

# THE APOSTLE THOMAS IN NORTH INDIA.<sup>1</sup>

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I. **T**HE PROBLEM.—Our study starts from an apocryphal book, *The Acts of Judas Thomas*. This book is clearly a piece of fiction; yet it introduces to us a king named Gūdnaphar, who is spoken of as ruling in India, and also his brother Gad. These two men are historical persons, and Gūdnaphar ruled one of the great provinces of India, viz. the Punjaub and the Indus valley. Yet those names were totally unknown to history until, by excavation both west and east of the river Indus in recent decades, coins and inscriptions were discovered which revealed the facts. These coins and inscriptions have also made it clear that Gūdnaphar belonged to a Parthian dynasty and ruled a large part of the Parthian domains as well as his great Indian province. The names in Parthian are Vindapharna and Guda. Of the king's Parthian lineage and his Parthian kingdom the author of *The Acts of Judas Thomas* is totally ignorant.

*The Acts* states that the Apostle Thomas went by sea to King Gūdnaphar's Indian Kingdom and preached the gospel there, and also met the king and his brother. The chronology is quite possible and there are other details which fit perfectly into the circumstances of the time. The question therefore arises, *Is the voyage of Thomas to India historical* as well as the king, his Indian realm and his brother?

<sup>1</sup> An amplification of the lecture delivered in the John Rylands Library, 14 October, 1925. The following abbreviations are used in this paper:—

Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*: W.

James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*: J.

Charlesworth, *Trade Routes and Commerce of the Roman Empire*:

A number of competent Orientalists have thought that the tale was probably historical, and they have therefore tried to reconstruct the history ; yet, thus far every attempt has broken down ; and the theory, stated by Dr. Garbe of Tübingen,<sup>1</sup> that the traditions are all mythical and that Christianity arose in India in the fourth century, has held the field since 1914. But recent archæological research has provided us with fresh details of the history of N.W. India in the first century, which fit into the old tradition in rather remarkable fashion ; while certain facts found in Syriac literature<sup>2</sup> tend to favour the truth of the ancient story. A fresh study of the problem may therefore be of interest.

There has been a Christian community in the extreme south-west of India since the sixth century at latest, and for centuries there was a sister-community on the south-east coast. This Christian community has a tradition to the effect that the Apostle Thomas came to the south-west coast from the island of Socotra, and that, when he had done the work of an Apostle in Travancore, he passed over to the Madras coast, where he won many for Christ but finally was put to death as a martyr by lance-thrust. Is this South Indian tradition historical or legendary ?

This is the second half of the problem of Saint Thomas ; but we propose to consider only the first half here.

The parts of *The Acts of Judas Thomas* essential for the discussion of the first half of the problem may be summarised as follows :—

When the Apostles had been for a time in Jerusalem, they cast lots to ascertain in which country each should preach, and India fell to the lot of Thomas ; but he was most unwilling to go. Christ appeared to him in a dream and promised him His grace, but he would not go. Christ then sold him as a slave to a merchant named Habbān, who carried him away by sea to India. The starting-point of the voyage is not mentioned, but they stop at Andrapolis ; and then, proceeding to India, reach the court of King Gūdnaphar who wanted a man to build him a palace. Thomas, introduced as a carpenter, received from the king money for the erection of the palace, but spent it on the poor. The king remonstrated ; but miraculous events convinced him that Thomas by spending the money on the poor had built him a palace in heaven.

<sup>1</sup> *Indien und das Christentum*, von Richard Garbe, Tübingen, Mohr, 1914.

<sup>2</sup> I am deeply indebted to Dr. Mingana of the Rylands Library, Manchester, for help in Syriac literature.

Hence Gūdnaphar and his brother Gad became Christians. Thereafter, Thomas went to another kingdom in India, where by order of the king, whose name was Mazdai, he was speared to death by four soldiers.

II. CHRISTIANITY AT EDESSA.—Since *The Acts of Judas Thomas* was written at or near Edessa in Mesopotamia, we must realise a few facts about the rise of Christianity there.

It was in the lands west and east of the Tigris that the Israelites and Judæans who were carried into captivity were settled by their conquerors. Their descendants proved a vigorous and intelligent race. There is clear evidence that, by the first century of our era, from the borders of Syria to Parthia there were large numbers of Jews, that many of them were engaged in business, and that a percentage of them were wealthy men.<sup>1</sup> These are some of the large facts which lie behind the narrative of the conversion of thousands of Jews of the Dispersion at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost in the second chapter of *The Acts of the Apostles*. In the catalogue of the converts Luke mentions "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia." Clearly, Mesopotamia is meant to cover the earliest Christians connected with Edessa.

In that great event, then, we see the mighty force liberated which led to the complete Christianisation of Osroëne (the district of which Edessa was the capital) and of Adiabene beyond the Tigris, at an earlier date than any other part of the world.<sup>2</sup>

By rare good fortune *The Doctrine of Addai* has preserved for us the names of two members of one of the earliest Christian families connected with Edessa. Addai was a travelling evangelist who arrived in Edessa about 90 or 95 and passed on to Adiabene in A.D. 99.<sup>3</sup> We are told that, when he arrived in Edessa, he became the guest of Tobias, the son of Tobias, a Palestinian Jew.<sup>4</sup> Thus, if we suppose that Tobias senior became a Christian at Pentecost and that his son was born about the same time, Tobias junior would be about sixty years of age when he had the joy of receiving Addai in his home. It is noteworthy that, when *The Doctrine of Addai* was written, Tobias senior was still remembered and deeply respected in

<sup>1</sup> Hastings, *Dict. of the Bible*, V. 92.

<sup>2</sup> Harnach, *Mission and Expansion*, II. 142 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Mšīha Zkha in Mingana's *Sources Syriacques* (Leipzig, 1907), 80.

<sup>4</sup> Phillips, *The Doctrine of Addai*, 5-6; Eusebius, *H.E.*, I. xiii. 11.

the Church. So much at least is implied in the careful mention of his name in the historical record. Clearly, he must have been one of the earliest Christian leaders at Edessa.

Aramaic was the language of all the Jews of Mesopotamia and the Far East. The literary form of Aramaic which was used in Osroëne and Adiabene is called Syriac. The O.T. was translated at quite an early date into Syriac ; and during the second century the Gospels were translated into Syriac at least three times.

It was probably at some date in the second century that an Edessene merchant, with a few companions, brought a case containing human remains to Edessa. They affirmed that they were the relics of the Apostle Thomas, and that he had suffered martyrdom in India, slain by spear-thrust. They said they had stolen the relics,<sup>1</sup> and had brought them from India by sea to Charax Spasini, a port at the head of the Persian Gulf. From Charax they had taken them by road to Nisibis and thence to Edessa.

The relics were enshrined at Edessa ; and Thomas was held in great veneration as the Apostle of India throughout Mesopotamia and the East.

*The Acts of Judas Thomas* was written, in Syriac, at or near Edessa, as a manual of instruction for visitors to the shrine of the martyr. The date of the work falls between A.D. 180 and 230.

III. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ACTS.—A. *The book is written in imitation of earlier apocryphal works, The Acts of John, Paul, Peter, Andrew and Thecla, and is written for the same purpose, to teach that marriage is unclean and unspiritual and that Christians therefore must not marry.*

Very little trustworthy information about Thomas was available at Edessa. We suggest that there was A, *a written document*, in all probability a letter, which was preserved at Edessa and which gave a brief account of Thomas's voyage from the Mediterranean with the merchant Habbān, of his arrival in Gūdnaphar's Indian kingdom and capital, and of his meeting with the king and his brother ; and B, *the tradition about the martyrdom of the Apostle*. These are the two sources the writer seems to have had ; and apparently no more biographical information was obtainable. Hence

<sup>1</sup> *Acts of Judas Thomas*, W. 297 ; J. 437.

B. *Apart from the information which comes from the two sources, the work is altogether a piece of fiction.*

The *Acts* falls into two well-marked divisions. *The first* contains the voyage to India and all that Thomas is said to have done in Gūdnaphar's kingdom. At the close, he bids his friends a final farewell, the scene being clearly modelled on Paul's farewell at Miletus, and leaves them. *The second* contains all that he is said to have done in Mazdai's kingdom and closes with his martyrdom. We suggest that the two divisions of the work reflect the two Edessene sources.

The question of the actual existence of the written document at Edessa will come up later.

