager desire to find apostolic relics do not induce confidence in their historical judgment or critical examination of

¹Tisserant, Eastern Christianity in India, p. 23.

²Ibid. ³Medlycott, pp. 69-75.

⁴Brown, p. 58.

the facts.¹

In 1547 the movement to make Mylapore a holy place was stirred by the discovery of a stone slab with a cross in bas relief and an incised Pahlavi inscription while foundations were being dug for a larger church on Saint Thomas's Mount. The inscription reads as follows:

In the time of the Lord Jesus, Thomas a man of God was sent by the son of God (whose disciple he was) to these parts to bring the people of the nation to the knowledge of God, and he built there a temple and wrought great miracles and that finally praying he knelt before that cross and was transfixed with a lance by a Brahman; and that that cross remained stained with the blood of the Saint for everlasting remembrance.²

This remarkable effort of course confirmed the faith of the Portuguese as well as many other people in India.

Let us turn now to what the early church outside of India has to say of the activities of Saint Thomas.

The witness of Saint Ephraem.— The earliest author of the Eastern Church is the Deacon Saint Ephraem, the great doctor of the Syrian Church. His writings witness that Saint Thomas went to India. He was a hymn-writer in Syria, and spent the last ten years of his life at Edessa (presently Urfa in Turkey). Edessa claimed to be the resting place of the bones of Saint Thomas brought back from India by a Syrian merchant. An annual festival of Saint Thomas in commemoration of this event was celebrated there on July 3rd, and is still kept in the Syrian churches. Saint Ephraem has compiled several hymns in honor of Saint Thomas in which he sings of the Apostle's preaching of the gospel in India, and of the bringing of his bones to Edessa.³ They

¹Francis Xavier remarks: "There are at San Thoma more than a hundred Portuguese all married; they have a very devout church and all think that the body of the apostle is lying there." *Monumenta Xavierana*, I, p. 387. When the Portuguese first landed at Pulicat near Madras they at once claimed to recognize the site of Saint Thomas's tomb (Luigi Raneinotto in *Gubernatis: Storia dei Viaggiatori italiana*, p. 128). At Vijayanagar, a city not founded until the Thirteenth Century, they said, "Here Saint Thomas preached"; letter of a Venetian traveler to Ser Zuane di Santi written in 1511, *Gubernatis*, p. 382. Quoted by Brown, p. 57.

²Brown, p. 58.

³Medlycott, pp. 18-25.

are too long to be quoted in full, but the last few stanzas are quoted here:

'Blessed art thou, Thomas, the Twin, in thy deeds! twin is thy spiritual power; nor one thy power, nor one thy name:

'But many and signal are they; renowned is thy name among the Apostles.

'From my lowly state thee I haste to sing.

'Blessed art thou, O Light, like the lamp, the sun amidst darkness hath placed; the earth darkened with sacrifices' fumes to illuminate.

'A land of people dark fell to thy lot that these in white robes thou shouldest clothe and cleanse by baptism: a tainted land Thomas has purified.

'Blessed art thou, like unto the solar ray from the great orb; thy grateful dawn India's painful darkness doth dispel.

'Thou the great lamp, one among the Twelve, with oil from the Cross replenished, India's dark night floodeth with light.

'Blessed art thou whom the Great King hath sent, that India to his One-Begotten thou shouldest espouse; above snow and linen white, thou the dark bride didst make fair.

'Blessed art thou, who the unkempt hast adorned, that having become beautiful and radiant, to her Spouse she might advance.

'Blessed art thou, who hast faith in the bride, whom from heathenism, from demons' errors, and from enslavement to sacrifices thou didst rescue.

'Her with saving bath thou cleanest, the sunburnt thou hast made fair, the Cross of Light her darkened shades effacing.

'Blessed art thou, O merchant, a treasure who broughtest where so greatly it was needed; thou the wise man, who to secure the great pearl, of thy riches all else thou givest;

'The finder it enriches and ennobles: indeed thou art the merchant who the world endowest!

'Blessed art thou, O Thrice - Blessed City! that hast acquired this pearl, none greater doth India yield;

'Blessed art thou, worthy to possess the priceless gem! Praise to thee, O Gracious Son, Who thus Thy adorers dost enrich!'

.....

In his several journeys to India,
And thence on his returns,
All riches, which there he found,
Dirt in his eyes he did repute
When to thy (sacred) bones compared.

Neither promised nor hoped for,
One thing more did he (the creator) give.

Lo, in India thy wonders,¹
Everywhere thy festival.

.....

Lo, his Bones, his Passion, his Work proclaim²
His Miracles, him yet alive assert;
His Deeds the rough Indian convinced.
Who dares doubt the truth of his Relics?³

Medlycott gives us the translation of the "Doctrine of the Apostles,"
edited by Cureton, in which Cureton says:

'After the death of the Apostles there were Guides and Rules in the churches, and whatsoever the Apostles had committed to them, and they had received from them, they taught to the multitudes all the time of their lives. They again at their death also committed and delivered to their disciples after them everything which they had received from the Apostles; also what James had written from Jerusalem, and Simon from the city of Rome, and John from Ephesus, and Mark from the great Alexandria, and Andrew from Phrygia, and Luke from Macedonia, and Judas Thomas⁴ from India; that the epistles of an Apostle might be received and read in the churches, in every place, like those Triumphs of their Acts which Luke wrote, are read.'

'India and all its own countries and those bordering on it, even to the farther sea, received the Apostle's Hand of Priesthood from Judas Thomas who was Guide and Ruler in the church which he built and ministered there.'⁵

The witness of the liturgical books and calendars of the Syrian Church.—

¹From this it would appear that in Ephraem's time merchants who had visited the Indian shrine brought back reports of miracles wrought there. Ephraem moreover expressly affirms that the inhabitants of Edessa were aware of miracles granted to their city, and that the fame of Saint Thomas had spread far and wide.

²In these words Ephraem brings us practically face to face with the realities. Here we come to the realities of his martyrdom, his preachings, his conversion of the Indians, his miracles after death, etc. No wonder, then, that Saint Ephraem exclaimed: "Who dares doubt the truth of his Relics?"

³Medlycott, pp. 26-31.

⁴In Syrian writings the Apostle is called Judas Thomas. Thomas means twin.

⁵Medlycott, pp. 35-36.

'O blessed Apostle, valiant Mar Thomas, whom the violent threats of the King on account of the palace thou didst build for him in heaven, did not affright.

'Blessed Apostle, be thou praised, O Mar Thomas, thou whose slavery secured freedom to the Indians and the Kushites (Ethiopians) blighted by the evil-doer.'

'O Apostle Thomas, athlete of the faith, who preacheest the Gospel and convertest peoples from their errors, and who for the love of Christ sufferest scourges and wounds and enterest the abode of joy.'¹

Another prayer contains the following words:

'The Apostle Thomas on leaving for India, parting from the apostles, wept and moved them to tears.

'He asked them to implore the mercy of our Saviour to assist and support him in his preachings.

'Behold, he said, I go now to a darkened (blind) land as architect, pray that I may erect a palace that may rise to the Kingdom above.

'Join me in prayer that my building may not be cast down by the flood.

'O blessed Thomas, whom thy Lord hath sent as a torch to illuminate the land shrouded in the darkness of error.

'O blessed one, thou goest forth as a ray of the sun to dissipate the dark night of India.

'O blessed Thomas, whom the heavenly bridegroom hath sent to unite unto him the dark bride whom thou hast cleansed and made whiter than snow.' . . .

'Blessed be he who solemnizes thy commemorative feast, O bright Apostle Mar Thoma. Of thee he has converted the Indians to the true faith and has baptized them in the name of the Trinity.

Again we read:

Kings and judges attend his preaching, are converted, and quit their evil ways, and plunge into the celestial waters of baptism; from black they become fair. When the sick and paralysed approach him his word restores them to health; they come to him void of sight and depart with sight restored. As the sun lights up and gladdens the world, so Thomas Apostle brightens and gladdens dark India by his numberless blessings. The heavenly hosts and the souls of the just are charmed with admiration when he measures and marks out the earthly palace, while his Lord completes it in heaven. While that celestial beauty expanded itself the king believed and was baptised with the children of his house and the nobles of his courts.²

The Church of the Jacobite Syrians. — The following quotations from the service books of this church are taken from Assemani, who gives the traditions of the Syrian churches connected with the Apostle Thomas:

¹Ibid., p. 38.

²Medlycott, pp. 38-40.

The Lord sent him to preach the gospel in the East Indies. . . . This Thomas whose memory we celebrate, as being sent to India was sold as a slave . . . while he was designing the splendid palace, the Lord was raising it up in heaven. Like unto his master, pierced by¹ a lance, with the honour of the Apostolate, he gained a martyr's crown.¹

The Nestorian section of the Syrian Church.— In the office for the feast of Saint Thomas, kept on July third, at Vespers, we read:

The Indians inhaled the odour of life by thy doctrine, O Thomas, and discarding all pagan customs at heart and extrernally, they commenced to cultivate chastity The Lord has designed to grant Saint Thomas to his faithful church as a treasure found in India . . . who for the faith was by a lance pierced. As Christ had anointed Peter to the High Priesthood of Rome, so thou (O Thomas) today among the Indians (has received the same honour) . . . Thomas took the route to India to demolish the temples of demons, and to extirpate immortality among men and women.²

The witness of the Fathers of the Western Church.— We pass now to review the testimony given by the Fathers of the Western Church to the apostolate of Saint Thomas. Jerom³ who wrote in the fourth century of the Christian era observes:

He (son of God) dwelt in all places: with Thomas in India, with Peter at Rome, with Paul at Illyricum, with Titus in Crete, with Andrew in Achaia, with each apostolic man in each and all countries.⁴

Gregory of Nazianzus⁵ (330-390) observes:

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 41.

³Jerom was born at Stridon, a small village on the frontier between Dalmatia and Pannonia, either in 331 or in 340. He went to Rome at the age of twenty to commence his literary studies; he received late baptism at the hands of Pope Liberius. Then he came to Antioch in 373, and was ordained priest at Antioch in 378. He died in 420 in Bethlehem, where he wrote most of his works and letters.

⁴Medlycott, p. 45.

⁵Gregory was born A. D. 330, and was ordained as a priest in 361. He was consecrated bishop by his friend Saint Basil; he did not take up the work of a bishop, but retired into solitude. In 379, the people of Constantinople called him to be their bishop. In 381, he resigned his see and returned to Nazianzus. He died between 389-390.

Peter indeed may have belonged to Judea; but what had Paul in common with the Gentiles, Luke with Achaia, Andrew with Epirus, John with Ephesus, Thomas with India, Mark with Italy?¹

Saint Ambrose² says that according to the Great Commission³ given by our Lord the disciples went out without delay, "even those kingdoms which were shut out by rugged mountains became accessible to them, as India to Thomas, Persia to Matthew."⁴

From the liturgical books of the Greek Church we find the following account of Thomas's mission:

'October, the sixth day - the contending of Saint Thomas the Apostle. After the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ when the apostles each went to the countries which had fallen to them by lot to teach, to Saint Thomas fell the country of the Indians, where he preached Christ. Because he had brought to the faith of Christ the wife of the king of Indians and her son, he is introduced before the king, who orders Thomas to be cast into prison with other convicts. The king's son, with his mother and others, not a few, enter the prison by bribing the soldiers, are by him baptised, and after a suitable delay, from among them priests and deacons are ordained, who taught in the name of Christ. On the king coming to know this, being angered, he ordered the Apostle to be taken from the prison and consigned to soldiers to be executed. The holy man thus was taken to the mount and is by them transfixed with a lance and killed.'⁵

We have been dealing hitherto with south Indian traditions and scattered references. But there is one book entirely about Saint Thomas, which does purport to give a fairly accurate account of his travels, his works, his teaching, and his martyrdom. This is the Acts of Thomas,⁶

¹Medlycott, p. 43.

²Ambrose, the son of a Pretorian Prefect of Gaul, was born in 340, and was chosen bishop of Milan, while acting in his official capacity as governor. He was then only a catchuman, but was forced to accept the office; he received baptism on the thirtieth day of November, 374, and was consecrated bishop on the seventh of December, 374. He died on April 4, 387.

³Matt. 28:19,20.

⁴Medlycott, p. 44.

⁵Ibid., pp. 67-68.

⁶For the text of the Acts of Thomas (in English) see Wilhelm Schneemelcher, New Testament Apocrypha (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), II, 425-531.

another Syrian book, to be dated perhaps about the middle of the Third Century. In this book there is an interesting but miraculous account of how Saint Thomas happened to undertake the mission to India. After the ascension of Christ, Thomas was spending his anxious days in Jerusalem not knowing where and how to begin his mission. One day while he was wandering by the market place he happened to meet Abban, the trade agent of King Gundaphorus, who was searching for a carpenter to take back with him to his master. While they were talking, Jesus appeared on the scene and recommended Thomas to Abban as a good architect, and Thomas who recognized the master, took the hint and agreed to accompany Abban to India. Here the king treated Thomas kindly and showed him the site on which he wished his new palace to be built. Thomas undertook the work and received an advance payment for materials, which he gave away to the poor, traveling round and preaching and ministering in the name of Christ. After six months King Gundaphorus returned to the place to see the palace but found no palace. The enraged king summoned the apostle to his presence and asked him: "Hast thou built me the palace?" And Thomas said: "Yes, I have built it, but now thou canst not see it, but when thou dost depart this life thou shalt see it."¹ Immediately Thomas and Abban were thrown into prison. But that night a strange thing happened. The king's brother Gad died suddenly and saw in heaven the glorious palace Thomas had built. He was then allowed to revive and tell his brother what he had seen. Gundaphorus immediately repented, released the Apostle, and embraced Christianity.

We shall now proceed to determine whether there be any, and what, foundation for coupling the name of King Gundaphorus with that of the Apostle. Did a king by the name Gundaphorus reign over any portion of

¹Ibid., p. 453.

India, and was he a contemporary of the Apostolic age? Probably few people would be prepared to admit more than a very few grains of historical truth in it, but there does seem to be a little. The king Gundaphorus at any rate is a historical character. But it was about the middle of the Nineteenth Century that it became possible to say whether a king of that name ever existed and had reigned in India. Since 1834 numerous coins have been found in the Punjab area and in Afghanistan bearing his name in Greek on one side and in Pali on the other; they are dated on paleographical grounds in the first half century A. D., and their number suggests that his reign was a fairly long one. These coins are to be seen in public collections at the British Museum, the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, and the Berlin Museum.¹

Besides the legend-bearing coins an inscription² was also discovered offering the name of King Gundophorus, and a date which is interpreted as A. D. 46. This is described as the twenty-sixth year of his reign. The takht-i-bahi stone is a large thick block, not a slab, with a flaw at the top centre; a large piece was apparently chipped off.³ In order to clear the doubt of the readers it will be best to give a historical account of the stone. General Cunningham in the Archaeological Survey Report for the years 1872-73 gives the following account:

The stone itself was discovered by Dr. Bellew, and has been presented by him to the Lahore Museum. We are indebted, however, to Dr. Leither for bringing it to notice. I have repeatedly examined it in different light, and have made numerous impressions of it, from which, with the aid of a large photograph, I have prepared the accompanying copy. Before seeing Professor Dowson's notice (published in Trubner's Literary Record), I had read the name Gondaphorus, together

¹Medlycott, p. 3-10.

²The Takht-i-bahi stone, now in the Lahore Museum, Pakistan.

³Medlycott, p. 10.

with the year of his reign and the name of the month Vesakh, in a small photograph. But an inspection of the stone showed me that there were two distinct dates - the first of which I take to be the year of the king's reign, and the second the Samvet year. As the stone has been used for many years, perhaps for centuries, for the grinding of spices, all the middle part of the inscription has suffered and become indistinct, and some portions have been obliterated altogether. . . . The stone is seventeen inches long by fourteen and one-half inches broad. I read the opening of the inscription as follows: 'In the twenty-sixth year of the great king Gundaphorus, in the Samvat year three and one hundred (repeated in figures) $100 + 3 = 103$, in the month of Vaisakh, on the fourth day.'¹

Medlycott pointed out that in the light of the present day advance in Indian archaeological research, the Vikrama era, which began in B. C. 58, February or March, the first year ending in 57 B. C., is, we may say, almost unanimously accepted to be the era of the Takht-i-Bahi record. Since Indian chronology only reckons completed years, the beginning of Gundrphorus' reign falls in A. D. 21 and that of the inscription is A. D. 46. If the reign of Gundaphorus be extended to forty years, it would bring us down to A. D. 60. From what has been shown above, the numismatic token on the Gundrphorus coins demand approximately a similar date - the middle of the first century; the date fits in mutually with the probabilities of the case and the possibility that the Apostle Thomas may have come in contact with the king then reigning.²

But did they meet? To suggest an answer to such a question the reader should first bear in mind that until the coins were found, no historical or other indication was known to exist that there had ever been a king bearing the name of Gundaphorus, or that he had reigned over any part of India, except and only in the Acts of Thomas which had been put down to legendary fiction. But now, when suddenly, about the middle of the last century, that name is deciphered on coins found in India and when it is further supported by the discovery of an Indian inscription bearing the

¹Ibid., pp. 10-11.

²Ibid., pp. 15-16.

name in ancient Gandhara, it is impossible to resist the conclusion that the writer of the Acts must have had information based on contemporary history. It is impossible to suppose that a later writer, drawing on his imagination for facts, persons, localities, and incidents, could have brought about the coincidence of two personages, one of whom was unknown to living history, fitting the circumstances of place, persons, duty, and time, so aptly as occurs in this case. "On this ground," says Medlycott, "we maintain there is every reason to conclude that the apostle Thomas has entered King Gundaphorus' dominions in the course of his apostolic career."¹

It is true that neither the Fathers nor the apocryphal Acts say anything explicit about Malabar, or the seven churches and their local traditions. Yet the Malabar tradition is not thereby disapproved. It may be yet true, as many people believe, only the evidence of it is not the statements of the Fathers but the continuous tradition of the Malabar Church. Firth writes:

The tradition stands by itself: and it ought not to be lightly assumed that a tradition handed down from ancient times in a living community which still exists is necessarily a worse historical witness than certain scanty, and often vague, statements in books written far away from India by men who evidently had little information at their disposal.²

There is no doubt that an apostolic mission in the first century was perfectly possible from a physical point of view. Evidence can be adduced to show the commercial importance of Malabar and its trade connections with the Babylonians and the Hebrews. Many claim that the Ophir³ from which Solomon's ships obtained apes, ivory and peacocks was in Malabar, but this cannot be proved. Trade between India and Rome was

¹Ibid., p. 16.

²Firth, p. 13.

³I Kings 10:22.

very common in the first century and our information is fairly complete and comes from Strabe, the Greek geographer (63 B. C. - A. D. 24) and from recent excavation in the Egyptian desert. At first (from about 90 B. C.) ships went from Aden and other Arabian ports directly to the mouth of the Indus, but later they began to use a port north of Bombay and finally discovered how to sail direct to Muziris, the port of Malabar. Malabar was in any case the end of the voyage, for it was from there that pepper, spices, and precious stones were exported.

