

ANTHROPOLOGY

OF

THE SYRIAN CHRISTIANS.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN MALABAR.

AS the representatives of the ancient Oriental Church on the West Coast of Southern India, are found the Syrian Christians, who form a large majority of the Christian population in Cochin, Travancore and in the Ponnani taluk of South Malabar. The members of this community own a curiously mixed spiritual allegiance, some belonging to the Patriarch of Antioch, some to the Patriarch of Babylon and some to the Pope, while others again obey a Bishop of their own and call themselves 'St. Thomas Christians.' The curious thing is, that some of these groups, separated as they are by merely differences of doctrine or church government, have, during the long lapse of time, crystallised into regular castes; so that a man who regards the Patriarch of Antioch as the head of the church cannot marry a girl who is so unorthodox as to recognise the spiritual authority of the Pope. Their early history, social and religious developments, and their ethnic characters are described in the following pages.

The Syrian Christians are called St. Thomas Christians or Nazarane *Māpillas*. The 'Nazaranees' was a name by which the Jews had originally designated the primitive Christians who held themselves bound to observe the ceremonial law without disputing the salvation of the Gentile Christians who abstained from its injunctions.

The term *Māpilla* is a compound Malayalam word, *Maha* (great), and *Pilla* (son), signifying 'prince' or 'royal

1. Professor Curtz. History of the Christian Church, Vol. I, p. 99.
Dr. H. Bruck. History of the Catholic Church, Vol. I, p. 83.

son,' which were the honorary titles granted to Thomas Cina and his followers by Cheraman Perumal, the old renowned Emperor of Kerala. It is said that they enjoyed the privilege of being called by no other name than that of 'sons of kings.'¹

The introduction of Christianity into Malabar and the subsequent history of the Christian church, like the early history of the Jews, is buried in obscurity, and even the available information is to a great extent based on the legendary and disputable traditions of St. Thomas, one of the twelve Apostles of Jesus Christ. According to the current traditions, the introduction of Christianity and the establishment of the original church in Malabar in the year 52 A. D., are ascribed to the Apostle St. Thomas to whose lot, after the division of the whole earth among the Apostles for evangelisation, fell Parthia. He left Syria in 35 A. D., went to his destination and built a palace for the king Gondophares who ruled over Afghanistan, Kandahar, Seistan, Northern and Southern Punjab. Though the Gospel was preached in the dominions of that king and many conversions made, there is no evidence to show that the Punjab was reached or any one was baptised in a single northern part of the actual Indian Empire. It seems that the Apostle then retraced his steps, announced the word of God to the Ethiopians, brought under the yoke of Christ, the inhabitants of the island of Socotra and arrived finally at Cranganur, a place which is now an obscure hamlet, but was in those days a flourishing sea-port called by the ancient geographers Mouziri² (Muyiri Kotta). He founded seven churches on the Malabar coast, viz., Malankara, Kottakayil, Kokkamangalam, Niranam, Chayil, Quilon and Palur, the first six being in Travancore and Cochin and the seventh in Chavakac in South Malabar. He also founded eight bishoprics, of which Malabar was one.

Two of the seven churches fell into decay, but the other five still exist as monuments of the memorable past. Seven other chapels were also built by him at Niranam, Pallipuram, Vattannaray, Parur, Cranganur, Palur and Kokkamana. He is said to have preached and laboured for thirty years in these parts and converted the people of all castes among

1. *Historia Ecclesiae Malabaricae* auctore, Jo. Faendi Raulin Reomae 1745. *Cochin Tribes & Castes*, Vol. II, chap. 17, p. 459.
2. H. G. Rawlinson. *Intercourse between India and the Western World*, pp. 108, 111, 121.

whom were the Nambudiris of thirty-two families. Some of them were Sankarapuri, Pālamattam, Kālikavingal, Koikara, Madapoor, Vyampilli, Muttōdal and Kottakara. Of these, the first two families were ordained and set apart for sacred orders and bishops. The priesthood has been practically hereditary in the two families, Sankarapuri and Palamattam, for several centuries with the inheritance in the female line.¹

The Apostle after his labours in these territories went to Mylapore along the Coromandal Coast, and thence to China, and on his return to the former place, either suffered martyrdom or met with an accidental death on St. Thomas' Mount. His grave is shown in the present Roman Catholic Cathedral at St. Thome, and at the Little Mount is a small cave containing Pahlavi inscription where he is said to have concealed himself from his enemies. It is also said that after the death of the Apostle, the church fell into evil ways, and some of the clergy, either afraid of persecution or influenced by persuasion and advice, returned to Hinduism.