Since so little was known about Thomas at Edessa, he formed quite a good subject for the purpose on hand, viz. the inculcation of the doctrine that marriage is altogether incompatible with Christianity. Had Thomas's actual teaching been known, it would not have suited the author at all.

C. *The author has no interest in chronology or geography.* He gives no date whatever. He actually omits the name of the port which was the starting-point of the voyage and also the name of the port of disembarkation. The capital city of Gūdnaphar is not named. Yet we can hardly be wrong in believing that the document which was his chief source contained these particulars. All that the author was interested in was the single fact that Thomas went to India.

D. One of the more prominent aspects of *The Acts* is that, *Wherever Thomas goes, he has royal or courtier disciples.*<sup>1</sup>

We suggest that the statement in the Edessene document, that he met King Gūdnaphar and his brother, suggested to the author the idea of making Thomas meet kings and courtiers everywhere.

E. *The Author calls Thomas the twin-brother of our Lord.* Dr. Rendel Harris, in his book, *The Dioscuri in Christian Legend*, suggests a reason which may have led the author to set a pair of twins at the centre of his work. That question need not be discussed here; but we had better show how the author found a basis for the idea that Thomas was a brother of our Lord.

<sup>1</sup> W., 153-159; 161-167; 200-204; 218-237; 256-298; J., 368-371; 374-376; 393; 402-411; 417-438. It is amazing to find Andropolis in Egypt with a king of its own, W., 148-9; J., 366. Cf. also p. 107 below.

The word Thomas means "twin," yet the Apostle receives no other name<sup>1</sup> in the N.T. He must have had a name of his own ; but he seems to have been usually called "Twin." At a later point<sup>2</sup> we suggest a reason for believing that Judas was his personal name, and that he was called Judas Thomas in the document preserved at Edessa. Now Jesus had a brother named Judas.<sup>3</sup> It was therefore possible to identify the twin with him.

F. *The author sets in the life of Thomas many incidents which are parallel with incidents in the life of our Lord.* This characteristic, doubtless, in the author's mind, was closely connected with the representation of the Apostle as the twin-brother of Christ. We suggest, however, that this method of portraiture was suggested to the author by the tradition of the martyrdom of Thomas. Since the tradition ran that he was speared to death, the author at once remembered that, while Jesus still hung on the cross, a soldier pierced His side with a spear. There was thus already one parallel between Thomas and Jesus : the author merely added others to it.

1. Thomas, who was a fisherman,<sup>4</sup> is represented as being a carpenter,<sup>5</sup> so that he may have the same occupation as Jesus.

2. He is also represented as preparing mansions in heaven,<sup>6</sup> like Jesus.<sup>7</sup>

3. He is sold for twenty pieces of silver,<sup>8</sup> as our Lord was sold for thirty pieces.

4. He heals sick persons, paralytics, lunatics.<sup>9</sup>

5. He casts out devils.<sup>10</sup>

6. He raises the dead.<sup>11</sup>

7. After restoring two women, who seemed to be dead, he bade their servants give them some food.<sup>12</sup>

8. The people crowd round him so that they tread on one another.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Didymus is simply the Greek word for "twin."

<sup>2</sup> See p. 104.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. xiii. 55 ; Mark vi. 3.

<sup>4</sup> John xxi. 1-3.

<sup>5</sup> W., 147 ff. ; J., 365 ff.

<sup>6</sup> W., 163-4 ; J., 373-4.

<sup>7</sup> John xiv. 2.

<sup>8</sup> W., 147 ; J., 365.

<sup>9</sup> W., 161 ; 198 ; J., 373 ; 392.

<sup>10</sup> W., 161 ; 187 ; 198 ; J., 373 ; 387 ; 392 ; 401.

<sup>11</sup> W., 164 ; 173 ; 194 ; J., 374 ; 380 ; 390 ; 401.

<sup>12</sup> W., 217 ; J., 401. Cf. Mark v. 43.

<sup>13</sup> W., 222 ; J., 403. Cf. Luke xii. 1.

9. He rides on an ass colt.<sup>1</sup>

10. As he is dragged away to be tried by King Mazdai, a courtier says, "Let us see if Jesus will deliver him from my hands."<sup>2</sup>

11. When examined by Mazdai, he gives him no answer.<sup>3</sup>

12. At a later point, he says to Mazdai, "Thou hast not power over me as thou thinkest."<sup>4</sup>

13. He is scourged.<sup>5</sup>

14. As Jesus was handed over to four soldiers and a centurion for crucifixion, so, in the Greek text, Thomas is handed over to four soldiers and an officer.<sup>6</sup> In the Syriac text,<sup>7</sup> the number is indefinite.

15. He is pierced with spears<sup>8</sup> and dies.

16. His body is wrapped in linen.<sup>9</sup>

17. He is buried in the tomb of the former kings,<sup>10</sup> as Jesus was buried in the rock-hewn tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.

18. After his martyrdom, he appears to his disciples on several occasions.<sup>11</sup>

The author's methods are so distinctive, and each is used so often in the course of the work that no thoughtful reader can doubt that the great mass of the incidents described in the work are fictitious, invented by the author in accordance with the few lines of procedure which he had decided to follow.

IV. THE MERCHANT ḤABBĀN.—There are three historical persons in *The Acts of Thomas*, Thomas, Gūdnaphar and Gad : are there any others ?—The first and second sections of the work give a prominent place to a merchant named Ḥabbān, who is said to have gone from India to the west, and who brings Thomas to India and introduces him to King Gūdnaphar. Is this Ḥabbān an authentic person too ? Was his name also in the ancient document which lay in Edessa ?

The fact that his name is not Parthian, like Gūdnaphar and Gad, but Semitic, is a point in his favour. If he is historical, he was a Jew,

<sup>1</sup> W., 179-182 ; J., 384. Cf. Matt. xxi. 7.

<sup>2</sup> W., 237 ; J., 410. Cf. Mark xv. 36.

<sup>3</sup> W., 237 ; J., 410. Cf. Mark xv. 4-5.

<sup>4</sup> W., 275 ; J., 426 ; W., 293. Cf. John xix. 11.

<sup>5</sup> W., 237 ; J., 410.

<sup>6</sup> J., 436. Cf. John xix. 23.

<sup>7</sup> W., 294.

<sup>8</sup> W., 296 ; J., 437.

<sup>9</sup> W., 296 ; J., 437. Cf. John xix. 40 ; Luke xxiv. 12.

<sup>10</sup> W., 296 ; J., 437.

<sup>11</sup> W., 296-7 ; J., 437.

and belonged to Parthia ; for he is represented as a subject of the Parthian king Gūdnaphar. Since he brings Thomas to India, he is regarded as a Christian. Thus, if he is historical, he is a Parthian Jew who had become a Christian.

But this description—a Parthian Jew who had become a Christian—recalls the passage in the Acts of the Apostles, discussed above, which tells us that, at the feast of Pentecost after the Passion, thousands of Jews belonging to the Dispersion became Christians ; and in the list of countries to which these converts belonged, Parthia comes first.

Can Ḥabbān have been one of the Parthian Jews who yielded to Christ then ?—He is not only called “The merchant Ḥabbān” but “the merchant of King Gūdnaphar,”<sup>1</sup> which must mean that he was the Commissioner in charge of the King’s trade. For centuries before Gūdnaphar Indian Kings had engaged in manufacture and commerce on a great scale. Dr. F. W. Thomas, describing the Maurya Empire in *The Cambridge History of India*,<sup>2</sup> says, “The King himself was a great trader, disposing of the output of his factories, workshops, and prisons, and the produce of his lands, forests and mines, for which he maintained store-houses through the country.” In a footnote, in which he gives references to the chief authorities, he adds, “The King’s trade-agent is *rājavaidehaka*,” i.e. ‘royal merchant.’ Thus Ḥabbān was Gūdnaphar’s *rājavaidehaka*. Naturally, the author of *The Acts of Judas Thomas* did not understand the significance of the phrase, “the merchant of King Gūdnaphar.”

We may also compare the policy which Augustus initiated in Egypt, and which his successors continued : “The emperors owned monopolies on the production and sale of innumerable articles and commodities . . . not only was the corn trade wholly in the hands of the imperial agents, . . . but the sowing of flax . . . the sale of the finished products . . . etc.”<sup>3</sup>

Thus Ḥabbān was a great official under King Gūdnaphar. He is represented as resident in the King’s Indian dominions. Hence his residence would be in Taxila the capital. Had he been merely an ordinary merchant with large interests in the trade between North India and the Mediterranean, he would have found it necessary to visit Alexandria once every four or five years at least ; but as

<sup>1</sup> W., 147 ; J., 365. The passage is quoted below, p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> I., 479.