Some Tamil¹ classics also speak of this trade. One poem speaks of Muziris, where "agitating the white foam of the Periyar River, the beautifully built ships of the Yavanas (Westerners) came with gold and returned with pepper, and Muziris resounded with the noise." In another poem we read of the Pandya king drinking "the cool and fragrant wine brought by the Yavanas in their good ships."²

Of course the evidence given above does not prove the apostolic mission of Saint Thomas in India. But it does show that there was no physical reason why Christian traders, or the Apostle himself, could not have come to Malabar in the first century. We have found the evidence for the belief that the church in India was founded by Saint Thomas to be of three kinds. There is the tradition of the Syrian Christians of Malabar, strong and constant in the community, but lacking clear documentary support. There are many references in the Fathers, not contemporary, but beginning only in the Third Century. And finally there is the apocryphal story.

We shall turn now our attention to the testimony of modern writers.

The Syrian Christian writers such as E. M. Philip³ and K.N. Daniel,

¹One south Indian language.

²Brown, p. 62.

³E. M. Philip, The Indian Church of Saint Thomas (Nagercoil: L. M. S. Press, 1950), especially Chapter IV.

strenuously defended the southern apostolate. They point out that the trade relation of the Roman Empire with India were chiefly with south India and the Dravidian peoples; so that Saint Thomas came by sea, he would be more likely to come to Malabar than to the northwest. They point to the absence of any surviving trace of a Christian community in those northern regions. According to E. M. Philip, Gundaphorus is really Kandapparaja, a Tamil king in the region of Mylapore.

The tradition of the Syrian Christians in south India has been accepted by scholars. Garbe says that Collins has expressed his conviction that Saint Thomas was the Apostle of Edessa as well as of Malabar. Again W. German regards the evangelization of southern India by Saint Thomas as historical, and also believes that the apostle died in Mylapore near Madras and that his body was removed from there to Edessa. But there has been a reaction especially in France, England and America, in recent decades since the discovery of coins and the inscription of Takht-i-Bahi have shown that a king Gandaphorus reigned over Parthia and the Indo-Iranian border in the first half of the First Century after Christ, and have shown that there is historical evidence to prove that the Indian king who appears in the first part of the Acts of Saint Thomas belongs in the place and time of the alleged apostolate of Thomas. This fact has made a strong impression, and in a number of prominent scholars has produced the conviction that the part of the Thomas legend in which the apostle carried on his work in Parthia and Northwestern India is based on a trustworthy memory. This conviction found further support in considerations regarding the international commercial intercourse of these times.¹

Goodspeed says that there is some reason to believe Christianity

¹Garbe, India and Christendom, pp. 131-132.

reached southern Indians early in the Third Century, and some of the names in the Acts of Thomas are known to history, such as King Gundaphorus, who ruled a part of India in the first Christian century.¹

Felix Alfred Plattner, a Roman Catholic, went to India in 1952 to participate as a pilgrim in the jubilee celebrations marking the Four hundredth Anniversary of the death of Saint Francis Xavier, and also the Nineteen Hundredth Anniversary of the arrival of the Apostle Thomas in south India. He says that Christianity has attempted to acquire ascendancy in India at three separate periods. The first occasion was in apostolic days when the church of the Syro-Malabar or Thomas Christians was in the southernmost part of the subcontinent. The second time was when Catholic missionaries appeared on the west coast at the period of the Portuguese in the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries. The third period was during the days of the British Empire.²

In December, 1952, the Archbishop of Ernakulam, in his capacity as Metropolitan of the Syro-Malabar Catholic church, said - in answer to the Papal Cardinal Legate who had just presented his credentials - "you come from Peter; and we are the sons of another Apostle - Thomas."³ Modern research is inclined to accept as true the traditional claim of the Malabar Christians to have been evangelized by Saint Thomas.

Whatever the historical accuracy of these ancient traditions may be, the fact remains, says Plattner, that "the Syro-Malabar religious communi-

¹E. J. Goodspeed, A History of Early Christian Literature (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1941), p. 120.

²F. A. Plattner, Christian India (London: Thames and Hudson, 1956), p. 11.

³Ibid., p. 29.

ties are of very early Christian origin."¹ Neil says that it is certain that from a very early date there were Christians on the coast of Malabar. Their history is for long periods hidden in obscurity. Such records as are available give only fleeting glimpses of this ancient church - "enough to whit, but not to satisfy our curiosity."²

Attwater says that there are references to Syrian Christians in the earliest middle ages and in the records of the later medieval travelers, and the Holy See aware of their existence. They had early received a grant of privileges from the Hindi kings, and at this time had even a ruler of their own, to whom Pope Eugenius IV addressed a letter as "my most beloved in Christ, Thomas, the most illustrious Emperor of the Indians."³

In this chapter we have found the evidence for the belief that the Church in India was founded by St. Thomas to be of four kinds. There is the tradition of the Syrian Christians of Malabar, strong and constant in the community, but lacking documentary support. There are many references in the Fathers, not contemporary but beginning only in the third century. Then there is the apocryphal story and the witness of the modern writers.

Some historians have rejected the tradition altogether and denied that Saint Thomas ever came to India. They look upon such traditions as legendary and void of foundation, and therefore give no further thought to the subject. But a close examination of the local Syrian Christian tradition and the witness of the early Christian Fathers and the witness of the modern writers suggest that the Apostolic Mission of Saint Thomas in South India. As a result of this study I should be willing to accept the ecclesiastical tradition that Saint Thomas did visit South India and

¹Ibid., p. 30.

²Neil, p. 19.

³Donald Attwater, The Christian Churches of the East (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1946), pp. 210-11.

founded the Church there. The local tradition with regard to his visit is very strong and there is no other rival local tradition as to the origin of the Church in South India. There is nothing improbable in the story that the Apostle should have travelled as far as India to preach the Gospel. If the story cannot be proved, it is certainly by no means unlikely. For it does not seem possible entirely to disregard the element of historical truth in the connection with Gundaphorus, or to refuse all value to the evidence of the Fathers; and as for the theory that the Malabar tradition is only an import, I think that no more can be said for that than for the Saint Thomas tradition in general, namely that it is possible.

CHAPTER III

MALABAR CHURCH COMES INTO HISTORY

The only certain conclusion which can be drawn from an examination of the Saint Thomas tradition is that at any rate such a visit was physically possible. Whether the Apostle gave the south Indian Church a Syrian liturgy is not known. Thomas suggests that from all accounts it is clear that the Apostle did not interfere with the time honored customs of the Indian congregation. Indian Christians were allowed to follow their own manner of dress and customs. The only innovation was in the name. The Christians were known as Nazrani Maphilas,¹ or followers of the Nazarene, a term still used in all government documents in the state of Kerala. The Apostle's main emphasis on his followers was accepting Christ as the Saviour and the cross as the mark of Nazrani.²

From the time of the Apostle's martyrdom until the Fourth Century of the Christian era very little is known about the state of Christianity in India. This silence of history caused many scholars to question the early existence of Christianity in India. However, the silence of existing literature about a south Indian church in the first century is not surprising even if such a church existed. The early stages of growth of any Christian community are usually unspectacular and apparently insignificant, and it is most unlikely that they would be widely noticed. We find

¹A title which is given to the Christians of the country, taking its name from the two Malayalam words, Maha ("grace") and pilla ("son").

²P. Thomas, p. 30.

little mention of any churches in Asia until they are so organized that their bishop has become a recognized figure.

The first probable reference to a church in India is contained in the missionary work of Pantaenus, the head of the Alexandrine Catechetical School, who gave up his work in that center of culture to go as a missionary to India, where Saint Bartholomew had visited. Eusebius¹ tells us that Pantaenus found a copy of the Gospel according to Hebrews which he calls "The Gospel According to Matthew" written in the Hebrew language. Therefore there must have been Christians in the place before him.

A more credible reference relates to the closing years of the Third Century is the story of Bishop David. About 295-300, Dudi (David), Bishop of Basra² left his see and went to India where he evangelised many people.³ This is the first reference to a bishop's being in India, and it is noteworthy that he was a Mesopotamian bishop. So quite early does the connection with the Mesopotamia and East Syrian churches begin to appear. Brown remarks that it is not likely that any other place could be meant here by the term "India" and in view of the trade connections it is likely that the bishop went to the southwest coast as well as to the northwest.

Among the bishops who signed the decrees of the First General Council of the Church at Nicea in A. D. 325 according to one account, was John of Persia who signed as "Bishop of the churches of the whole of Persia and Great India."⁴ We have here an indication that there were Christians in India at that time, and that they were under the jurisdiction of a bishop

¹Eusebius Pamphilus, The Ecclesiastical History (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1869), Book V, p. 190.

²In Mesopotamia near the head of the Persian Gulf.

³Firth, p. 20.

⁴Tisserant, p. 7.

of Persia.

Another reference to a church in Malabar is contained in the story of Theophilus the Indian in the middle of the Fourth Century. This Theophilus appears to have been a native of the Maldivé Islands; in his youth he had been sent to Rome as a hostage, and while he was in Rome he had become a Christian. After finishing his work in south Arabia he visited his native place, and from there went on to "other parts of India."¹ The Arian historian Philostorgius says: "He reformed many things which were not rightly done among them; for they heard the reading of the Gospel (at the Eucharist) in a sitting posture,² and did other things which were repugnant to the divine law; and having reformed everything according to the holy usage, as was most acceptable to God, he also confirmed the dogma of the church."³

According to Brown the first unquestionable historical reference to the Church in South India is a passage in the Christian topography of Cosmas Indicopleustes⁴ who traveled widely between 520 and 525 and published his book about 585. He tells us that even in the island of Taprobane in inner India where the Indian Sea is there is a church of Christians with

¹Medlycott, pp. 188-202.

²This is a custom still practised among the Syrian Christians. The habit of the West Coast people of sitting down on the floor as often as permissible is quite characteristic, and it may be that it also extended to their remaining posture at the reading of the gospel. If this account indeed refers to our India - in which case Malabar is most likely to be meant, as being the part of India nearest to the Maldivé Island - it is evidence of an organized church with a ministry celebrating the Eucharist, which was old enough to have developed certain indigenous peculiarities, such as sitting for the gospel.

³Medlycott, p. 195.

⁴Cosmos was an Alexandrian merchant who was surnamed Indicopleustes on account of the fame of his voyage in the Indian Seas early in the Sixth Century.

clergy and a congregation of believers. Such also is the case in the land called Male where the pepper grows. And in the place called Kalliana there is a bishop appointed from Persia, and a vast multitude of Christian people, and they have many martyrs.¹

Ceylon is described thus:

This is the great island in the ocean lying in the Indian Sea. By the Indians it is called Sielendide but by the Greeks, Taprobane. In it is found the hyacinth stone. It lies on the other side of the pepper country. The island hath also a church of Persian Christians who have settled there, and a presbyter who is appointed from Persia and a deacon and all the apparatus of public worship.²

From this account it is clear that there was a church in South India and the description given above could not refer to anywhere except the west coast of India and Ceylon. The references to the pepper country must refer to Malabar. Even today Malabar is famous for pepper, which is one of the main crops. Kalliana has been identified with Quilon in the Travancore. But the report of Cosmas tells more than that; it places beyond all doubt the deeply interesting fact that the church to which the Indian Christians then looked for government was the Church of Persia. The signature at Nicea of "John Bishop of Persia and Great India" had already suggested the existence of such a connection.

In the Fourth Century an epoch-making event took place which put Christianity on a firm footing in India. This was the immigration into Malabar of a large colony of Syrians under the leadership of a merchant prince called Canai Thomas or Thomas of Canaan. According to the traditions of Malabar the Bishop of Edessa had a vision of Saint Thomas who commanded him to send someone to tend his flock in Malabar. Immediately the bishop sent Thomas of Cana to inquire into the state of the Malabar Christians. He duly visited them and returned to report their needs to

¹Brown, p. 68.

²Ibid.

the bishop. After a very short time the merchant Thomas of Cana left his country and accompanied by that very bishop who saw the vision and by priests and deacons, by men, women and children from Jerusalem, Baghdad and Nineveh. They went on board a ship and went to Malabar and reached Malankara in the year three hundred and forty-five of our Lord. When the inhabitants of Malabar recognized them they assembled near them, and took advice from one another. Then they went to Sharhan, the king of all Malabar and brought him gifts and presents. The king was pleased with them and said to them: "I will gratify all your wishes," and he gave them land as long and broad as they desired. And he invested them also with royal honors inscribed on pieces of copper which are preserved with us down to the present day. When they received all these from the king they returned to Malankara. Then they began to build the churches and the town.¹

These Syrian immigrants were not treated as untouchable foreigners by the high born Malabar Christians (which was ordinarily their attitude toward the Portuguese when they came to Malabar at a later date), but as the countrymen of Mar Iso (Lord Jesus) and Mar Thoma (Lord Thomas) and as such worthy of the greatest honor and respect. The Syrians and Malabar Christians soon entered into matrimonial relations and merged into a single community. Canai Thomas himself married a Christian lady from Malabar. Because of the splendor of his princely household Thomas and his heirs were known as Ravi Kartan (Lord Sun).²

Many a Malayalam ballad describes the greatness of Canai Thomas and his prosperity. Thomas's voice was supreme in the councils of the king and very often he dined with the king. During the feasts in the

¹Mingana, pp. 45-49.

²Thomas, p. 31.

court Thomas was served on double leaves, a royal privilege, in memory of which Malabar Christians to this day fold the ends of the banana leaves from which they eat on ceremonial occasions.

The town built by the Syrian settlers is supposed to be the Christian quarter of Cranganore which was called Mahadevarapatnam. To this day there is among the Syrian Christians a social distinction which is said to have originated in this settlement between those who intermarried with Indians and those who did not. The former, called Northists (Vadakumbagar), are the more numerous forming the major portion of the Syrian community; the latter, called Southist (Thekkumbagar), are a small group who claim to be the direct lineal descendents of Thomas of Cana and his Syrian Colony. According to E. M. Philip, who was one of them, this small group even professes to be able to give the name of the Syrian tribe to which each family belongs. They do not intermarry with the Northists. The common explanation of the names is that originally the ancestors of the Northists lived in the northern portion of Mahadevarapatnam and those of the Southists in the southern part.¹

The Syrians brought a new vigor to the Malabar Church. The bishop and the clergy organized the church and introduced Syrian liturgy. From that time on the Nazranis began to be known as Syrian Christians.² Churches sprang up throughout the land of Malabar. The Malabar Christians even adopted some of the habits of the Syrians such as the Syrian usage of shaving their heads clean.

In the work of Bishop Gregory of Tours (died in 594) we find a

¹E. M. Philip, pp. 73-75.

²J. Richter, A History of Missions in India (London: Oliphant Anderson and Ferrier, 1908), p. 32.

reference to the great national shrine of the Indian Christians, the sanctuaries of Saint Thomas near Madras. Gregory bases his statements on the testimony of a traveling Syrian monk, Theodore, who visited Mylapore. These shrines of Saint Thomas at Mylapore sprang at once into the light of day by the discovery in 1547 of the so called "Thomas" Cross on the great hill of Saint Thomas. It consists of a fairly large stone on which is carved in relief a cross of an antique shape. It has above it the form of a dove; around the cross there runs an inscription which for centuries was a puzzle to scholars. It was at length recognized by an English Indologist, Dr. Burhell as pahlavi of the sixth or seventh century. He translates: "In punishment by the cross was the suffering of this one who is the true Christ God above and that guide ever pure."¹ It is remarkable that an exactly similar cross with precisely the same inscription in the same pehlavi character has been found in a church at Kottayam in north Travancore. There exists a third similar cross in the same church at Kottayam. The statement of Cosmas that the great Christian community of South India was under Persian influence seems to receive confirmation from these phalavi inscriptions.

We turn our attention next to another tradition that which claims the foundation of Quilon as the work of Christian immigrants in A. D. 825, the year from which the Malayalam era is reckoned. A number of Christians from Persia, including two bishops, came to Quilon in Travancore and settled there having obtained from the local ruler grants of land and various other privileges. A document written in Malabar by an Indian at the beginning of the Eighteenth century recounts the tradition thus:

In those days and in the days that followed, Syrian Fathers used to come to that town by order of the Catholicos of the East, and govern

¹Ibid., p. 33.

the diocese of India and Malabar, because it was from it that the Syrians used to go to other parts until they were dispersed. Then in the years 823, the Syrian Fathers - Mar Sapor and Mar Parut (Piruz) with the illustrious Sabrisho - came to India and reached Kullam (Quilon). They went to the king Shakirobirti, and asked from him a piece of land in which they could build a church for themselves and erect a town. He gave them the amount of land they desired, and they built a church and erected a town in the district of Kullam to which Syrian bishops and Metropolitans used to come by order of the Catholicos who sent them.¹

We have clear evidence today to show that the party came and settled in India at or near Quilon, and this time contemporary evidence is available in the form of five copper plates recording various grants to the Christians. Three of these are at the Jacobite Seminary at Kottayam, Kerala, and the other two in Sabha office of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church at Tiruvalla. They are written in Tamil-Malayalam, but two pages are in Pahlavi and Arabic. The first set of plates was granted by a Perumal (king) named Stahanu Ravi Gupta to Maruvan Sapor Iso, the Syrian founder of Quilon. In some sections Maruvan Iso is mentioned as having received hereditary possession of the town.²

These plates seem to imply the existence of a Christian community before the arrival of the colonists, and dealings between it and them, and it would appear that the former community was very much strengthened by the influence of the new arrivals.

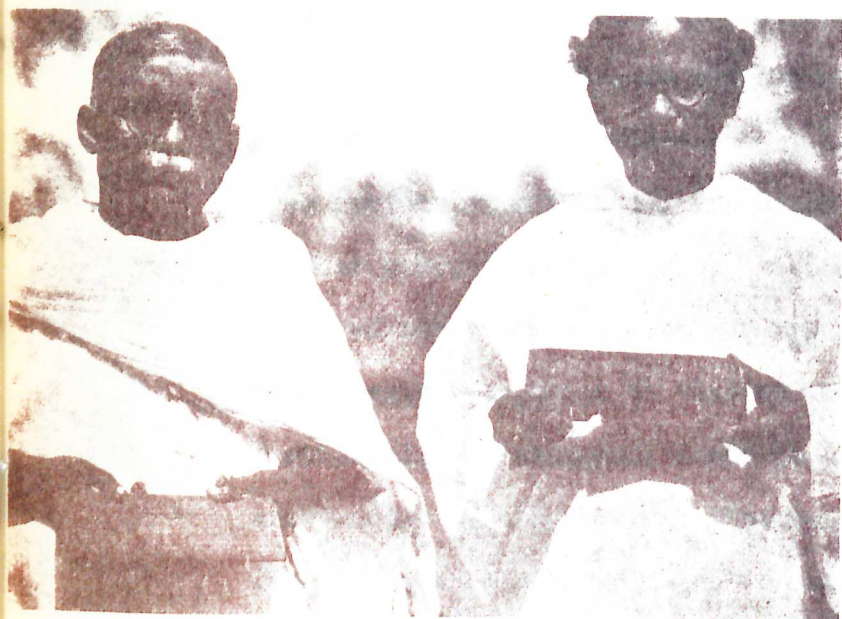
Besides the copper plates of which we have just been speaking there is another one, a single plate fourteen and three-fourths inches by four inches, written in Tamil, now preserved in the old seminary, Kottayam.³ It relates to the Christian community at Cranganore, and records a grant made by a king called Uira Raghava Charkrauarthi to Iravi Korltan of Cranganore

¹Mingana, pp. 44, 56-66.

²On these copper plates see Brown, pp. 74-76, 85-90.

