

THE APOSTLE THOMAS IN SOUTH INDIA.¹

BY J. N. FARQUHAR, D.LITT. (OXON.), D.D. (ABERDEEN).

PROFESSOR OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION, MANCHESTER
UNIVERSITY.

IN an earlier article² I have tried to show that there is some reason to believe that the Apostle Thomas sailed from Alexandria with Habbān, *the Merchant* of king Gūdnaphar, to the Indus and reached the king's Indian capital, Taxila, probably about 48 or 49 A.D. In this paper we ask the question, Is there any evidence to show that the Apostle left the Punjaub and went to South India ?

I. *The Acts of Judas Thomas* definitely says that he left Gūdnaphar's kingdom, and went to another, which was also in India, that he preached and won converts there, but finally was put to death by order of the king. The writer does not tell us the name of this kingdom, nor does he indicate in what part of India it was situated. This is probably merely another instance of his carelessness as to matters of geography, a characteristic already noted in our former article :³ it is likely that he could have learnt the name of Thomas's

¹ The following abbreviations are used in the notes in this paper :—

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

James, *The Apocryphal N.T.*, from the Greek : J.

Bibliotheca Orientalis by Assemani : B.O.

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

TR.

Rawlinson, *Intercourse between India and the Western World* :
IWW.

Cambridge History of India : CHI.

Cambridge Ancient History : CAH.

Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics : ERE.

Medlicott, *India and the Apostle Thomas* : MEDLY.

Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society : JRAS.

² *The Apostle Thomas in North India*, in the JOHN RYLANDS
LIBRARY BULLETIN, January, 1926.

³ *Ibid.*

second field of labour, had he cared to make enquiry in Edessa.¹ Of one thing, however, we may be absolutely certain, that in stating that Thomas met his death in an Indian kingdom other than Gūdnaphar's, he gives us one of the fixed points of the Edessene tradition. In a matter of such crucial importance, he would not depart from the settled belief of the Church. This we shall then hold as certain, that the leaders of the Edessene Church believed that Thomas had preached in two distinct sections of India and that he lost his life in the second of the two.

But there is another point of which we may be absolutely certain : *the reason given in the Acts for his abandonment of the Punjaub is quite unhistorical.* After serious deliberation he had decided to leave Egypt, in order that he might evangelize the people of Gūdnaphar's Indian kingdom. He arrived in Taxila with the king's merchant, was received by the king and had every opportunity to do the work of an Apostle in a great province containing millions of people of varied race and religion. Yet, if we are to believe *The Acts*, he abandoned the splendid project, because he had been invited to go to another kingdom to heal two sick women !²

But if *The Acts* offers us only a silly story, history is able to tell us the real reason for his departure. At some date round about 50 A.D., the Kushāns (a people who had come westwards from China to the Oxus, and had then settled and prospered in Bactria) broke over the Hindu Kush, conquered the Cabul valley and the whole province as far east as the Indus ; and then, marching south, seized the provinces of Arachosia and Gedrosia, thus stripping the Scytho-Parthian empire of the Western half of its territory.³ Thereafter, rallying their forces, they crossed the Indus and seized the Punjaub with its capital and the whole valley of the great river.⁴ The Scytho-Parthian Empire was thus completely destroyed.

The precise dates of these happenings are not known as yet. One inscription proves that Gūdnaphar was still reigning in 45 A.D.; while another, which is dated 64 A.D., proves that the Kushān king was then supreme. Scholars are inclined to think that the great attack was made at some date near 50 A.D. The finding of a fresh inscription or a fresh coin may any day supply more precise information.⁵

¹ Cf. pp. 27, 31 below.

² *W.*, 200 ff. ; *J.*, 393 ff.

³ *CHI.*, I., 580-3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 584.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 584-5.

As soon as the danger to the eastern half of the empire became serious, the population of Taxila and of the whole western section of the Panjaub must have begun to break up. Preaching and teaching must have become altogether impossible. Habbān, who was responsible for having brought the Apostle to India, would be most anxious to send him away to a place of safety, and would urge him to leave. Thomas would be eager to continue his work even under the direst difficulties, and would be quite ready to die for Christ, if necessary ; but his Master's words, "When they persecute you in one city, flee ye to another,"¹ had taught him that it was better to escape and preach elsewhere than to stay where preaching was impossible and perish. He would therefore agree to leave, if he could find his way to another part of India which would provide him with a hopeful field of work.

Habbān points out that no part of the Scytho-Parthian empire is possible : the enemy holds already almost half of it ; and the whole of the rest of the territory is in commotion, all able-bodied men being used for the army or other government necessities, most women and children being sent into safety. "Unless the enemy can be defeated, he will overwhelm the whole of the Punjaub and will seize the Indus valley." Thomas must therefore leave at once and sail down the river, before the Kushāns seize Pattala. Thus the Kushān war was the reason why Thomas abandoned his chosen field of work. Every one will recognize in that great upheaval sufficient reason for the change.

