

JUHANON MAR THOMA

CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA AND
THE MAR THOMA SYRIAN CHURCH

This Booklet gives in an expanded form addresses given by the author to groups of students, young people and audiences outside of Travancore. In putting the matter in a book form, the author has made liberal use of *A History of the Syrian Church in India*, by F.E. Keay and *A History of the Mar Thoma Church and its Doctrines* by K.K. Kuruvilla. For those who desire to know the main facts about the origin and present position of the old Syrian Christian community in South India, this booklet will, I trust, be of help.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	THE ST. THOMAS TRADITION	413
II.	THE CHURCH IN MALABAR AND THE PERSIAN CONNECTION	414
III.	THE MALABAR CHURCH AND THE ROMAN CATHOLICS	415
IV.	THE COMING OF THE JACOBITES, THE COONEN CROSS INCIDENT	416
V.	THE C.M.S. MISSION OF HELP AND THE ANGLICANS IN MALABAR	417
VI.	THE REFORMATION IN THE SYRIAN CHURCH AND THE MAR THOMA SYRIAN CHURCH	418
VII.	THE MAR THOMA SYRIAN CHURCH : WHAT IT STANDS FOR	420
VIII.	THE FUTURE	422
	APPENDIX	422
	NOTES	423

CHAPTER I

THE ST. THOMAS TRADITION

By time-honoured tradition the beginnings of Christianity in India go back to the visit of St. Thomas, the Apostle. He is believed to have landed at Cranganore (ancient name Mouziris), an important seaport on the Malabar coast, in the year A.D. 52. In true Apostolic tradition he is said to have preached first to the Jews who had settled in and around Cochin, and then to have turned to work among the Hindus. As the result of his preaching and the many miracles he wrought, many high-caste Hindus are said to have accepted Christianity. The tradition goes on to say that he founded seven churches for the worship of the Christians, and ordained Presbyters from four leading families. The seven churches ascribed to St. Thomas are : (1) Maliankara (Cranganore); (2) Palur (Chavakad); (3) Parur; (4) Gokamangalom; (5) Niranam; (6) Chayal (Nilakal); (7) Kalyan (Quilon). All these except Chayal are on or near the coast.

From Malabar the Apostle is said to have gone to the east coast and preached Christ. The Brahmins became jealous of his success and he was speared to death, thus dying a martyr's death on St. Thomas Mount, a place eight miles south-west of Madras. According to another story the Apostle met with an accidental death, by the arrow of a fowler. His body was buried in Mylapore; and later in the second century, the bones were carried off to Edessa. There is also another story concerning the remains of the Apostle. Mylapore ceased to have a Christian population, and the place of the burial remained more or less forgotten. In the early sixteenth century when the Portuguese visited the place a Muhammadan pointed out a chapel which

he said covered the burial place of St. Thomas. On further investigation bones were found inside a tomb, and the relics were transferred to Goa. In a reliquary in the San Thome Church, Mylapore, a portion of the bones and a piece of the spear which killed the Saint are kept. It is still a place of pilgrimage to the Roman Catholic Christians. King Alfred in the ninth century sent offerings to the tomb of Thomas in India. Both in the east and west the Apostle's work in India and his death as a martyr are strongly supported by tradition.

According to another line of tradition the visit of Apostle Thomas was to the Indo-Parthian kingdom. An apocryphal book of the early third century, *Acts of Thomas*, says that the Apostle was bought by Hubban, an agent of King Gundaphorus (another spelling is Gudnaphar), an Indo-Parthian king. The Apostle was introduced to Gundaphorus as a carpenter, and he was given money for the building of a palace at a marked-out spot. Thomas spent the money for the relief of the poor. When the king came to see the palace, the Apostle said that the palace he had built for him was in heaven. Hubban and Thomas were put in prison to be executed. At this time the king's brother was seriously ill, and that night he dreamt that he died and went to heaven. There the angels showed him the palace which Thomas had built for his brother, the king. In the morning he told the king about the dream and the beautiful palace in heaven. The king released Hubban and Thomas and was converted and received baptism. Thomas was now free to preach the gospel in the king's realm. The book, *Acts of Thomas*, contains many such queer stories. It is enough to read the book to discard it as full of made-up stories. But the story about St. Thomas has gained the attention of historians. From the third to the nineteenth century the names of Thomas and Gundaphorus were connected together by tradition. But Indian history knew no king by name Gundaphorus. Strangely enough towards the close of the nineteenth century excavations in the Punjab brought to light the fact that Gundaphorus was a historical person, a king of Indo-Parthia, who lived and ruled in the middle of the first century, chronologically a contemporary of St. Thomas. So we are forced to grant that there may be some truth in the story of the work of St. Thomas in the kingdom of Gundaphorus. Milne Rae, who was a professor of the Madras Christian College, in his book, *The Syrian Church in India*, accepts the north Indian apostolate of St. Thomas and looks upon the Malabar story as the 'Migration of a tradition'. But J.N. Farquhar believes in the probability of both visits. According to Dr. Farquhar, Thomas first worked in Gundaphorus' kingdom and after the destruction of the Indo-Parthian kingdom, by the Kushans, might have gone to Socotra. From there he went to the Malabar coast and then went to the eastern coast, worked in Mylapore, and died a martyr's death.

There is another strain of tradition which makes St. Bartholomew the founder of the Indian Church. Alfred sent alms to both the Saints, Thomas and Bartholomew. Among Church Fathers Clement and Eusebius speak of Bartholomew as the Apostle of India, while Jerome and Chrysostom connect India with St. Thomas. Jerome says, 'He (the Son of God) was present in all places, with Thomas in India, with Peter in Rome, with Paul in Illyria, etc.' But when considering the early writers there is always the doubt as to which is the place referred to as India. All the regions south-ward and eastward of the Roman and Parthian Empires were known as India. In the Nicene

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Council A.D. 325 a Bishop signs as John of India. Which is that India one cannot be certain of.

What then shall we say of the St. Thomas tradition? We can ignore the stories about Thomas, the disciple of Jesus Christ, having converted high-caste Hindus only, and that by performing miracles like throwing up a handful of water which stayed suspended in the air and fell down as flowers. We need not give any credence to the stories of the Apostle laying foundations of churches with stone crosses. That is a practice which never existed in the first century. But, try as we may, the Thomas tradition clings to us. The tradition is strong in the east and west, and is sufficiently early. As time goes on and research progresses the tradition about St. Thomas visiting Malabar is only being strengthened. Difficulties in the way of accepting the tradition are disappearing, and more and more historians are coming to accept the probability of the tradition. Undisputed historical evidences there are not. But should we accept such evidences for the history of the Christian Church in the first century? Suffice it to say that St. Peter's founding of the Roman Church, and St. Thomas' founding of the Malabar Church stand on the same footing. Both are supported by sufficiently early and strong traditions, and that is all that we can say.

CHAPTER II THE CHURCH IN MALABAR AND THE PERSIAN CONNECTION

If the picture of the beginnings of Christianity in Malabar has to be drawn upon a background which is entirely traditional, its further history for many more centuries is sketchy, dependent upon tradition, occasionally lit up with historical evidences. How did the newly-established Church fare in this stronghold of Hinduism? How did it govern itself, how far did it preserve the faith that was given to it? One wishes to know much but can learn little. The history of the Christians in Malabar in the last half of the first century and well on to the close of the second century is unknown. The veil is lifted with the reputed visit of Pantaenus, who is said to have been sent by Demetrius of Alexandria at the request of the Christians of Malabar. Pantaenus visited Malabar in A.D. 189. His stay was short and no account of his visit is left. He found a Gospel of St. Matthew in Hebrew which he took away to Alexandria. There are some who say that Christianity was introduced into India from Alexandria and has St. Mark as the Indian Apostle. Much credence is not given to this theory.

In the middle of the fourth century with the visit of Thomas of Cana, we reach a new stage in the history of the Malabar Church. Thomas of Cana was a Syrian merchant. The story is that the Catholicos of Jerusalem having known of the needs of the Malabar Church sent Joseph, Bishop of Edessa, some priests and deacons and about four hundred persons under the leadership of Thomas of Cana. They were well received by the local raja, and the people, and they settled in and around Mahadevapatnam, old Cranganore. This was about A.D. 345. The raja seems to have given them a certain town, and bestowed upon them certain social privileges, inscribed on a copper plate. If there were copper plate charters they have been lost. The fourth century being a period of persecution of Christians in Persia a number of refugees may have come and colonized in Malabar. If this is so, this colonisation is important as the first known instance of a Syrian community being introduced into Malabar. There are some historians who put the visit of Thomas of Cana in the ninth century.

Thomas of Cana is known in Malabar as Cnae Thomman. He and his colonists have another historical importance to the Malabar Church. There is a division in the Syrian community of Malabar, both in Roman Catholic and Jacobite sections, known as Southists and Northists. The Southists have their own dioceses both in the Jacobite and Roman Churches. They do not intermarry with the other Christian families. This division is traced to Thomas of Cana. He and his colonists lived on the southern side of the river in Cranganore, and did not freely mix with the local Christians. They wanted to keep their race-purity and by custom avoided intermarriage. And this separatist tendency persisted through the centuries.