<sup>3</sup> *TR.*, 18, 26, 29, 30, 31.

King's Trade Commissioner, he would, in all probability, have to go more often. He would sail from the Indus to Alexandria and would transact most of his business there. But, on such occasions, to go from Alexandria to Jerusalem to keep the Passover, or Pentecost, or both, would be quite easy. The times of the sailings would fit perfectly : travellers from India to Egypt, if they sailed late in November, which was the usual time, would reach Alexandria early in March ; while for the outward voyage, they might leave Alexandria at any time between the first of May and the middle of July.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, we are not straining probability too far, if we say that Ḥabbān is probably an authentic person, a Jewish merchant belonging to Parthia, but appointed Royal Trade Commissoner under King Gūdnaphar in India, and therefore resident in Taxila, and that he may have been one of the Jews who became Christians at Pentecost.

For reasons which will appear later, we suggest that Ḥabbān and Tobias senior, whom we have already met, became fast friends at Pentecost, that for years they kept up correspondence, and that they may have also met occasionally in Jerusalem, after the first Christian Pentecost. If they were both merchants, they would have no difficulty in carrying on correspondence, even when they were far sundered. It is probable that both men made the acquaintance of Thomas during those golden days in Jerusalem.

The story in the *Acts* represents<sup>2</sup> Ḥabbān as commissioned to bring a carpenter from the west to India for the King ;<sup>3</sup> and we are asked to believe that our Lord sold Thomas to Ḥabbān for twenty pieces of silver. He is then brought to India, meets the King and arranges to build a palace for him, but spends the money on the poor,<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *TR.*, 60.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 93 below.

<sup>3</sup> This story of an Indian King desiring to buy a carpenter belonging to the west reminds one of the story that King Bindusāra, the father of Aśoka, is said to have requested Antiochus to buy a Greek professor and send him out to India to the King. V. Smith, *Early History of India* (Oxford), 147. But, while the story told of Bindusāra has a certain reasonableness, since, in the third century B.C., the wisdom of the Greeks was already famous in India, and the King might be eager to come in touch with one of its representatives, the story told of King Gudnaphar is foolish and unlikely in the extreme ; for there were plenty of Greeks in his capital who could have built him a beautiful palace : see below.

<sup>4</sup> For an Indian story parallel to this particular part of the legend, see the account of the conversion of Māṇikka Vāchakar, Pope, *Tiruvāśagam*, (Oxford), XVIII.-XXVII.

meantime building a palace for the King in Heaven. Clearly, the details of this episode are merely phantasms conjured up by the author of the *Acts*. If, however, Thomas went to India to preach the Gospel, as is implied even in the *Acts*, then we must believe that *circumstances arose which enabled Habbān to persuade Thomas to take that momentous step.*

V. THE APOSTLE THOMAS IN ALEXANDRIA.—The references to Thomas in the New Testament are at first sight very strange. There is a bare mention of his name once in each of the Synoptic Gospels and in the *Acts*; but, except in the Fourth Gospel, he is mentioned nowhere else in the New Testament. From these facts we may safely conclude that his Apostolic labours, whether they were great or small, did not take place in the lands where Luke, Paul and his lieutenants travelled and toiled. He seems to have been outside their horizon altogether. His bilingual names, Thomas Didymus, at once place him beside Simon Petrus, John Marcus, Saul Paulus, and we may realise that he was fit for Apostolic work not only among people who spoke Aramaic, but in Greek-speaking lands as well.<sup>1</sup> Since Paul seems to have worked almost entirely on the northern coasts of the Mediterranean, we may think it possible that Thomas was one of the men who proclaimed Christ in Egypt, Cyrene and further west.

In the Fourth Gospel he takes a very noteworthy part in several of the scenes at the close of our Lord's life. If the historical character of these narratives is not absolutely certain, there can be no doubt about the high opinion the author of the Gospel held of the Apostle. In these scenes he appears as a cautious, matter-of-fact person, who wishes to understand things clearly and to have evidence of that which he is asked to believe, but also as profoundly devoted to our Lord, and ready for the utmost self-sacrifice for His sake. Do not these passages, when read together, seem to reveal a real personality?

Let us suppose, then, that Thomas is leading the Christian movement in Alexandria, the greatest port in the world then, the second city of the Roman Empire.

Augustus had seen so clearly the wisdom of encouraging the trade of the Empire that, when, through the battle of Actium, he obtained control of Egypt, he took the greatest care to keep the government of the country and also large sections of its trade in his own hands. He

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller* (London, 1895), pp. 81 ff.

then did all that could possibly be done to help the most important trade of those days, viz. the trade between Egypt and the East.<sup>1</sup> Under his masterly administration, commerce with Africa and Arabia, and especially with India and China, grew rapidly. In those days, 120 great ships sailed for India from Egypt every year.

The chief elements of the population of Alexandria under the Empire were Egyptians, Jews and Greeks, the Jews forming two-fifths of the whole mass. It was thus the greatest Jewish city of the ancient world; and the production of the *Septuagint* is the visible symbol of their strength and their zeal. Under the Empire, they were a wealthy community, largely engaged in trade, as so many Jews are now.

For Thomas, his kinsmen the Jews would be the chief objective. The bulk of his conversations and addresses would require to be in Greek, but there would be a minority who would understand his vernacular, Aramaic. With the Jews, then, he would wrestle and pray day by day, wooing them to the knowledge of the love of Jesus. Yet, as the life of Paul shows, in those days educated Greeks and Romans were almost as open to the appeal of Christ as the Jews were. Besides Egyptians, Jews and Greeks, all the races of the Mediterranean were represented in Alexandria; and there were in the city also, as residents or as visitors, Abyssinians, Arabs, Indians, Parthians and men from the Persian Gulf, all engaged in commerce or shipping, most of them connected with the trade with the Far East. Greek was the one medium of communication. It was as well known in Alexandria then as English is in Calcutta to-day.

Now those capable business men, accustomed to travel, and to meet men of many races, in touch with the main currents of the life and thought of the time, were a class who were drawn into the Church in considerable numbers in those early decades. They are precisely the type of men who formed the strong fibre of the Churches founded by Paul. If the Spirit of Jesus led Thomas to the great task of revealing the truth to those groups, he must have had a very hard fight, but he would also gain great experience in dealing with individuals and in presenting the Gospel of the grace of God to the most vigorous type of men of the day.

We suppose, then, that Habbān, King Gūdnaphar's Trade Com-

<sup>1</sup> *T.R.*, 2-34.

missioner, arrives in Alexandria on one of his frequent visits to the West, to sell Indian exports and to buy western goods for sale in India. Being a very keen Christian, he seeks out the Christian Church at once and meets Thomas. If they had become friends at the great Pentecost, conceive their joy at meeting again ! Ḥabbān had not expected to meet the Apostle there. They spend some time together, talking on the greatest of all themes. Ḥabbān hears about the fight for the Gospel in Alexandria ; and Thomas hears of the efforts of Ḥabbān to win individual Parthians<sup>1</sup> and Hindus in the Punjab. Ḥabbān tells how hard the struggle has been, and how little has been accomplished. "I have been doing my utmost," he adds, "on the voyage with a few Parthian merchants, friends of mine, who sailed with me ; and I know that their hearts are strangely moved by the story of the Cross, but not one of them has reached the great decision. Let me bring them to you : I know they will come gladly, when I tell them that one of the men who lived with Jesus and saw Him after His resurrection is here ; and who knows whether they will not accept our Lord ?"

Thomas at once replies, "Do bring them as soon as you can find an opportunity. Tell me their names ; and you and I meantime will pray in secret with all our strength for them."

Next day, the Parthians meet the Apostle and stay with him for hours, listening to him with infinite eagerness<sup>2</sup> and asking him endless questions. Next day they return and spend the whole day with him, fascinated by his character, his manner, his prayers, but above all by his presentation of Jesus. One by one they yield, and the new Christian life is born within them. Their baptism makes an ineffaceable impression on the infant Church in Alexandria.