The apostacy was due to the revival of the Sivite worship advocated by the celebrated Mānikyavāchakar who exercised great influence upon the new converts by exorcising devils and curing the diseases of the cattle by his prayers and incantations. He laboured among the Syrians of Kurkanikulam, and led away many of the faithful. These were henceforward called Manigrāmakār,² and were shunned by the Syrians. They are scarcely distinguishable from the Nayars. Their descendants are to be found at Quilon, Kāyamkulam and other places.

There is an interesting Malayalam account which gives a history of the Syrian Christians beginning from St. Thomas down to 1770 A. D., a literal translation of which is herein given.

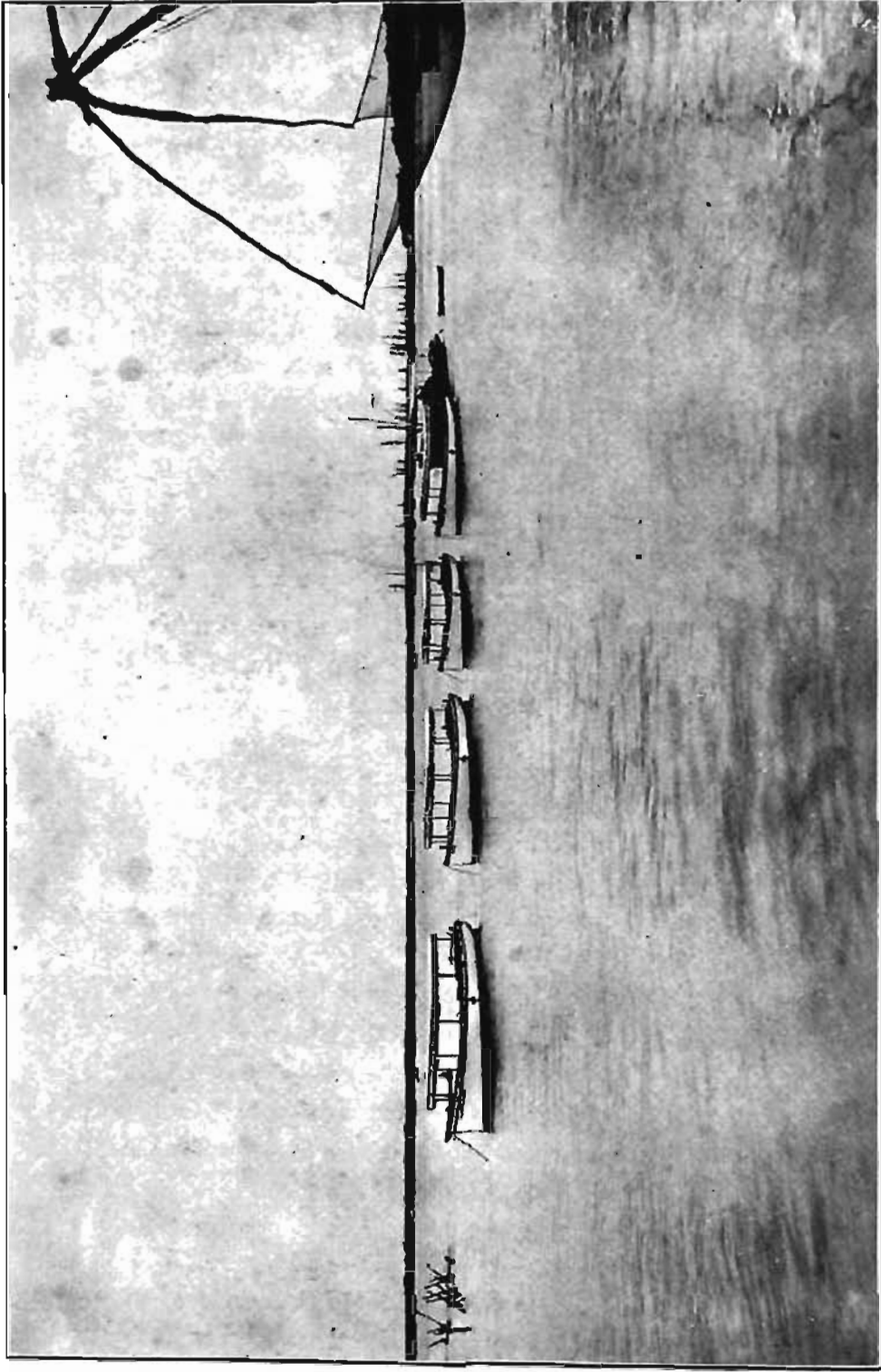
“ In the name of the Unoriginated and Endless Essence. When Chéra Perumal ruled in Coromandal Coast (east coast of India), one day in sleep, by the divine blessing, the King beheld beautiful buildings like a palace, filled with light and splendour and sights productive of beautiful thoughts. Filled with unbounded joy, he awoke, and, while eagerly thinking over the matter, and making inquiries, he came across a certain merchant named Hawan, to whom he related all these things saying, ‘ I have a boundless desire to build myself just such a