Leaving aside traditions and vague historical references, we come

to solid ground in history with the visit of the Alexandrian merchant Cosmas, in the sixth century. Cosmas was a great sailor and because of his sailings in the Indian seas he is known as Cosmas Indicopleustes, i.e. the Indian Voyager. He has left on record that in Ceylon and in Malabar, where pepper grows, he saw Christians as a well organized community, with a Bishop from Persia. Milne Rae thinks that this Christian community which Cosmas saw could not have been of much antiquity. He would assign the origins of Christianity in India to the missionary activity of the Nestorian Church in the fifth century. Nestorian communities existed in Ceylon, Malabar and the Ganges region and in China. All have died out except the Church in Malabar.

So then we note that when the Malabar Church comes into the light of history it is in communion with or as a part of the Chaldean Church. The Chaldean Church was Nestorian and it was with the Nestorian Patriarch of Babylon that the Church had connection. It could not have been a domination as any domination would have been impossible from such a distance. It is supposed to have been a relation of communion only. Bishops from Persia had episcopal supervision, local administration being carried on by local Archdeacons. This is the view taken by all historians of the Syrian Church. Did the Malabar Church accept the Nestorian doctrine? The orthodox faith was retained, though there was Nestorian episcopacy. Shut off by the mountains on one side and the sea on the other, the Christians of Malabar lived more or less a life of isolation. The great Christological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries did not concern them. The Church which accepted Nestorian bishops for long centuries equally welcomed the Jacobite, Monophysite bishops when they came. Principal A.M. Varki is right when he says, 'Historians have tried to make out that the Orthodox Syrian Church in South India was at one time Nestorian and later Monophysite. The truth seems to be simply that these Christians, few in numbers, living among large non-Christian populations and without opportunities of frequent contacts with Christian communities outside, welcomed with open arms whoever came from Asia Minor or Palestine or Persia without stopping to enquire into his precise doctrinal and ecclesiastical affiliations, and so quite probably the Church at one time accepted Nestorian bishops and at another time Monophysite bishops without however accepting the doctrines which those bishops held. In one sense, therefore, the contentions of the historians may be true. In another and a truer sense, the Church has always kept its faith orthodox and its succession Apostolic.' (The Tambaram Series: *The Growing Church*, p. 223).

There is a well authenticated immigration of Persian Christians in the ninth century. This time it is Marwan Sabriso and party with two bishops, Mar Sapro, and Mar Prodh, in A.D. 825. This was the period of Cheraman Perumal who ruled over the whole of Malabar and was a great and good king. The tradition about him is that after a period of beneficent rule he left his kingdom and went to Arabia where he became a Muhammadan and never returned. There are others who say that he became a Christian. The Malabar Era begins with the traditional date of his leaving the kingdom, 15th August A.D. 825. According to another account the Malabar Era begins with the landing of Marwan Sabriso. The land ruled over by Cheraman Perumal broke up into small chiefdoms which were later grouped into three kingdoms: that of the Zamorin of Calicut, and those of the Rajas of Travancore and Cochin. Marwan Sabriso and party settled in and around Quilon, and he built a church there. A local ruler, king of Venad, gave to him and to his community certain rights and privileges. These were inscribed on two sets of copper plates. Five plates do still exist: three in the Old Seminary, Kottayam, and two in Tiruvalla with the Mar Thoma Metropolitan. There is also mention of another charter of privileges granted at Cranganore to one Iravi Kortan, a Christian merchant of that city. These social privileges granted to these Christians helped to make them into a caste, indifferent to the Christian heritage of witness and evangelism.

Two of the oldest Christian monuments in Malabar have to be briefly referred to, the two Persian crosses. A Persian cross was discovered at St. Thomas Mount, Madras, in 1547. A duplicate of it is in the Big Church, Kottayam. On a black stone with the design of a

Gothic arch is a Persian cross on the top of the vertical piece of which is a dove. Running along the arch border there is a Phalvi inscription. This was translated by Dr. Burnell thus: 'In punishment by the cross (was) the suffering of this One; He who is the true Christ, and God above, and guide ever pure.' A more recent translation is: 'My Lord Christ, have mercy upon Afras, son of Chaharbukht, the Syrian who preserved this.' This cross is supposed to be of seventh or eighth century origin. There is another cross in the Kottayam church which has in addition to the Phalvi inscription, a Syriac inscription with the figure of two peacocks on either side of a small cross on the top panel. The Syriac inscription is: 'Let me not glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Tradition has it that the Syrian Christians in the States of Travancore and Cochin grew to such social and political eminence that they elected one of their number as king. The first king Beliarth or Villiarvatta founded a dynasty which lasted for a time. The subjects of these kings, the Syrian Christians, were scattered in different places under different rulers. If the Christians had their kings for some time they must have been local chiefs. The dynasty became extinct and no records are left. The Christians are said to have presented to Vasco de Gama in 1502 a red staff with silver work on it and three silver bells on the top, which they said was the sceptre of their kings. Few historians believe this story of a Christian king. The story may have arisen because the raja of Udayamperoor came to be known as the king of the Christians.

In the Middle Ages the Malabar Church had many visitors. Marco Polo, the Venetian traveller, was an important visitor in the year 1293. He has left some record of his visit to Mylapore. Other visitors were Roman Catholic friars. Of these we shall have occasion to refer to in the next chapter.

In Syrian Church history the period from the fourth to the sixteenth century is known as the Persian or Babylonian period. This was the period when the church was connected with the Persian Church from which bishops came for ecclesiastical purposes. Jacobite historians in Malabar try to show that the connection was with the Antiochian Patriarch through his representatives in Persia. Now there is another attempt made to prove that the connection was neither with the Nestorian bishops, nor with the Jacobites, but with the Catholicose of the East, of the orthodox faith, independent of the Patriarch of Antioch. Whether these contentions could be substantiated by evidence is questionable. What is certain is that the Persian Christians and Malabar Christians were in ecclesiastical contact. The Babylonian Patriarch was Nestorian, and the bishops who came to Malabar were from the Babylonian See.

To remind Malabar Christians of the twelve centuries of Babylonian connection, there is still a Nestorian church in and around Trichur. The members of this Church claim to be the true inheritors of the ancient Babylonian tradition in India. They still have Nestorian bishops sent by the Babylonian Patriarch who is now in America. They are an exclusive community and do not encourage intermarriage with others. They are also called Chaldean Christians. They number about 10,000. Besides the very old cathedral church at Trichur, there are nine other churches in and around Trichur. The Church has in India at present six priests and six deacons.

CHAPTER III THE MALABAR CHURCH AND THE ROMAN CATHOLICS

Among the travellers and itinerant preachers who visited Malabar in the middle ages a number of Roman Catholics are mentioned. John of Monte Corbino, a Franciscan friar, had been sent to China by the Roman Church as its first missionary and bishop. On his way to China he stayed in India for thirteen months. He was a contemporary of Marco Polo. He speaks of India as the place 'wherein stands the Church of St. Thomas'.

Friar Jordanus, a Dominican, made more than one visit to Malabar. As the result of his first contact he wrote to his fellow workers of the necessity and opportunity for working in India. At Salsette and Surat he saw Christian churches. In 1330 Jordanus was sent by the Pope as a bishop with a Papal bull to the Christians of Quilon, asking them to

accept Jordanus as bishop and to enter the Catholic Church by giving up their schism. One wonders at what time the Malabar Christians broke away from Rome to create a schism. This bull is important as the first claim on record of the authority of the Roman Pontiff over the Church in Malabar. Another important visitor was John De Marignolli of Florence. He spent over a year in Quilon. He mentions the existence of a church of the Latin communion in Quilon (1338).