³Philip, pp. 57-61.

PLATE III



THE COPPER PLATES IN THE POSSESSION OF THE MAR THOMA
CHURCH AT TIRUVALLA

bestowing on him the title of Manigrammam - which may be a title implying recognition as head of the Christian merchants of Cranganore. He receives besides this certain privileges, two castes of the place to serve him and his community as slaves, and tolls and dues in all merchandise in Cranganore harbour and town. These rights are guaranteed to him and his heirs so long as "the sun and moon shall last."¹

Some important conclusions to be drawn from these plates are these. These copper plates are solid evidence for the early existence of a church in south India at Mylapore as well as in Malabar. From these documents we learned that the Christians appear as distinguished merchant princes who have concentrated in their own hands a large part of the commerce of the Malabar coast (Kerala). Most important of all, they appear to have been assigned comparatively high rank in the hidebound caste system of the south coast region, superior to that of the waniers (oil makers) and kammalers (artisans), and as feudal lords to have been placed on a level with the aristocracy of the country. The relatively high position of the Syrian Christians in Kerala up to the present day obviously finds its explanation and basis in these ancient documents. They were permitted to wear gold tresses in the hair locks in marriage feasts, to ride on elephants and to decorate the floor with carpets. A Hindu doing violence to a Christian had his crime pardoned only in the case of his offering to the church a hand either of gold or silver according to the seriousness of the offense. Otherwise the crime was expiated in blood. They never saluted anyone below their own ranks because it was dishonorable to their status. The Syrian Christians were allowed to have a military force of their own which was composed chiefly of Shanars, the caste that cultivated the palm tree.

¹Brown, p. 89.

A native prince was respected or feared by his neighbors according to the number of Syrians in his dominions. The Christians were staunch allies and loyal subjects of the kings and were a source of great military and monetary strength to the kings.¹

About the middle of the Thirteenth Century the veil of darkness which for five hundred years had hidden Eastern Asia from the eyes of Europe was rent asunder. The emperor of Mongolia, Jhengiz Khan, and his successors built up their mighty empire in the East, and were anxious to establish communication with the West.

The famous traveler, Marco Polo, who traveled in the East from 1270 to 1295, was the first to bring a trustworthy account of India to the ears of Europe. He had been twice to the East Indies, once as commander of several ships belonging to Kubla Khan, and then again as commander of a Chinese fleet escorting a Mongolian princess to Persia. Concerning the Syrian Church of Malabar he writes:

In the kingdom of Quilon (Travancore) dwell many Christians and Jews who still retain their own language In the province of Malabar lies the body of the glorious martyr, Saint Thomas the Apostle, who suffered martyrdom there. He rests in a little town which is visited by few merchants because of its insignificant commerce, but a great multitude of Christians and Sarcens make pilgrimage thither.²

We get another glimpse in the Thirteenth and early Fourteenth Centuries. It was the great age of the Friars³ who were sent by Pope Innocent III to evangelise the East, and from their narratives we gain a few scraps of information about Christianity in India. Franciscan missionaries were

¹Thomas, pp. 35-37.

²Richter, p. 38.

³Friars - Latin *fratres*, "brethren", that is to say members of the mendicant orders of Sannyasis founded by Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Dominic men vowed to poverty, celibacy and obedience. They were ready to endure all things for the sake of Christ and His Church.

preaching themselves over all the East, and some of them making the adventurous journey to China passed by South India. They found the ancient church still in existence and apparently prosperous.¹

The first was John of Monte Carvine, a Franciscan, who stayed for about a year in 1291 on his way to China. In a letter written after his arrival in China, he says that he remained in the country of India wherein stands the tomb of Saint Thomas the Apostle, for thirteen months and in that region baptised in different places one hundred persons.² This short reference to India is mainly of interest because of its mention of a church of Saint Thomas presumably at Mylapore. In another letter he says that there were some Christians and Jews in Malabar.³ About 1310 friar Menentillus was in India for a short time; in his letters we find only one passage of interest to us: "Christians and Jews there are in the coast district of India."⁴

Jordanus⁵ was another friar who stayed in India on his way back to Rome from China; and baptised many people. In a letter written early in 1324 he says:

Be it known to you, my venerable father, that I am alone and without an associate in India, a poor pilgrim, where I have been permitted to live after the passion of my associates. And in the same place, after their blessed martyrdom which took place in the fifth week before Palm Sunday, in the course of ten days, in a district which is called Parrot, I baptized about ninety persons, and still I do not cease to baptise; for since then I have baptised more than twenty in Tanna, and thirty-

¹Neil, p. 20.

²A. A. King, The Rites of Eastern Christendom (Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1948) II, 429.

³Ibid.

⁴Richter, p. 39.

⁵Jordanus went to India with four Franciscans: Thomas of Tolentino, James of Padua, Peter of Siena and Demetrius of Tibilis. These four were traveling to China, but they never reached China; instead they became martyrs in India.

five at Sefa. Praise be to Christ, the creator of all of the conversion of these nations of India I say this, that if there were two or three hundred good friars who would preach faithfully and fervently the Catholic faith there is not a year which would not see more than ten thousand persons converted to the Christian faith.¹

After this he returned to Eurpoe and reported on his mission and on the state of Christianity in India. Pope John XXIII consecrated him Bishop of Quilon and he went back to India in 1330 bringing a letter from the pope to the Syrian Christians and their ruler urging them to be reconciled through him to the Roman Church.

In 1321 another Franciscan who visited India on his way to China was Odoric of Udine. He came to the west coast and collected the relics of some friars who had been put to death near Bombay by Muslims in 1302. Next he went to Quilon and Mylapore. He says that it was ten days journey from Malabar to another part of India where Saint Thomas the Apostle was buried.²

John de Marignolli was the next friar to leave a record of his contact with Malabar. He arrived at Quilon on Palm Sunday 1348 and stayed a year and four months. He give the records as follows:

On Palm Sunday, 1348, we arrived at a very noble city of India called Quilon where the whole world's pepper is produced. Now this pepper grows on a kind of vines which are planted just as in our vineyards. . . . There are things that I have seen with my eyes and handled with my hands during the fourteen months that I have stayed there. And there is no roasting of the pepper as authors have falsely arrested, nor does it grow in forests but in regular gardens, nor are the saracens the proprietors but the Saint Thomas Christians. And these latter are the masters of the public weighing office from which I derived as a prerequisite of my office as pope's legate, . . . There is a Church of Saint George there, of the Latin communion, at which I dwelt, and I adorned it with fine paintings and taught there the holy law.³

Here the Syrian Christians of Quilon appear as a prosperous community, and relations between them and Marignalli seem to have been cordial. Whether

¹Ogilvie, p. 70.

²Medlycott, pp. 90-92.

³Brown, pp. 83-84.

he ministered to them or not is not clearly stated. However, before leaving India he paid a visit to the shrine of Saint Thomas at Maylapore.

With this we come to the end of this short period of Roman Catholic missions, indeed, it is hardly to be termed a missionary period, for of actual missionary work we read absolutely nothing. We may, however, read between the lines the few scattered narratives that the Franciscans were even then trying to establish themselves in force among the Syrian Christians in the neighborhood of Quilon - Jordanus's ten thousand converts, the Latin Church of Saint George, and so on, pointing in this same direction.

With 1350, all our information again comes to an end for a century and a half. The only mention of Indian Christianity is found in the account of Nicolo de Conti. In 1449 he returned to Rome from his adventurous travels in the East; he says that in Mylapore, a town of one thousand hearths, the body of Saint Thomas reposes honorably in a large and beautiful church close to which dwell a number of Nestorian Christians who are also found disseminated all over India just as Jews are found in Europe.¹

Right at the end of the Fifteenth Century the history of the Syrian Church again begins to emerge out of the clouds of uncertainty. From a Syriac source² we learned that in the year 1490 a deputation of two Indian Christians came to Mar Simeon, Patriarch of the East, and asked him to send bishops to their country. The Patriarch ordained the two men, George and Joseph by name, priests, and sent them to the monastery of Saint Eugenius to choose from the monks two suitable candidates to be sent to India as bishops. They selected two, and these two were duly consecrated by the

¹Richter, p. 43.

²The document is translated in Mingana, pp. 36-39.

patriarch and given the names Mar Thomas and Mar John,¹ and were sent to India with the two Indian priests. The people received them with great pomp, with psalms and canticles. They consecrated altars and ordained many priests.

According to the record after a short time Mar Thomas returned to the Patriarch to report, leaving Mar John in India. Meanwhile the Patriarch had died and he was succeeded by Mar Elias to whom Mar Thomas came. On hearing Mar Thomas's report, Mar Elias chose three monks and ordained them bishops to be sent to India with the returning Mar Thomas. One of them, Mar Yahb Alaha, was consecrated Metropolitan, the others, Mar Jacob and Mar Dinha, bishops. This was in 1503. These four returned to India and joined with Mar John. The Malabar Christians received them with open hands.

By the time these bishops reached India the Portuguese were there, and we shall deal with them in the next chapter. It is said that these five bishops brought about a revival of church life among the Christians of Malabar. When the new bishops arrived there was general rejoicing; new churches were built, old ones were repaired, new clergy were ordained, and a church life of greater regularity and vigor was fostered. E. M. Philip, writing as a Jacobite Syrian Christian, argues at length that it was only at this time that Nestorianism was introduced into the Malabar Church, and that from the Sixth Century until then it had in fact been Jacobite, owing allegiance to the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch, and that if meanwhile it had done so on the assumption that he was a deputy of the Patriarch of Antioch.²

¹It is customary in the Syrian church even today for a man to receive a new name on being ordained to the episcopate. Since it is a rule that bishops must be celibate, they are commonly chosen from among the unmarried priests.

²E. M. Philip, pp. 130-158.

One of these five bishops, Mar Jacob, was still alive in 1549, when Saint Francis Xavier knew him. By that he served in India for forty-five years and was a very old man. He seems to have been the last survivor of the five.

An Italian traveler called Ludovico di Varthema visited India in 1505 and spoke of the Christians at Kayamlulam (north of Quilon). He says:

In this city we found some Christians of Saint Thomas, some of whom are merchants and believe in Christ as we do. They say that every three years a priest comes there to baptize and that he comes from Babylon. These Christians keep Lent longer than we do; but they keep Easter like ourselves and they all observe the same solemnities that we do. But they say mass like the Greeks.¹

In this chapter we have seen a remarkable picture of a strong and well organized community, commanding respect among its Hindu neighbors and managing its own affairs. We also learned from John de Marignolli's testimony from the Fourteenth Century that the Christians controlled the pepper trade and the public weighting office, and the charters recorded on the Syrian copper plates. All this gives us the impression of a proud and prosperous people who had won for themselves a good standing in society and were well able to look after their interests. From this study we also learned a major weakness of the church. Ecclesiastically it was dependent on a foreign Patriarch and bishops from overseas; it had not developed either an ecclesiastical organization or an ecclesiastical language of its own. This was a great weakness whenever the connection with Mesopotamia was interrupted. The Syrian Christians were always in danger of being left as sheep not having a shepherd. Such was the Syrian Church of Malabar at the end of the Middle Ages. With the coming of the Portuguese a new epoch in Syrian Church history begins.

¹Brown, pp. 84-85.

Nearly fifteen hundred years lie between the Apostolate of Saint Thomas and the arrival of Vasco da Gama, and through those centuries Christian efforts in India, as we have seen had never entirely ceased. Yet when one seeks to summarize the results achieved they prove to be most disappointingly small. There are many reasons for it; such as the isolation of the Malabar Church from the rest of the Christian world and India's lack of a common language. Ogilvie describes the condition of the Syrian Church as follows:

In a remote corner of India, in the territory of a people separated from the mainstreams of Indian life by geographical and other barriers, there is found existing a Christian Church of ancient lineage indeed and surprisingly respectable social status, but unprogressive in religious life, numerically very small in comparison with the vast population of India, and as a spiritual influence upon India's people almost negligible. This is all, after fifteen hundred years.¹

This criticism is almost true. The isolation of the Syrian Church from the dominant Christian nations of the West, especially after the insertion of the Mohammedan wedge, accounts for much. So completely was the Church of Malabar cut off from the centers of ecclesiastical life and spiritual stimulus, and the wonder is that isolation did not spell for Indian Christianity extinction. India's lack of a common language such as the Roman Empire had given to Europe and which there greatly facilitated the advance of a common religion, was a heavy handicap for India's church. Another factor which partly accounts for the non-progressiveness of Indian Christianity is found in the character of the one church that did take outward shape. The Syrian Church of Malabar throughout these centuries seems never to have possessed the missionary spirit in measure sufficient to impel its sons to missionary endeavor. It had enough spiritual vitality to save itself from extinction, but not enough to awaken con-

¹Ogilvie, pp. 71-72.

cern as to the souls of others. No apostle went forth from it to preach to the Hindus the gospel of Jesus Christ, no theologian whose name and influence abides ever appeared among its sons, no quickening breath of the spirit seems ever to have swept over its members, transforming them into evangelists. A decorous ritual, a decent respectability in the eyes of the people of the land, and a recurring contact with the churches of Eastern Christendom as each bishop was received - these were sufficient for its desires, and no experience of persecution ever drove home the need of qualities deeper and more vital. It may with considerable truth be said that the bane of the Syrian Church was its worldly prosperity. The social status which it acquired, at the hands of the tolerant Hindu rulers, had the effects of giving it something of the character of a caste, and the limited life inseparable from all castes inevitably followed. The time was to come when persecution and adversity would lift the Church of Malabar to a higher level of thought and duty, but at the end of fifteen hundred years that time had not yet arrived.

The supreme factor in restricting the progress of Christianity in India in those earlier periods was the enormous strength of Hinduism. In its conquest of Europe the Christian Church met with nothing that can be compared with the hostile forces it encountered in India. In Europe the old paganism, as a religious force, was dead, and the task of the church was in consequence much simplified and eased. But in India the conditions were very different. There Christianity was confronted with a religion deep rooted in the popular life, powerful in its hold, and real and living to its supporters. Even in our own day and time it has needed the combined forces of modern Christendom to make visible headway against it, and create for the religion of Christ a truly Indian home. What India needs today more than anything else, is a united church which only can give a united and effective witness for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

PART II. THE PORTUGUESE PERIOD

CHAPTER IV

THE COMING OF THE PORTUGUESE AND THE MISSION OF SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER

The second half of the Fifteenth Century is famous in the history of the world as the time of the great voyages of discovery undertaken by the maritime nations of Western Europe which led to the founding of colonial empires in America, Africa and Asia. In 1498, Bartholomew Diaz¹ reached the southernmost point of Africa and named the cape, Cape of Good Hope as it gives promise of great things and reopened India to the West. Europe had known much of India in Ancient days, but the conquest of Moslems had barred the way. On May 20, 1498, Vasco de Gama reached Calicut, the then principle port of the west coast of India. The Portuguese efforts to discover the sea route to India were thus, after many decades of struggle, crowned with success. When asked for what he was searching on these distant shores, Gama replied, "for pepper and souls." Thus the second period in the life of the Syrian Christians in India began about 1500.

The Portuguese settlement in India was not accomplished without violence and strife. In particular the Mohammedan Arabs, in whose hands the overseas trade with the West was at that time opposed to the newcomers and stirred up some of the Indian kings against them. The Portuguese sought to establish a permanent position for themselves in Asia. Thus

¹For the Portuguese Period in India see Frederick Charles Danvers, The Portuguese in India (London: W. H. Allen & Co., Limited, 1894).

Albuquerque, their second governor, set out to capture and command certain strategic spots not only in India but in other lands to the east and west also. It was in his time in 1510 that Goa was captured from the Sultan of Bijapur and was taken by the Portuguese. Goa was made the center of administration and became the capital of all Portuguese settlements in Asia. After Goa the most considerable station was Cochin. It was Albuquerque's policy to encourage mixed marriage between Portuguese and Indians. Thus soon a large Indo-Portuguese population grew up in the Portuguese stations, nominally Christians.

Soon the Portuguese rose to power. The Arabs were quickly driven off the main ports of India and the Indian Ocean and even the Pacific began to be dominated by the Portuguese fleets. The maritime trade of India passed into the hands of the Portuguese and those Arabs who wished to trade with the East did so by the permission of the Portuguese.

Though it was the hope of gain that brought the Portuguese adventurers to India, it was also the purpose of their kings to promote the spread of Christianity among those who came under their rule. The popes of the period had, from the earliest days of their conquest, laid on the kings of Portugal the responsibility for the establishment of the Church in all the lands discovered or still to be discovered in the Far East.¹ Thus in 1514 Pope Leo X caught the golden opportunity to spread Roman Catholicism in India. Goa soon became the headquarters of ecclesiastical authority and missionary activities. In 1534 Goa was raised to bishopric and in 1557 to an Archdiocese with Cochin and Malabar as suffragans; the Inquisition was established in 1560. Franciscans and Dominicans were the pioneers in missionary work in Portuguese India. Within a short period they brought

¹Plattner, p. 58.

the majority of the population of the city of Goa under the Roman influence.¹ But the work of Christianizing was carried on as much under the auspices of the government as of the Church, and some of the methods were very shameful. Temples and mosques were destroyed and public worship of Hindus and Muslims forbidden in the Portuguese settlement became starting points for their campaign. Public offices were given only to the Christians; converts might not be disinherited because of conversion, and they enjoyed the same privileges as the Portuguese. Many converts were made and by no means always by compulsion, but the prospect of coming under the protection of the powerful foreigners was a stronger incentive to many than the preaching of the gospel, and it was frankly offered as such. This can be proved by an example of the conversion of the Paravas or the fishermen on the south coast of India.

Paravas in India are a caste by themselves condemned as untouchables by the higher classes. Pearl fishing was, however, an organized industry in Tuticorin and the neighboring coastal region. The actual pearlfishers were known as Paravas or Bharatars. These humble folk were persuaded to ask for baptism by a convert employed by the Portuguese on secular business near Cape Comorin who pointed out to them the advantages of Portuguese protection. He advised them that the only way to save themselves from the fury of the Arabs was to embrace Christianity and put themselves under the formal protection of the Portuguese. The Paravas jumped at the idea, and a deputation of fifteen Paravas immediately went to Cochin and were baptized. Soon the Portuguese missionaries appeared in the Fishery coast, baptized over twenty thousand Paravas and in accordance with their practice declared they were all under the protection of the king of Portugal. They were then left

¹Thomas, pp. 50-51.

without any Christian instruction or discipline except that a few boys were taken to school in Goa. Their hopes of protection came true in 1538 when the Portuguese admiral attacked and defeated a fleet of Arabs the former proprietors of the pearl-fisheries who were harassing them, and then they discovered the value of their baptism.¹

On their arrival in India the Portuguese met the Syrian Christians, and the news of the arrival of the Portuguese spread throughout Malabar. The Malabar Christians were very happy to welcome them. The Syrians were delighted with "their brothers from the West and desired to be taken under their protection,"² for they had suffered practical isolation with the rise of Islam and the dominance of the Indian seas by the Muslims, and felt that they would be safer under the shadow of the great king of the West. On Vasco da Gama's second arrival in India in 1502 the Syrian Christians sent ambassadors to him at Cochin and asked for the assistance and protection of the Portuguese. The Syrians so trusted the Portuguese that in 1502 they presented Vasco da Gama with the silver-tipped 'Rod of Justice' of the extinct Valiar Vattam dynasty in token of their friendship.³

At first the relations were thus friendly. A. A. King, a Roman Catholic writer, says:

The Portuguese, in the early days of colonisation, treated the native Christians in all respects as coreligionists, hearing their confessions, giving them holy communion and lending churches for the celebration of the Syrian liturgy, while provincial synods enacted decrees in regard to the oriental rite. Contemporary Portuguese writers are quite clear on this point, and the Jesuit Father Maffei spoke of the Malaparese as the 'faithful of Christ that still existed in that country.'⁴

As the Portuguese rose in power and dominance of the Indian Ocean,

¹James Brodrick, Saint Francis Xavier (London: Burns Oates, 1952), pp. 122-123.