1. Church History of Travancore, pp. 9—10. La. Croze, pp. 39—40.

2. History of the Catholic Church, Chap. I. p. 3.

palace, and for this purpose you must procure me a skilful artificer.' The merchant accepted the royal charge, and promised, by the blessing of God, to find one. The King gave the money needed for the undertaking, and sent him on his journey with attendants. He set out on his search and at length came to Mahosa in the land of Yus (Yudea or Judea?). While dwelling here in grief, Lord Jesus Messiah appeared to him as a man of that country, and graciously promised all that he was so earnestly seeking and said, 'I will give and send with you a master carpenter most highly skilled in all kinds of work.' Having heard the divine word, he was astonished, and forthwith by the Spirit, Jesus summoned the Apostle Mar Thomma and said, 'Lo! there is a carpenter. He will accomplish everything according to your mind.' Then He sold the Apostle to Hawan for a sum of money, which he received and handed to the Apostle. But when He ordered him to go with the merchant, the Apostle declared his sorrow, and said, 'Two and two Thou didst send the others into all lands, but Thou hast commanded me to go into a land of malefactors whose tongues I know not and who live like beasts of prey.' Jesus said, 'Fear not, I am with thee. Thy thoughts are my thoughts.'"

" Thus commanded and encouraged, Mar Thomma, the Apostle, departed with Hawan, and in the Year of Our Lord 52 he arrived in Mylapore (now part of Madras). At the first interview with the King, His Majesty commanded him saying 'Draw a plan of the palace which I saw in my dream, in its extent and beauty, that I may know it.' Then the Apostle drew the palace and, when the King saw it, he rejoiced and greatly honoured the Apostle, and told him all about the work. The Apostle assenting, all the details as to the site, expense, and the necessary time were agreed upon, and the King gave him the required money and commanded him to gather all things necessary and to build. He departed, and began to make known the Gospel, to gather the poor, to comfort them as they needed, to heal the sick, the demoniacs, the blind and the lame. In those days, when the way of baptism was increasing, the Devil entered into the hearts of his servants, and being jealous, they informed the King that not a single stone was cut for the palace, nor even the foundation laid, and that all the vast wealth entrusted to the Apostle was being squandered on those who joined his new religion; and that there was not the slightest sign of the building. When the King



Backwater Views (Near British Cochin).

heard this, he called the Apostle and asked him saying, 'How much of the palace is finished?' 'Let me see all that you have done.' To this the Apostle answered, 'The palace is quite finished, and it is in the Heavenly kingdom, but the time has not yet come for you to see it.' "

"When the King heard this, he was angry, and sent for Hawan, and cast them both into prison. Then he bethought him how he might ill-treat them, 'for, by this affair,' reasoned he, 'I have incurred dishonour, an ill-name and loss of wealth'. So he was grieved, and his mind was disturbed, and sickness broke out. The heir-apparent died in the meanwhile, and by the divine will, angels received his spirit and carried him into bliss, where he saw a palace called 'The palace of the King, built by Mar Thomma.' The angels told him that the Apostle had made this palace for the King, his brother, against the time when they should carry him to paradise. Hearing this, he rejoiced in spirit, and immediately by the Lord's command, his soul was restored to his body and he returned to life. Having called the King, his brother, he said, 'I am your brother. Deny me not what I shall ask of you.' The elder King replied. 'With great joy will I grant all that you ask.' When he had ceased speaking, he replied, 'My request is that you agree to receive of me all the money you have given for the building of the palace with one in ten added, and that you give me in exchange, the palace which the Hebrew has finished for you'. Thereupon the King who had despaired, asked with great desire to know his secret and he told him the whole matter. Then the King rejoiced, but being greatly melted for his sinful conduct, they both went with reverence, saw the Apostle, fell at his feet, and loosed his bonds. With deep humility both the kings and, with them, many people received baptism. Then the Apostle after he had ordained many priests and built churches there, set out for several other countries and preached the Gospel."

"In the hill country of Chérakon, in Malabar, in Kerala, in those days, there was no King, but thirty-two *grámams* (village colonies of Brahmans) and thirty-two chiefs held sway. Accordingly, when the Apostle disputed with them, the truth won the victory, and many from various *srámams* were baptised."