But if that actually happened, what would be the result ?—Ḥabbān would inevitably turn to Thomas and say, "Come over to India and help us ! We Jewish Christians (only two or three families) have been struggling for years in Taxila to bring Parthians and Hindus into the Church, but with very little success. Clearly, you are the man we need. Come and evangelise India !"

<sup>1</sup> The Parthians, originally rather a wild race on the northern frontiers of Persia, had conquered that country, and had also accepted its religion, Zoroastrianism.

<sup>2</sup> As monotheistic Zoroastrians, they would be partially prepared for Christian teaching.

Apart from some striking manifestation of the power of Christ working in Thomas to win men from the Far East, one can hardly believe that Ḥabbān would have dared seriously to suggest that Thomas should take the unexampled step of going to India ; but, in these circumstances, one can believe that he might be emboldened to beg him to go.

Naturally, the new-born Christians, in their eagerness that their own families, friends and fellow-countrymen should find the precious treasure they have found, join Ḥabbān in beseeching Thomas to go with them. They tell him that the Parthians rule not only all the territories on the west side of the river Indus, but the delta and the whole valley of the giant river and also the great province of the five rivers, the Punjab, stretching far to the East. In the Punjab, within a short distance of the upper Indus, they have a famous capital city, named Taxila, where Greek is spoken as well as the tongues of India and Iran. There he may preach to Scythians, Parthians and Greeks as well as to Indians ; in the University he may meet learned Hindu, Buddhist and Jain scholars ; while in the streets of the city, and in the country round, he may talk with the famous ascetic philosophers<sup>1</sup> of India, men of every type and every belief, naked and clothed, theists, atheists and pantheists. "Taxila is the Athens of India."

Thomas protests that the distance is far too great, that the voyage would consume a ruinous amount of time, that he would have to acquire new languages and that in all probability he would never be able to return to his work in Egypt.

His friends reply that there are great ships of excellent build which sail to India and that a short route is now followed, so that the voyage from the coast of Egypt to the coast of India takes only two and a half months.<sup>2</sup> They also suggest that India is a country of such

<sup>1</sup> Strabo tells us of a group of naked ascetics who were near Taxila when Alexander was there.

<sup>2</sup> In Kaye's memoir on *Hindu Astronomy*, which has just appeared in Calcutta, we are told that Le Gentil, in 1769, took the much more serious voyage of the xviii<sup>th</sup> century from France to Pondicherry, on the south-east coast of India, to observe a transit of Venus. The voyage in those days usually took six months, but it frequently took longer. When Warren Hastings went out for the first time, in 1749, it took nine months, and Henry Martyn had the same experience in 1805.

size and population and of so much influence in Asia<sup>1</sup> that to spend one's life as the Apostle of India would be to use it to the greatest possible advantage for the kingdom of Christ.

But Thomas is unwilling to go. Habbān makes a great appeal to him in the name of Christ : Thomas doubts, hesitates and refuses. Later, however, in quieter mood, he prays to his Master for guidance, and finally decides to go.<sup>2</sup>

Now the *Acts of Judas Thomas* opens with the following passage :—

And when all the Apostles had been for a time in Jerusalem—Simon Cephas and Andrew and Jacob (James) and John and Philip and Bartholomew and Thomas and Matthew the publican and Jacob (James) the son of Alpheus and Simon the Kananite and Judas the son of Jacob (James)—they divided the countries among them, in order that each one of them might preach in the region which fell to him and in the place to which his Lord sent him. And India fell by lot and division to Judas Thomas (or the Twin) the Apostle. And he was not willing to go, saying, "I have not strength enough for this, because I am weak. And I am a Hebrew : how can I teach the Indians?" and whilst Judas was reasoning thus, our Lord appeared to him in a vision of the night and said to him : "Fear not, Thomas, because my grace is with thee." But he would not be persuaded at all, saying : "Whithersoever Thou wilt, our Lord, send me ; only to India I will not go." And as Judas was reasoning thus, a certain merchant, an Indian, happened (to come) into the south country from —, whose name was Habbān, and he was sent by the King Gūdnaphar, that he might bring to him a skilful carpenter. And our Lord saw him walking in the street, and said to him : "Thou wishest to buy a carpenter?" He saith to him "Yes." Our Lord saith to him, "I have a slave, a carpenter, whom I will sell to thee." And he showed him Thomas at a distance, and bargained with him for twenty (pieces) of silver (as) his price, and wrote a bill of sale thus, "I, Jesus, the son of Joseph the carpenter, from the village of Bethlehem, which is in Judæa, acknowledge that I have sold my slave Judas Thomas to Habbān, the merchant of King Gūdnaphar." And when they had completed his bill of sale, Jesus took Judas and went to Habbān the merchant. And Habbān saw him and said to him : "Is this thy master?" Judas saith to him : "Yes, he is my master." Habbān the merchant saith to him : "He has sold thee to me outright." And Judas was silent.

<sup>1</sup> Ceylon was already largely Buddhist ; Kashmir, Afghanistan, Bactria and Central Asia had responded eagerly to Buddhist teaching ; and China was on the verge of welcoming the preaching monks.

<sup>2</sup> A well-known Iranian scholar, Professor J. H. Moulton of Manchester University, went through the submarines in the great war, in order to have the privilege of commending Christ to the Zoroastrians of India, and lost his life on the way home.

And in the morning he arose and prayed and entreated of his Lord, and said to Him : "Lo, our Lord, as Thou wilt, let Thy will be (done)." And he went to Habbān the merchant, without carrying anything with him except that price of his, for our Lord had given it to him. And Judas went and found Habbān the merchant carrying his goods on board the ship and he began to carry (them) on board with him.<sup>1</sup>

One wonders whether this extraordinary narrative is not a dull, uncomprehending reproduction of a vivid report of what happened when Thomas actually yielded. Is it not possible that, in the exaltation of the moment, Thomas turned to Habbān and said (in words such as our Lord and Paul used more than once),<sup>2</sup> "I yield : my Master bids me go : I am your slave for Jesus' sake." If this phrase occurred in the written document, which we believe existed in Edessa, then the author of the *Acts* might quite well transform the incident into the impossible yet attractive tale which he tells.

VI. TRADE BETWEEN INDIA AND THE WEST.—There had been great trade between the Mediterranean and India for some two centuries : and the arrangements made by Augustus after the battle of Actium gave this commerce an unparalleled opportunity. As the years passed, it seems to have become steadily greater, reaching its climax under Nero. Large quantities of Roman coins have been found at various points in India. Mommsen calculated that the equivalent of half a million sterling was sent in Roman coinage to India annually.

From Alexandria goods and travellers sailed up the Nile to Koptos. Thence a march of six or seven days across the desert brought them to Myos Hormos on the Red Sea, just outside the Gulf of Suez. This harbour had eclipsed all its rivals in the India trade. Pliny's *Natural History*, completed in A.D. 77, contains an interesting account of the voyage from this port to the coast of India.

Originally, ships from Egypt went as far as Aden only, and there exchanged their cargo for goods from India ; but, by the first century A.D., they made the complete voyage. They crept along the south and east coasts of Arabia, passed the Persian gulf and then sailed along the coast of Baluchistan to the mouth of the Indus.

<sup>1</sup> W., 146-8 ; J., 365-6.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xx. 26-28 ; Luke xxii. 26-27 ; 2 Cor. iv. 5 ; 1 Cor. ix. 19.

But about A.D. 45 a Greek Captain named Hippalus got to understand the regular monsoon wind which blows strongly *from the south-west* every year from June to September. He therefore made up his mind, instead of skirting the coast, to use the monsoon to take him straight across the ocean *north-east* to the mouth of the Indus. He made the attempt and was carried from Cape Syagros, i.e. Ras Fartak, on the south coast of Arabia, direct to the Delta and landed safely at Pattala, the chief port of that time there. He thus greatly shortened the voyage from Egypt to India. Later, he succeeded, by sailing closer to the wind, in making the gale from the south-west carry him straight across from the Gulf of Aden to Barygazus, the modern Broach, on the Bombay coast, and even to Muziris, on the Malabar coast, far away to the south-east. The voyage from Myos Hormos, at the mouth of the Gulf of Suez, to the coast of India, took about two and a half months. This sea-route from Alexandria to India was as well known to intelligent people in the first century as the Suez Canal route is to-day.<sup>1</sup>

It is very remarkable that, after those great days of the early Roman Empire, travel from Europe to India was never so quick and easy again until about 1830, when the East India Company began to send their mails and a few of their chief officers by *the Overland Route*, i.e. across Egypt from Alexandria to Suez by carriage and thence to Bombay by steamer. At a later date, a railway from Alexandria to Suez shortened the time spent in crossing Egypt. Finally, the Suez Canal, opened in 1869, introduced modern conditions.