II. We had better at this point introduce the tradition, preserved in the Syrian Church of Travancore, about the Apostle's arrival in South India and his work there, as it throws light on the question with which we have been dealing and will be wanted in the sequel at many points. It runs as follows :—

In the year 52 A.D., the Apostle Thomas arrived in Muziris by sea, from the island of Socotra. He preached to the people ; made many converts ; organised seven churches ; and ordained two presbyters. He next went to the east coast and preached there with success, the king as well as considerable numbers of the people accepting baptism. Thereafter he paid a visit to China, and won many for Christ. But when he returned to the east coast of India, he had so much success in his work that the Brāhmins of the district

¹ Matt. x. 23.

were filled with envy and anger ; and, in a sudden riot, one of them pierced him with a lance, and he won a martyr's crown. The date of his death is given as 72 A.D.

Such is the Travancore tradition. But there are two points on which there is no unanimity. Instead of 52 A.D., 50 or 51 is occasionally given as the date of his arrival ; and in some versions the island of Socotra is not mentioned.¹

III. It will be at once apparent how well the tradition agrees with our suggestion that it was the Kushān war that drove the Apostle out of the Panjaub : the date fits perfectly.—But why should Thomas go from the extreme north to the extreme south of India ? Was there no promising field within narrower range ?

There need be no doubt that the new field was selected for Thomas by Ḥabbān. He, naturally, knew India better than most men, certainly far better than Thomas. Now Alexandria, where, as it seems, Thomas had laboured, was the greatest port of the ancient world ; and he had probably found a more fruitful seed-plot for the Gospel in the international commercial community than in any other in that city. Certainly, Ḥabbān and his companions belonged to trade. Thomas, like Paul, was thus at home among business and sea-faring men, and knew how to deal with them.

Now Ḥabbān was Gūdnaphar's "royal merchant." We may therefore be fairly well assured that he did not neglect the great trade which went on continuously between North India and the chief harbours of the South.² Three kingdoms in the first century divided the far south between them. The peak of the pear was called the Pāndya realm and contained one of the greatest ports, *Nelcynda* ;³ while the territory immediately to the north was bisected, the western half, called Kerala, containing a famous port called *Muziris*,⁴ the eastern half, called the Chola kingdom, having three notable ports, *Kāviripattanam*, *Poduca*, *Supattanam*.⁵ Our ancient authorities tell us of the great

¹ For these and other particulars connected with the tradition and the Syrian Church, I am indebted to my friend, Mr. T. K. Joseph, B.A., L.T., Trivandrum, Travancore.

² *CHI.*, I., 212 f., 595-8.

³ *Periplus*, 56 ; Pliny, *N.H.*, VI., 26 ; *IWW.*, 108, 111, 120, 121, 130.

⁴ *Periplus*, 54 ; Pliny, *N.H.*, VI., 26 ; *TR.*, 68 ; *IWW.*, 108, 111, 120, 121 ; *CHI.*, I., 595.

⁵ *Periplus*, 60 ; *TR.*, 71 ; *IWW.*, 122 ; *CHI.*, I., 212, 595, 598.

wealth which the sea traffic brought the three kingdoms. Many hoards of Roman coins have come to light in India ; but all the biggest have been found in these southern territories. Here the trade with Arabia, Egypt, and the Mediterranean was at its greatest ;¹ and a large commerce was also carried on between these ports and North India,² on the one hand, and the Persian Gulf,³ on the other.

What advice then did Habbān give the Apostle ? He probably expressed the opinion that the best thing he could do was *to regard the extreme south of India as his field, to begin his work from Muziris, Nelcynda, and the other ports on the west coast, and, at a later date, to make a similar beginning from the three ports of the Chola coast, in each case extending teaching and organization towards the centre as soon as the growth of the Church rendered extension possible.* One language, Ancient Tamil, was spoken throughout that section of India ; and its compactness made it more manageable than any of the great provinces of the north. In Muziris on the west there was a very large foreign community, Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Arabs, Jews, and men from the Persian Gulf and North India, all educated in some degree and open to fresh religious influence. The mass of the people from the Roman Empire was so great that there was a temple to the Emperor in the city. Nelcynda probably did not fall far behind Muziris. In Kāvīripattanam also, on the east coast, the foreign community was very large and attractive ;⁴ and the same type of men were to be found in all the other ports. Most of these men spoke Greek ; while the remainder—people from Babylonia, the Gulf, and North India—all used Aramaic, the language of commerce and education in Mesopotamia.⁵ The letters he could give him would introduce him in the happiest way possible to the commercial community in each city. He would probably be able to win a rich harvest for Christ among these modern men in Muziris, while he was acquiring a working knowledge of the Tamil tongue ;⁶ and he would find the

¹ *IWW.*, 120 ; *TR.*, 68-71.