The story says the Rev. Thomas Whitehouse is of eastern origin, and is founded on the spurious history of

Abdias, but to what precise age it is to be assigned is uncertain.¹

All along the ages, St. Thomas has been known as the Apostle of India, and the testimony of the Christian writers is worthy of consideration. In A. D. 190, the Great Gnostic Pantænus, a Professor of Theology in the school of Alexandria, set sail from Bernice in the Red Sea and landed after the tedious coasting voyage of those days in one of the Cochin ports, where he found a colony of Christians in possession of the Aramaic version of the Gospel of St. Mathew, in Hebrew, which St. Bartholomew was supposed to have carried thither, and this is the earliest mention of the community now known as the Syrian Christians.² The Acta Thomæ (third century A. D.) gives the earliest detailed account of St. Thomas' Apostolic labours, and connects the mission with King Gondophares whom coins prove as having been an Indo-Parthian king with his capital at Kabul and thus make no reference to his journey to Southern India. St. Jerome (A. D. 390), in one of his letters, speaking of the Divine word in his fulness, being present everywhere, says, "He was with St. Thomas in India, with Peter at Rome and with Paul at Illyricum." Hippolytus, a still earlier writer, states, that he perished at Calamina, an Indian city. Dorotheus, bishop of Tyre, and contemporary with Eusebius, says, 'It was handed down to them, that Thomas preached to the Parthians, Medes and Persians, but died at Calamina³, in India, and was buried there.' Calamina is said to be *Kallimmel Ninnu* (from the top of a rock), referring to the top of St. Thomas' Mount, near Madras, but this name has had another explanation also, Gregory Nazianzen (A. D. 370) makes mention of a place in India where the body of St. Thomas lay, before it was carried to Edessa, and the existence of a monastery is also the record of a miracle at the tomb.

Ruffinus in 371 A. D. says that the bones of St. Thomas were brought to Edessa from India which is evidently Indo-Minor—the country west of the India known to the mediæval geographers. In remembrance of this, a feast called *Duhrana*

1. Whitehouse *Lingerings of Light in a Dark Land*, p. 15.

2. Pantænus *India Apostolicus*, *Lux Evangelii*, Chap. 86, p. 627.

3. Calamina—Syriac *Galmona*, meaning 'little mount'.

Calamina, *kala* (fish), *Ur* (a small town or village) is synonymous with *Mallepuram*, both meaning a fish-borough or fish town. *The Apostle St. Thomas, by the Most Rev. Ladislav Michal Zaleski*, pp. 87-88.

is celebrated by the Romo-Syrians and Jacobites of Malabar on the third of July of every year as a day of obligation. If Parthia and India Minor had been the scenes of the Apostolic labours, there would not have been the least likelihood of his having landed at Cranganur for the propagation of the Christian faith. Nevertheless, the tradition of the Apostolic origin handed down from generation to generation is even now tenaciously clung to by the zealous Christians of these parts.

In the Council of Nice, the first Œcumenical Council held by the Emperor's order in 325 A. D., the Christian interests in India were represented by Johannes, the Metropolitan of Persia and of the Great India, and this proves the existence of Christianity during the fourth century. Some critics, on the other hand, argue that India above referred to is not the Peninsular India, but Parthia, Ethiopia, and Arabia, i. e., countries outside India. This council was held to discuss sectarian differences, to define the jurisdiction of the various ecclesiastical heads and to frame a code of general dogmas, doctrines, and rituals, and appointed four Patriarchs at Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria and Antioch; and the Catholicos of Bagdad, likewise subject to Antioch, was invested with the authority of managing the affairs of the Eastern Churches. Thus, the Patriarch of Antioch was given the jurisdiction over the Indian Churches as early as the fourth century A. D.¹

In 547 A. D. Cosmos, an Alexandrian monk, who was called Indicopleustes on account of his voyages to India, went to Ceylon, and reported that there were churches there. "At Male (Malabar) where pepper grows and at Kalliana (Kollam)—Quilon—there is a Bishop who is specially ordained in Persia." It is very probable that the church was founded in the fifth century by Nestorian Missionaries, from Babylon; for, in spite of the decision of the Council of Ephesus in 431 A. D., the Nestorians flourished in the East, and the Patriarch of Babylon sent missionaries as far as Tibet and China between the sixth and seventh centuries.² As recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 'Alfred the Great in 883 sent an embassy to India, headed by Sighelm, bishop of Shireburne, bearing the alms which the King had vowed to send to St. Thomas and to St. Bartholomew.' The embassy penetrated into India with great success, and brought thence

1. Hist. Eccles, I. 19.

2. Topographia Christiana, XI, p. 337. Kalliana is identified with Quilon, but is probably Kalayan, north of Bombay.

many foreign gems and aromatic liquors. Marco Polo, visiting the neighbourhood about 1259, describes the place of the saint's burial as a small city, which was a place of pilgrimage visited by a vast number of Christians. Miracles and signs were the order of things at Mylapore for many centuries. ¹

The miraculous lamp which Theodorus saw burning at St. Thomas' shrine in the sixth century was followed by other marvels which attracted pilgrims. "The Christians," says Marco Polo in the thirteenth century, "who perform this pilgrimage, collect a red coloured earth from the spot where the Apostle was slain and carry it away with them, and give it to the sick to cure their illness."