After the arrival of Vasco de Gama in Cochin the fortunes of the Malabar Christians began to change. The Christians of the place presented to him, as we have seen, the sceptre of the king who once ruled over them. They requested the king of Portugal to take them under his protection. From 1498, the date on which Vasco de Gama landed at Calicut, for a century and a half the Portuguese had command of the eastern seas. With the establishment of the Portuguese empire in the east the Pope saw the opportunity of bringing the Malabar Christians under his supremacy. St. Francis Xavier landed in Goa in 1542 and carried on the work of baptising hundreds along the seacoast. His life and work had a profound influence on the people. In his fervour for the mother Church he requested the establishment of the inquisition court at Goa. This iniquitous institution was a weapon in the hands of the Roman Catholics to enquire into the faith of the people. Another effort made by the Roman Catholic priests was the establishment of seminaries where young men could be trained for the Ministry in the Malabar Church. In this way they thought the Roman Catholic influence would permeate. But the Syrian Christians refused to accept those trained in the Roman Catholic seminary as priests. Then they put difficulties in the way of Babylonian bishops entering the country; a bishop, Mar Joseph, was even deported to Portugal; another bishop, Mar Abraham, who came from Persia endured much persecution at the hands of the Romans. His position was very difficult and he sometimes had to play a double game. In 1597 he died; Archdeacon George continued as leader. The year 1592 saw the arrival of Archbishop Menezes at Goa. Armed with the backing of the Portuguese viceroy, working with a determined purpose, and with a character which stooped to use any means to achieve an end, by friendly visits, bribery and threats, he managed to win over many leaders to his side. He visited the churches, securing the support of the raja of Cochin, and finally when he saw the time opportune he called together in June A.D. 1599 a synod at Diamper (Udayamperoor, in Malayalam) a town on the border between Travancore and Cochin. This was to be attended by four representatives from each congregation, persons most honourable, conscientious and experienced to be chosen. This synod had as its objects the following: '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 doctrines 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 St. Peter and vicar of Christ upon earth, from whom they had for some time departed.'¹

We have no record of the synod left by any member of the Syrian Church. But the *Jordana*, a book published by Antonis de Gouvea, gives an account of the synod and its decrees. The Archbishop presided and after preliminary announcements and discussions read out the decrees to be passed. After the close of the session (the Council sat for four days) all present were asked to sign it, and, though some

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THE MOST REV. JUHANON MAR THOMA
Metropolitan, Mar Thoma Syrian Church

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protested, the object of the Archbishop was achieved. The Syrian

Christians of Malabar, and the Malankara Church became part of the Roman Church and under the Pope. New doctrines and practices were introduced, and the freedom of the Church was lost. The records and prayer books of the old Church were burned. But the acts and decrees composed for the Council, passed and recorded, give us an insight into the faith and practices of both the Malabar and Roman Churches in the sixteenth century. Those who have studied the records say that the following facts about the Malabar Church may be undoubtedly affirmed:

The Malabar Church

- (1) Never accepted the Papal supremacy;
- (2) Denied the Doctrine of Transubstantiation;
- (3) Condemned the adoration of images;
- (4) Knew nothing of masses and prayers for the dead;
- (5) Knew nothing of the intercession of saints;
- (6) Did not use the holy oil in Baptism;
- (7) Looked with horror on auricular confession;
- (8) Did not practise the celibacy of clergy;
- (9) Recognized only two orders, the priesthood, and the diaconate;
- (10) Believed in the activity of the Holy Spirit in the consecration of the elements in the Holy Communion;
- (11) Had Communion in both kinds;
- (12) Admitted to the Communion members of other churches;
- (13) Accepted three sacraments: Baptism, the Eucharist and Holy Orders.
- (14) In all questions of doctrine they accepted the authority of the sacred Scriptures as decisive.

These features of the Syrian Church in Malabar bear ample testimony to the fact that up to the sixteenth century the Church maintained its independence and kept its doctrines free from doctrines and practices which are now characteristic of the Nestorian or Roman or Jacobite communions in the Catholic Church.

Archbishop Menezes went to Goa leaving the work of Romanising the Malabar Church to the Jesuits and other workers. Francisco Roz was consecrated bishop of the Syrian Church, and the seat of the bishopric was removed from Ankamali to Cranganore. Though there were some Syrian Christian leaders and churches which were discontented with the state of affairs they had to submit to it because of the domination of the Portuguese power. For over half a century from A.D. 1600 the Malabar Church continued under the Roman domination. But the Portuguese empire in India was on the decline and the opportunity for the Syrian Christians to assert themselves was not to be long delayed.

CHAPTER IV

THE COMING OF THE JACOBITES, THE COONEN CROSS INCIDENT

The Jesuits with whom was entrusted the work of carrying out the decrees of Diamper, in their efforts to make them effective in the various congregations, offended many by their harshness. The appeals which the Syrians made to Rome were unheeded. Discontent was smouldering and in the year 1653 something happened which fanned it into flame. One of the Eastern Patriarchs sent to India a representative of that church, in the person of Bishop Ahatalla. He was taken hold of by the Portuguese before landing in Cochin, shipped off to Goa, and nothing more was heard of him. Rumour went about that a bishop sent to them was either drowned in the sea or burnt at the stake. This infuriated the Christians of Malabar. People began to gather in numbers to protest and make a demonstration. A crowd reported to be about 20,000 marched on to Cochin under the leadership of their head Archdeacon Thomas. The gates of the Cochin fort were closed against them and cannon were mounted on the fortress. Frightened and disappointed, the angry crowd gathered together in the open ground in front of the Church in Mattanchery, a part of the town of Cochin. There was a stone cross in front of the church. They wanted to take an oath touching the cross. For this they tied ropes on to it, and holding it in their hands made a vow abjuring Rome and declaring their freedom from the Roman yoke for ever. This happened in 1653 and is known as the Coonen Cross Incident, or the vow

at Coonen Cross. The word Coonen in Malayalam means 'bent', the cross probably was not standing upright. It was a universal revolt, only about 400 families remaining faithful to Rome. But soon the Roman Catholic propaganda machinery was set in motion and when the heat subsided the majority of those who took the oath re-entered the Roman fold. It is said that only 32 congregations stood faithful to the Archdeacon, and 84 congregations accepted Rome.

Thus there was division in the once united Church in Malankara. Up to the sixteenth century the Malankara Church was one, united in communion with the Babylonian Church, and for a century and a half united under Rome. Henceforward there were two Communions, the Roman and the non-Roman. Members of the Roman Communion came to be called as *Pazhayakuttu* (the old community) and the non-Romans were called *Puthyakuttu* (the new community). This is a strange use of terms. The Romans who came a century and a half ago are called the 'old' and the centuries old independent Malankara Christians are called 'new'.

THE COMING OF THE JACOBITES.

What about the 32 congregations which maintained their independence? They had no bishops and no hope of getting one, as long as the Portuguese control of the seas lasted. So, twelve priests joined together and as a provisional arrangement raised Archdeacon Thomas to the episcopate. This was irregular they knew, according to ecclesiastical law. This first bishop was called Mar Thoma I. Meanwhile they sent appeals to the ancient Patriarchates for a bishop. In 1663, the Dutch captured Cochin from the Portuguese. They were Protestants, and the way was now open for foreign bishops to reach Malabar. In 1665 Mar Gregorius, Metropolitan of Jerusalem, a bishop who was under the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch, landed in Cochin. Mar Thoma I and his people welcomed him with open hands, without caring to enquire from what Patriarchate or Eastern Communion he came. Mar Thoma I was consecrated as bishop or Metran (the local name for a bishop). The Jacobite Church in Malabar now contends that the Malabar Church was never under Nestorian Patriarchs. It was the Catholicose of the East, who was under the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch they say, who maintained connection with Malabar. The Orthodox Syrian Church in Malabar under the Catholicose would contend, that it was the independent Catholicose of the East, who was always orthodox, not Jacobite, that sent bishops to Malabar, until the fourteenth century when some Nestorians came. The truth or correctness of these contentions does not fall in the province of this narrative. Nine bishops or Metrars with the title of Mar Thoma and four with the title of Dionysius were consecrated and held ecclesiastical authority over the Syrian Church between the years 1665 and 1843. Very often there were foreign bishops also, sent by the Patriarch. Some of the consecrations were by the local Metrars and some by the foreign. There seems to have been no binding rule about it. There were two cases where the local bishops had reconsecration at the hands of foreign bishops.

THE ORIGIN OF THE INDEPENDENT SYRIAN CHURCH OF THOZHUR.

Mar Thoma VI who was consecrated by Mar Thoma V got himself reconsecrated by a foreign Metran in the year 1770, and took a new name Mar Dionysius I. He is also known as Dionysius the Great. It was during his time that the Rev. Claudius Buchanan, a Chaplain of the East India Company, visited Travancore, in 1806. There was a certain priest of the *Kattumangattu* family who was very friendly with a foreign Metran, Mar Gregorius. He ordained this priest as Remban (Remban is a celibate order in the Syrian Church, the Metrars are selected from this order). Mar Gregorius consecrated *Kattumangattu* Remban as a Metran with the name of Mar Kurilos, without consulting Dionysius I, or getting the consent of the people. This led to a dispute between Dionysius and Gregorius, the former calling in question Mar Kurilos's authority in the Diocese. The Dutch Commodore in Cochin was called in as an arbitrator. He decided against Mar Kurilos. Mar Gregorius had before his death given away to Mar Kurilos all his wealth. Mar Kurilos collected the money, went away to the then British Malabar, bought a property in Anjoor, three miles off Kunnankulam on the Malabar border, and established an independent Diocese. This incident is significant because it shows that even in the