Vast quantities of goods from China, Central Asia and Northern India were carried by road through Parthia, Mesopotamia and Syria to the Mediterranean coasts, under the early Empire; and there was also a large trade by sea between the great ports of India and the Persian Gulf.<sup>2</sup>

VII. ALEXANDER TO GŪDNAPHAR.—Alexander built up a vast Empire stretching far into India, but he passed away, and his successors could not hold the lands on the Indus. The Maurya empire fell heir to his conquests east and west of the river.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *T.R.*, Chap. IV.

<sup>2</sup> Rawlinson, *India and the Roman Empire*, 109 ff.; *T.R.*, Chap. VI.

<sup>3</sup> See *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. I., chaps. xvii.-xx.

But by 200 B.C. that great empire was itself crumbling, and the frontiers could not be guarded. The Greeks of Bactria—a realm which had been conquered and colonized by Alexander—climbed over the Hindu Kush, seized the Cabul valley, crossed the Indus, and conquered the Punjab. They held these lands for more than a century.<sup>1</sup>

When Mithradates II., the great Parthian monarch, passed away in 88 B.C., Seistan,<sup>2</sup> Arachosia,<sup>3</sup> and other eastern districts, became independent; and from these provinces, about 75 B.C., armies of both Parthian and Scythian blood, starting from Kandahar, marched to the south-east over the Bolan Pass and down to the Indus, and conquered the whole of the lower valley and the Delta. Thereafter, they carried on continuous fighting with the Bactrian Greeks of the Punjab and North Afghanistan, until they finally got the upper hand and seized both provinces.<sup>4</sup>

This Scytho-Parthian empire was completely independent of the Arsacid dynasty, which was then ruling Parthia and the rest of Western Iran from Hecatompylos and Ctesiphon. There were usually two monarchs of this new empire, each called Great King of Kings, one in Arachosia or Seistan, the other in the Punjab, and younger princes (always near relatives) were associated with them in the government as Viceroys. By far the greatest of these kings was *Vindapharna*, Greek, *Gondopharnes* or *Gundaphoros*, Aramaic, *Gūdnaphar*, who, originally, under the Great King of Kings, Orthagnes, was Viceroy in Arachosia along with another prince named Guḍa, but in A.D. 19 became Great King of Kings and held the supreme power both west and east of the Indus. He was still ruling in A.D. 45, but we do not know how long he ruled after that, in all probability to some date between A.D. 50 and 55, or even later.<sup>5</sup>

VIII. THE APOSTLE'S VOYAGE TO INDIA.—Habbān and Thomas would start out from Alexandria to sail up the Nile. The next day would bring them to Andropolis—the Andrapolis, where, according to *The Acts of Judas Thomas*, the ship called and they

<sup>1</sup> *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. I., chap. xxiii.

<sup>2</sup> I.e. Sakastan, "Scythic Land."

<sup>3</sup> Also called Kandahar from its capital.

<sup>4</sup> *Cambridge History*, I., 568-9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 563-78.

landed.<sup>1</sup> Andropolis, the chief city of the Andropolite nome, was a large town in the Delta on the left bank of the Nile. The modern town on the site is called Chabur or Shaboar. If Thomas had been preaching for some time in Alexandria, he might quite well have friends in Andropolis.

Eleven days later,<sup>2</sup> they would reach Koptos, and they would then march over the desert for seven days<sup>3</sup> to Myos Hormos.

The sea voyage would begin early in May. The date may have been 48 A.D. or 49. They would leave Okelis, the last port on the east side of the Red Sea, early in June, and a few days' sailing would take them out of the Gulf of Aden, when they would at once find themselves exposed to the full force of the great seasonal wind from the S.W. They would then have to endure more than a month of the worst sailing in the world, driven furiously over the tempestuous Arabian sea by the irresistible Monsoon, lashed by wild rainstorms, the heat and the damp unendurable, many of the passengers sick and ill day and night.

In those days the only time when voyages were made across the Arabian sea to the East, was the Monsoon months, June to September, the one time which every traveller avoids to-day, if possible.

They would disembark about the middle of July at Pattala, the chief port of the Delta. They would then select a suitable boat,<sup>4</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> W., 148; J., 366. In the Greek text, the phrase "a royal city," follows the name of the town. This seems to be a reference to the fact that, under the Egyptian kings, the revenues of the city formed part of the Queen's income. Smith, *Dict. of Anc. Geography*, s.v. If that phrase was in the written document preserved at Edessa, it may have suggested to the writer of the *Acts* the foolish idea that the Apostle could have royal disciples in this Egyptian city under the Roman Empire! See p. 107.

<sup>2</sup> T.R., 23.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>4</sup> Here is what a modern writer says about the Indus boat: "It matters not whether you confine yourself to the great river itself with its broad and open reaches, whether you follow the meanderings of its branching canals into their most intimate silence, or whether you leave both the river and canal and wander over the quiet lakes of the Indus valley. The boat of the valley is everywhere the same in general form. In miniature it is not unlike the punt of Western streams and reed-choked waters, the craft of philosophic ease and contented idling; in larger scale it is an uncouth barbarism, with a great redemption in its towering yard and lateen sail. The fashion of its building is wondrous. Its sides and bottom are first separately completed, and then

in it would slowly ascend the great river for about 1300 miles<sup>1</sup> to some point near the modern Attock, where the railway to Peshawar crosses the Indus. From there a march to the south-east of some forty miles<sup>2</sup> would bring them to Taxila. A month or more would be required for the voyage up the river. They would thus arrive at Taxila about the middle of August.

IX. TAXILA.—Taxila was a notable city centuries before the Christian era. It seems to have been distinguished by its architecture from a very early date ; for the Sanskrit form of the name, *Takshaśilā*, means “the city of cut stone.” It was the Oxford of early India. Close by, at Śālātura, Pāṇini, India’s master grammarian, was born ; and he may have been still alive and teaching in the University when Alexander was entertained in Taxila by King Ambhi. The city was then wealthy, populous and well governed. But Alexander marched away to the West ; and his lieutenants failed to hold his conquests east and west of the Indus ; and the Maurya empire annexed them. Some thirty years after Alexander’s visit, Aśoka was stationed at Taxila, ruling the provinces of the north-west as Viceroy under his father, Bindusāra. He would travel the whole way from Pāṭaliputra<sup>3</sup> to Taxila—over a thousand miles—in comfort, on the Royal Road, constructed, for military and commercial purposes, by his grandfather, Chandragupta.

The city retained its great position under successive governments

brought together like the sides of a box ; where the bow and stern are to rise the planks are lubricated with a mixture that, combined with applied force, gives them a curve upwards. And the completed boat appears a caricature of river art, picturesque and quaint with her rising ends and great rudder, or oar in place of rudder. She is a thing of strange curves and stranger lines : a fretwork of inconsequent timbers ; and as horses and cattle or lumbering camels leap over her low gunwale on to that unprotected bottom, one wonders at the fate that gives her a normal life of seven years. Yet the caricature has its truths and in the quaintest of her barbarisms is an unexpected response to the needs of the river and the dangers of its ever-shifting channels.” Abbott’s *Sind*, 103. The boat of the first century was probably very much of the same type ; and the fisherman from the Lake of Galilee would scrutinize its lines and watch its behaviour with the keenest interest and understanding.

<sup>1</sup> The long river journey would be both possible and safe, because the whole valley from the Himalayas to the sea was controlled by Gūdnaphar.

<sup>2</sup> Taxila railway station, which stands close by the mounds of the ancient city, is 42 miles distant from Attock.

<sup>3</sup> That is the modern Patna.

until A.D. 455, when the Huns destroyed it so effectively that it has never revived.

During the last few years Sir John Marshall has superintended the excavation of certain sections of the great mounds which mark the site of ancient Taxila. Three distinct cities are buried there. The most southerly site, *the Bhir mound*, covers the ancient Hindu city, where Pāṇini taught, Alexander was entertained and Aśoka reigned as Viceroy. Close by, to the north, is *Sirkap*, which was founded by the Bactrian Greeks and was held by the Scytho-Parthians for more than a century. Still farther north, lies *Sirsukh*, which hides the Taxila of the Kushān empire.