It is generally believed that St. Mark, the evangelist, founded the church of Alexandria. Historians are divided in opinion as to the time when he went to Egypt, some affirming that it was in the second, others, in the ninth year of Claudius, and others in the third of Caligula. This much is certain that he spent the latter years of his life in that country where he introduced the Gospel, and lived to see the Church under his superintendence.² At this period Alexandria was the Emporium of the world, and had acquired an importance second to Rome herself. Like other mercantile towns, its population was composed of the inhabitants of all the nations with which they carried on trade. Of these, the Jews formed a very large portion. There were also large numbers of strangers, not only from Syria, Lybia, Cilicia, Ethiopia and Arabia, but also from Bactria, Scythia, Persia and India, who were drawn thither by the attractions of its mart.³ Here the Evangelist Mark assembled a numerous church which, like the first fruits of the Gospel at Jerusalem, could be composed of converts from all the nations which Divine Providence had thus brought together, that they might hear the glad tidings of salvation. They came for the sake of this world's traffic indeed; but they found the knowledge of the Gospel infinitely more than they sought, and returned home freighted with the merchandise of Heaven. It has also been known that the Indian trade was in his time the chief object of attraction at Alexandria, and the progress of Christianity in India at that early period might be traced with some probability. There is also a romantic episode regarding the advent of Thomas Cana.

1. *Cosmos' Indic Topograph.* Christ. Lib. XI, 337. Robertson's India.

2. *Eusebius Eccl. History* Lib. II, Ch. 16.

3. *Fleury. Ecc. Hist.* Lib. II, sec. 5.

“The Christians of Malabar were in a state of disorder for about 300 years from the time of Apostle Mar Thomas visiting Malayalam and establishing the true faith, as they had neither head nor shepherd. But, by the Grace of the Lord, the Episcopa of the Syrian land called Uraha had a vision in his sleep, in which a person appeared to him and said, ‘grieve ye not for the flock that suffer and collapse in Malayalam which I even won at the sacrifice of my life? The Episcopa hereon awoke, and at once announced the important tidings to the Holy Catholicos of Jerusalem. He thereon called together the learned Malpans and others, and consulted them; and it was resolved that the respected Christian merchant called Thomas of Cana residing in Jerusalem should be sent to Malayalam, and particulars ascertained through him. And thereon, he was sent to Malayalam on a trading enterprise.”

“This Thomas of Cana arrived at the Cranganur bar, and landed and saw and, from the cross then worn round the neck, recognized the Christians who were brought to follow Christ by the exertions of Apostle Mar Thomas, and who in spite of the oppression of the heathen and heathen sovereigns continued to remain in the True Faith without any deviation. He struck their acquaintance and asked them for particulars, and learned that their grievance was very great on account of the want of priests and that the church was, owing to that reason, in a tottering condition. On learning these particulars, he thought delay was improper, and loading his ship with the pepper, etc., which he then could gather, sailed off, and by Divine grace, reached Jerusalem without much delay and communicated to the venerable, the Catholicos of Jerusalem in detail, all the facts he had observed in Malayalam. And thereon, with the sanction of the Eustathius, Patriarch of Antioch, four hundred and odd persons comprising men, women and boys, with Episcopa Joseph of Uraha, priests and deacons were placed under the orders of the “respectable merchant, Thomas of Cana, and sent off by ship to Malayalam with blessings.”

“By the grace of Almighty God, all these arrived at Cranganur in Malayalam in the year 345 of Our Lord, without experiencing any inconvenience or distress on the way. On this, they were received by the people of Kottakayil community of the Christians called *Dhariakkel* of the sixty-four families. They acknowledged allegiance to Joseph Episcopa who came from Jerusalem as their Metropolitan. And

the affairs of the Church continued to be regulated by Thomas and others."

"Thomas went and obtained an interview of King Cheraman Perumal, the then ruling sovereign of Malayalam, and made presents to him and represented to him the sufferings and weakness of the Christians; and the sovereign was pleased, and said that he, the Lord of the land, would undoubtedly render all help. Not only was command issued to have all aid rendered to the Christians, but privileges of honour were also bestowed under title deeds with Sign Manual and embossed on copper-plates, the sun and moon being witnesses to be enjoyed without any demur from any quarter as long as the sun, the moon, etc., shall exist. Further, King Cheraman Perumal made a grant of a tract of land in Cranganur, 144 koles in extent by the *Anakole*, comprising land on which a parah of paddy was scattered, and conveyed it to the Christian Thomas with the (then usual) rite of dropping water and flowers into the hands of the donee. This grant was obtained at Karkadagam *rasi*, the *Sapthami* (seventh) day, Saturday, the 29th Kumbham of the above year, and called it Mahadeva-pattanam, and (Thomas) lived there in the enjoyment of great power".