Jacobite period, though a foreign Metran could consecrate a Bishop, the consent and support of the local Metran and people were necessary for it. Mar Kurilos had some following and some local people also joined him. This Diocese is now known as the Independent Syrian Church of Malabar. This small Diocese has played a significant part in the history of the Syrian Church. Mar Kurilos I (Cyril) consecrated his successor Mar Kurilos II. Mar Kurilos II was succeeded by Mar Philoxenos I who in his turn was succeeded by Mar Philoxenos II. This Philoxenos II had the privilege of consecrating three Metrans in the Jacobite Syrian Church. These were known as Pulikote Mar Dionysius, Punnathari Mar Dionysius and Cheppat Mar Dionysius. This Cheppat Mar Dionysius in turn consecrated the Thozhyur Metran Kurilos III, when Philoxenos II passed away without consecrating his successor. On two occasions, once before the consecration of Punnathari Mar Dionysius, and again before the consecration of Cheppat Mar Dionysius, the Thozhyur Metropolitan Philoxenos II, acted as Malankara Metropolitan in the Jacobite Syrian Church for short periods. This action of Philoxenos II consecrating bishops in the Malankara Church and claiming no jurisdiction or authority over the bishops or the Church is highly commendable. If the great Patriarchal sees of the East had followed this principle, how great a blessing it would have been for the growth of indigenous churches. Mar Kurilos (Allothur Metrachen) was present at the consecration of Thomas Mar Athanasius by Mathews Mar Athanasius of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church. When Thomas Mar Athanasius of the Mar Thoma Church passed away suddenly without consecrating his successor, it was Mar Kurilos from Thozhyur Church who consecrated Titus I Mar Thoma as Metran of the Mar Thoma Church. Though there are some differences in faith and practices of the Mar Thoma and the Thozhyur Churches, both are in communion with each other. The present Thozhyur Metropolitan Geevarghese Mar Kurilos was consecrated by the Mar Thoma Metropolitan. At present the Thozhyur Church, i.e. the Independent Syrian Church of Malabar, has one Metropolitan, four priests and two deacons, five churches and a few chapels, and an English High School, and a Middle School.

CHAPTER V

THE C.M.S. MISSION OF HELP AND THE ANGLICANS IN MALABAR

The Portuguese power in India was displaced by that of the Dutch and towards the close of the eighteenth century the British East India Company became the dominating western power in India. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, Travancore and Cochin entered into treaty relations with the British. According to one of its terms a British Resident was to live in Travancore. Colonel Macaulay was the first British Resident. It was during his time and that of Dionysius I that Rev. Claudius Buchanan, a Chaplain of the East India Company, visited Travancore. He wanted to be of help to the Syrian Christians and he made arrangements for the printing of the Scriptures in Syriac and also had the four Gospels translated into vellum. It was he who took away with him an old Syriac Bible on vellum presented by Mar Philoxenos which is now in the Cambridge Library. In 1810 Colonel Munro came to Travancore as Resident. He was a very devout Christian and became interested in the Syrian Church. He saw the social and religious state of the Church at a low ebb. After the Coonen Cross incident a century and a half elapsed and the Church just existed, we cannot say it lived. Church administration and worship and sacraments were carried on, but there was no sign of spiritual vitality, no evangelistic work and no Christian activity of any kind. The clergy were uneducated and there was no centre for training. Boys of ten and below were ordained deacons. It was a means of income to the Metrans. Compulsory celibacy of the clergy, introduced by Rome, remained the rule. There was no facility for the reading of the Bible. Church services were conducted in Syriac, which the congregation did not know at all, and the celebrant priest knew only to a small extent. The clergy made money by saying masses for the dead. Superstitious practices which prevailed in the land affected the Christians also. Though doctrinally Rome was rejected, the Jacobites who came in had many of the practices like masses for the dead, invocation of saints and auricular confession. The lay people

cared little for doctrines and practices. So in the Syrian Church there was a change of ecclesiastics after Coonen Cross, and that was all.

Colonel Munro saw the need of the Syrian Church and wrote to the Church Missionary Society, founded in 1799, to send a mission of help. Buchanan's book *Christian Researches in Asia* had awakened in England interest in the Syrian Church of Malabar, so the C.M.S. readily responded to the call. Rev. Thomas Norton was the first missionary sent by the C.M.S. He lived in Alleppey and was well received by the people. This was in 1816. The first Anglican bishop in India, Bishop Middleton, visited the Syrian Church in 1819, had an interview with the Metran Dionysius and with Norton. He advised Norton to be very careful in his dealings with the Syrian Church.

In the course of the next three years four C.M.S. missionaries came to Kottayam. Rev. Benjamin Bailey, Rev. Joseph Fenn and Rev. Henry Baker were a famous trio, who left a mark on the history of the Syrian Church. They were well received by the Syrian Metrans, and given freedom to work among the people and to visit and preach in the churches. Supported by Resident Munro who helped them with government money and his influence, and encouraged by the friendly relationship with the Metrans, the missionaries started work with vigour and hope. Baker took to educational work and started village schools and a school for higher education in Kottayam, Bailey took to literary work, started a printing press in Kottayam, translated the Bible and the English Prayer Book into Malayalam, and published two Malayalam dictionaries. Fenn devoted his attention to the Seminary for the training of the clergy. In 1813, during the time of Macaulay, he made available to the Syrian Metran the interest accrued from a trust fund of Rs. 10,500 which was entrusted with the British for the benefit of the Syrian Church. This is the famous '*Vattipanam*' the claim to which has led to so many court cases, between the Metropolitans of the Syrian Church. The Seminary built in 1813 was built on land given free by the Rani of Travancore and it was here that Fenn did his work. It is now known as the 'Old Seminary'. The first batch of missionaries were in friendly relations with the Syrian Metrans Dionysius II and Dionysius III. The missionary trio was wise enough to appreciate the instructions given to them by the C.M.S. 'Not to pull down the ancient Church and build another, but to remove the rubbish and to repair the decaying places.' The Church should be brought back 'to their own primitive worship and discipline rather than be induced to adopt the liturgy or discipline of the English Church.' The missionaries strictly kept to this principle, though they were sometimes impatient of the small results produced. During this period the Syrian Church was visited by Rev. James Hough, a Chaplain of the East India Company, and by Bishop Middleton of Calcutta, who made his third visit in 1821. They were satisfied with the relations between the missionaries and the Syrian Metrans. Between the years 1826 and 1833, the first batch of missionaries Fenn, Bailey and Baker had to go back to England.

In the year 1830 Dionysius IV or Cheppat Mar Dionysius became Metran. He had never been friendly with the missionaries. In the years 1833 and 1834 new missionaries, Rev. Joseph Peet and Rev. W.J. Woodcock, came. Peet was in charge of the Seminary and Woodcock had supervision of general work. These were different types of persons from the original trio. Peet was rash and hasty in his actions and Woodcock a controversialist. Both thought that the time of waiting for gradual results was over, and that it was time for boldly criticising error and working deliberately for reform. One can very well imagine the situation: Metropolitan Cheppat Mar Dionysius very unfriendly with the missionaries, the clergy and the laity indifferent to all new light, and the missionaries determined to carry out a reform with open criticism and action. The scene was set for another fight. Peet was unwise in his actions. To take one example, there were important documents kept in the seminary strong room under two locks, one key with the Metran and the other with Peet. Fearing that the Metran was planning to take the documents into his sole keeping, Peet broke open the strong room and took away the documents and kept them in safe keeping with the Resident. This led to an open dispute. The C.M.S. Secretary from Madras came down to pacify matters but could not bring about a settlement and things moved on

to an open breach. Then in 1835 Bishop Wilson of Calcutta came down and made a friendly approach to Cheppat Mar Dionysius. For the continued relationship between the Syrian Church and the missionaries he made the following modest suggestions for the consideration of the Metropolitan :—

- (1) As a rule, only those who have received certificates from the Seminary in Kottayam should be ordained.
- (2) Accounts of Church lands and properties should be rendered to the British Resident.
- (3) There should be a permanent endowment so that the clergy be paid a fixed amount instead of depending on uncertain payments at the time of services in the church.
- (4) Every parish church must have its school.
- (5) During divine service every Sunday the Gospel must be expounded to the people.
- (6) Malayalam prayers are to be used instead of Syriac.

The Metropolitan promised to consider the suggestions and called together a council meeting at Mavelikara, where the suggestions were rejected. The Metran then sent a circular letter prohibiting all association with the missionaries. Thus ended the Mission of Help.

It is interesting to read some extracts from the Mavelikara *Padyola* (agreement), the agreement arrived at the Mavelikara Council.

‘... We the Jacobite Syrians being subject to the supremacy of the Patriarch of Antioch and observing as we do, the liturgies and ordinances instituted by the prelates sent under his command, cannot deviate from such liturgies and ordinances and maintain a discipline contrary thereto, and a man of one persuasion being not authorized to preach and admonish in the Church of another, following a different persuasion, without the permission of the respective Patriarchs, we cannot permit the same to be done against us, and our churches being built by the aid of the prelates sent under the order of the Patriarch and on the wishes of the people of each parish and ornamented by their money, and as the accounts of the annual income accruing to our churches under the head of voluntary contributions, offerings, etc., are as required by the rules furnished to our Bishops, as is the custom in the churches of Antioch as well as in the churches of this and other countries following different persuasions we are without the power and feel disinclined to follow and cause to be followed a different procedure from the above. . .’