²Neil, pp. 20-21.

³Thomas, p. 45.

⁴A. A. King, II, 437.

missionaries of various orders went to India in large numbers and they obtained a fairly sound idea of the religions and people of India. They realized that India was inhabited mainly by Hindus and Muslims and found that the Syrian Christians, though enjoying self-government in all social and civil matters, were formally subject to local Rajahs; that they followed the Syrian rite.

The Syrians too found out many things about the Portuguese which in their original enthusiasm they had either overlooked or failed to notice. They found that their rites differed from those of the Portuguese; that the way of life of the Portuguese was incompatible with Syrian notions of respectability and ceremonial purity. Thomas remarks:

The beef and pork eating Portuguese were held in contempt as unclean both by the Hindus and Muslims. In sexual morals they appeared to recognize no law and their attitude towards the people of the land was arrogant and contemptuous. The Portuguese soon earned for themselves a notoriety for lawless living and term 'Parangi' by which the Portuguese were known to Indians degenerated into a synonym for an unclean barbarian. This general contempt for the Portuguese began to be shared by the Syrians too. And when the Portuguese expressed a desire to marry Syrian Christian girls, the Syrians thought that the time had come to keep the foreigners at a respectable distance.¹

Anyway, the contempt of Indians did not seriously hinder the Portuguese rise to power. About the year 1540 the situation was so that the Portuguese had established themselves firmly on the west coast with their center at Goa. The Syrians continued as before, and their relations with the Portuguese were still friendly. It was at this stage that King John III of Portugal appealed to the pope and the newly formed Society of Jesus for priests who should go to India. The first man to be chosen bears a famous name in the history of Christianity in Asia: Saint Francis Xavier (1506-1552). The Roman Catholic work was going on in Goa from the time of the arrival of the Portuguese, but no conversions of any consequence

¹Thomas, p. 48.

appear to have taken place until the arrival of Francis Xavier whose unexampled works and success merit some detail. He was one of the first disciples of Loyola, the founder of the Order of Jesuits which received Pope Paul III's sanction in 1540. Ignatius, Francis, and five other converts dedicated themselves to the service of the Pope and the Church of Rome and faithfully did Xavier perform his vow to the last moments of his life.

Never has a Christian missionary gone forth with so many substantial tokens of royal approval. Xavier left for India loaded with favors by his king and accompanied the viceroy when the king sent him to India. With him Xavier bore a letter from the pope appointing him papal nuncio to the Eastern world and giving him supreme authority over all the missions and churches already existing in these parts while by the king he was furnished with an order to the Portuguese officials to supply him with everything needed for his suitable maintenance.¹ On May 6, 1542, a notable day in the calendar of the Indian Church, Xavier - after a tedious voyage of thirteen months - landed at Goa then the brilliant capital of the Portuguese power, the seat of the Viceroy, the scene of oriental luxury and royal display.

Speaking of the interview granted to Francis by Bishop Albuquerque immediately after his disembarkation, Teixeira writes:

Father Francis explained that he had been sent by the pope and the king of Portugal to help the colonists in India, to instruct the newly converted Indians, and to work for the salvation of the unbelievers, but that he committed himself unreservedly into the hands of his Lordship and desired to do nothing except with his permission and approval. He showed him the letters of the pope accrediting him as Apostolic Nuncio and said that he had no intention of using the powers which they conferred otherwise than as might seem good to his Lordship.²

But Goa did not supply the sphere in search of which Xavier had gone

¹James Brodrick, pp. 84-118.

²Manuel Teixeira, quoted by Brodrick, pp. 119-120.

to India. His mission was not to his own countrymen, but to the Paravas; so after a stay of five months in Goa, at the insistance of the Viceroy, he went to the extreme southern coast east from Cape Comorin where the Paravas live. His great initial difficulty was his ignorance of Tamil, the language of the people, and with all his admirable powers Xavier by his own confession was no great linguist. He never made much progress with any of the languages of the East, and in this his first field the difficulty oppressed him greatly. His method of meeting it had at least the merit of simplicity. As soon as he arrived in the district he got the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Ave Maria, and the Ten Commandments translated into Tamil. These he then committed to memory, and after four months felt himself to be sufficiently equipped for beginning his work. His procedure is told in one of his best known letters, written after a year of experience:

I sought out men who had an understanding of my Portuguese as well as their own Tamil. Then, after many days and meetings, we got the prayers into Tamil, beginning with the manner of making the sign of the cross as a profession of faith that there exists one only God - God in three divine persons. After that, we set forth the Creed, the Commandments, the Pater Noster, the Ave Maria, the Salve Regina and the Confiteor in the same language. I then learned the translated formulae by heart and taking bell went ringing it right through the town to collect as many children and adults as I could. Having gathered my audience, I held forth to them twice each day until, at the end of a month, they had learned the prayers. I then arranged for the children to teach their fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, and neighbours the lessons which they had acquired at my school. On Sunday I assemple all the people, men and women, young and old, and get them to repeat the prayers in their language. . . . We begin with a profession of faith in the unity and trinity of God I first saying the Creed in stentorian tones and then they all together in mighty chorus. That done, I go through the Creed article by article. . . . I make them repeat the Creed more often than anything else because only a man who believes in the twelve articles has a right to call himself a Christian. . . . I give out the First Commandment which they repeat and then we all say together, Jesus Christ, Son of God, grant us grace to love Thee above all things. When we have asked this grace we recite the Pater Noster (Lord's Prayer) together, and then cry with one accord, Holy Mary , Mother of Jesus Christ,

obtain for us grace from thy son to enable us to keep the First Commandment. Next we say an Ave Maria, and proceed in the same manner through each of the remaining nine commandments. . . . I require all of them to say the Confiteor (Confession), especially those about to be baptized, and then we have the Creed. I question the candidates individually about each several articles to see whether they believe it firmly. If they reply that they do, I go on to explain to him the law of Christ which must be observed in order to save one's soul, and then I baptize them.¹

Once he baptized a whole village in a single day, and often, by repeating so frequently the Creed and other things, his voice and strength have failed him. Baptism was ever his great aim. In twelve months he baptized one thousand infants who were moribund, "whom God called away from these parts of His heavenly mansion before they had lost the robe of innocence."² Some words, written in August, 1544, after he had been two years in the field, are significant of much:

Here I am almost alone; . . . and I find it a most inconvenient position to be in the midst of a people of an unknown tongue, without the assistance of a capable interpreter. . . conceive . . . what kind of sermons I am able to address to the assemblies, when they who should repeat my address to the people do not understand me, nor I them. I ought to be an adept in dumb show. Yet I am not without work, for I want no interpreter to baptize infants just born, or those which their parents bring; nor to relieve the famished and the naked who came in my way. So I devote myself to these two kinds of good works, and do not regard my time as lost.³

After a year's work among the Paravas, Xavier turned to the district west of the Cape, and met with like success among the people.

As a result of the labors of Xavier and his co-workers, there were added in a single decade forty thousand souls to the visible church of Christ. And if that be enough to constitute success, Xavier was perhaps the most successful missionary of the world. But the element of quality as well as that of quantity is here essential to a right judgment; and in

¹Quoted in Brodrick, pp. 141-142.

²Ibid., p. 145.

³Quoted in Ogilvie, p. 100.

quality Xavier's missionary work was gravely deficient. His own accounts of the methods he adopted, and the speedy way in which he 'made Christians', are distressing reading. They leave behind them a sense of disappointment and humiliation that a man so great should have approved methods so superficial, and in general so destitute of Spiritual worth. His magnifying of baptism, the purely formal and external character of much of his work, the hasty reception into the church of multitudes whose understanding of the first principles of Christianity must have been almost nil - these are defects too grave to be overlooked, and it is no surprise that after history of those communities, where Christian were so rapidly 'made,' should have little that is gratifying to record. Born in ceremonialism the religion of the people has never grown to higher things.¹

Yet grave though these defects are, there are at least two considerations which in fairness should be kept in mind, one of which is that the defects were not in Xavier so much as in Xavier's church. Great and good although he was, he yet came under the spell of his ecclesiastical environment and was subject to its limitations. And there is this other consideration that Xavier being himself greater than his system, was in his heart dissatisfied with his Indian work, and with the spiritual standard of his Indian converts. Writing to King John III of Portugal in January, 1548, just before quitting India for Japan, he says:

I am not as yet, Sire, completely determined to go to Japan, but I think I shall, for I almost despair to any real chance or encouragement to increase the faith in India, or even to preserve in the faith in India,² or even to preserve in the faith the existing Christian communities.²

¹I had the opportunity to work very close with these people for a while.

²Brodrick, p. 307.

In a letter to Ignatius Loyola, written in December, 1548, he is even more pessimistic - he says that the natives, on account of the enormity of their wickedness, are as little as possible fitted to embrace the Christian religion. They so abhor it that "it bores the Indians to extinction to be asked to become Christians."¹

However, we must be willing to appreciate his prayer life, his love for his Christ and church, his enthusiasm and his devotedness to his work. His contemporaries described him as a "true soldier of Jesus Christ." This is a title that fits him perfectly. The admiration he won from men of his own day has passed on undiminished to later generations. Today he is known as "Rome's greatest missionary to the East."² Xavier planted missions in India, in several islands of Indonesia and in Japan. It was an amazing career. Xavier died on the second day of December, 1552, in Canton, a port in Kwangtung Province, southeastern China. His body, given a temporary burial on the island, was taken to Malacca by the Portuguese and was buried in the church there; but about five months later it was secretly exhumed by his friends and removed to Goa, its final resting place where his shrine still is. He was canonized by Pope Gregory XV on March 12, 1622. Pope Benedict XIV constituted Francis patron Saint of India and all the East.³

¹Ibid., p. 329.

²Ogilvie, p. 121.

³For the voyage to China and the burial see Brodrick, pp. 454-455, 494, 538.

CHAPTER V

THE PORTUGUESE AND THE SYRIAN CHRISTIANS

When Vasco da Gama and his followers went to South India they discovered there a very ancient, comparatively strong, and highly respected Christian Church. At first the Syrian Christians welcomed the Portuguese as their friends. At the time of the arrival of the Portuguese in India the Christian community was governed by the Metropolitan, Mar Yahballaha, assisted by the three suffragan bishops, Mar Denha, Mar Jacob and Mar Johanes, all natives of Mesopotamia. The arrival of the Portuguese coincided with Moslem incursions into south India. In the spring of 1502, when Vasco da Gama sailed for the second time to the East Indies, he cast anchor in the harbor at Cochin, and a deputation of the Malabar Christians asked him to take them under the protection of the king of Portugal. This was a political move, so they overlooked the ecclesiastical differences for a while, and friendly relations were soon established. The Orthodox did not expect that their alliance with the Portuguese would affect their church life and at first it did not. In all the treaties with the native princes special regard was paid to the Christians. And Bishop Mar Jacob, who for forty-five long years had held a position of great influence among the Thomas Christians, was so well disposed towards the Portuguese, and he soon handed over to the Portuguese governor of Cochin, Pedro de Sequeira, "the precious privilege Tablets which were of simply incalculable value to his church."¹

¹Richter, pp. 78-79.

Saint Francis Xavier, during his missionary work in India, did not proselytize among the Orthodox and maintained friendly relations with them. He even recommended the head of the Saint Thomas Christians to the Portuguese King John III in the following words:

This good old man (he had been at work in India for forty-five years) was a bishop from Mesopotamia, the land that had supplied the Malabar Christians with their prelates for a thousand years. Technically, from the Catholic point of view, he was a schismatic, though not in the least schismatically inclined and on terms of intimate friendship with the Franciscans and Saint Francis Xavier. The Malabar Christians, who were a real phenomenon of church history, had been cut off from all contact with the West by the rise of Islam and took to themselves the only bishops available.¹

This amicable relationship began to deteriorate in the second part of the Sixteenth Century. The Syrian Christians retained Syriac as the language of the church with great tenacity, although Malayalam was the general language of the people. Only Syrian books were used in the church service. They observed three sacraments - baptism, holy communion, and ordination to the priesthood. The Lord's Supper they administered in both kinds; but before handing the bread to the communicant the priest dipped it in the wine. They had no confirmation, no auricular confession, no extreme unction. They had no monks, no nuns, no monasteries. A beautiful and greatly beloved custom was that of the "love feast" (Nercha) at the celebration of which many thousands of Christians frequently assembled. Mass was said every Sunday although it was not a strict rule of the church that the congregation should assemble in the churches to hear it. It is worthy of special note that there existed a very numerous body of native priests (Kattanars) and deacons (Shammas), who were required to gain a certain degree of education, especially a reading knowledge of the Syriac language. In many ways the Syrian customs were unsatisfactory to the Romans, and they

¹Borderick, p. 339.

realized it to be their duty to try to bring these neglected Eastern Christians to a more satisfactory kind of Christian practice. Then in the first half of the Sixteenth Century they began an attempt to introduce among the Syrians the teachings of Western Catholicism. "Throughout the century the attempt went on," says Firth, "becoming, as time passed, more and more clearly a policy of bringing the entire Malabar Church into conformity with Western ways and under the government of Portuguese bishops."¹ The pope had given the power to the king of Portugal to nominate the bishops for the Malabar Church and supervise its administration.²

Following are the main differences between the Roman and Syrian practice which were the cause of the Portuguese action:

(1) Not only first but foremost, there was the question of ecclesiastical allegiance. The Portuguese acknowledged the pope of Rome, not only as their own ecclesiastical head but as the supreme bishop over all Christians on earth, but the Syrians acknowledged the Patriarch of the East as their head and not the pope. The Patriarch consecrated Syrian's bishops.

(2) The second difference was in the use of the sacraments. The Portuguese being Romans, accepted seven sacraments,³ but the Syrians accepted only three.⁴

(3) In the Eucharist the manner of giving communion to the people was different. The Syrian method is "intinction," that is the bread is placed

¹Firth, p. 69.

²Nicolas Zernov, Eastern Christendom (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1961), p. 165.

³Baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, ordination, penance, marriage and unction.

⁴Baptism, holy communion, and ordination.

in the wine and the two are given together by means of a spoon.¹ The Roman method is that the celebrating priest receives the bread and the wine separately, but that all other communicants, whether clergy or laity, receive the bread only and not the cup.

(4) Among the Syrians the parochial clergy were married, whereas the Portuguese held to the Roman rule of a celibate clergy. In this manner, too, the Syrians have followed the common custom of Eastern churches, by that the parish clergy are married and only monks are celibate; bishops also must be celibate, and are therefore chosen from among the monks.

(5) The Portuguese held the Roman doctrine of Purgatory, but the Syrians had not this doctrine.

(6) The Portuguese in the Roman manner observed the habit of venerating images of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints. The Syrians on the other hand did not practice this veneration.²

It will be noticed that in most of the illustrations given the Syrians were really preserving Eastern customs, and could not in these matters be justly charged with heresy. But in the eyes of the Portuguese, the Syrian rite which they could not understand was thought to contain many errors inspired by Nestorian influence. So the Portuguese began to reform the Syrian Church something more like the Western form of Christianity which in the future met with great opposition from the side of Malabar Christianity.

Franciscans and Jesuits worked hard for the advancement of the

¹The theory was that the breaking of the bread symbolized Christ's death, the mixture of the bread and the wine in the cup the reunion of his life and body in the resurrection; so that to receive the body and blood together is to receive the whole Christ, and to separate them would be as if to undo the resurrection and crucify Christ again. E.M. Philip, p. 385.

²Firth, pp. 69-74.

Roman Church. It is strange but true that it was the great missionary Francis Xavier who introduced the Inquisition in his Indian dominions, and it was set up in 1560 at Goa. Andeney says that he did this

in the burning earnestness of his zeal, not because he imagined that he could convert it into an engine for forcing the heathen into the church - any such object was not in its province; but because he desired to have certain impediments to the growth and what he deemed the health of the church removed out of its way. This institution was invoked to plough up fallow ground; it was demanded in order to remove rocks of offence. In 1545 Xavier begged the king of Portugal to establish The Inquisition in order to check 'the Jewish wickedness' that was spreading through his Eastern dominions.¹

Both the Franciscans and the Jesuits started educational institutions for the training of young men in the hope that, if these infiltrated into the community and if at least a few among them were to become priests, a way could be opened to influence the community to accept the Roman Catholic faith. In the midst of these efforts - in 1542 - Mar Jacob Abuna died, and the Portuguese started direct interference with the Syrian Church. To fill the vacant See, Patriarch Abdiso of Geziresh, who was formally subject to Rome, sent Bishop Joseph to Malabar. The Portuguese opposed this appointment and claimed the right of appointing bishops for the Syrian Christians. So when the vessel taking Mar Joseph to Malabar touched Goa in November, 1556, the Portuguese kept him in Goa as a virtual prisoner.²

In the meantime news reached Goa that a Syrian bishop of obscure origin had reached Malabar and was teaching heretical doctrines. This upset the plans of the Portuguese. They now thought Mar Joseph a lesser evil and allowed him to go to Malabar. By reaching Malabar, Mar Joseph was convinced of the need of reforms in the Malabar Church and earnestly set to work in this direction. Soon he won the love and admiration of the Syrians

¹Andeney, pp. 527-528.

²Thomas, pp. 75-79.

and persuaded the Chaldean Bishop then working Malabar to go back to where he came from. But the Portuguese were not satisfied with the reforms of Mar Joseph and sent a Jesuit missionary, Father Carneyro, to Malabar. He went about preaching from parish to parish and telling the Syrians that they were no better than heretics. This irritated Mar Joseph and the Syrians and their antagonism led to the withdrawal of Father Carneyro from Malabar. On a charge of heresy Mar Joseph was deported to Europe. He was examined by Cardinal Henry and Queen Catherine and they declared him innocent and sent him back to Malabar. He reached Malabar in 1565, but no sooner had he taken charge of his flock than reports of fresh heresies reached Goa from the Jesuit of Cochin and Cranganoor. The authorities at Goa found the charges serious and again denounced Mar Joseph, this time directly to Rome. The pope ordered an inquiry and Mar Joseph had again to go to Goa to prove his innocence. But the first council of Goa held in 1587 condemned him as a heretic and sent him again to Lisbon, the capital of Portugal. Here Mar Joseph produced irrefutable evidence of his innocence. He had no difficulty in convincing Lisbon that the accusations were inspired not by a desire of reform but solely by a desire for bringing the Syrians under Goa. Finally the pope declared him not guilty of heresy.