Sir John Marshall has laid bare a large part of Scytho-Parthian Taxila and has also excavated the numerous Buddhist stūpas and monasteries outside, which ennoble the plain.

It is a moving experience to wander through Sirkap as exposed by excavation and survey the intricate mass of low walls thus laid bare, the fortifications, the streets, the houses,<sup>1</sup> the shrines<sup>2</sup> and the palace of Gūdnaphar. The mist of nineteen centuries is withdrawn ; the old life rises vividly before the eyes ; and Indians, Parthians and Greeks walk the streets again.

Less than half a mile from the northern gate of the city, on an artificial mound some 25 feet high, stand the walls of a great Zoroastrian temple, 158 feet long by 85 feet wide, recently dug from the heap of earth and stones which had kept them in perfect safety for more than eighteen centuries. The front of the building is adorned with Ionic columns and pilasters, and the plan, except in one particular, is precisely that of a classical Greek temple. It is clear that the architrave, frieze, cornice and roof, which were of wood, were destroyed by fire. The one feature which differentiates the shrine from a Greek temple is a mass of solid masonry, standing between the *naos* and the

<sup>1</sup> Some of these contain so much accommodation that Sir John Marshall suggests that they may have been residences, each housing a Hindu professor and his disciples. The Hindu ideal was that students should reside in the house of their preceptor.

<sup>2</sup> Most of these were Buddhist, but Marshall has found two which he thinks were Jain, and there must have been Hindu temples as well. Note especially the temple of the Sun mentioned in the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* : Marshall, *Guide to Taxila*, 15.

*opisthodomos*, of the same height as the walls, but with its foundations reaching down some 20 feet below the floor, in order to support the weight of the high pyramidal tower of stone, which originally crowned the structure, but which was thrown down when the temple was pillaged and burnt. The two lowest flights of the stone stair which led to the top of the tower also remain. In this noble shrine, we may be certain, the Parthian population of Taxila worshipped, and also Gūdnaphar, when in residence in the city.<sup>1</sup>

There must have been a considerable Greek population in Taxila ; for the shrines of Sirkap, the stūpas and the Zoroastrian temple outside the walls, and many pieces of plate and jewellery found in the city, prove that Hellenistic art was still eagerly cultivated there. It was in this very province and in the first century of our era, that the earliest images of the Buddha were cut by men of Hellenistic training.<sup>2</sup>

Philostratus, in his *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, says that Apollonius and Damis, in the course of their travels, visited Taxila. Most classical scholars have emphasized the unhistorical character of many details in the *Life*, and have regarded the visit to India as a myth. It is most interesting to find that Sir John Marshall is inclined to believe that the philosopher did visit Taxila. The remarks made about the palace and the houses of the city in the *Life* are noticeably accurate as far as they go, and "a temple in front of the walls," where Apollonius and Damis are said to have waited until they received permission from the King to enter the city, is described in language which fits the Zoroastrian temple perfectly.

If Apollonius actually reached Taxila, the date of the visit was about A.D. 44.

Ḥabbān, Thomas and the few Parthians who had become Christians, would thus arrive peacefully in Taxila. The Church of Taxila—two or three families of Jewish Christians at most, meeting in Ḥabbān's house—would welcome the Apostle and the converts with joy and deep thankfulness.

X. GŪDNAPHAR AND THOMAS.—If the King was then in Taxila, it would be Ḥabbān's duty, as the King's Trade Commis-

<sup>1</sup> See Marshall's *Guide to Taxila* (Calcutta, 1921), a charming book which ought to be much more widely known.

<sup>2</sup> *Cambridge History*, I., 648.

sioner, to call on His Majesty at once and report what he had been able to accomplish on his voyage to the West. Hence we read in the *Acts*,<sup>1</sup> "And when Judas had entered into the realm of India with the merchant Ḥabbān, Ḥabbān went to salute Gūdnaphar, the king of India, and he told him of the artificer whom he had brought for him. And the King was very glad, and ordered Judas to come into his presence."

It is an interesting circumstance that the remains of the palace of King Gūdnaphar have recently been discovered in the mound of Sirkap at Taxila ; so that we know its position, its approximate size, its general plan and the character of its masonry. It stood within the walls, facing the west, its front measuring 352 feet and its depth about 270. "There is nothing at all pretentious in its planning or sumptuous in its adornment," is Sir John Marshall's remark. The purpose of the various sections of the palace can be made out, and noticeably "the hall of public audience" and "the hall of private audience." It is a striking fact that the author of the *Acts* knew that King Gūdnaphar's palace was within the city ; for he tells us that, after the interview, the King "took Thomas and went outside the gate of the city," to show him where he wanted to have the new palace built.<sup>2</sup> We may therefore infer that the written document preserved at Edessa referred to the King's palace as within the walls.

Here then, in the hall of private audience, if Thomas went to Taxila, we may be sure he met King Gūdnaphar and his brother. The King probably asked him a few questions about the message he had come to deliver and the methods he proposed to use.<sup>3</sup>

There then follows the mythical tale of how Gūdnaphar took Thomas to a meadow outside the city and explained that he wanted to have his new palace built there. The Apostle agrees that the meadow is a good site, and the King says to him "Begin to build." Thomas replies, "I cannot begin to build at this season." "When canst thou begin ?" asks the King. "I will begin," he replies, "in the month Dios," i.e. October-November. The tale is impossible ;

<sup>1</sup> W., 159, J., 371.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> The fact that the King himself was a monotheist may have made him sympathetic towards his two Christian friends.

but the date given agrees perfectly with the middle of August as the time of the Apostle's arrival in Taxila.<sup>1</sup>

Within a few years of the arrival of Thomas in Taxila, the whole empire of Gūdnaphar was overthrown by the Kushāns.<sup>2</sup> The destruction was so complete that the very memory of the great dynasty was utterly obliterated. In no ancient history, Indian, Persian or Greek, is there the slightest reference to Gūdnaphar or the earlier kings of the dynasty. Until the spade brought their coins and inscriptions to light, nothing was known about this mighty line of monarchs, except the mention of Gūdnaphar and Gad in the *Acts of Judas Thomas*; and that was believed to be mythical.

The cataclysm may have come shortly after the arrival of Thomas, before a Church of any size could be formed; but, even if the Apostle had already won a considerable number of converts and had organized a growing Church, the utter destruction of the Scytho-Parthian empire supplies sufficient explanation of the fact that no trace of his work remains in early Indian records.

XI. A LETTER TO EDESSA.—From the very outset Thomas would be able to evangelize. The Greek community of the Capital and others, both Indian and Parthian, who understood Greek would gather round the man who had come all the way from Alexandria to preach the religion of the crucified and risen Jesus. Of this early work we seem to have a single echo in the *Acts*. When the Apostle is about to leave Gūdnaphar's kingdom, we are told that he called the Christians around him and confided them to the care of a man named Xanthippus, whom he had ordained. Since the name is Greek, it is just possible that he may be a real man, one of the earliest converts won in Taxila. If so, then his name was mentioned in the document preserved at Edessa and he is the fifth historical person in the *Acts*.

But the Apostle would inevitably be stirred to the very depths by his surroundings. The Buddhist stūpas and monasteries in the neighbourhood, and the smaller stūpas, both Jain and Buddhist, within the city, the great Zoroastrian temple on its lofty mound, the Hindu University, the Hindu temple to the Sun<sup>3</sup> and other humbler shrines

<sup>1</sup> Above, p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> *Cambridge History of India*, I., 580-85.

<sup>3</sup> Marshall, *Guide to Taxila*, 15.

in the narrow streets : all this would bring home to his mind the gigantic task of the evangelization of the Parthian empires, on the one hand, and of the inconceivable population of India, on the other. To which of the two communities was he to turn ? The difference in language would make it necessary for him to select one or the other. To attempt both at once would be unwise ; and since he had come all the way to India, it would seem that his duty would necessarily be to seek to win the people of India. We therefore think of him as learning the vernacular of the Punjab with great eagerness, so that, as soon as possible, he may be able to commend to the uttermost the love of Christ to Hindus, Buddhists and Jains. The Hindu University made Taxila the right place for the training of the Apostle of India ! As soon as he was able to use the vernacular, he would meet groups of keenly interested educated men, from whose questions and answers he would learn a very great deal about the religious life of India ; and day by day he would come to see more clearly how the Gospel of the grace of God had better be commended to the Hindu conscience and heart. He would begin to understand *karma* and *release*, the devotion showered on the gods in Hindu temples, the renunciation of the best ascetics and the working of that most amazing social system, caste.