Then follows a sentence contrasting the two batches of missionaries:—

‘The reverend missionaries who have come to Kottayam in their profuse benevolence taught the youths at the Seminary English and other languages, protected our children like loving fathers, caused books to be printed for the benefit of all classes, rendered all necessary help in maintaining the prevailing discipline of the Syrian Church, caused the annual interest due to be drawn on the receipt of the Metropolitan, had superintendence on the affairs of the Seminary, and caused ordinations to be made agreeable to the requests of the people and the power of the prelates. While affairs were being thus conducted the missionaries took to managing the Seminary without consulting the Metropolitan, themselves expended the interest money drawn annually on the receipt of the Metropolitan, dispersed the deacons instructed in the Seminary, conducted affairs in opposition to the discipline of the Church and created dissensions amongst us, all of which have occasioned much sorrow and vexation.’

Here may be a case of mutual recriminations. We can only lament the situation that arose.

The missionaries and the Syrian Metran instead of going to the court for the property and money called in arbitrators. A partition award was accepted by both parties. According to the award, the Old Seminary and compound and the ‘Vattipanam’, the Trust Fund of Rs. 10,500 were assigned to the Metropolitan. The missionaries received the Munro island, and the fund for education. Henceforward the missionaries and the Church parted company.

What were the missionaries to do? To pack up and go or establish themselves for work among the non-Christians? The latter course was adopted. There were some Syrian families and priests who found in the teaching of the missionaries enrichment in their religious life.

They naturally left the Syrian communion and cast in their lot with the missionaries. The first church was built at Mallapally, then others at Mavelikara and Alleppey. The English Prayer Book translated into Malayalam was used for service. The missionaries besides shepherding the Syrian families began evangelistic work among the Hindus, especially the low castes who were completely left untouched by the Gospel. Their work thrived. The C.M.S. Missionaries have done much in the cause of education both primary and higher. In the year 1878 the Anglican Diocese of Travancore and Cochin was formed. Thus came into existence the Anglican Communion in Malabar.

The C.M.S. Missionaries have been blamed for adding in this land one more separate communion, along with the existing Roman and Jacobite communions, and the small independent communion at Thozhyur. The question is whether they had anything distinctive to offer. Yes, the emphasis on personal religion freed from the teaching and practices introduced, by the Romans and more or less continued by the Jacobites; the emphasis on people’s worship—a worship in their own language into which they could enter intelligently; and the emphasis on the Church’s duty to preach the Gospel to the non-Christians; all these were new emphases and very much needed for the Malankara Church. But why did they introduce a foreign form of worship and life? They gave to the people the best they knew and possessed, the Anglican form of worship and life. Situated as they were, they could not have done otherwise.

CHAPTER VI THE REFORMATION IN THE SYRIAN CHURCH AND THE MAR THOMA SYRIAN CHURCH

In the year 1836 the work of the Mission of Help sent by the C.M.S. terminated. But was it a failure? We have seen in the last chapter the establishment of the Anglican communion in Travancore and Cochin, which was joined by numerous Syrian families. One work of the missionaries was the encouragement of the reading of the Bible in Malayalam. Once the Bible is in the hands of the people, it does its work. The Seminary in Kottayam and schools in the villages had helped the spread of elementary education to a certain extent. There were two Syrian priests associated with the missionaries in the work of the Seminary and the spiritual life and teachings emphasized by the missionaries had a great appeal to them. These were Abraham Malpan (Malpan means a professor) of Maramon and Kaithayil Geevarghese Malpan of Kottayam. When the missionaries and the Syrian Metropolitan fell out they were not prepared to give up the light they had received, but they were also not willing to leave the Syrian Church and join the missionaries. They thought of carrying out the reform in the Syrian Church itself. Twelve priests joined together and submitted a memorial to the British Resident. In it they made certain charges against Cheppat Mar Dionysius and enumerated some twenty-three points concerning church practices which were abhorrent to them. They complained that these were corruptions which had crept into the Church. The memorial contained complaints against such things as prayer for the dead, and the keeping of relics of the saints in churches, failure to use the Scripture for instruction. It struck at certain corrupt practices in the community and the Church, which affected the spiritual life of the people. This memorial to the Resident in 1836 is considered by some to be the ‘Trumpet Call’ of the reformation. No result came out of this memorial. The reformers then decided upon making changes in the liturgy and working for reform. But when the time came, the reforming zeal of many died away, and Abraham Malpan, backed by Kaithayil Geevarghese Malpan, was left alone. Abraham Malpan began to use the revised liturgy whenever he celebrated the communion.

Abraham Malpan was born in the Palakunnathu family in 1796. He lost his parents before he was three years old and was brought up by his uncle, a priest. He received instruction in Syriac and the Bible under Korah Malpan of Pudukall and was ordained priest in 1815 by Mar Thoma VIII. He was of conservative temperament and yet progressive in out-look. As there were some doubts about the validity of the consecration of Mar Thoma VIII he had some doubts about his own ordination. So when a Jacobite Metran from Syria came he had

himself reordained by him. Mar Dionysius lodged a complaint against him and the government sent Abraham Malpan to prison for thus flouting the authority of the Indian Metran. His progressive and spiritual out-look is exemplified by an action of his when he was vicar of Maramon Church. There was a church festival connected with a certain saint of the Church. A wooden image of his used to be taken around in procession and people used to offer prayers and offerings to it. Once Abraham Malpan took the image and threw it away so that when the festival came round there was no image to be taken in procession. This offended some people but the practice was stopped.

Abraham Malpan attracted the attention of the missionaries who took him as professor of Syriac in the Kottayam Seminary. He appreciated the teachings of the missionaries, and when the time came took the leadership of the reform after the missionaries had left the Seminary. The use of the revised liturgy, and the changes he brought about in practices, offended the Metropolitan and he was excommunicated. Deacons trained under him were refused priesthood by the Metropolitan. All these things were severe blows and brought much pain and hardship to him and his congregation, yet he and his people stood faithful to the reform and in places like Kottayam, Abraham Malpan began to get sympathizers. Cast out of the mother Church for his faith and convictions what was he to do? To retrace his steps and go back to the original fold? That would be unfaithfulness to the vision he had received. He was not willing to join the missionaries and become a member of a western church. So he decided to remain in the old traditions of the Syrian Church as much as possible and bring about reforms in the light of the new emphasis and vision he had received. But how could this be done without a Metran to support him and he was not prepared to give up an apostolic tradition and a valid episcopacy.

There was at this time a nephew of Abraham Malpan, deacon Mathew studying in the Madras College. He was asked to go to Mardin, where the Patriarch of Antioch resided. Deacon Mathew dared the perils of the long journey, reached Mardin where the Patriarch received him kindly and allowed him to stay for over one year and sent him back to Malabar as Metropolitan. He reached Cochin in 1843. Cheppat Mar Dionysius was there already as Metropolitan; the large majority of the people were conservative and the reform party was a very small minority. Mathews Mar Athanasius, as the new Metropolitan was called, first wanted to get authority to carry on his work efficiently. So when he came back he celebrated the communion not according to the revised liturgy as Abraham Malpan desired he should do, but according to the old form. He evidently did not want to antagonize the majority. He went to the capital, Trivandrum, to get government proclamation in his favour as Metropolitan of Malankara, but Mar Dionysius opposed this. The struggle between these two Metropolitans went on for about ten years. In 1852 Mathews Mar Athanasius was confirmed by royal proclamation as the Metropolitan of Malankara. Meanwhile in 1845 Abraham Malpan, the leader of the reformation, passed away, rather disappointed at the slow progress of the reformation and highly vexed at the attitude taken by his nephew in seeking for power and authority forsaking the cause of the reformation. Abraham Malpan may be called the Luther of the Syrian Church.

However, once he was recognized as the Metropolitan. Mathews Mar Athanasius took up the cause of reform. He was the first person to get direct consecration at the hands of the Jacobite Patriarch. Cheppat Mar Dionysius was getting old and to meet the situation, the orthodox party sent Rev. Joseph Pulikote to Mardin who returned to Malabar as Joseph Mar Dionysius (Pulikote Mar Dionysius) to work for the cause of the Patriarch. Mathews Mar Athanasius consecrated his cousin, Abraham Malpan's eldest son, as Thomas Mar Athanasius. Now the cause of reform began to progress slowly. The reform party was in possession of the Old Seminary and the Bishop resided there and Mathews Mar Athanasius ruled as Metropolitan of the Malankara Church till 1876 when the royal proclamation was withdrawn, and the different claimants were asked to fight out their case in a court of law. In 1875 the Patriarch of Antioch himself had come down to Malabar, because he saw that his own authority in Malabar was in danger.