During the first deportation of Mar Joseph to Lisbon, the Syrians applied to Patriarch Abdiso for another bishop in place of Mar Joseph. A new bishop, Mar Abraham, came with credentials from the Patriarch, to Serra, the hinterland where the agricultural population among the Syrians lived. He started to govern the Syrians from the Serra when Mar Joseph, after receiving his innocence in Lisbon, returned to Malabar. After a conflict between the two and a period of persecution from the Portuguese ecclesiastical authorities, Mar Abraham settled down to his ecclesiastical

work in Angamali, a new see created by Patriarch for him. Mar Abraham vigorously fought for the independence of his ancient church. He informed his own patriarch of the evil intentions of the Portuguese and warned him that if he did not take active steps to combat them, the Malabar Church would be grabbed by Goa. He then got influential members of the Syrian community to send a petition to the patriarch impressing upon him the need for appointing at least five bishops under the Archbishop of Angamali. In the midst of this struggle with the Portuguese, Mar Abraham died in 1597 which gave the Portuguese, at long last, the opportunity for successfully carrying out their designs on Angamali. And with the hour came the man. He was Alexio de Menezies.¹

Menezies enjoyed the special confidence of Lisbon and Rome and was appointed Archbishop of Goa in 1595. He was well connected with the Viceroy of Goa who had the greatest regard and respect for him. His first attempt was to impress Rome and get the necessary authority from the pope for the execution of his schemes. The Portuguese were in a favorable position to present their case forcefully while the Syrians could only send an occasional petition which in all probability never reached Rome. By this time Rome was inclined to the view that it would be desirable to bring the Syrian Church under the Portuguese. Hence in 1595 Pope Clement VIII had ordered the Archbishop of Goa to inquire into the matters of Syrian Christians in Malabar.

Menezies decided that no bishop owing allegiance to Rome or elsewhere should reach Malabar without his permission and ordered a general blockade of the Indian Seas. During this blockade of the Indian Seas, Mar Abraham died, and pending the arrival of a new bishop, Archdeacon George

¹J. Hough, A History of Christianity in India (London: R.B. Seeley and W. Burnside), I, pp. 238-287. On Mar Joseph and Mar Abraham see also Tisserant, pp. 35-47.

of the Pakalomaltam family acted as the interim head of the Syrian Church in conformity with traditions. This arrangement did not suit the convenience of Archbishop Menezies who requested the pope to appoint a new bishop. The pope appointed Father Francis Roz as the Bishop of Angamali, but at the same time he lessened the importance, making it a diocese suffragan to Goa and in the patronage of the king of Portugal.¹

Archdeacon was an able man and did what he could to retain the independence of his ancient church. With the appointment of Francis Roz as the bishop, George stirred up the Syrians. There was resentment throughout Malabar and the Syrians did not permit Bishop Roz to enter into their churches.² Archdeacon George ordered a general assembly of the Syrians and a large number of Kaltanars (priests) and principal laymen gathered at Angamali; George made every priest and layman swear that he would accept no bishop appointed by Goa. They all promised, with an oath, to stand by their Archdeacon "in defense of the ancient faith in which they and their forefathers had been brought up; and they declared that they would not permit even the slightest alteration to be made therein."³ George exhorted the people and the clergy to resist all European innovations in the Syrian Church as a retaliatory measure against the Portuguese blockage. The Syrians determined, not only to exclude the Latin priests from their churches, but to drive them from their villages; and two Jesuits, one at Angamali, the other at Carturte, are said hardly to have escaped with their lives.⁴

Finally Archbishop Menezies determined to visit Malabar. On the first day of February, 1599, he landed in Cochin and sent an invitation to Archdeacon George to go and meet him. George decided to go to Cochin and to meet

¹Brown, p. 92.

²Thomas, p. 38.

³Hough, VI, 303-304.

⁴Ibid.

Menezies. But he could not make out what the Archbishop exactly wanted. He was afraid that he would be kidnapped by the Portuguese. So he started from the Serra for Cochin at the head of an army of three thousand picked Syrians which he called his body guard.

In the meeting Archbishop did not find much difficulty in having his own way with Archdeacon. However, when asked to sign the clause in which the allegiance of the Syrian Church was to be transferred to Goa, the Archdeacon hesitated. George knew he was fighting a losing battle and he signed the agreement. According to the agreement a synod of all the priests and leading laity was to be held under the auspices of the archbishop in order to purge the Syrian Church of its errors and bring it under Goa. When the people came to know about the agreement, there was considerable resentment all over the Serra. But Menezies soon won the people to his side. He proceeded for further reforms. He thought that Babylon was a weakening link, a mere memory with no vitality. On the other hand, Goa was a living force with infinite prestige in close proximity to the land of the Syrians, and he felt sure that the Syrians would accept its authority if properly presented. Immediately he ordered the priests of Vaipicotta, Cochin and Cranganoor to launch an intensive campaign among the people "to familiarize them with the proposed innovations."¹ The archbishop, in the circular convening the synod of 1599, declared that he is "determined and prepared to go in person to take possession of the bishopric" of the Syrians.² He continues:

We were also moved by the piety of the people and the mercy God had shown them in having preserved so many thousand souls in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, from the time that the holy Apostle Thomas preached unto them until this day By virtue of holy obedience, also, and upon pain of excommunication, the archdeacon of this diocese

¹Thomas, p. 91.

²King, p. 450.

and all the priests were to come to this synod, together with four representatives from every town and village.¹

This campaign and his own extensive tours had the desired effect.

Archdeacon George was now thoroughly alarmed and in his sheer despair he excommunicated archbishop Menezies. Menezies sent an urgent note to the king of Cochin requesting him to take serious action against archdeacon George for his misbehavior. What is known is that archdeacon George received peremptory orders from the king to behave himself.

Meanwhile Menezies had found a new way of winning himself a following, namely by ordering candidates for the priesthood. As there had been no ordination since Mar Abraham's death, nor perhaps in the last two years of his life, many young deacons were available. Thirty-eight men were ordained by Menezies at Udayamperur on the Saturday before Passion Sunday² in spite of energetic protests by George. They were ordained of course by the Roman rite. It was thus "that Menezies began to secure in this country a number of persons who remained faithful to him, and never abandoned his interests."³

Finally George was forced to give his full support to Menezies to call the Synod. The archbishop and the archdeacon sent out separate circulars commanding all priests to attend it. His aim, as Menezies wrote to a dignitary in Rome in December, 1597, was to get a Jesuit appointed as bishop of the Syrian diocese, and then

. . . to purify all the churches from the heresy and errors which they hold, giving them the pure doctrine of the Catholic faith, taking from them all the heretical books that they possess. . . . I humbly suggest that he (the new Latin bishop, preferably a Jesuit) be instructed to extinguish little by little the Syrian language, which is not natural. His priests should learn the Latin language, because the Syriac language is the channel through which all that heresy follows. A good administrator ought to replace Syriac by Latin. What is most important of all is that the bishop be a suffragan of this city, as is at present the bishop of Cochin, his near neighbour.⁴

¹Ibid., pp. 450-451.

²Haugh, I, 385.

³Ibid., p. 392.

⁴King, II, 449-450.

CHAPTER VI

THE SYNOD OF DIAMPER AND AFTER

The Synod of Diamper (Udayamperoor in Malayalam) is one of the most interesting and at the same time probably the most famous episode in Syrian church history - famous not as a model of an ecclesiastical assembly, but for the extraordinary nature of its decisions and their effects. It is for this reason that a modern Roman Catholic historian calls 1599 "a fateful date and one of the darkest in the history of the relations between Latin and Orientals."¹ It was held at a time when the office of metran or bishop of the Syrian Church was vacant.

"Whereas," says the archiepiscopal atation:

By immemorial custom and right introduced into this diocese from its beginning, and consecrated to by all the infidel kings of Malabar, the whole government, as it were, and the cognisance of all matters wherein Christians are any way concerned, has belonged to the church and the prelate thereof; and it likewise having been an ancient custom in the same to give an account to the people of whatsoever has been ordained in the church, in order to it being better observed by all; we do therefore command all Christians in all towns and villages in this bishopric, and, where there are no villages, all that use to assemble at any church as belonging to it, immediately upon this our pleasure being intimated to them, to choose four of the most honourable, conscientious, and experienced persons among them to come in their name to the said Synod with sufficient powers to approve, sign, confirm, and consult in their name, so as to oblige themselves thereby to comply with whatsoever shall be determined in the Synod.²

The Synod itself, beginning on the twentieth of June, 1599, was a very large one, attended by one hundred and thirty-three priests, twenty

¹Tisserant, p. 166.

²Roe, pp. 225-226.

deacons and six hundred and sixty lay representatives - in all eight hundred and thirteen persons on the Syrian side.¹ According to Philip there were only two churches which did not send delegates;² it was thus a thoroughly representative gathering. It lasted for seven days. After the celebration of mass, Menezies, explaining the reason for calling the Synod, announced that he had done it because Pope Clement VIII had entrusted the government of the Malabar Church to him until the vacant diocese should have a bishop of its own and that in any case it belonged to him as Metropolitan and Primate of the Indies, the diocese being vacant. The Synod was convened:

For the increase and exaltation of the Catholic faith among the Syrians in Malabar; for the destruction of the errors and heresies which had been sown in the diocese by several heretics and schismatics; for the purging of books from the false doctrine contained in them; for the perfect union of this church with the whole church Catholic and universal; for the yielding of obedience to the supreme bishop of Rome, the universal pastor of the church and successor in the chair of Saint Peter and Vicar of Christ upon earth, from whom they had for some time departed; for the extirpation of Simony, which had been much practised in the diocese; for the regulating of the administration of the holy sacraments of the church and the clergy and for the custom of all Christian people of the diocese.³

It was in fact intended by means of this Synod to revolutionize the whole doctrine and practice of the Syrian church, to annex and assimilate it as far as possible to the church of Rome, and to force the Syrian Christians to accept the whole body of the doctrine formulated by the Council of Trent. The Roman Catholic historian, King, says that

the synod of Diamper was intended to sound the death knell of the Syrian Church of Malabar. No native bishop was present to defend the usages of his church and the proceedings were not only one-sided, but expressed many things contrary to the truth.⁴

Unfortunately we have no account of the proceedings of the Synod from any member of the Syrian Church. However, we have a summary description of the

¹Firth, p. 88.

²Philip, p. 118.

³Rae, pp. 226-227.

⁴King, p. 451.

important business of the Synod given by James Hough, and parts of which are produced below:

After the usual solemnities and a short address from the archbishop, he began by repeating in substance the Apostle's Creed. Then followed the traditions of the church and her interpretations of Holy Scripture; then the seven sacraments, together with the customary rites in administering the same; then, the mass for the living and the dead, with the doctrine of transubstantiation, fully and unequivocally stated therein, and of purgatory for those who die before they are cleansed from their sins; but it is asserted that the souls of the just go to heaven immediately on departing from the body, having entirely satisfied for the punishment due to the sins that they have committed. Those also in purgatory were said to be translated to heaven as soon as they had made the same satisfaction. Then followed the confession and affirmation 'that the Saints now reigning with Christ in heaven are to be revered and invoked, and that they offer prayers to God for us.' Their relics and images also were to be preserved, used and revered, with due honour and veneration.

'That our Lady, the most holy Virgin Mary, is a proper and true mother of God' was the next article of belief; to which was added her perpetual virginity and freedom from sin. The doctrine of indulgences, the pope's supremacy and the oath of obedience due to him as the Vicar of Christ were confidently affirmed.

The archbishop next anathematized everything contrary to decrees of the Council of Trent and to whatever the Roman Church has determined to be true. Then followed an enumeration of heresies and heretics to be cursed.

He maintained there was but one law, 'one pure Christianity' in opposition to those who, he said, 'ignorantly taught, that there was one law of Saint Thomas, and another law of Saint Peter, and that they were so different as not to have anything to do with each other.' The Prelate concluded this confession with an oath, never to receive into the Church and Bishopric of the Serra any Prelate or governor except those whom the pope of Rome should send. He then renounced and anathematized the Patriarch of Babylon, in the same terms as he had just used in his anathema against Nestorians.¹

The Synod was asked to sign this declaration which they did, although in the beginning there was a murmur of protest. It is natural to ask why the Syrians submitted themselves to Rome. The immediate reason for their acquiescence at the synod was that Menezies had already won many of them over to his side. Another reason was that the Syrians were without a bishop

¹Hough, III, 26-29.

and were ill-organized to meet aggression. The Syrian's knowledge about the doctrines of Rome was limited, and the pope was no arch-enemy to them. Moreover they had already for many years been exposed to Roman teaching and influence, both directly through contact with Franciscans, Jesuits, and other Roman Catholics and indirectly through their own bishops. All these things can be counted as reasons for their submission to Rome at the Synod. Zernov comments:

This complete victory was partly the result of a display of Portuguese military power, for the Viceroy sent a detachment of troops to Diamper to watch over the council's proceedings. This seeming triumph of the Latins was accompanied by the wholesale burning of Orthodox Service books and other ecclesiastical documents. This destruction was so thorough that hardly any reliable information is available today about the life¹ and teaching of the Indian Church prior to the Sixteenth Century.

The value of the Synod to the church at present is that it offers a basis for the study of the faith and practice of the church during this period. K. K. Kuruvill remarks:

The acts and decrees of the Synod of Diamper are of no inconsiderable value, as an historic record of the faith and practice both of the Roman and the Syrian Churches at the close of the Sixteenth Century . . . and, with respect to the Syrians, these decrees contain the best, indeed, it may be said, the only, account extant of the doctrines and customs of their church at the time of their publication.²

The vicissitudes through which that injured people have since passed; the unsparing hand with which the Archbishop afterwards committed to the flames every document he could find that contained a sentiment opposed to the pretensions and tenets of Rome; the numerous variations that have since been introduced into their creed and ritual; these and other causes have combined to render it very difficult, if not impossible to ascertain the character of their church at the early period of their history. Seeing that the only knowledge we have of their creed is derived from the history of

¹Hough, II, 26-29.

²K. K. Kuruvilla, pp. 7-8.

this Synod, Geddes has justly remarked that Menezies, by composing the acts and decrees in question, was

instrumental in letting the world know more of the orthodoxy of that apostolic church . . . and that therefor we have reason to bless Providence for bringing so good an end out of his evil design; but that we have no reason at all to thank him for it,¹ who intended nothing less than the making of such a happy discovery.

Rae says that the most cruel of the Synod's proceedings was the making of the decree about the celibacy of the clergy retrospective. Menezies compelled all married priests, on pain of excommunication, to put away their wives. But what history will least willingly forgive to this 'notorious synod' is its wanton destruction of books. The liturgies were either destroyed or changed beyond recognition, and there is probably no entire copy now in existence which was used by the Syrians in south India before 1599.² From the decrees of the Synod, Hough summarizes the faith of the Syrian Christians as follows:

(1) Salvation by faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ for the sins of mankind.

(2) The necessity of the new birth or regeneration by the Holy Spirit, before anyone can believe or be saved.

(3) The Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity, as defined in the Athanasian Creed, but without its damatory clauses.

As in these fundamental tenets she agrees with every Orthodox Church in Christendom, it is unnecessary to dilate upon them. But it is important to show here wherein she differed in other respects from the church of Rome at this period of his history:

(1) She rejected the pope's supremacy . . .

(2) She denied the doctrine of Transubstantiation. The Syrians main-

¹Ibid.

²For details see King, II, 454-473 and Rae, p. 251.

tained the spiritual presence of the body and blood of Christ in the sacraments.

(3) They condemned the adoration of images as idolatrous. This remark does not apply to the figure of a cross which was long regarded with reverence and placed in all their churches.

(4) They maintained that the Church of Rome had corrupted the true faith. Besides the three fundamental tenets of that church stated above, the Syrians accused the Romanists of setting up many human inventions and making the word of God of no effect.

(5) Their Church knew nothing of the intercession of saints. . . . They believed that their souls were in a state of happiness but that they would not appear in the presence of God until after the general resurrection and the last judgment.

(6) Purgatory . . . of this state they had never heard, and were at a loss to understand what Menezies meant, when at the opening of his campaign he first brought it to their notice.

(7) Of masses and prayers for the dead they knew nothing.

(8) They made no use of holy oil in the administration of baptism. It was however customary after the service to rub the infant's body, either with coconut oil or gergelin, a species of Saffron. This practice, though not attended with prayer or benediction, they regarded as somewhat sacred, and we have seen that they appealed to it as superceding confirmation, when first desired to conform to that rite.

(9) They had no knowledge of extreme unction.

(10) Of auricular confession also they had never heard and they shrank from it with great horror when it was first proposed to them.

(11) They never dreamed of the celibacy of the clergy who were allowed to marry with all the freedom that the laity enjoyed. Their wives were

called Catanaries.

(12) They denied matrimony to be a sacrament.

(13) They appear to have held but two orders: priesthood and diaconate.¹

(14) They celebrated the communion with cakes, mixing the meal with a little oil and salt . . . at all events, it was much more like bread than the wafer of the Roman Church.

(15) They consecrated the elements with prayer, believing that, without the Holy Ghost, the mere words of the priest would be of no avail.

(16) They administered in both kinds to all communicants.

(17) They admitted to communion the members of other churches.

(18) In all questions of doctrine they appealed to the authority of sacred scriptures as decisive.

(19) They are said to have held three sacraments: Baptism, the Eucharist and Holy Orders.²

Soon after the termination of the Synod, the archbishop decided to give effect to the reforms personally. In order to accomplish this he undertook an extensive tour of visitation of his newly acquired diocese. This time he spent four and a half months among them, going about with impressive pomp and distributing largesse, as at Kalloorkat, where, so the story goes, he caused a certain kind of sweet cake called Kolukatta³ to be distributed among the children and each child was delighted to find a gold coin inside.⁴ Soon after the tour he went back to Goa in 1600 having realized the greatest ambition of his life. He had secured the submission of

¹It does not appear why the order of the bishops is omitted here. It is conjectured that it was because the head of the church is not properly called bishop but metropolitan or rather metran and that is a distinction which might have been admitted between order and name of dignity. C. Buchanan, Christian Researches in Asia (Cambridge: The University Press, 1949), 108-109.

²Hough, II, 11-19.

³A baby food made of rice.

⁴Philip, p. 122.

the Malabar Church to Rome, but the life of the church could not suddenly be transformed and assimilated to the Roman pattern. The task of building on the foundation laid at Diamper was entrusted to the Jesuits who had accompanied Menezies on his visitation. In 1600 the pope appointed the Jesuit Father Francis Roz to the see of Angamali. Roz was consecrated at Goa, early in 1601, and at once returned to take charge of his diocese. However, the successful end of Menezies's mission was but the beginning of the real trouble. Roz had a most difficult task because the Syrian Christians had never before been ruled by a bishop. The native archdeacons had always governed the Syrian Christians in all matters except those liturgical functions which were reserved for bishops. At first archbishop Menezies, and now bishop Roz, came with a conception of the episcopal office radically different from that familiar in the Serra; and the consequent changes in administration were "a greater annoyance to the Malabar Church than any liturgical or doctrinal reforms could have been."¹ Another serious cause was the reduction of the Goa of Angamali to a bishopric from an archdiocese and its subjection to Goa.

Francis Roz was personally well qualified for his new work. He was pious and a hard worker. He knew both Malayalam and Syriac, and had already considerable firsthand knowledge of his diocese. He pressed on with the preparation and printing of Syriac translation of various books of the Roman rite and as soon as he could he set out on a visitation of his diocese.

Roz realized the importance of raising the see of Angamali to an archdiocese. He also felt the need of transforming the see to Cranganoor. Archdeacon George and his party were particularly strong in Angamali and Roz felt he would be much more comfortable at Cranganoor, a port under

¹Brown, p. 92.