But, while this seems to be what would most naturally happen, we are altogether without reliable information about the Apostle's work. What is offered us in the *Acts* is plainly undiluted fiction.

But one thing was done about which there need be no doubt. Habbān, in his joy that the Apostle had actually arrived in Taxila, thought of his friend Tobias, and begged Thomas to write to the Church in Edessa, and give them the great news ; and Thomas readily complied. Naturally, he would tell about his work in Alexandria, the arrival of Habbān and the train of circumstances which led to his decision to leave the West in the hope of beginning the evangelization of India. He gave some particulars about the voyage from Egypt to the Indus. Naturally, their arrival in Taxila, the Apostle's interview with the King and the work he was then attempting in the capital were briefly described. He would write in Aramaic.

Does it seem too bold to postulate that Thomas wrote a letter from Taxila to the Church in Edessa ? There is one very definite

statement in early Syriac literature to the effect that *he sent letters from India*; and there is abundance of indirect evidence that such a letter as we have described lay in Edessa until the close of the second century at least.

In all references to Thomas in literature arising from Edessa, the Apostle is called *Judas Thomas*; and it seems clear that the double name comes from the Apostle's letter. In writing the letter he would inevitably use his own name, and would naturally add to it the word for "twin," which had been so universally used instead of his real name. We may thus conclude that his name was Judas.

The definite statement that Thomas sent letters from India, which were preserved and read in the Church services, occurs in the Syriac *Doctrine of the Apostles*. It can be read in Cureton's *Ancient Syriac Documents*, p. 32. The passage seems to have stood originally in *The Doctrine of Addai*: see F. Nau, *La Didascalie des douze Apôtres*, Appendices, 230.

How was the letter sent? The King's Trade Commissioner would have ample facilities. Two routes, in normal circumstances, were open. The first was the land route from Taxila, which led over the Indus, up the Cabul valley, over the Hindu Kush and then west to Merv. Thence it led to Hecatompylos, Ecbatana and Ctesiphon, and so on to Edessa. Our knowledge of the relations subsisting between the two Parthian empires at this time is too slight to enable us to say with certainty whether the land route would in those days be safe and speedy or not: it seems likely that it would be quite impossible; but the sea route would certainly be open. Ḥabbān would send the letter down the Indus to some Government official in Pattala, and he in turn would send it, by the captain of the first ship sailing to the Persian Gulf, to some friend or agent of Tobias in Charax Spasini—which is now roughly represented by Basrah. From Charax it would be sent by road to Edessa.

There would be great excitement in the Church at Edessa, when the Apostle's letter arrived and was read at the service on Sunday; and from that day those Christian men and women would feel very closely bound to the daring leader who had carried the message of the Cross into the very heart of Asia. The letter would be frequently read or referred to in the Church services; and the whole community would feel that Judas Thomas was their Apostle, although

he had never visited their city. Every Edessene Christian knew that the land of Thomas's apostolate was India.

But if Thomas actually wrote a letter to the Church in Edessa, how did it not become known throughout the Christian world? How is it that it is not found in the N.T.? The reason is that it was a news-letter rather than a letter of spiritual edification. Therefore, other Christian centres would be less likely to desire to possess copies of it for reading in their churches.

But for the Church of Edessa it had the supremest interest, *first*, because it was a real apostolic letter, *secondly*, because it was addressed to the Edessene Church; *thirdly*, because it was written in Aramaic; and *lastly*, because of the bonds which bound their own beloved leader Tobias to Habbān and the Apostle.

But if they treasured the letter so highly, how is it that it does not survive in Syriac literature? As soon as the first church building<sup>1</sup> was erected in Edessa, the letter would be kept, along with the other apostolic documents (gospels or epistles) which they possessed, in the Church itself; and this Church (the earliest church building of which we have any record) was destroyed by a flood of the river Daisan in A.D. 201;<sup>2</sup> and all the precious MSS. necessarily perished in the disaster.

Since the author of *The Acts of Judas Thomas* was able to copy out the historical details contained in the letter, it seems we may safely conclude that his work must be dated before A.D. 201.

XII. IS THE NORTH INDIAN APOSTOLATE HISTORICAL?—Is the story of Thomas, then, as we have told it, historically true? What we have thus far done has been to form a narrative from statements made in the *Acts of Thomas*, with the addition merely of such circumstances as the history of the fifth decade of the first century imposes. The result is a story so natural and realistic that it appears to bear the mark of truth. Yet, though the impression of historicity is strong, we must not confuse possible history with historic fact. It is plain that the story in all its detail *could* have happened; but the question is, *Did it happen?*

<sup>1</sup> The Edessene tradition is that this Church was built by Addai. If the tradition is true, its date was about A.D. 95.

<sup>2</sup> Harnack, *Mission and Expansion*, II., 86.

The narrative possesses certain striking features which seem almost to compel us to recognize it as a real history.

(a) *The Acts of Thomas* was written at a date from 130 to 180 years after the fall of the empire of Gūdnaphar, and it was written at or near Edessa, which, by road, is almost 2000 miles from Taxila. The accuracy with which the King, his Indian kingdom and his brother are referred to, the accuracy also with which the capital of his Indian kingdom, with the palace within the walls, is alluded to without being named, coupled with the utter oblivion in which the Empire was so soon lost, is, in the circumstances, so striking that we are driven to the conclusion that the author of the Acts must have found in Edessa a *written document* which contained the facts in question—a document which must have been *contemporaneous or almost contemporaneous* with the facts. Scholars will probably accept this conclusion.

(b) It is most noticeable that there is not the slightest echo of the fall of the empire of Gūdnaphar in the *Acts*. We can scarcely be mistaken in believing that there was no such mention in the document which the writer used, else he would not have omitted such a tragic part of the tale. Hence we can hardly doubt that the original document was *written before the great catastrophe*.

(c) The preservation of the document in the Church of Edessa for a century and a half is scarcely explainable in any other way than this, that *some Christian in the Punjaub had sent it to a Christian friend in Edessa*, and that he treasured it as a most precious fragment of Christian history. Thus Thomas's letter seems to be demanded by the circumstances.

It is quite true that these considerations seem, at first sight, almost to compel us to accept the historical character of the tale; and they certainly greatly strengthen the claim of the narrative to be considered; but the scientific historian must still refuse to capitulate. He will acknowledge that *it is probable that the story is true*, but will stand by the position that, apart from corroborative evidence from an independent source, we cannot be certain.

The sceptic will argue that the facts about the Parthian King may have been preserved in Edessa, in circumstances which we cannot now recover, until the middle of the second century, when Christianity was already strong in the city and in the country round, and that some Christian, whether through an innocent mistake or in gross deceit,

may have then connected the facts with the name of Thomas in a written document, which fell into the hands of the writer of the *Acts* and was used by him. Would not that account for the whole story?

The historical student will at once reply that an Edessene Christian, writing in the middle of the second century, would have inevitably made some gross blunder in trying to sketch events belonging to Egypt and India in the middle of the first century. We have in *The Acts of Judas Thomas* itself striking examples of such inevitable blunders: the author represents the city of Andropolis in Egypt as having a King of its own under the Emperor Claudius!<sup>1</sup> He writes as if there were no architect in Taxila equal to the task of building King Gūdnaphar a suitable palace!<sup>2</sup>

Yet, though it is impossible to torpedo the evidence in this fashion, the serious scholar will close the question with the demand for confirmatory evidence from some independent source; and two pieces of such evidence can be given.

I. There is a piece of early evidence about Thomas, which, coming, as it does, from the Greek world, is quite independent of *the Acts of Judas Thomas*, the source of which is Edessa, and is therefore well worthy of our attention. Origen, in the third chapter of his *Commentary on Genesis*,<sup>3</sup> says that, according to tradition, Thomas's allotted field of labour was Parthia.

We have here a most curious situation: even on the surface it seems as if Origen and *The Acts* may refer to the same exploit; and so indeed it must be.