Mathews Mar Athanasius had already been excommunicated. The twenty-five years of his Metranship was a stormy period, but he was a person who was ready to meet any fight. Though in the early years when he was fighting to get his authority established, he seemed to be indifferent to reforms, he later proved to be keen about reforms. Besides changes in the worship, he advocated the reading of the Bible, establishment of Sunday classes, and the preaching on the Scriptures. Moreover he effected many things for the social uplift of the Syrian Christian community. Though the story of the relationship between the Hindu rulers and the Christians was one of mutual harmony and respect, in course of time the Hindu neighbours oppressed the Syrian Christians in many ways. No wonder that the Church which was spiritually dead had also fallen in the social status. Mathews Mar Athanasius had good influence with the British Resident and the government officers, and he used it to remove the social disabilities of the Syrian Christians which they suffered at the hands of their Hindu neighbours.

After the demise of Mathews Mar Athanasius, there followed a series of cases in court for the possession of the Old Seminary and Church property, and for the right over the *Vattipanam*, the Trust Fund. The case dragged on for years, and it was left for Thomas Mar Athanasius to carry on the fight in the courts and to experience the tears of defeat. The case filed in the Alleppey Zilla Court by Joseph Mar Dionysius against Thomas Mar Athanasius came up for final disposal in the Royal Court of Appeal in Trivandrum in 1889. The two judges in the High Court decided that Joseph Mar Dionysius was the rightful Metropolitan of the Malankara Church, and that the Church was under the Patriarch of Antioch. The one Christian judge, Justice Ormsby, decided in favour of Thomas Mar Athanasius as the true Metropolitan and held that the Malankara Church had always been an independent Church. Thomas Mar Athanasius and party left the Old Seminary with tears. A series of court cases followed for the individual churches, all except a few of which went against the reform party. Of the old churches the reforming party got the Maramon church by court decision, and the Kottarakkara church without a case being filed. Five old churches were secured for the reform party for alternate Sundays, the Other Sundays going to the Jacobites.

Without a place to live, except his own home church, Thomas Mar Athanasius left the Old Seminary. Without places of worship the reforming party left the churches where their parents had worshipped, in the church yards of which their ancestors lay buried. In some places social fellowship, and ordinary amenities were refused to the reformers. What sustained them? The question at issue was not just one of freedom and independence of the Church from a foreign yoke. It was not one of doctrines or of ecclesiastical orders only. People felt that there were spiritual values at stake. The freedom of the individual to approach God, to enter into the spirit of worship by intelligently following the service, to read the Scriptures and understand the ways of God. These were all spiritual values worthy of sacrifice. Along with the reformation and the separation of the reform party the Church experienced a revival also. In 1864 Mathews Mar Athanasius allowed Ammal, the daughter of a famous Tamil convert, Vedanayaka Sastri, to visit the churches and inspire the people through her Christian songs. The spiritual revival started by an unknown preacher Mathai Upadesi and carried on by Justus Joseph (Vidwan Kutty) a famous scholar and musician and a Brahman convert, had its influence throughout Central Travancore. In 1887 there was the influence of Baringold and Carny, in 1888 that of Lakshmana Rao, and in 1894 the revival as the result of the preaching of Tamil David and Wardsworth. The spiritual fervour and revival were continuously kept up in the Church, and that sustained the people to be loyal to the Church through litigation and the period of trial and strain. The Evangelistic Association was founded in 1888. At a time when the time and energy of the Church were spent in defending themselves in the court, a band of twelve moved by a higher spiritual vision started the Association for Gospel preaching in the Church and outside. It was blessed by the Metropolitan and Church leaders. The defence in the courts failed, but this onward march on the spiritual front not only defended the Church, but led on to progress.

The losing of the court case and the leaving of the Old Seminary necessitated the reform party having a separate existence. They were called in contempt 'the Reformers', but they called themselves the Mar Thoma Syrian Church. The Church is not ashamed of the name 'Reformers'; it has stood for reform, and always stands for reform of all that stands in the way of real spiritual values.

Thomas Mar Athanasius who sustained the Church through his sufferings passed away suddenly in 1893 without consecrating a successor. The enemies of the Church hoped that without episcopal succession the reform party would come to an end. Much influence was used to prevent Mar Kurilos of Thozhyur Church from coming for the consecration, but in spite of that Mar Kurilos came and consecrated Titus I Mar Thoma. Titus was a devout soul and a man of prayer. During his period the foundations for much of the spiritual activity of the Mar Thoma Church were laid. The work of the Evangelistic Association developed year by year. Preaching, Bible reading and prayer in the Church and in the home, were greatly emphasized, Sunday school teaching was encouraged. Two high schools were started. In the impoverished Church the work of reconstruction was well on the way.

Titus I Mar Thoma had two narrow escapes with his life. After the loss of the Old Seminary the Mar Thoma Metrans lived in the Maramon church. Once when the Metropolitan was resting in the two storeyed part of the church the building crashed, leaving intact just the part where he lived. Then he went and lived in a part of the seminary building in Tiruvalla. The roof of the room where he was sleeping was set fire to in the night by some miscreants. The Metropolitan was saved from that calamity also. In all the calamities he had to go through, and in all the difficulties he had to face, Titus I Mar Thoma had the counsel and support of the Very Rev. Eipe Thoma Kathanar, who was Vicar General of the Church. He was an iron man and his personality gave confidence and hope not only to the Metropolitan but also to the priests and members of the Church, when in doubt or despair about the future. His advice and help was available to Titus II Metropolitan during the first part of his period of administration. Titus I Mar Thoma may be considered one of the saints of the Syrian Church. If performance of miracles at the tomb is a test of sainthood, he was no saint. But if devotion, virtuous character, love towards God and man, and intimate fellowship with God are the tests for saintliness, Titus I was indeed a saint.

Titus I consecrated a nephew of his as Titus II. As Suffragan (Assistant Bishop) he helped the Metropolitan in the reconstruction work of the Church. In 1911 Titus I passed away, and Titus II became Mar Thoma Metropolitan. In those days of difficult travelling he constantly visited parishes, sometimes living for days in a parish, encouraged the building of new churches in place of temporary sheds, and helped in the organisational work of the parish. It was during his episcopate that many new churches were built and foundations of many laid. With the help of Rev. O.J. Joseph Malpan and M.G. Zachariah Kasseesa he had almost all the offices of the Church translated and printed in Malayalam. Educational institutions began to grow in number and more and more educated men began to enter the ministry. In 1917 Bishop Abraham was consecrated by Titus II and the Metropolitan of Thozhyur. Till 1944, for twenty-seven years, Titus II as Metropolitan and Bishop Abraham as Suffragan carried on the administration of the Church for the good and advancement of the congregations and the Church. The passing of a constitution for the Mar Thoma Church, giving due place to Metrans, clergy and laity; and the coming into use of a tentative Kurbana Thaksa (Liturgy of the Holy Communion) were difficult tasks but peacefully achieved. The Evangelistic Association under the parental care of the two Metropolitans and with the self-sacrificing labours of Rev. C.P. Philipose Kasseesa began to grow in strength and extended its activities outside of Malabar, starting work on Ashram lines. The Sunday School Association established in 1909 under the able leadership of the then Mr. V.P. Mamman (late Very Rev. V.P. Mamman) grew in its work and efficiency and has a leading place in the India Sunday School Union.

Titus II Mar Thoma passed away in 1944 and Bishop Abraham became the Metropolitan as Abraham Mar Thoma. He was the first Metran chosen outside of the Palakunnathu family. After graduating

from the Madras Christian College he went to the Wycliffe College, Toronto, and had his theological education there. His consecration as a Metran was an event in the Syrian Church. He infused new spirit and vigour into the evangelistic work of the Church. He toured throughout India and all missionary circles knew him as a great evangelist. His vision of evangelism as the task of every Christian led to the starting of the Voluntary Evangelist Association, and the *Sevika Sangham* with training institutions of their own and workers in different parts of the country. In 1939 two new Metrans were consecrated, Juhanon Mar Timotheus and Mathews Mar Athanasius. In 1947 Abraham Mar Thoma passed away in the midst of his labours leaving the task of ecclesiastical oversight of the Church to the two remaining Metrans.

CHAPTER VII THE MAR THOMA SYRIAN CHURCH: WHAT IT STANDS FOR

There are those who say that the Mar Thoma Syrian Church is a schismatic and heretical Church which broke away from the Jacobite Church in the nineteenth century and is thus only a century old. This view may be correct if we look at things from the background of the nineteenth century only. Abraham Malpan led a reform movement in the Jacobite Syrian Church and had to leave the Jacobite communion as he and his followers were excommunicated by Cheppat Mar Dionysius because of the reformed teachings which he held. Later, Mathews Mar Athanasius was excommunicated by the Patriarch of Antioch because he was supposed to hold new teachings and also refused to accept the authority of the Patriarch over the Malankara Church. But the Mar Thoma Church views things from the background of the early centuries before the Nestorian or Roman or Jacobite teachings and practices were imposed upon the Church in Malankara. It contends that the reformation was a going back to the original doctrines and practices of the Independent St. Thomas Church. So the reforms were only a throwing away of errors which were imposed upon the Church in the middle centuries by the Roman and Jacobite ecclesiastics. This contention will be made clear by a comparison of the inferences from the decrees of Diamper outlined in chapter three of this book, with the reforms and changes effected by Abraham Malpan.