Portuguese influence. One of Roz's difficulties was done away in 1608, when the pope¹ reestablished Angamali as an archdiocese. Later he removed Cranganore from the diocese of Cochin making it the headquarters of the archdiocese of the Serra instead of Angamali.²

Meanwhile archdeacon George became the most powerful man in the Serra. The Cochin Rajah and the European enemies of Roz actively supported him, and his voice became powerful enough to be heard even in Rome. On the sixteenth of February, 1624, the first Latin archbishop of the Syrians died at the age of sixty-seven. He was buried in the church at Cranganore on February 16, 1624. A tablet in the old church at Paravar records his death.³

The next archbishop was Stephen de Brito, a Portuguese Jesuit who had been coadjutor with right of succession since 1620. He was a man of peace, on good terms with the people and with the archdeacon, and he had been one of those who counseled moderation. He was overwhelmed by the authority the old archdeacon exercised over his diocese and was distracted by the quarrels between the Dominicans and the Jesuits in Serra for power. He followed the line of least resistance and when he found that archdeacon George would give him no peace until he had received written confirmation of the powers he had seized, the obliging archbishop signed a document of virtual abdication in his favor. Thus until his death which occurred July 25, 1637, archdeacon George was the virtual ruler of the Syrians under de Brito. The Syrians still revere him as one of their greatest countrymen who successfully fought the Portuguese domination. De Brito appointed

¹Bull of Paul V dated Dec. 22, 1608. Quoted in Brown, p. 94.

²Bull of Paul V dated Dec. 3, 1609. Ibid.

³Brown, pp. 94-96.

Thomas de Campas, a nephew of George as his successor and in 1641 Brito himself died.¹

After this, the Portuguese influence generally and the Jesuits in particular began to decline and the Syrian Church again worked for severance from Goa, and applied to Babylon for a bishop. The influence of Rome dominated the whole Syrian Church for about fifty-five years. There were small groups here and there which reacted violently against the change, and they went underground until a favorable opportunity arrived for an open revolt. It soon came. The substitution of Latin for Syriac in the service, the introduction of images in churches, compulsion on the clergy to separate themselves from their wives and the pressure on people to conform to Roman practices had alienated the sympathies of the masses from the Roman Church. Meanwhile Archdeacon Thomas who had succeeded archdeacon George, was persuaded by the anti-Romanists to accept the leadership of the aggrieved party and wrote to the Babylonian Coptic and Jacobite Patriarchs of the East to send the Syrians a bishop, and the Patriarch of Babylon immediately sent a bishop by the name of Ahatalla² to Malabar. Bishop Ahatalla appeared in Mylapore at the shrine of Saint Thomas and wrote to the Syrians that he would be shortly proceeding to take charge of the see left vacant by Mar Abraham. The news was received with the greatest rejoicing

¹ Ibid.

² Who he was and from where he came are matters of some doubt. It would seem most natural to suppose him to have been sent by the Patriarch of Babylon in response to appeals from India, but the Roman Catholic accounts say that he was a deposed Jacobite bishop or Patriarch sent by the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria, and even that on his way he had visited the Nestorian Patriarch and received credentials from him too. Hough, II, pp. 300-304. The Jacobites of Malabar were persuaded that he was no lesser person than the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch himself. Mingana, p. 45. Whoever he was, he was not destined to exercise office in India, for he fell into the hands of the Portuguese who detained him at Mylapore.

in Malabar and as he started from Mylapore in 1653 for Cochin by sea, large groups of people from all over Malabar moved to Cochin to welcome him.¹

About one hundred thousand Syrians including some forty thousand armed men gathered in Cochin to receive the patriarch.² Meanwhile the news went out that the Portuguese caught the patriarch as a prisoner, and was conveyed to Goa, where he was tried by the Inquisition, found guilty of heresy and shipped off to Europe.³

The impatient Syrians demanded the immediate surrender of the patriarch, but the Portuguese refused the demand. In the resultant excitement, a wild rumor spread throughout the crowd that a venerable patriarch was murdered and thrown overboard by the Portuguese. The furious Syrians wanted to storm the Portuguese fortress, but they were advised by their leaders to march to Mattanchery. At the church of Mattanchery the Syrians decided that no Syrian worth his name should owe allegiance to Goa and the Portuguese. Every one was asked to swear by the cross of the Mattanchery church, made famous by this day's events, that he would not accept the authority of Goa. To make the oath effective, it was necessary for every individual to touch the cross while swearing. What with the eagerness of the crowd this presented a difficult situation. The numbers being so great that all could not touch the cross in taking the oath they connected themselves by means of rope.⁴ Thus the Syrians showed their determination to end once and for all the authority of Goa. This event is known in Syrian church history as the Revolt of the Coonen (crooked) Cross.

¹Rae, pp. 259-260.

²Thomas, p. 103.

³Brown, p. 100. Another account says that he was burned at Goa.

⁴Rae, p. 260.

The revolt was almost universal, but a few - about four hundred families - clung to the Roman faith.¹ The difficulties of administration had now to be solved. The authority of the ruling bishop was rejected but there was no Asian bishop at hand to take charge. So the Syrians decided to ordain a bishop. Twelve priests, representing the apostles, ordained archdeacon Thomas as their bishop. He ruled the Syrians taking the title of Mar Thoma I. From now on the Syrian Church enters its modern period, and the farther history of this interesting church will be continued in the next chapter.

The Syrian Christians appear to have formed a single church until the Sixteenth Century and it is evident from the revolt which was almost universal. During the time of the Portuguese dominion in India the Church of Rome thus made a determined effort to enforce the allegiance of the Syrian Christians to the pope. The ultimate result of this endeavor was a division in the church which has never been healed. Since the middle of the Seventeenth Century the history of the Syrian Church has run in two main channels. On the one side there are the Romo-Syrians who form a large and important section of the Roman Catholic Church in India, but in worship are permitted to follow the Syriac rather than the Latin liturgical rite. On the other side there are the independent Syrian Churches with whom we are primarily concerned in this thesis.

In 1663 the Dutch expelled the Portuguese from Malabar which allowed the Orthodox to regain their lost contacts with other Eastern Christians. Mar Gregorious, a Syrian bishop, arrived in 1665 and represented the apostolic ministry among the Indians by reordaining their clergy. He represented,

¹Karuvilla, The Mar Thoma Church and its Doctrines (Madras: C.L.S. 195), p. 11.

however, not the Nestorian, but the Jacobite tradition of Oriental Christianity.¹

Zernou rightly remarks:

Thus the Syrian Christians of South India who had preserved their faith and unity in the midst of Hinduism for sixteen hundred years became divided through meeting the Christian West. Their community was split into two halves, and the gulf between them is as unbridgable today as it was in the Seventeenth Century.²

¹Zernou, p. 165.

²Nicholas Zernou, Eastern Christendom (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1961), p. 165.

PART III. MODERN PERIOD

CHAPTER VII

THE FIRST PROTESTANT MISSION TO THE SYRIAN CHURCH

Archdeacon Thomas assumed episcopal powers as Mar Thoma I, but doubts were entertained about the validity of his consecration as he was not raised to the episcopate according to the canon of the episcopal churches. This again led the church to seek the offices of one of the Eastern non-Roman churches, and this time it was neither the Nestorian nor the Coptic but the Jacobite that came to its aid. Mar Gregorius, Jacobite bishop of Jerusalem, went to India in 1663 and reconsecrated Mar Thoma I. This was the starting point of the long connection which has existed between the two churches until the present time. From this point on the Syrians were known as the Jacobit Syrians.

During the Eighteenth Century, the two communities, Romo-Syrian and the Jacobit Syrians, continued side by side, the Jacobites struggling to maintain itself in face of the superior power and organization of the church of Rome. Yet there was also a good deal of connection between them. In some places they shared the same church building although their services were different, and at times they seemed disposed to make common cause. Many times there were negotiations with Rome designed to bring about the union of the two communities under an Indian bishop.¹

¹Brown, pp. 102-103.

The Jacobites had a succession of bishops all entitled Mar Thoma, each of whom received his office from his predecessor. During the period from 1663 to 1843 eleven bishops ruled the Malabar Church.¹ While Mar Thoma VI was the bishop of Malabar a foreign Jacobite bishop, Mar Gregorios, consecrated one Kattumangot Ramban (a monk) as bishop Kurilos. Soon differences arose between Mar Thomas VI and Mar Kurilos. Both appealed to the Dutch governor who claimed sovereign power in the Cochin state. The governor's decision was against Mar Kurilos who soon fled from the Malabar diocese and acquired some land outside the jurisdiction of Mar Thoma VI.² He organized a new diocese known as Thozhur.³

Political factors were once more to have an influence on the Christians of Saint Thomas and created a changed situation. In the latter part of the Eighteenth Century Malabar suffered the ravages of war. Some ten thousand Syrian Christians are said to have perished in the invasion of Tippoo Sultan, the Tiger of Mysore, in 1789, and many churches were destroyed including the Cathedral church of Angamali.⁴ At Arthad in north Kerala the Christians were hanged on trees round their churches. Tippoo was defeated in 1799. From 1800 a British resident was appointed to Travancore and Cochin.

The Nineteenth Century was the great age of missionary work in India. The rise of the English power brought peace and order out of chaos; for the first time the whole country was opened up to the work of the church, and progress was ordered and assured. The British

¹Kuruvilla, p. 12.

²Ibid.

³This Thozhur Church remains an independent church in communion with the Mar Thoma Syrian Church.

⁴Brown, p. 121.

influence in south India had an immediate effect on the history of the Syrian Church because the first two residents, Colonel Macauley (1800-1810) and Colonel Munro (1810-1819) were Protestant Christians of strong convictions who interested themselves in its affairs especially those of the Jacobites.¹

Probably at the resident's suggestion the Madras government of the East India Company sent their senior chaplain, Dr, Kerr, in 1806 to investigate the state of the Syrian Church. He was very impressed by the moral quality of the Syrian Christians and by the honor and obedience they gave their clergy. He says that they were much respected by the raja and the nayars and remarkable for their veracity and plain dealing.

It seems, however, not improbable that Christians had been planted in these shores, long before the time of Nestorians, and I am inclined to regard the tradition of its having spread hither in the age of the Apostles, as very far from fabulous . . . to unite them to the Church of England would, in my opinion, be a most noble work; and it is most devoutly to be wished for.²

The same year, 1806, Claudius Buchanan, Provost of Fort William College in Calcutta, made an adventurous journey through the southern part of India with the king's full cooperation, and penetrated the fastness of the Syrian Christians. At first they were very suspicious of him, as probably yet another of those Roman emissaries who had so often harried them, but gradually they came to trust him, and in the end were as much delighted with him as he was with them. A year or two later, his Christian Research was published, and aroused immense interest in England for this fragment of a long forgotten church.

Buchanan thus speaks of the picturesque appearance of Syrian Christian's churches and of his visit to them:

The form of the oldest building is not unlike that of some of the old parish churches in England. They have sloping roofs, painted arched

¹Ibid., p. 132.

²Buchanan, pp. 270, 373-374.

windows, and buttresses supporting walls. The beams of the roofs being exposed to view are ornamental, and the ceiling of the chair and altar is circular and fretted. . . . Most of the churches are built of a reddish stone, squared and polished at the quarry, and are of durable construction. The bells of the churches are cast in the foundaries of the country; some of them are of large dimensions, and have inscription in Syriac and Malayalam When we were approaching the Church of Chinganoor, we met one of the Kattanars, or Syrian clergy. He was dressed in a white loose vestment with a cap or red silk hanging down behind. Being informed who he was, I said to him in the Syriac language, 'Peace be with you.' He was surprised at the salutation; but immediately answered, 'the God of Peace be with you.' . . . The sight of the women assured me that I was once more (after a long absence from England) in a Christian country. For the Hindu women and the Mohammedan women, and in short, all women who are not Christians are accounted by men as inferior; and, in general, are confined to the house for life. In every countenance now before me I thought I could discover the intelligence of Christianity. But, at the same time, I perceived all around symptoms of poverty and political depression. In the churches, and in the people, there was the air of falling greatness. I said to the senior priest, 'you appear to me like a people who have known better days.' 'It is even so,' said he. 'We are in a degenerate state compared with our forefathers.' About three hundred years ago an enemy came from the West bearing the name of Christ, but armed with the Inquisition, and compelled us to seek the protection of the native princes. And the native princes have kept us in a state of depression ever since. They indeed recognize our ancient personal privileges, but they have encroached by degrees on our property, until we have been reduced to the humble state in which you have found us. The glory of our church has passed away; but we hope your nation will revive it again. We have preserved the Bible . . . the Hindu princes never touched our liberty of conscience.' . . . In every church, and in many of the private houses, there are manuscripts in the Syriac language.¹

The priests, many of whom knew Syriac well, were accustomed to translate into Malayalam sections read in Syriac during the public services. Buchanan had several conversations with Mar Dionysios I whom he describes as "a man of highly respectable character in his church, eminent for his piety and for the attention he devotes to his sacred functions," and as "far superior in general learning" to the other clergy.² He spoke about the need for translation of the Scriptures from Syriac into Malayalam. The metropolitan expressed great interest in this project and presented

¹Buchanan, pp. 72-80.

²Ibid., p. 81.

Buchanan with a copy of the Scriptures which he said they had preserved for a thousand years. Buchanan gives the description of this Bible as follows:

It contains the old and the new testaments, engrossed on strong vellum, in large folio, having three columns in a page; and is written with beautiful accuracy. The character is Estrangelo Syriac, and the words of every book are numbered. But the volumn has suffered injury from time or from neglect. . . . I scarcely expected that the Syrian Church would have parted with this manuscript. But the bishop was pleased to present it to me saying, 'It will be safer in your hands than in our own;' alluding to the revolutions in India. 'And yet,' said he, 'we have kept it, as some think, for near a thousand years. 'I wish,' said I, 'that England may be able to keep it a thousand years.' In looking over it, I find the very first proposed emendation of the Hebrew Text by Dr. Kennicott (Gen. 4:8) in this manuscript, and, no doubt, it is the right reading. . . . How wonderful it is, that during the dark ages of Europe, whilst ignorance and superstition, in a manner, denied the Scriptures to the rest of the world, the Bible should have found an asylum in South India; where it was freely read by upwards of an hundred churches.¹

Such was the commencement of the intercourse between members of the English church and the Syrian Christians in India. While Colonel Munro was the Dewan (prime minister) of Travancore (1811-1815) as well as resident, he used his authority to redress their political grievances and to give important posts to members of the community. They were exempted from certain taxes and other duties to Hindu temples that had been required of them, and some of them were appointed as judges. When Ittoop (Joseph) Ramban, a Syriac priest, approached Munro for financial help for building a seminary at Kottayam for the education of the clergy, he found a willing and powerful supporter. Munro paid over to him the interest which had accumulated for five years on a trust fund established for the Syrians by the previous

¹Ibid., pp. 88-89.

resident,¹ and obtained from the Rani (queen) a grant of land for the seminary. The building, now known as the old seminary, was begun in 1813, and the seminary opened in 1815 with Ittoop Ramban as its head. In the same year he was consecrated as Mar Dionysios II (Pulikot Mar Dionysios). But Munro was planning a reformation in the religious life of the Syrian Christians and for this purpose he applied to certain members of the English Church for clergymen to be sent out to India, with the object of bringing a revival and reformation to the Syrian Church. The application being forwarded to the Church Missionary Society, was received with great cordiality. Thomas Norton, as missionary to Ceylon, was diverted to Travancore; and thus began what is called the Anglican mission of help to the Syrian Church² (1816). Soon the Society selected three clergymen, Benjamin Baily, Henry Baker, and Joseph Fenn, who reached Travancore in 1816. Between the arrivals of Norton and Baily Mar Dionysios died. Mar Dionysios III who became the new metran was willing to cooperate with Munro and the missionaries. Sherring says that the intention of the Society was, if possible,

not to amalgamate the Syrian Church with the Church of England, but while fully acknowledging its independence, to induce it to reform itself from the superstitions and corruptions which had grown up in its past ages.³

Their tasks were varied and difficult. They were not to proselytize or make the Syrians into Anglicans; they were to work patiently in harmony with the rulers of the church for a reform of ancient church from within. At first all went well; the bishop was favorable and welcomed

¹This fund consisted of three thousand 'starpagodas,' said to have been obtained by Colonel Macaulay as compensation for wrongs suffered by the Jacobites in the past, and invested by him on their behalf for benevolent purposes. The interest had not been paid because since the death of Mar Dionysios I in 1808, the succession to the office of metran had been disputed. Brown, p. 127.

²Firth, p. 163.

³Sherring, p. 289.

everything that the missionaries did. There were three lines of action immediately open to them.

The Scriptures and if possible the liturgy must be translated into Malayalam, the vernacular of the country. Up until this time everything had been carried out in Syriac. The first ten years were given largely to this task. Fenn became principal and joint manager of the seminary with the metran; Bailey resided at Kottayam where he spent his time in teaching and translating the Bible and other books into Malayalam and set up a printing press. Baker started a number of schools in Syrian parishes. He was a visitor in charge of seventy-two Syrian churches.