² *CHI.*, I, 213.

³ *Ibid.*, 62, 329, 516-7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 212 ; Iyengar, *Dravidian India*, 196.

⁵ *ERE.*, XII., 168 ; *CHI.*, I, 62, 657 ; *CAH.*, III., 78, 95, 423.

⁶ To-day two languages are spoken in South India, Tamil in the greater part of the country, Malayalam in Travancore. In the first century, on the other hand, Ancient Tamil was spoken from west to east ; and only in later centuries, through progressive differentiation of dialects, did the speech of the west become a distinct language, *CHI.*, I., 595.

other ports quite as valuable as bases at later dates. To those business men who accepted Christ he could look for financial help when he needed it ; and to them he could turn when he required a short period of rest, when he wished to send letters to friends by sea, and when he wanted a passage to some other port.

Every one who has worked for the Kingdom in or near one of the great ports of the modern East will agree as to the value of such a base of sympathy and help.

Thomas agrees that the proposal is all he could wish for, and decides to sail for Muziris, pleased to think that, in his new field, he would still be in India and would still be dealing with Hindus. It is just possible also that, among the many students drawn from all parts of India by the fame of the University of Taxila,¹ Thomas may have met two or three of the famous Nambūtiri Brāhmins² of the Kerala land. If so, he already knew something about the country and its people.

Habbān therefore writes a letter to the Port Superintendent (paṭ-tanādhyaṣha)³ in Pattala, asking him to arrange a passage for Thomas to Muziris. He also prepares letters of introduction to be handed to the king's Trade Superintendents (panyādhyaksha)³ in Muziris, Nelcynda, and the Chola ports.

Thomas would then say farewell to Habbān and the little circle of Christians in the city, greatly grieved to have to leave them. It is at this point that *The Acts* states that the Apostle committed the care of the Church to Xanthippus, who may, possibly, be an authentic person.⁴

IV. He sails rapidly down the Indus and arrives in Pattala towards the end of December, calls at once on the Port Superintendent and presents his official letter. He is told that there is no ship sailing direct for Muziris, and that, on account of the war, it is impossible to say when there will be a vessel available ; but an Alexandrian ship, which is almost ready to sail for Egypt, has to call at Socotra for cargo ; and in it a passage can be readily secured. He may have to wait two or

¹ *CHI.*, I., 214, 345 ; *Arch. Survey of India Reports*, II., 1914-15, 36 ff.

² There were Brāhmins in the far south in the first century A.D. ; *CHI.*, I., 596. For a modern description of the Nambūtiris, see *JRAS.*, 1910, 625.

³ These technical terms are from the *Arthaśāstra* of Kautilya ; see Monahan, *Early History of Bengal*, pp. 57, 72.

⁴ P. 25 of my first paper.

three months in the island ; but early in June Alexandrian ships, using the S.W. Monsoon to reach Muziris, will begin to pass the island and some of them will be certain to call. In this way alone was it possible at that time to get a passage to Muziris. Thomas consents to the arrangement and sails, late in December, 51 A.D.

The voyage from Pattala to Socotra would take quite two months and probably longer ; for the N.E. Monsoon, on which ships sailing to the S.W. from the Indus depended, is a light and inconstant breeze ; so that the average speed of sailing was much less than on the voyages from the Gulf of Aden to the Indus, when ships were swept forward at a great pace by the violence of the S.W. Monsoon.

Socotra ¹ lies off the African coast, opposite Cape Gardafui, just outside the Gulf of Aden. The island, in the first century, had a considerable population, Greek, Arab, Syrian, and Indian, and was of some importance as a port of call.

Thomas would have to pass almost three months on the island ; for he would arrive in March, and the Monsoon would not bring the Alexandrian ships before the early days of June. We may be sure he would not be idle. Many others besides the Greeks of the island would be able to understand his Greek addresses ; and it would be strange if he did not win some for Christ.

There is clear evidence from 423 A.D. ² onwards that many of the inhabitants of the island were then Christians ; and at a much later date, there is evidence ³ that they said their fathers had been evangelized by Thomas.

Thus the statement in the Travancore tradition, that Thomas came to Muziris from Socotra, fits perfectly into our theory that he had come from the Indus, and is also in full agreement with later facts. The omission of Socotra in some versions of the tradition is easily comprehensible.