The changes made in the Thaksa (Liturgy of the Holy Communion) are given below :—

'All prayers for the dead and to the blessed Virgin Mary were omitted. According to the old Liturgy before receiving the Communion the priest says, "Thee I am holding Who holdest the bounds, Thee I am grasping Who orderest the depths, Thee, O God, I place in my mouth." This prayer was removed. In another prayer the priest says, "We offer Thee this unbloody sacrifice for Thy whole Church all over the world." Here "prayer" was substituted for "unbloody sacrifice". At one place the priest lifting the veil addresses as follows: "Thou art the hard rock which was set against the tomb of our Redeemer." This prayer is replaced by one addressed to our Lord: "Thou art the tried and precious stone which was set at naught by the builders." A rubric to bless the incense was removed. With regard to practice also certain changes were made. The Communion was to be administered in both kinds. It was not to be celebrated when there was no one to partake. The service was to be conducted in the vernacular and not henceforth in Syriac.' (Quoted from *The Mar Thoma Church and its Doctrines* by K.K. Kuruvilla.)

In continuation of the changes made by Abraham Malpan, further changes on the same lines and principles were brought about in the Thaksa and that revised Thaksa is now in common use. They are:—

(1) Relating to incense the old Liturgy gives great importance, giving the impression that it is something which effects reconciliation with God. The invocation 'Accept our incense out of Thy mercy, O Lord' was changed into 'Accept our worship, O Lord' and 'be reconciled to us through the incense offered by Thy priests' into 'Attend unto the prayer of Thy priests'.

(2) The word 'sacrifice' wherever it expresses the idea that the sacrifice of Christ is being repeated is either dropped or explained. It

was replaced by the expression 'the bloodless sacrifice of grace, peace and praise'.

(3) (a) With regard to the words of institution, the words of Christ as given in the Gospels alone are retained. (Luke 22 : 19; Matthew 26:28.)

(b) The word 'mystery' is dropped from all places where it occurred, as it was feared that this word might encourage the worshippers in the belief that some magical change took place in the bread and wine during the Communion service.

(c) With regard to the *Epiclesis* (the prayer of invocation of the Holy Spirit) the following prayer was accepted : 'May the Holy Spirit sanctify this (bread, wine) to be the (body, blood) of our Lord Jesus Christ.' The word 'transform' and 'descend on' were specially omitted.

(4) With regard to the Person of Christ all passages suspected of Monophysitism were dropped from the liturgy. To take one example the statement 'Emmanuel is one and the same after the indissoluble connection, He is not divided into two natures.'

(5) Regarding the priesthood, in all prayers which the priest offers in his own name for the people, the first person singular is deleted and either the first person plural or the second person plural signifying the congregation is substituted. This change was made in order to emphasize the priesthood of the laity. (1 Peter, 2:5; Rev. 1:6.) This change also affirms that Christ alone is our Mediator, and that the Church does not recognize the 'mediatorial priesthood'.

(6) Auricular confession was given up.

The constitution of the Mar Thoma Church makes the following affirmations of its faith and practice, and these are declared to be unalterable:—

(1) 'The Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, believed to be founded by St. 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 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 66 books (Old and New) and the Nicene Creed based on the Bible, 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 festival days concerning the life and work of our Lord should not be completely cut off from the observances of the Church.

(4) 'The object and mission of the Church is to keep and safeguard the faith as revealed by Christ and taught by the Apostles, to promote the spiritual life of the faithful through the administration of the Sacrament 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 Holy Ghost.'

The above are the only constitutive statements for the doctrines of the Mar Thoma Church available. It is not the genius of the Eastern Church to codify articles of faith. The Liturgies form the basis of the doctrines. With the liturgies are also the great confessions of faith of the ecumenical councils.

Does the Mar Thoma Church stand for something to justify a separate existence amongst the various Communion into which the once united Church of St. Thomas has broken up? This is a reasonable question which the young people of the Church and those outside the Church interested in it naturally ask. In connection with this the following answer is given. Yes, it stands for something distinctive and has a contribution to make to the Bharat Church that should arise in the future.

(1) *An Autonomous Church.* It has independence and freedom to initiate and carry out policies for the development of an indigenous Church. This freedom the Anglican Church in India has achieved. For this, through many sufferings and losses, the Orthodox Syrian Church is carrying on a struggle. Here we have to remember that freedom of action is a great privilege and a great responsibility. Freedom for a small community is fraught with danger. Propagandists

and those who canvass votes can have free play and in emotional excitements undesirable decisions could be made and wrong things achieved. A communion with greater bodies which have traditional moorings, would be of great help as a check and point of reference.

(2) *Biblical teachings and evangelistic emphasis based on Oriental Church forms and ways of life.* The expectation now is that in every land indigenous autonomous Churches should develop. The experience of foreign missionaries and Churches in introducing their Church forms and ways of thinking into foreign lands has showed that it does not help the growth of vigorous Churches. Abraham Malpan had three alternatives when he was excommunicated from the Church. To give up the struggle and join the missionaries; to re-enter the old Church because the times were not suitable and the opposition too strong; to brave the sufferings and the opposition and absorb into the old traditions the new spiritual emphasis in the teachings of the missionaries and live in the new light though it meant separation and independent existence. He was prepared to throw away old traditions when they interfered with personal spiritual religion. Practices and emphases which might lead to corruption he threw away and retained as much as possible harmless and helpful religious practices. The principle that guided him can be illustrated by one example. The St. James Liturgy then in use, opened the public worship of the Holy Qurbana with the words, 'Mary who bore The Lord, and John who baptized The Lord, pray for us.' The sentence involved the invocation of saints which has always done harm to the worship of the one and only Redeemer, Jesus Christ. One would have expected the reformer to have cut out that sentence and begun the service with Trisagion. But he decided to retain the names of Mary and John, and to change the idea. He used this sentence 'Jesus Messiah! who took birth from Mary, and was baptized by John, have mercy upon us.' To change the content without changing the form unnecessarily, seems to have been his idea. The result is that the Mar Thoma Church is Eastern in its worship, forms and ways of life but the doctrinal emphasis is that of Luther's Reformation. This is a unique feature and distinctive of this Church.

(3) *The Mar Thoma Church has a progressive and reforming outlook.* To possess freedom is one thing. A community may be afraid of new things and averse to changes being introduced. As the result of the reforming zeal which nurtured it, the Mar Thoma people have a keenness to see new values and to make them effective in the Church. Certain fixed compulsory dues at the time of baptism and marriage used to be the source of income to the priests. This was abolished in favour of voluntary offerings and subscriptions towards Church support. When the question of women being given votes and seats in the Assembly and Council came, though it was an unknown practice in the Eastern Church, it was accepted. Its young men have always taken a keen interest in working for social and economic justice, though even now it is looked upon as veiled communistic activity.

CERTAIN WEAKNESSES OF THE CHURCH

In common with other Churches there is of course the great difference between profession and practice. The great impression which an outsider gets may not be a reality in the inner life of the individuals and of the congregations. Secondly, there is a spiritual pride coming out of its present growth in institutions and labours for the kingdom, when seen against the background of poverty and struggles in the past. Thirdly there is the danger of parties arising in the community because of its comprehending within its fold people of diversity of emphasis and outlook. Just cry, 'our fathers' faith in danger,' and a storm is easily raised. Then there is a tendency to fight for certain niceties of received teaching and interpretations of the Bible. In all Churches and spiritually devout communities there are certain catch-phrases which are well worn by use and are able to create certain feelings, though the spiritual content has been lost for those who make a fetish of them. There is spiritual danger lurking in this. Along with all other Churches, the Mar Thoma Christians also have failed to be attuned to the live problems that challenge Church and state. Failing in this, the Church fails in being the salt and the light which the Master wants it to be.

CHAPTER VIII THE FUTURE

After the separation of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, the Jacobite Syrian Church went forward under the Patriarchal domination. A Synod which met at Mulanthuruthy affirmed loyalty to the Antiochan Patriarchate, and the steps for the proper administration of the Church were taken. The Patriarch Moran Mar Peter III left Malabar leaving Pulicote Mar Dionysius as Metropolitan of Malankara. After his demise, Geevarghese Mar Dionysius succeeded as Metropolitan. He was a very strong man and a great scholar in Syriac. He and his colleague, Bishop Kurilos, were consecrated in 1909, at Jerusalem by Patriarch Moran Mar Abdulla. They did not sign documents of submission to the Antiochan See as it would have been not valid in Travancore. The Patriarch came to Travancore in 1910. He wanted Mar Dionysius and Mar Kurilos to sign documents of submission. Mar Kurilos yielded, but Mar Dionysius did not. The Patriarch claimed more administrative and financial control over the Church. This also Mar Dionysius refused. Thus the Metropolitan and the Patriarch had to stand on opposite sides. The Metropolitan was excommunicated and Mar Kurilos was made the Metropolitan. A strong party stood by Mar Dionysius. This led to a schism and the question of the Patriarch's jurisdiction in Malabar and the rights of Mar Dionysius over the *Vattipanam* and Church property became an issue in the courts. After forty years, still the case drags on. The excommunication of Mar Dionysius was withdrawn, yet it did not bring peace in the Church.