The traditions as to who exactly Thomas of Cana was, and as to the date of his arrival in India are very conflicting. Visscher, in his letters of Malabar, gives the date of his advent as 745. Hough says, "About the year 780, the Church in India was again under the authority of the Patriarch of Selucia to whom its Bishops were subject, and consequently they were Nestorians. Not many years after, an Armenian merchant took up his abode in Malabar who is said to have been the first to obtain for the Christians in those parts immunities of considerable importance. His name was Thomas of Cana or as he is usually called "Mar Thomas." Hough says, that the accounts of the Mission are so uncertain that it appears that Thomas of Cana has been confounded with Thomas the Apostle. Assemanus regards him not as an Armenian merchant but as a Nestorian Bishop sent by a Nestorian Patriarch. Paoli gives the date of his arrival as 825 A. D. Assemanus says about the year 800 A. D. Gouvea says it is generally believed that Thomas of Cana arrived in Malabar in the fourth century.

The arrival of Thomas of Cana and the reign of Cheraman Perumal have been placed by some writers four centuries after

this date, perhaps because the usual legend is, that Cheraman Perumal went to Arabia, and there he became a Muhammadan. But Day, in His Land of the Perumals, (43 note), says that Cheraman Perumal reigned from 341 to 378, and then went on pilgrimage. De Faria, in his Portuguese Asia, I, 100, says that the pilgrimage was to Mylapur. Visscher, in his letters from Malabar 176, says " Like Charles V, the aged monarch, weary of the cares of State, retired to console his declining years with religion and solitude and taking up his abode within the precincts of a sacred pagoda in the Cochin territory died full of years A. D. 352."

There is also another explanation. The introduction of Christianity to India is very often attributed to Thomas, a Manichean, who is said to have arrived in India in 272 A. D. He is also said to have been a heretic of the School of Manes. There seems however no ground to support the above statement. On the contrary the Syrian Christians have a tradition that this infant church was persecuted by the Manicheans.

Some of the best authorities are inclined to accept this tradition. *Epistolae Edifiantes* give much importance to it. Romanist writers, in general, and Jesuit Fathers, in particular, like Emmanuel Anger, Martin Matinez and others, do not reject the tradition as unworthy of belief. Among Protestants, the great Dr. Buchanan, Chaplain, Jacob Canter Visscher, the Dutch author of the well-known letters of Malabar, Dr. Kerr, and other illustrious men of his church, viz., Bishop Hiber, and Archdeacon Robinson—all attribute an apostolic origin to the Syrian Church of Malabar. The Rev. Mr. Whitehouse is inclined to accept the tradition on proper and reliable grounds. He said that India could not have been such a 'terra incognita' to St. Thomas as it was to the natives of Southern Europe. He must have traversed the regions after crossing the ancient overland route where the inhabitants must have been as familiar with India, the Indian commodities and Indian News, as the ordinary Natives of Suez, Cairo and Alexandria are at the present day. Further, the existence previous to the Christian Church, of a Jewish colony (the Jewish colony of Cochin on the West Coast of India) would very likely have attracted the Apostle who was himself of the stock of Abraham, and to whom the pilgrimage to this distant country commended itself as a fitting termination of a career which had threatened to end differently. The Rev. Alexander J. D. Orsey in his *Portuguese Discoveries and*

Dependencies, after a close examination of the Portuguese records, arrives at the conclusion that the tradition concerning St. Thomas current in Malabar is true.¹

There are also others who doubt and reject the tradition as unworthy of any credence. Among them are La Croze and Hough, who assign good reasons for regarding the whole story as legendary and mythical. Chaplain Trevor holds that "there is better evidence that the light of Christianity extended from Egypt, where it was kindled by St. Mark, through Persia towards the northern confines of India, and that Syrian Churches might have been planted in the fourth century by Thomas, a monk from that country, whose name must have been confounded with that of Thomas the Apostle." The Rev. Mr. Mateer considers that there was in the first instance a colony from Antioch, perhaps driven thence by violent persecutions about the middle of the fourth century. Mr. Campbell, on the other hand, thinks that their colour, names, manners and customs, style of architecture, ignorance and non-employment of the Syrian language, except in churches, the rites and ceremonies used in their worship, and their subjection to the see of Antioch in modern times, confirm the truth of the views already advanced. Dr. Milne Rae, in his *Syrian Church of Malabar*, advances arguments to prove that the Apostle St. Thomas never came to Malabar.²