There were vernacular schools at each of these churches which the children of all Syrians were required to attend, the Church Missionary Society furnishing books and the salaries of the teachers. There was also a superior grammar school preparatory to the instructions at the college under Mr. Baker's care. In all the schools a strictly scriptural education was given in Malayalam; but in the grammar school, situated at Kottayam, English was also taught. Some of the pupils in the college were Syrian deacons when Mr. Fenn instructed in Latin, Greek, and the elements of Mathematics, and the general course of an English education. Syriac was taught by a malpan or literary doctor, and Sanskrit by Munshis.¹

Such was the organization introduced among the Syrians by the missionaries of this society. But this happy relationship between the Church Missionary Society and the Syrian Church ended in 1834, when a new metran came to power who withdrew his countenance from the missionaries, and set his face against all reforms. Baker has given the reasons for the changes as follows:

The metran Dionysios who had been a friend to the missionaries, and who desired in some measure to reform his church, was now dead. Colonel Munro also had left the country. Consequently the English clergy had lost a portion of their influence, and hence were not regarded in the same favourable light by the body of the people. The new bishop was an

¹Report on the south India Missionary Conference. Paper by Baker on the missions of the Church Society in Travancore and Cochin quoted by Sherring, op.cit., p. 290.

extremely avaricious man. He at once began to ordain children and ignorant youths on the receipt of sums of money; and also let out the college lands on excessive rents, appropriating the surplus to his own purposes. The combined ruling committee he utterly neglected; and soon discouraged the college and parochial schools, and forbade the habitual preaching of the gospel by the missionaries in the several churches. Mr. Fenn had been succeeded by others; and Bailey and Baker had visited England for their health, which had been much impaired. Some of these old missionaries had pleaded for a change of system, and were desirous of commencing the independent mission About this time Bishop Wilson of Calcutta visited Travancore, and at once saw that much labour had produced very little results. He accordingly made a proposition that the Syrian Church should reform itself of all errors that had been acquired by their connection with the Nestorians, and in later times with Menezes and the Portuguese, in short, that they should restore their own ancient canons which were extant, thus returning to the periods nearest to the apostolic times. A synod was consequently held in which the Syrian bishop, by bribes and intimidation, succeeded in preventing the reforming party from being heard; and then, by means of a majority of his followers, dissolved all connection with the Church Mission, their church and objects. On this the Travancore government appointed an arbitration by which the endowment of the Syrian College was fairly divided. Half was given to the metran to be employed in education, and the other half was intrusted to the Church Mission Society for educating native Christians.¹

It was an unfortunate event which eventually led to the division of the Syrian Church again. It would not be absolutely right if we said that the evils of the Syrian Church and its leaders caused this division. Of course the missionaries were there solely because of Colonel Munro. The plan was his, and it could be carried out only by the consent and cooperation of the metran and his people. If differences of opinion were to be avoided, the missionaries would have to be men with deep understanding of, and sympathy with, the liturgy, ideas and customs of an Eastern Church very unlike their own, and men of great patience and tact. Unfortunately such knowledge and sympathy were rare in Church Mission Society circles in the Church of England, says Brown, in the early Nineteenth Century which were strongly Protestant and anti-Catholic. In their eyes Eastern customs were "the errors of the Greek Church," only a little less pernicious than

¹Sherring, pp. 291-92.

those of the 'Papists'. When men holding such views undertook such work, trouble was bound to arise sooner or later. Moreover Munro expected and encouraged them to assume a degree of authority far beyond their instructions from the Church Missionary Society. On February 28, 1817, Munro wrote to Bailey as follows:

I again request that you will assume a control and direction over the whole system of the discipline and church government of the Syrians, employing, of course, the metropolitan as your coadjutor, the first point to be attained is to establish invariable obedience to your commands; and I request that you will in conjunction with the metropolitan address a circular letter to all the churches enjoining strict, uniform and implicit obedience to all your orders on pain of such penalties as you may think proper to establish. If any contumacy or neglect should be manifested by the Kattanars you will suspend them from office, and may report the case to the resident who will adopt measures for their trial and punishment. All candidates for priests' orders should be carefully examined by you before their ordination by the Metropolitan, and should be invariable rejected if found to be unqualified. All matters of internal church government such as fines for crimes etc. should be reported to you, and subjected to your consideration and decision.¹

The synod which met at Mavelikkara in 1836 marks the end of the official connection of the Church Missionary Society with the Syrian Church in India, and the triumph of the reactionary party in the Church. In 1837 the missionaries withdrew from all connection with the ancient church, but remained to shepherd their converts from Hinduism. The reforming leaven was working deeply in the ancient church, and many of the Syrians were more attached to the evangelical faith of the missionaries than to Antioch and the old ways. It is estimated that about eight thousand of them left the Syrian Church and joined the missionaries. Hitherto, in accordance with the policy laid down by the Church Missionary Society, "no Anglican congregation had been formed, and even now the missionaries hesitated before taking a step which would create a permanent division; but in the end they agreed."² The official policy of the Society was against proselytization.

¹Brown, pp. 134-135.

²Firth, p. 168.

The Madras Committee at once said it was their "decided conviction that we ought to preserve their (i.e. Syrians in sympathy with the missionaries) identity and not attempt to amalgamate them with the Church of England."¹ However, other congregations and individuals followed, and so a branch of the Anglican Church became established in Malabar. The branch grew and became a diocese in 1879. It now forms the Central Travancore diocese of the Church of South India.²

The Syrian Christians who left their church to join the Anglican Church were a relatively small group; many more who desired reform stayed inside the church and the result was eventually another schism and the emergence of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church. A young clergyman who was later known as Abraham Malpan was the leader of this reforming party.

Abraham was born in 1796, and at the age of three he became an orphan. He was brought up by his paternal uncle, a clergyman of "repute of piety." He was a member of the Palakunnath family which gave to the church several leading clergymen and four bishops. His uncle gave him the education that was available at the time and when he had finished his course in Malayalam he was called to the diaconate. He was then sent for further training to Korah Malpan³ the Syriac professor of Pathupally. He learned the Bible through Syriac as it was not translated into Malayalam at that time. When he completed his theological education Mar Thoma VIII ordained him as a priest in 1815.⁴ During the early part of his ministry he was a great advocate of the Orthodox Jacobite faith and did not hesitate to suffer for it. Though conservative in temperament, he never hesitated to introduce reforms in both teaching and practice. The following illustration will

¹Resolution of March 14, 1836; quoted in Brown, p. 140.

²Ibid. ³Malpan means teacher of Syriac. ⁴Kuruville, p. 13.

prove this point:

In his parish at Maramon, a village in central Travancore, there was a wooden image of a saintly ancestor which was held in great reverence by the people. A large concourse of people used to attend the festival held in honor of this ancestor. When his image was taken in procession, prayers were offered to him and offerings were given to the church in his name. At one of these festivals Abraham removed the image and brought this superstitious practice to an end. The angered pilgrims dispersed, spreading wild rumors about his destructive tendencies. His eruditⁱon, piety and enthusiasm for reforms appealed to the missionaries who invited him to be a Syriac professor in their seminary at Kottayam.¹

His position as Syriac Malpan gave him an opportunity to lead the reform movement. This institution had come into being through the efforts of Colonel Munro. The malpan along with eleven other clergymen submitted a memorial to Colonel Fraser, the British Resident, in 1836, requesting his support in their attempt to cleanse the church of abuses. He had already prepared a revised version of the liturgy omitting everything for which he could find no scriptural warrant.²

Many of Abraham Malpan's friends approved the changes he had made in the liturgy, but he faced the odium of fully carrying them out. Wherever he officiated - at the seminary chapel and in the churches of Pallam and Kollad and especially in his own church at Maramon - he used the revised liturgy for the communion service. This liturgy was being used also in

¹Ibid., p. 14.

²He omitted prayers for dead and prayers to saints: "Thee am I holding who holdest" prayer, "We offer to thee this unbloody sacrifice," "Thou are the hard rock" prayer to chalice, the rubric saying the Holy Spirit will bless the incense; he ordered communion in both kinds; no celebration if no communicants; no auricular confession; service to be read in Malayalam. Brown, p. 140.

the churches at Kozhencherry and Ayroor and the priests there were in difficulties because they were no longer celebrating masses for the dead and living on the fees paid for these services.¹

These changes in the liturgy disturbed the ruling bishop, Mar Dionysios and his party. They reacted violently against it and soon Dionysios excommunicated Malpan and his entire congregation. He also refused the priesthood to any of the deacons who received their education under Abraham Malpan. This was indeed a terrible blow to Malpan who attached much importance to episcopal ordination. Upon realizing the importance of reformation in his church and the necessity for a duly consecrated bishop with reform sympathy to lead the church he soon sent his own nephew Mathew a young man of marked ability and education to Mardin, the headquarters of the patriarch. Mathew arrived there in July, 1841, and stayed for two years as a member of the patriarch's household. He was only twenty-three when he ventured on the perils of the sea and the road to seek the advice of the patriarch in the future of his church. The patriarch, Mar Elive, consecrated Mathew as bishop in spite of many letters from Dionysios warning the patriarch against him.² In the commission given to Mathew, the patriarch says:

While we were labouring with all these thoughts, as to who should be sent to Malayalam, there came our dear son Mathai from you in peace. On seeing him, we were much pleased with him and said that, as one had come from among them, it is best above all that he should be father and ruler among them. So first we ordained him as deacon, thereafter as ramban and afterwards as metropolitan.³

Mathew returned to India in 1843 by the name of Mar Mathew Athanasius. His ministry among his people was opposed by Dionysios and his party. Mar Dionysios, the presiding bishop was not willing to hand over the administration

¹Kuruvilla, p. 18.

²Brown, p. 141.

³Kuruvilla, p. 19.

of the diocese to Mar Athenasius. However, the party which stood for reform looked upon him "as the champion of their cause."¹

Soon priests were sent by Dionysios to the patriarch who in 1846 sent a bishop called Mar Kurilos to investigate allegations made against Mar Athanasius. Mar Kurilos excommunicated Mar Athanasius using for the purpose blank papers bearing the patriarch's signature. Mar Dionysios then resigned and petitioned the Travancore government to recognize Mar Kurilos as metran.² A special committee set up by the government and the resident pronounced Mar Kurilos documents as forgeries and Mar Athanasius the rightful Metran (1848). He was proclaimed by Travancore on July 28, 1852 and by Cochin October 4, 1853, as the rightful metran.

Athanasius was now sole metran but his position was difficult. He was indeed a man for reformation and soon as he made his position secure he started the work of reform on which his heart was set which resulted in an opposition against him led by the orthodox party and cheppat Mar Dionysios. They found a new leader, deacon Pulikot Mar Dionysios Joseph in 1865. They sent him to the Jacobite patriarch in Mardin and got him consecrated as metran of Malankara. He returned to Malabar in 1866 by the name of Mar Dionysios V, and soon after his arrival he informed the governments of Travancore and Madras of his appointment as metropolitan and petitioned the government to recognize him instead of Mar Anthanasius. This the government refused to do. They said that they had acted throughout the whole affair with no partiality to either side and they strongly advised the parties to compromise, or failing that to take the case to the

¹Ibid.

²Because of the frequent disputes a custom had grown up since 1816 that the governments of Travancore and Cochin should officially proclaim the metran and that thereafter only those so proclaimed should be recognized as legitimate. Brown, p. 142.

courts. Meanwhile Mar Anthanasius consecrated his cousin as his successor in 1869 under the title of Thomas Anthanasius and made a will so that in case of his death Thomas Athanasius might enter on the duties of the office of metran and joint manager of the property held in trust for the benefit of the Syrian community.¹ A religious revival which started in his churches in 1873 also helped to unite his people and strengthen their bishop. Under the influence of the revival quarrels were made up and Hindu customs abandoned.

Finally Mar Dionysios Joseph appealed to the patriarch at Mardin who "in the interest of his own church espoused the cause of Mar Dionysios and earnestly decided to visit Malabar."² He came through London with the desire of gaining the support of the Archbishop of Canterbury and other influential men in England. But the archbishop was in communication with the bishops of Calcutta and Madras on this matter, and had come to the conclusion that for the sake of the church of Malabar Mar Anthanasius and not Mar Dionysios should be supported as metran. Thus the patriarch's visit to London was not successful, and finally he went to South India in 1875. He persuaded the Travancore government to withdraw the Royal Proclamation made in 1852 in favor of Mar Athanasius, and in its place a new royal decree was issued on March 4, 1876, proclaiming that:

Whereas representations have been made that the patriarch of Antioch or his predecessor claims to have deposed the said Mar Anthanasius and to have appointed another metran, this is to inform all it may concern that the former proclamation is not to be considered as in any way precluding the courts of law from deciding on the churches or church property or the power of appointing or removing officers connected with the church.³

Immediately the patriarch consecrated six more bishops and Mar Joseph Dionysios as president of the synod of bishops. He divided the see

¹Kuruvilla, p. 19-20.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 318.

of Malankara into seven dioceses and made each bishop responsible directly to the patriarchal throne. The synod of bishops met at Mulanturatty in 1876 and affirmed that His Holiness "Moran Mar Ignatius, Peter III Patriarch, is the chief authority on the apostolic throne of the Antioch and the Holy Father of the Jacobite Syrians of Malankara."¹ Then his holiness returned to Mardin in 1876.

Mar Athanasius had lost many of his followers as a result of the patriarch's excommunication but he had carried on his ministry without bitterness until his death. The year 1877 saw the demise of Mathew Mar Athanasius, acknowledged to be the greatest of the bishops who ruled over the Church of Malabar. All parties recognized that "in knowledge of Scriptures and theology he was perhaps the most able metran the Christians of Saint Thomas had ever had."²

Rae comments:

During his regime, every encouragement was given to the reading of the Scriptures translated by the missionaries; prayers in the church were conducted in many instances in the vernacular; invocation of saints and worship to relics with other superstitious practices introduced into the Syrian Church by Roman Catholics were excluded; Sunday schools, Bible readings, preaching and other active efforts to spread the truth were fostered and encouraged, and all the ordinary apparatus of evangelical work was used for promoting the good of the Syrian Church.³

In addition to all this, he devoted himself to rebuilding the theological seminary with able teachers and students. The liturgy which was in Syriac was translated into the vernacular. He was also equally interested in the welfare of the Christian community. He was succeeded by Mar Thomas Athanasius.

Mar Athanasius's death in 1877 provided an occasion to Mar Joseph Dionysios for fresh action. He and his party filed a suit at the Alleppey Court in 1879, and after ten years of litigation, the Royal Court of Final

¹Brown, p. 143.

²Rae, pp. 324-25.

³Rae, pp. 324-25.

Appeal consisting of three judges gave the final decision - the two Hindu judges, in favor of Mar Dionysios confirming the authority of the Jacobite patriarch, and the one Christian judge, Ormsby, in favor of Thomas Mar Athanasius, declaring that the church had throughout been independent and that Thomas Mar Athanasius was the legal metropolitan.¹ This decision was the signal for many other cases to be filed for the possession of property, and all those were decided against Mar Athanasius. One by one the churches were taken by Mar Dionysios's party until only two or three remained.

It was this judgment in 1889 that finally made the split in the church between Jacobite and Reformed which has not yet been healed. Neil describes the tragedy of the Syrian Christians as follows:

Syrian Church is by far the oldest branch of the Church in India. The Syrians are fairly well educated, they have great traditions and instincts of independence and leadership. It seems that they ought to be the strongest instrument in the hand of God for the conversion of India. As it is, they are crippled by division; high moral standards are not easily maintained in the midst of ecclesiastical controversy; their witness is immeasurably weakened by clannishness.²

After the division Mar Dionysios became the local head of that section of the church which accepted the patriarch as their head. Thomas Mar Athenasius abandoned the church property but otherwise ignoring the decision of the court, organized his section of the church on an independent basis. It must be remembered that this church claimed to be the original Syrian Church. We will learn more about this Church in the next chapter.

The affair of the Jacobite section has been more complicated.³ The reorganization intended by the patriarch Peter III at the Synod of Mulanuruttu in 1876 was never whole heartedly accepted by the church although

¹Ibid., pp. 327-333.

²Neil, p. 29.

³For a detailed history of the Jacobite section see Brown, pp. 149-161.

for party reasons the synod was agreed, and it was only partially carried out. In 1910 patriarch Abdulla went to India, and it quickly became clear that these were differences of opinion as to the precise nature of the patriarchal authority over the Indian church. Mar Dionysios and his party opposed the patriarch, and in return the patriarch excommunicated Dionysios and appointed Mar Kurilos in his place. Mar Dionysios continued to officiate as metran. The patriarch returned to Syria in the autumn of 1911, leaving the Jacobites split into two parties with two persons, Mar Dionysios and Mar Kurilos, claiming to be metran.

Mar Dionysios and his party invited Mar Abdulla's predecessor, Mar Abdul Massih to India to obtain some kind of patriarchal recognition. He arrived in India in 1912 and during his stay not only consecrated three new bishops but created a new office - that of "Catholicos." The intention was to provide the Indian Jacobites with a "local patriarch," as Brown expresses it; that is to say a person empowered to consecrate bishops and do all other acts without first getting permission from the patriarch of Antioch, although acknowledging in some way the spiritual supremacy of the patriarch.

It was a move to secure full local autonomy. Paulose Mar Ivanios was selected as the first Catholicos. As a Catholicos he took the title of Mar Baselios. As long as Mar Dionysios lived, however, he continued to be the party's metran and effective leader. After his death in 1934 the catholicos was elected metran, and thus the two offices merged into one. In that year the party took a new step by adopting a written constitution which they had drawn up for themselves, and a new name, the Orthodox Syrian Church of Malabar. Thus the Jacobite section was divided into two

bodies - one body owing allegiance to the patriarch of Antioch, the other to the Indian Catholicos. The healing of the division of the Jacobite Church occurred in 1956. As a result of this the reunited church recognizes the Supreme Patriarch of Syria as the supreme spiritual head of the Church of India and abroad, and the Indian Catholicos are to be the ecclesiastical head of the church of India.¹ Today this church is known as the Jacobite Syrian Church of Malabar.

As we have already ignored the Romo-Syrians and the Anglican Syrians as continuing bodies so now we leave the Jacobite Syrians and return to the Reformed Party, the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar which claims to be the original Syrian Church.

¹International Review of Mission, Vol. 45, 1956. New York, p. 24.

CHAPTER VIII

MAR THOMA SYRIAN CHURCH AND ITS DOCTRINES

In 1889 the Mar Thoma (Reformed Syrian) Church was formed with a membership of some eighty thousand. From that time on "they became known before the civil authorities as the Navikaranmakar, i.e. the 'Reformed Party.'"¹ The Mar Thoma Syrian Church claims to be the original church founded by Saint Thomas affirming that

it has removed the traces of Nestorian, Monophysite, Roman Catholic and Anglican influence at which it had become subject in different periods of its existence. Until the inauguration of the Church of South India in 1947, it was in fact the only wholly autonomous church in India.²

It is an independent episcopal church. Although the tradition of parish autonomy remains strong, the administration is more centralized than that of the Jacobite Syrian Church, and the training of the ministers has been developed along the modern lines. A theological seminary has been maintained for many years at Kottayan.³ The church aims at giving a systematic theological education to all its candidates for ordination. The highest ecclesiastical authority rests with the archbishop called the metropolitan who uses the title "Mar Thoma."

The Reformed party had to build new churches which was by no means

¹Tisserent, p. 152.

²Stephen Neill, Towards Church Union (London: S C M Press, Ltd., 1952), p. 38.

³C. W. Ranson, The Christian Minister in India (London: United Society for Christian Literature, Lutterworth Press, 1945), p. 37.

an easy task both because of the material cost and because of the opposition usually encountered from Dionysios's party and the Hindus. A strong link was formed with the Toliyur diocese¹ whose bishops in 1894 consecrated Titus, the younger brother of Mar Thomas Athanasius who died in 1894. With the loss of property and the defection of many, the church decided to think afresh about its situation at that time and to plan for the future. It is a very noteworthy fact, says Kuruville, that

though in point of numbers its membership at the time was less than that of the section which won the suit, the leading thinkers and scholars with a reputation for Christian life were at least mostly on the side of Thomas Mar Athanasius.²

Thomas Mar Athanasius decided to organize the church to develop its evangelical activity and to define its faith afresh. His first attempt was to drop the erroneous teaching which were creeping into the church and to form the doctrinal statements in compliance with the original traditions of the church and the teachings of the Bible. He then proceeded to revise the liturgy, but before he effected this he passed away in 1893. However, the work of revision of the liturgy continued under the leadership of Titus I, Mar Thoma Metropolitan.

Metropolitan Titus I Mar Thoma and his successors not only carried on the work of liturgical reform initiated by their predecessor, but also endeavored to reestablish the church on a strong basis. This was the era of reconstruction. The Evangelistic Association which was organized in

¹Mar Kurilos has assisted at the consecration of Mar Thomas Athanasius. On March 13, 1883, he consecrated Joseph Mar Athanasius as his assistant bishop (with Mar Thomas Athanasius assisting). Mar Kurilos died on February 1, 1888. Mar Thomas Athanasius and Joseph Mar Athanasius then consecrated Geevarghese Mar Kurilos as assistant of Toliyar (Joseph Mar Athanasius becoming diocesan) on September 13, 1893. The present bishop of Toliyur was consecrated by the Mar Thoma Metropolitan and his suffragan (1950). Brown, p. 149.

²Kuruville, p. 26.