The party opposed to the Patriarch was known as Metran's party. But in 1912 another Patriarch Moran Mar Abdul Messiho was brought to Malabar. This Patriarch by an order transferred the Catholicate of the East, which had its seat in Selucia (Persia), and which had long been non-existent. Henceforward the party came to be known as the Catholicose Party. The contention of this party, mentioned in another chapter, is that the Malankara Church has been in communion neither with the Nestorians of Persia, nor with the Antiochan Bishops in Syria, but with the Catholicate of the East which was independent of and equal in authority to the Patriarch of Antioch. From the fourteenth century the chair of the Catholicate has been very often vacant. The present Catholicose is Moran Mar Basileos, the third to occupy the throne in Malabar. The Orthodox Church under the Catholicose is progressing in educational and missionary activities inside and outside Travancore. That the Church is going forward, in spite of the trials of the long drawnout litigation, testify to the fact that there is some inherent strength and virtue in the strong traditions of the Church.

Thus we see the sad spectacle of the once united St. Thomas Christians of Malabar divided into various communions:—

(1) The Nestorian Church in Trichur, known also as the Chaldean Church in communion with the Patriarch of Babylon.

(2) The Roman Catholic Church. This Church holds within it the following Communions:—

- (a) The Romo-Syrians;
- (b) The Latin Syrians;
- (c) The Syrian rite.

The last—Roman Catholics of the Syrian rite are under Archbishop Ivanios. He was a Metran of the Jacobite Church, who tired of the litigations found peace in the Roman Communion. They follow mostly the Eastern ritual forms.

(3) The Jacobite Syrian Church in communion with the Patriarch of Antioch.

(4) The Independent Syrian Church of Malabar known also as Thozhyur Church. This is in communion with the Mar Thoma Church.

(5) The Anglican Church. Now this Church has become part of the Church of South India.

(6) The Orthodox Syrian Church. It claims to have revived the Catholicate of the East in Malabar on the authority of the order by Patriarch Abdul Messiho.

(7) The Mar Thoma Syrian Church.

What of the future? The history of Christianity in Malabar has not been without its bright spots. For the early and the middle centuries the information we have is sketchy. The story of the past three and a half centuries is sad reading. As foreign influences came in, the

Church became divided. These are days in which deliberations are going on in different lands about Church union. How will the divided Church in Malabar respond? One can only make broad surmises. The Anglicans in Malabar have welcomed the South India scheme, and have entered the Church of South India. Any understanding between the Jacobite and Orthodox Communions, though sometimes the prospects have been bright, humanly speaking now seems to be a remote possibility. The Orthodox Syrians are thinking more of entering into relations with the Greek and other Orthodox Churches of the East. Occasional intercommunion had been established between the Anglicans in Malabar and the Mar Thoma Syrian Church before the former joined the C.S.I. The relation between the C.S.I. and the Mar Thoma Church remains undecided, though the communion with the ex-Anglicans still continue. The Mar Thoma Church may be willing to end its independent existence if there develops a Church of Christ in India which will be autonomous, accepting historic episcopacy, eastern in rituals and practices, evangelistic in outlook, and Biblical in doctrines.

The ancient Church in Malabar has a great opportunity in India. The Western missions are finding it more and more difficult to carry on the work in India. Doors are opening for missionary work in various new fields. Some of its young men are going forward seeing doors opening, in places like Rewa and Nepal. Only a united Church in Malabar can fulfil the task which the Master has laid upon it. Will the Church respond?

APPENDIX

(a) NESTORIANISM

In the attempt to understand the divine-human person of Christ the Church divines have expressed their views in occasional statements which the Catholic Church in Council had to declare as heresies. The teaching of Arius that Christ was a created being, the first created and above all angelic hosts, and divine, yet not God, was condemned at the Council of Nicaea, A.D. 325. The Council declared that Christ was of one substance with the Father, begotten, not created, and was fully human and fully divine. Then Appollinarius put forth a teaching that in Christ, the divine Logos took the place of the reasonable soul. This would mean that Christ's mind was not human at all. This, the Fathers said, deprived Christ of true humanity, and was condemned at the Council of Constantinople, A.D. 381. Nestorius, a man of much piety and scholarship, who became Patriarch of Constantinople, in his attempt to counteract the influence of Arius and Appollinarius, said that in Christ the human and the divine natures subsisted side by side. This was a kind of mechanical union. This denied the supernatural union between the human and the divine in Christ, and made of him more or less a dual person. Besides this, Nestorius said that the Virgin Mary should not be called *Theotokos*, Mother of God. This was really a protest against the growing tendency to Mariolatry that was growing in the Church. This created an uproar. But it was considered to be a denial of Christ's complete divinity, which Nestorius never taught. Nestorius and his teaching were condemned at the Council of Ephesus, A.D. 431. Nestorius had to flee the country and Nestorianism was rooted out of the Roman Empire, but it found supporters in Persia and the countries adjacent to it. That country had the Syrian ritual, discipline and doctrine. In a Council at Seleucia A.D. 448 it was accepted by a strong party, and the Patriarch of Seleucia or Babylon and his Suffragan Metropolitan of Persia became Nestorian. It was with this Babylonian—Patriarch and his Persian bishops that the Malabar Church had contact up to the sixteenth century.

(b) JACOBITISM

Eutyches was a great supporter of Cyril of Alexandria who took a leading part in having Nestorius condemned at Ephesus. Eutyches in his reaction to the teaching of Nestorius became the author of another heresy. He said that there was a union of the two natures human and divine in Christ, the humanity being absorbed in the divinity. A controversy arose about this and the Council of Chalcedon, A.D. 451, condemned Eutyches as a heretic and the doctrine was again affirmed that the two natures in Christ were united 'without any alteration, absorption or confusion'. So the Orthodox teaching is that in Christ



there were two natures, the human and the divine, each perfect in itself. Eutyches was excommunicated and died in exile. The Eutychian teaching of Monophysitism, one nature of Christ, spread to Syria, Asia Minor, Palestine, Armenia, Egypt and Abyssinia. The Monophysites were weak and divided. But in the sixth century a great teacher Jacob Bardaeus revived Monophysitism and tried to unite the various groups. From this leader the Monophysites in Syria, Palestine and Asia Minor came to be known as Jacobites. Their head is known as the Patriarch of Antioch. The Armenian, Egyptian and Abyssinian Churches are Monophysite and in communion with the Jacobites. Armenians and the Jacobites in Malabar condemn the doctrine of Eutyches though they would not subscribe to the statement that there are two natures in Christ.

(c) THE CHALDEAN SYRIAN CHURCH

In 1838 Pope Gregory VI abolished the sees of Cranganore and Cochin, transferring the jurisdiction to the Vicar Apostolic of Varapuzha. The Archbishop abolished the smaller Seminaries where the Malpans were training candidates for priesthood, and refused to ordain those trained by them. This caused discontent among one section of the Syrians. In 1856, they applied to the Catholic Chaldean Patriarch of Babylon to send them a Chaldean Bishop. In response to this he sent a Bishop called Rocoos. Some accepted him, while a section did not receive him well and they referred the matter to Rome. The Pope recalled him and warned the Chaldean Patriarch not to interfere like this. The Patriarch of Babylon however claiming a special right over Malabar sent in 1874 another Bishop called Mellus to Cochin. A large number of Christians in Trichur heartily welcomed him. This led to a split in Trichur which finally went to the courts and the legal proceedings dragged on for some years. Those who sided with Bishop Mellus argued that they had always been under the Chaldeans and never in communion with Rome. The Pope excommunicated Mellus. But independent of Rome he continued to exercise spiritual authority over his adherents. The case was for the right over the church and property in Trichur which was built about 1812. The court case was decided in favour of the Christians in Trichur. Bishop Mellus was recalled and he was reconciled to Rome. After he left, Anthony Kattanar was consecrated by the anti-Roman Patriarch of Babylon. Thus that section of the Christians in Trichur came to be under the Nestorian Patriarch of Babylon. That connection which ceased with the coming of the Romans was now restored by a small section of the Church. This is known as the Chaldean Church and is Nestorian. It had been without a bishop for the past ten years. Now Bishop Mar Thoma has been sent by the Nestorian Patriarch, who at present resides in America.

The Chaldean Church in India has one bishop, six priests, six deacons, ten churches and its membership is about 10,000.

NOTES :

¹ K.K. Kuruvilla, *A History of the Mar Thoma Church and its Doctrines*. (C.L.S., Madras.)

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