From the foregoing account of the introduction of Christianity in Malabar, it may be seen that the authorities differ in their views. In the palmy days of the Roman Empire, there was considerable trade between the East and the West. A force of two Roman cohorts was stationed at Mouziris (Cranganur) to protect their trade. In the second century a merchant fleet of one hundred sail steered regularly for Myoz Hurmuz on the Red Sea, Arabia, Ceylon and Malabar. Even a few centuries earlier there had been a great deal of commercial intercourse between the coasts of Malabar and Palestine, and the Jews had already settled in these parts. Judging from these historical facts (liturgical documents testimony of the Fathers of the Church, the account of the early European travellers) and from the traditions current among them, as also from the old numerous songs sung by the Syrians on marriage and other occasions, it is not unlikely that the Apostle St. Thomas came to these parts to spread

1. *Church History of Travancore*, p. 6.

2. *Dr. Milne Rae. Syrian Church of Malabar* pp. 27-28.

the Gospel among the Hindus of Kerala. The Jewish and Syrian inscriptions on copper-plate documents and the Christian inscriptions on stone in a language unwritten in India, for over a thousand years also confirm the truth of the tradition¹.

Mention has already been made of the seven churches established by St. Thomas. The traditions connected with the churches founded by St. Thomas. tions connected with each of them may not be without interest here.

1. KODUNGALLUR--It was called Cranganur by the Portuguese, and is situated at a distance of 20 miles north of Cochin. This was one of the earliest settlements of the Jews, Christians and the Muhammadans. Within a distance of two miles is the island of Malankara, held sacred as the landing place of St. Thomas. It also gives the name of the diocese. The church erected by the Apostle is no longer there, nor has any vestige of its former glory survived. Gouvea mentions that there was a Syrian Church there at the end of the fifteenth century, and that it bore testimony to the population, wealth and power of the Syrian Christian community in ancient times. "There was," he says, "One chapel open on one side and approached by steps, in the midst of which stood an ancient cross, much venerated and said to have been placed there by St. Thomas." This miraculous cross possessed strange powers, and Christians could not prostrate themselves before it without a spirit of compunction for sin being awakened in their hearts. Hindus made their vows there, brought offerings of oil and wax to replenish the lamp that burned before it, and returned gladdened by the recovery of their lost wealth or property, but still unwilling to become Christians. It is said that at times this wonderful cross became so elevated in the air that few could see it, and so resplendant that those who gazed at it, ran the risk of losing their sight. In 1536, the Muhammadans destroyed and burned the shrine of St. Thomas. Immediately afterwards the King of Cranganur gave the land to the Portuguese, who on the same spot built a church dedicated to St. Thomas. It is also said that there were two churches, the upkeep of which was borne by the Portuguese; and that there many native converts were engaged in their service. The clergy must have come either from St. Francis Vincent College, established in 1540, or from

1. The most Rev. Ladislas-Michel Zaleski. *The Apostle St. Thomas in India*, pp. 1-88.

that of St. Francis in Goa founded in 1541 for candidates from Canara, the Deccan, Malabar and other places¹.

2. **QUILON.**—The town is called Kollam by the natives. It commands one of the entrances into the beautiful back-water of Travancore. Tradition says that St. Thomas preached there, and in after-times a party of Christian immigrants from Syria landed in the neighbourhood of the modern town, a place now engulfed in the sea, just as a similar party did at Cranganur. "Whether they came for the purpose of trade or were driven to seek shelter from the sword of Muhammad or for other reasons cannot now be determined." Nor can the date of their arrival be known with any degree of certainty. This much is known that on the arrival of the Portuguese, there was a flourishing settlement of Native Christians whose forefathers have resided there for many centuries. Tradition makes mention of the foundation of a church by St. Thomas who preached first at Cranganur, and then went to Quilon whereupon a rock near the seashore was to be seen, as late as 1662, a stone pillar which according to the Christians had been erected by the Apostle. This ancient church is now no more, and the encroaching sea has covered even its site, and the old pillar must either have been removed or destroyed.²

3. **PARUR.**—There are two Syrian parishes bearing the names Thekkan Parur and Vadakkan Parur (Southern and Northern Parur). The latter is regarded as one of the seven churches founded by St. Thomas in Kerala. Geddes says, Parur was the metropolis of a kingdom in which the noblest body of all the Christians of St. Thomas lived. In his *Christian Researches*, Buchanan says, "Not far from Cranganur is the town of Parur, where is an ancient church which bears the name of the Apostle St. Thomas." It is supposed to be the oldest in Malabar, and is still used for divine service. There is still a tradition that the Apostle lived here before he went to preach at Mylapore and St. Thomas' Mount, where he was put to death. Bishop Middleton who visited the place in 1816 speaks of it in his journal. This old church was one of the many burnt by Tippu Sultan in his invasion of Travancore. Parur is even at this day a stronghold of Syrianism.