1888 while the church was struggling for its very existence has progressed beyond the hopes of its most ardent well-wishers. Throughout its history from 1888 to 1948 one man - the Rev. C. P. Philipose - was behind the organization supporting the bishops and giving his life to the Association. "Its remarkable success is mainly due to his faith and untiring labours, and to the self-sacrificing efforts of Bishop Abraham towards the latter part of its history,"¹ says Kuruville. It started with one paid evangelist and it has now several hundred paid evangelists along with several unpaid workers. It has influenced several young men to start Ashrams² along Indian lines in different parts of India. It has several Ashrams today all over India and has one in Nepal.

The two other powerful evangelistic agencies are the Suvisesha Sevika Sangam (the Association of Women for Evangelistic Work) and the Sannadha Suvisesha Sangam (the Volunteer Evangelistic Association). The initiative for both these organizations came from Bishop Abraham. It was his earnest and sincere desire to send evangelists all over India.³ Today the church is playing an important part in the evangelization of India. Hodge, who worked for thirty years in various parts of northeast India as a missionary, remarks:

There can be no shadow of doubt that the Syrian Church is a church of ancient lineage that has weathered the storms of many centuries, and kept alive, though often with difficulty, the sacred flame of Christian

¹Kuruville, p. 49.

²An ashram meant originally a hermitage or a group of ascetics living their religious life together in some quiet place, perhaps under the leadership of some sage. The idea of a life of retirement and meditation is familiar to the Indian mind and has a considerable popular appeal. The ashram therefore was to be an institution which Christians could use to express their religious ideal in a way which India would readily appreciate.

³Kuruville, p. 49.

faith . . . it has held its ground and is today, particularly in the Reformed branch, a living instrument of evangelism.¹

While Bishop Abraham as suffragan was absorbed in developing the evangelistic work of the church, Titus II Mar Thoma who became Metropolitan in 1911 was devoting himself to the building up of the church in other ways. It has already been mentioned that in the conflict with the Jacobites the church had lost practically all its property, and with the few exceptions it had to give up all church buildings. So he devoted himself to the task of acquiring sites and building and of making up the losses, and he was eminently successful in his attempt.

Abraham Mar Thoma, leader of the church between 1922 and 1937, was a striking personality with many Western friends. Educated at the Madras Christian College, he went to Toronto for his Theological training. Bishop Abraham was a courageous leader and a man of peace. Around him he built a company of men of high calibre and education who today are carrying forward his work. When he died, Dr. E. Stanley Jones wrote:

The brightest spot in the Christian situation in India is the Mar Thoma Syrian Church. And the brightest spot in that church has been Bishop Abraham, the Metropolitan. He headed a church long before he became the actual head because he was the soul of sincerity, had wide statesmanship and an evangelistic zeal. He led a church which is entirely Indian, with no outside help except such as a few of us could give at the edges. Each year I have gone to the greatest convention with fifty thousand in the audience, the largest Christian audience in the world. They were drawn by a spiritual impulse and by nothing else Bishop Abraham was the center of this convention, made its plans, directed it, drenched it with prayer.

In a crisis when there was an attempt on the part of the authorities to cripple or crush the growing Christian movement it was rumored that Bishop Abraham would be arrested. People gathered before his house, prepared to lie down in every road leading to the house so that no car could get to the house without going over the prostrate bodies of his followers. That was the way he was loved.

He was courageous, but always a man of peace and always loyal to

¹J. Z. Hodge, A Salute to India (New York: Friendship Press, 1944), p. 80.

his beloved Travancore. . . . He was a great man who prepared men to take his place. . . . The greatest Christian of India has gone, but he has left behind a growing, dynamic church manned by growing dynamic men. I know of no greater Christian movement.¹

The church now has five bishops, four hundred and ninety-two parishes, and two hundred and forty-four ministers, and a total membership of three million.² The church has also several colleges and schools.

Dr. Johanon Mar Thoma is the metropolitan who was installed as metropolitan in 1947. He is a man of wide vision and keen on the social aspect of church work. He is also a theologian and a good administrator, and is very much interested in the Ecumenical Movement. He was elected as one of the Presidents of the World Council of Churches at Evanston in 1954.³ The other bishops are: Right Rev. Dr. Mathew Mar Athanasius (1939), Right Rev. Dr. Alexander Mar Theophilos (1953), Right Rev. Thomas Mar Athanasius (1953), and Right Rev. Philipose Mar Chrysostom (1953).

Today the church extends its fellowship to all who believe in Christ as the son of God and the Savior of the world. However, separate we may be in the interpretation of the saving grace of Christ, of the means of securing it, our experience of this indwelling grace is the same. It gives us the joy of the forgiveness of sins and of the unclouded communion with God the Father.

The Reformed Church unequivocally holds the doctrine of the Trinity as interpreted by the Creeds of Nicea, Constantinople and Ephesus. Concerning the Person of Christ:

Our belief is that both the divinity and the humanity of Christ are united in the same person inseparably, but so as not to be confounded

¹The Christian Century, Vol. LXIV, No.39, Sept. 24, 1947, p. 1146.

²Mar Thoma Sabha Diary, (Tiruvalla: St. Thomas Press, 1967), pp.1-2.

³David P. Gaines, World Council of Churches (Petersborough: Richard R. Smith Houses, 1966), p. 707.

in the union. We are neither Nestorian nor Monophysite. The prayer of the congregation in our present liturgy expresses the same idea, 'We will magnify Thee, O Lord, our king, the only begotten son and word of the heavenly Father who art immortal in Thy Nature, who by Thy grace didst come for the life and salvation of the whole race of man, and didst take a body from the Holy Virgin Mary and became the Son of Man without change and was crucified for us. O Christ our Lord, who by Thy death didst trample under foot our death and destroy it, who art one in the Holy Trinity and art worshipped and glorified equally with Thy Father and Thy Holy Spirit, have mercy upon us all.'¹

Concerning sacraments: The bread and wine used in the Eucharist is regarded as the sign and semblance of the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. The church does not say that the bread and wine are the body and blood of Jesus Christ. We accept the bread and wine set at the Eucharist as the symbol and likeness of the body and blood of Christ after the mass is over. We do not consider that the bread and the wine before the mass are the body and blood of Christ. We consider the same as simple bread and wine. We deny transubstantiation and the physical presence of Christ in the bread and blood. We reject the prayers for the dead and those to the Blessed Virgin and the Saints.²

The constitution of the church starts with the following brief declaration of its faith and practice:

- (1) The Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, believed to be founded by Saint Thomas, one of the Apostles of Christ, and called by that name, is a part of the one Apostolic and Catholic Church.
- (2) Along with the other historic Christian Churches this church believes in the Holy Trinity as revealed by Jesus Christ - God incarnate and the Redeemer of mankind.
- (3) This Church acknowledges the Bible consisting of sixty-six books (old and new) and the Nicene Creed as the basis of its faith and doctrines, and under no circumstances should this be modified by anyone at any time. The orders of Deacon, Priest and Metran, the consecration of churches, Baptism, Holy Communion, Marriage, Extreme Unction and Burial as well as Sundays, Lent, and Saints' days should find a permanent place in the observance of the Church.
- (4) The object and mission of the church is to keep and safeguard the

¹Kuruville, p. 30. He quotes this from The Order of the Public Administration of the Holy Communion, p. 35.

²Ibid.

faith as revealed by Christ and taught by the Apostles, to promote the spiritual life of the faithful through the sacraments and the preaching of the word, and to proclaim the gospel to all nations, baptizing them to be His disciples in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Ghost.¹

The constitution defines the Church as the body of Christ, with the faithful as its members. This definition is based on the words of the Apostle Paul.² The baptism is a sacrament which admits a person - adult or infant - to the membership of the church. Infant baptism is the accepted practice. Auricular confession has been discarded, but there is general confession before the Holy Communion Service.

There are customs which The Syrian Christians have copied from the Hindus. For example the marriage customs show traces of Hindu influence. The tying of a tali around the neck of the bride by the bridegroom to which great importance is paid by the Syrians, is an imitation of the practice of Hindus. The marriage celebrations which lasted four days now very rarely practised were again an adoption from the Hindu custom. The dowry system, which I dislike, is so widely prevalent in the Syrian community; and they copied it from the Brahmans and Namboodiris, the highest castes in Malabar. In the ecclesiastical matters, the Syrian Christians have followed the Brahmin hierarchy. For the expressions 'diocese,' 'His Holiness,' 'priest,' the Syrian Christians use 'edavaka,' 'tirumeni,' and 'achen.'³

¹Quoted by Kuruvilla, p. 33.

²Col. 1:18.

³'Edavaka' in secular life is used for the area that comes under the jurisdiction of a Brahmin or Namboodiris Janmi (land lord); 'tirumeni' is the honorific title used in addressing the Jemmies and Maharajahs in Malabar; 'achen' is still used by certain sections of the Hindu in speaking of their Gurus (teachers).

CHAPTER IX

MAR THOMA CHURCH AND CHURCH UNION

"Unity may be a desirable ideal in Europe or America, but it is vital to the life of the Church on the mission field,"¹ said the late Bishop Azariah in an address to the Lausanne Conference on Faith and Order. He was expressing one of the deepest convictions of the Church of India. It is shared by men of the most diverse ecclesiastical backgrounds and has not undermined their loyalty to their own traditions.

Mar Thoma Church has always stood for the union of churches. It has worked in close cooperation with the Anglican Church in Kerala.

An American evangelist, G. Sherwood Eddy, a Congregationalist, went to India in 1919 and in February he held convention in "Personal Evangelism" for the Mar Thoma Christians. He was convinced that if this ancient church could be stirred to new activity it would be a "mighty factor in the evangelization of India."² Again he, in a convention of Free Churchmen in the Mar Thoma Church, held in April, 1919, before the Tranqubar Conference, was impressed by the evangelistic potentialities of the Mar Thoma Church for India as a whole, "if once it is kindled with the fire of genuine missionary enthusiasm."³

The first minister's conference on church union met at Tranqueber in South India in 1919. When this conference was over, Eddy, who was one

¹C. W. Ranson, The Christian Minister in India (London: Lutterworth Press, 1946), p. 116.

²Sundkier, p. 95.

³Ibid., p. 129.

of the participants, approached the Mar Thoma Metropolitan.¹ When he laid the proposal from Tranqueber before Titus II Mar Thoma, it was on the basis of evangelism, not on Faith and Order nor on Indian nationalism that he made his appeal, says Sundker, and that was the reason why he succeeded.

After Eddy's visit, the Malabar Suffragan, Abraham Mar Thoma, made the following statement in June, 1919:

As individual members of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, we have received an invitation from certain pastors of the Anglican communion and the South Indian United Church who met at Tranquebar, May 1 and 2, 1919, in the ministers' Conference on Church Union, requesting the members of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church prayerfully to consider with them the question of uniting the divided churches of Christ in India. This appeals to us the more deeply, as we ourselves have been praying fervently for years for the healing of the sad divisions which have rent asunder the Church of Christ. These divisions have been particularly disastrous and destructive in India where the Church has at times become almost a byword among the non-Christians, where religion which was meant to unite mankind has actually divided it.

We agree with you that union is the will of God, and that instead of being responsible for perpetuating the divisions of Christ's Church, we should seek to answer our Lord's prayer that we all may be one.

We also believe that the awaking of a new national consciousness in India, and the entry upon a new era of responsible government, makes it imperative that the church also, instead of wasting its strength in internal strife should face the new conditions and work for unity in order to meet the overwhelming demand of the hour. After centuries of the bitter experience of division, we, like yourselves, do not desire to perpetuate such divisions.

We are glad to see that you propose union not on any basis of compromise but on one of comprehension where each body shall contribute its treasures and traditions to the enrichment of the whole. We understand that you do not ask us to change our long-cherished conviction, principles, and practices which we have maintained for centuries in the face of bitter persecution. We also understand that you do not ask us to surrender our autonomy or lose our freedom of action in things pertaining to our own communion. We see that you propose union on the basis of four articles and by two definite methods with all of which we find ourselves in hearty agreement. In the constitution of our church all the four articles mentioned are incorporated as the unchangeable fundamentals of our faith.

(1) We have held that the Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary for salvation, and have stood for the principle of the open Bible

¹Ibid.

which has never been forbidden to the people.

(2) We have always held the Nicene Creed, and it forms a part of our regular services. While we accept all the doctrines contained in the Apostle's Creed, it has not been our practice to use it in formal worship.

(3) We have always held the two sacrament of baptism and Lord's Supper, administered with Christ's words of institution and the elements He used.

(4) We have always stood strongly for maintaining the historic Episcopate, but we agree with you that it is no part of our duty to call in question the validity of each other's orders

A century ago a mission of help was sent by the Anglican Church which led to the quickening and vitalizing of our own isolated communion. Deeply indebted as we are for the self-denying labours of the representatives of the Anglican Church on our behalf, we are all the more glad that the proposal for union comes also from the church to which we have been so long indebted.

We believe that it is under the guidance of the Spirit that union is now proposed between the Anglican, Syrian, and Free Church bodies. This would unite three churches representing the Western Catholic, the Eastern Catholic, and the Free Protestant Churches. It would be the first instance in history where union has been effected between episcopal and non-episcopal bodies. The prayer of centuries would thus be answered.

We are ready to consider union now that a definite proposal has come from the members of the Anglican and South India United Churches. As the Church of England has for three decades suggested conditions for union, we hope that our synod will also favorably consider the same and take steps for effecting union upon this common ground. We understand that there is no question of the absorption of one church by another, but that standing on the principle of spiritual equality before our common Lord, we shall each seek to contribute the riches of our own spiritual inheritance to the United Church of the future. We shall be glad if this union brings the long-desired dawn of a new day of Christian unity when there shall be neither Jews nor Greek, neither bond nor free, neither East nor West, but as our Lord prayed we shall all be one in Him.

While writing unofficially without committing our metropolitan and the synod of our church which will have to take final action upon the matter, we as individual members of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, with the blessing of God, agree to pray and work toward union upon such a basis.

(Signed) Abraham Mar Thoma, C. P. Philipose, V. P. Mamman.¹

Thus Abraham Mar Thoma, so far unofficially, declared himself

¹G. K. A. Bell, Documents on Christian Unity (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 125-129.

"ready to consider union." The union proposal seemed to have made an appeal. The metropolitan would bring the matter up before his synod, and Bishop Abraham was hopeful that it would go through. Eddy says of Metropolitan and Bishop Abraham: "They unanimously approved the plan and are working quietly to win the approval of a few old conservative priests of their church."¹

Eddy was convinced that the Mar Thoma Church was to play a great role in the United Church. But the local problems of the Syrian Christians proved too great for any immediate union to take place. Many people in the Mar Thoma Church felt that their first aim must be reunion with the Jacobite or Orthodox Syrians. This was no easy proposition as the Jacobites then were very much a house divided within itself, and it was very difficult for the Mar Thoma Church to decide which Jacobites to join. But Mar Thoma Church felt that union, like charity, begins at home, and some of the leaders in the church opposed any kind of union with denominations under Western influence because they thought that would close the doors against any such hope. Kuruville enumerated the following reasons against union with the Tranquebar group:

- (1) Under union, the enthusiasm and loyalty of its younger men to Mar Thoma Church might be lost. The term "Syrian" had a charm of its own to them which might be lost in a larger Indian church.
- (2) It would be unwise to join with organizations which have foreign support and therefore are stronger than the Mar Thoma Church.
- (3) Union would not solve the internal problems of the Church.
- (4) A large majority of the church are suspicious of union.
- (5) The relation with the Jacobites.²

However, on the other hand the younger generation in the Mar Thoma Church went so far as to suggest union with the Anglicans on educational lines and with Mar Thoma leadership. And Bishop Abraham Mar Thoma showed his personal interest in the union negotiations by attending the General Assembly of the South India United Church in September, 1921.³

¹Ibid., p. 385.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

Relationships between the Mar Thoma Church and the Anglican Church in Kerala were extremely friendly, but were unregulated by any ecclesiastical agreement. Commissions of each of the two churches appointed in 1934 reported favorably on the doctrines, episcopal succession and ecclesiastical standing of the other, and recommended a measure of intercommunion. This is strictly limited. Members of the one church, being communicants of good standing, are authorized to receive the Holy Communion in the other church if the ministrations of their own church are not available; in certain special circumstances intercommunion is permitted even to those who are within reach of the sacraments of their own churches. This agreement was accepted by the Mar Thoma Church in 1936, and promulgated in 1937 by the Bishop of Calcutta, as Metropolitan of the Church of India, Burma and Ceylon, on the authority of the General Council of the Church.¹

This agreement is notable as providing the only instance in the world of formal intercommunion between an "Eastern" and "Western" church.²

The situation has greatly changed since 1942 since the Anglican diocese of Travancore has now become part of the Church of South India, and relations between the Mar Thoma Church and the Church of South India have not yet been formally defined. The Mar Thoma Church is concerned about the closer relations with the Church of South India. The theological commission has been appointed with authority to start conversations as soon as possible, and view recently expressed by a leading member of the commission indicate a favorable attitude towards union

¹Neill, Towards Church Union, p. 39.

²The Church of India, Burma, and Ceylon is Western in the sense that it is an independent province of the world wide Anglican Communion.

with the Church of South India.¹

Cooperation in the area of education became very common in India among the Christians. The Alwaye Union Christian College was started under the joint auspices of the Jacobites, Anglican, and Mar Thoma Churches, and it is the first fruit of the cooperation of the Churches. The college has taken the lead in organizing the Kerala Council of Church Union which was composed of representatives from the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Anglican Church and the Mar Thoma Church. The first conference was held at the Christian Mission Society, Bungalou, Tiruvalla, on February 15 and 16, 1935.² Since 1943 the Mar Thoma Church has also cooperated in the United Theological Seminary at Trivandrum.³ Now discussions and negotiations are going on between the leaders of the Mar Thoma Church and the Jacobite Syrian Church for a re-union. I believe a united church, free from the bonds of the presently separated denominations, will provide a congenial atmosphere for the Indian expression of Christianity. Many Syrian Christians feel that a union with the Church of South India or any other Church which has Western influence would destroy the indigenous character and nature of the Syrian Church. However, the Mar Thoma Church is considering the possibility of a union with the Jacobites Syrian Christians. Many people in the leadership, including the present Metropolitan, are for a union but it will require time, and patience, to convince the people in the pew the importance and necessity of such a union.

Though the Mar Thoma Church is small in numbers and limited in resources its influences have gone far beyond its confines. Mar Thoma

¹International Review, Vol. 53, 1964, p. 21.

²Kuruville, p. 51.

³C. W. Ranson, p. 37.

Church became a member of the World Council of Churches in 1948,¹ and in 1954 when the World Council of Churches met at Evanston, Johanona Mar Thoma, Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church, was elected as one of the presidents of the World Council of Churches.² Today the Mar Thoma Church is playing an important part in the ecumenical movement. One of the practical outcomes of the ecumenical movement in India has been the formation of the National Council of Churches. The Mar Thoma Church is taking an active part in the National Council of Churches in India. Its young men are serving the country as well as the church under different capacities such as doctors, lawyers, educators, and politicians. Syrian Christian's contributions to the society are beyond our estimation.

I am sure the Mar Thoma Church will continue to take an active part both in the National Council of Churches of India and the World Council of Churches. In the future the Mar Thoma Church will play an important role in the union of Churches in India, and I am sure the Lord will use this Church and its leaders for the glory of His name and the growth of His Kingdom.

¹David Gaines, p. 228

²Tbid., p. 707.

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