The facts are these: Gūdnaphar was a Parthian King, but he ruled in India as well as in Parthia. That is perfectly well known to scholars to-day from the King's own coins and inscriptions. But, when we turn to the documents, we find that the author of *The Acts of Judas Thomas* knew that he ruled in India, but did not know that he was a Parthian and ruled in Parthia also; while the Church of Alexandria knew that he was a Parthian King, but did not know that he ruled in India also. Each has preserved one-half of the truth; but we, with our accurate historical information, can see that the two traditions arose from one historical event.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 84, and p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 88 and p. 100.

<sup>3</sup> Eusebius, *H.E.*, III., 1.

The source of Origen's information is also plain : the Christians of Alexandria met Ḥabbān, and they realized that he was a Parthian Jew and also Trade Commissioner of the great Parthian King Gūdnaphar, but they did not understand the complicated political situation in the East, nor had they realized that Ḥabbān actually resided in India. Thus Thomas sailed away with Ḥabbān to the East ; but, when, at a later date, the Alexandrian Christians were asked where Thomas had gone, they, very naturally, answered, "To Parthia."

In consequence, then, of this divergence there is in the ancient church one succession of writers who say that Thomas went to India : these are all dependent on Edessa :—

The author of *The Acts of Judas Thomas* (A.D. 180-230).<sup>1</sup>

Ephraim of Nisibis and Edessa in his hymns (*d.* A.D. 373).

Gregory of Nazianzus, Hom. XXXIII.

Ambrose, Ballerini, II., 389.

Jerome, Migne, P.-L., XXII., 588.

There is then another succession of writers who say that he went to Parthia : these are all dependent on Alexandria :—

Origen, *Comm. on Genesis*, III.

*The Clementine Recognitions*, IX., 29.

Eusebius, *H.E.*, III., 1.

Rufinus, *H.E.*, II., 5.

Socrates, *H.E.*, I., 19.

But this divergence was felt to be rather a serious difficulty. Hence, some early scholar sought to get round it by conflating the two accounts. Thomas was conceived as going eastwards by land, preaching in Mesopotamia, Persia and Parthia on the way and finally reaching India. Here are the chief writers who take this view :—

Pseudo-Hippolytus, *Ante-Nicene Library*, IX., pt. ii., p. 131.

Dorotheus of Beyrout (VIth cent.), *H.E.*, Migne, *P.G.-L.*, XCII., 1071.

Bar-Hebræus (a Syriac scholar of the XIIIth cent.), *Chron. Eccl.*, I., 34.

Yet there can be no shadow of doubt that the overland journey through Mesopotamia, Persia and Parthia to India, which is implied

<sup>1</sup> For many of these patristic references, I am indebted to *India and the Apostle Thomas* by A. E. Medlycott, Bishop of Tricomia, London, 1905.

in these statements, is quite unhistorical ; for, although Edessa and Adiabene felt they had a very close connection with the Apostle, *they never suggested that Thomas had visited them.* This single fact is thus sufficient by itself to destroy the theory that Thomas went to the East by the overland route. Since, then, we are able to show that Origen's statement, that the Apostle went to Parthia, depends upon a slight and very natural error, his testimony becomes an independent piece of evidence corroborating the Edessene story that Thomas went to India by sea.

II. There are then a number of historical facts connected with Edessa which seem to prove conclusively the truth of our theory, that a letter from Thomas about his voyage to India was treasured for a century and a half in the city.

(a) The Edessenenes believed that *their Church stood in peculiarly close relations with the Apostle Thomas*, that he was, in the fullest sense, the friend of the Church of Edessa. This deeply rooted feeling comes out clearly in the extraordinary belief that it was Thomas who sent Addai to them.<sup>1</sup> From the same feeling, that Thomas was *their Apostle*, came the exploit in which a few Edessenenes stole the relics of the Apostle and brought them to Edessa.<sup>2</sup>

Where shall we find an adequate cause for this sense of the greatness of Thomas and of his close connection with Edessa, unless we accept the hypothesis that a letter of his describing his voyage to India was one of the most cherished possessions of the Edessene Church ?

(b) There is evidence in the earliest Syriac Christian texts that the Church of Edessa called the twin Apostle "Judas Thomas."

1. In John xiv. 22 the Greek text reads *Judas, not Iscariot* ; but the earliest Syriac version, viz., the Sinai Palimpsest, reads instead of these three words simply, "Thomas."<sup>3</sup> How are we to explain the variation ? The author of the Gospel certainly was not thinking of Thomas at this particular point ; for he invariably refers to him as "Thomas"<sup>4</sup> or "Thomas who is called Didymus,"<sup>5</sup> and to have

<sup>1</sup> Phillips, *Doctrine of Addai*, 5 ; Eusebius, *H.E.*, I., xiii., 4, 11 ; II., i. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Above, p. 83.

<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Lewis, *Light on the Four Gospels*, 162 ; Burkitt, *Evangelion Da-Mepharreshe*, 147.

<sup>4</sup> xiv. 5 ; xx. 26, 27, 28.

<sup>5</sup> xi. 16 ; xx. 24 ; xxi. 2.

called him "Judas" in a single instance would have seriously confused his readers. But the translator of the Sinai text had been trained under the influence of Edessa, and had therefore known all his life that the twin's name was Judas; and, concluding that he was the Judas referred to in John xiv. 22, he took the simplest way of indicating the Apostle by calling him "Thomas."

The Sinai Palimpsest is the earliest of all Syriac Christian texts extant: it is believed to come from about A.D. 140. Thus in the earliest piece of literature in which we hear the voice of Christian Edessa, we have explicit evidence that the Church had a special interest in Thomas and believed that his personal name was Judas.

2. In the same passage in the Fourth Gospel, the Curetonian Syriac text, which is believed by scholars to be about fifty years later than the Sinai Palimpsest, reads "Judas Thomas."<sup>1</sup>

3. *The Doctrine of Addai*, the original text of which was probably written about A.D. 200, calls the twin Judas Thomas.<sup>2</sup> This work is completely independent of *The Acts of Judas Thomas*.

4. *The Acts of Judas Thomas*, which is the starting-point of our study, and is very little, if at all, later than *The Doctrine of Addai*, bears the Apostle's double name in its title.

5. Eusebius, when telling the story of Addai, who was also called Thaddeus, writes "To these epistles" (i.e. Syriac MSS. in Edessa) "there was added the following account in the Syriac language, *After the ascension of Jesus, Judas, who was also called Thomas, sent them Thaddeus, an apostle, one of the Seventy.*"<sup>3</sup>

6. Ephraem Syrus, the greatest Christian scholar of the Syriac-speaking lands in the fourth century, in one of his numerous metrical works, quotes John xx. 24, and instead of "Thomas" reads "Judas Thomas."<sup>4</sup>

Thus these quotations make it quite clear that, at least from about A.D. 140, all Edessene Christians called their own Apostle "Judas Thomas." Nowhere else in early Christian circles is his personal name Judas known. Even the Syriac *Diatessaron* does not call him

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Lewis, *Light on the Four Gospels*, 162; Burkitt, *Evangelion Da-Mepharreshe*, 147.

<sup>2</sup> Phillips, 5.

<sup>3</sup> *H.E.*, I., xiii., 10.

<sup>4</sup> Burkitt, *Evangelion Da-Mepharreshe*, 146-7.

Judas, the reason being that it was prepared at Rome. What is the source of this exclusive and persistent tradition? A letter containing the double name, written by the Apostle himself, and sent by him to the Church in Edessa, is the one natural and sufficient explanation.

(c) When, round about A.D. 200, the author of *The Acts of Judas Thomas* sat down, at or near Edessa, to write that work, historical information was available about Gūdnaphar, his Indian kingdom, his brother Gad and his Trade Commissioner, information which, so far as we know, was available nowhere else in the ancient world.

Our reading of the events behind the phantasmagoria of the *Acts* thus reconciles for the first time the divergent traditions of the early Church about Thomas's field of labour; while the letter, which we believe to have been sent from Taxila to Edessa about A.D. 48 or 49, would create the extraordinary feeling and belief of the Church of Edessa with regard to the Apostle, would make his personal name Judas known and would also provide the historical material about King Gūdnaphar, his kingdom and his brother which appears in the *Acts*.

Thus, the tradition which appears in Origen, coupled with these most noticeable historical facts connected with the Church in Edessa, provide the independent testimony necessary to prove the historicity of the Apostle's voyage to India.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> We do not discuss in this paper the second section of *The Acts of Judas Thomas*, the reason being that the questions raised by that narrative inevitably involve the whole problem of Thomas's connection with South India.