4. **KOKKAMANGALAM** or **SOUTH PALLIPURAM.**—This parish is situated at a distance of twenty miles south-east of Cochin, and the old church is only a short walk through coconut plantations from Kokkamangalam. According to the

1 & 2. *Whitehouse Lingering of Light in a Dark Land*, pp. 25—29.

traditions current among the people, the first settlement is said to have been formed two or three miles off where a cross was erected from where they were compelled to remove, and this necessitated their settlement near the present church. An image of St. Thomas with a book in one hand, and a highly decorated carpenter's square in the other, was then enclosed in a tabernacle. In the upper apartment of this building appears a cross said to be the work of St. Thomas, though it is now covered over with a heavy coating of green paint. An inscription in Roman letters "COME COV NAER A. D. 1705 CABU NEAR, 1702" is cut in wood in a verandah in the northern side of the church¹.

5. NIRANAM.—This was another of the seven primitive settlements, lying some thirty miles to the south of Pallipuram on the side of the backwater. The old church and the relics are said to have disappeared during the long lapse of time. In Ward and Connor's Survey of Travancore, it is said that there is an inscription in the church at Niranam recording some repairs in the thirteenth century. No such inscriptions can be seen now. The only inscription at the Niranam church are two grave stones and are in old Malayalam as follows: (a) ന്നര-മാണു മെടം തൊയർ ന-ാം-പ്രാർ തൊമ്മൻ ചൊല്ലി (b) കൊല്ലം ന്നര-മാണു കർമ്മം തൊയർ ന-ാം-പ്രാർ ചൊല്ലിയാൻ തൊമ്മൻ കത്തനാർ. (a) Mepral Thomman Chandy on the ninth day of the month of Medam of the year 92. (b) Cheriyan Thomman Cattanar on the twenty-fourth day of the month of Karkadagam of the Kollam year 799.

6. CHAYIL.—It lies about thirty-six miles due east of Rany, and is at present one of the most eastern Syrian settlements on the road to the famous temple of Chourimala in the dense mountainous jungle infested by tigers and other wild beasts. The Syrians were said to have emigrated to Kadam-banad and Kaniyarpalli, where their descendants followed the Syrian ritual. These were the chief centres of trade in ancient times. It is said that the ruins of the old church situated on a high tableland commanding an extensive view are still discernible, and that the old baptismal font is still there in the depths of the sacred tank beside the temple-site.

7. PALUR.—This was the most northerly of the seven churches, as Quilon was the most southerly. It is in the Pon-nani taluk of South Malabar, and is about a mile southwest of

1. Whitohouse Lingerings of Light in a Dark Land, p. 25.

Chowghat. The old church is said to have been destroyed by Tippu Sultan. The present one on the same site is dedicated to Macarius. The town must have been a trading colony in ancient times like Quilon and Cranganur. Tradition says that the Apostle came here, converted many Nambudiris and destroyed many of the temples in the site of the seat on which stands the present church. Near this are also two tanks said to have been formerly used by the Nambudiris. On a recent visit to the village, I was shown the site of the temple, the tanks adjoining it, some ruinous wells here and there, an image of one of the Hindu deities, some broken slabs of cugged stones, and the remains of the foundations of the old edifice which once belonged to them. It is believed that in consequence of the desecration of the village by the Apostle, the Brahmans who then remained true to their faith cursed the place as *sapakad*, forest of curse, and removed to the neighbouring villages, where they settled in the hope of performing their daily ceremonies without hindrance. In remembrance of this event, they even to this day avoid chewing betel leaves and arecanuts within the limits of the profane locality. Some of the members of the Christian community told me that they were the descendants of the old Nambudiri converts, and still bore their old house names. Not far from the village of Palur, in the Syrian town of Kunnankulam, settled the descendants of the Brahman converts from the abandoned village, among whom many of the old social customs were once in vogue, some being still observed.

From the foregoing account of the seven churches said to have been established by the Apostle, it may be seen that they have all disappeared either by destruction or otherwise, and on their sites, new ones have been erected. The traditions concerning them, as handed to the Syrian Christian community by their forefathers, are firmly believed even in these days, and the conversion is said to have taken place in the first century.¹

1. On the south of the present church, there is a paramba or waste land called *Ottu paramba* with survey No. 27 and sub-division 39. This indicates a building adjoining the temple in which the Brahman youths of the village used to recite Vedas. Nobody now dares to occupy it in the belief that it is haunted and that vedic recitations are heard on dark nights.