We must think of Thomas as carrying on evangelistic work in the island for some three months. Then, finally, the month of June arrived, and soon the S.W. Monsoon was blowing hard against the island, and people began to watch for the big vessels from Egypt

¹ See Smith, *Dictionary of Ancient Geography*, s.v.

² In the history of Philostorgius, an outline of which has come down to us in Photius. See Migne, *P.G.-L.* vol. LXV.

³ Francis Xavier is the witness.

bound for S. India. Two or three ships under full sail, driven hard by the Monsoon, sailed past, but the next turned towards the island and entered the harbour.

Thomas said good-bye to his Socotra friends and went aboard. In some five or six weeks the coast of Kerala, green with glorious forests, appears ahead, and within a few hours the ship is in the great harbour.

V. In Muziris he is at home at once ; for it is a smaller Alexandria. Besides a thronging Tamil population, there is in the port a large foreign community absorbed in trade and shipping.

Ḥabbān's introductions secure him all the help and advice he needs at first. In a few days he is preaching in Greek, telling the story of the love of God in the crucified Jesus, throwing all his energies into a great effort to win those vigorous, intelligent men for Christ. There would probably be plenty of opposition, especially from the leading Jews. Yet people could not but listen : men of his type had never been seen in the world before !—Was he not one of that small group who had spent three years in closest companionship with Jesus ?

If within the first few months he won a group of this class of men and formed them into a small church, they would not only prove life-long friends to the Apostle but would be a source of great strength and comfort to him in his main task, the building up of the Indian Church.

VI. But, as soon as he was settled in Muziris, he would wish to communicate, if possible, with Ḥabbān. If Gūdnaphar had a Trade Agent (*panyādhyaksha*) in the port, as seems probable, he would arrange to forward Thomas's letter at the first opportunity. Otherwise, Thomas would get one of his commercial friends to send the letter by the first ship sailing to the Indus.

Further, if we are right in our conjecture, that he had sent a letter from Taxila to Edessa with the news of his arrival in Gūdnaphar's capital, he would be most eager to write again to the Church, to tell them about his new field and the reason for the change.

Trade between the Persian Gulf and India began at very early dates,¹ and plays a large part in Indian commerce to-day. In the first century, we hear of ships sailing from Charax Spasini, Apologus, and

¹ *C.H.I.*, I., 329.

the other ports of the Gulf to Barygaza and other Indian marts.¹ Thus, when a ship arrived in Muziris from Charax, it would be possible, on its return voyage, to send by it a letter, which, delivered to an agent in Charax, would be sent by road to Edessa. This would be the second of his letters sent from India to the Church of Edessa, according to the statement of the Syriac *Didascalia*.²

VII. He would readily find in Muziris an intelligent son of Kerala who could speak Greek and would thus be able to teach him ancient Tamil. To become a master of that language would cost some considerable time ; but it would not take Thomas the Jew very long to acquire enough of the colloquial to enable him to wander about among the people and talk with them. Then, it is probable that he had had the inestimable privilege of mingling freely with the teachers of the university of Taxila. From them he would learn the leading ideas and practices of Hinduism, and would pick up many of those short pithy Sanskrit phrases in which the most important conceptions of Hindu philosophy, religion, and life are expressed. So he would be received by Nambūtiri Brāhmans³ as an extraordinary foreigner who was already something of a paṇḍit. He was thus already partially prepared for the task on which his heart was set, the leading of Tamil Hindus to the feet of Christ. Day by day he would preach in the open spaces of Muziris and in the villages of the countryside ; and would spend hours in conversation and prayer with interested individuals.

As soon as a number of individuals had been won and a small church of faithful men had been organized and well established, he would pass on to a new district in order to seek other souls for his Master Jesus, but would frequently return to visit his earlier converts, conscious how much care and love and wisdom are needed to train young Christians so that they may become ripe, fruitful Christian men.

No detailed account of his work has come down to us. All the information we have is the Travancore tradition which gives us the names of the seven churches which he planted. These, enumerated

¹ *TR.*, 102, *IWW.*, 113.

² See my former paper, p. 27. Nau, *La Didascalie des Douze Apôtres*, Paris, 1912, p. 230.

³ The writer, from personal experience, can vouch for the extreme friendliness of Hindu scholars, Nambūtiris as well as others, to Europeans who show a living interest in Hindu teaching and practice.

from north to south in order, are : 1. *Pālūr*, 2. *Cranganore* (i.e. Muziris), 3. *Parūr*, 4. *Gokkamaṅgalam*, 5. *Chāyal*, 6. *Niraṇam*, 7. *Quilon*. From *Pālūr* in the north to *Quilon* in the south the distance is about 130 miles. All these places, with the exception of number 5, *Chāyal*, are on the coast or within a very short distance of it. *Cranganore* (Muziris) was the chief port of Kerala then ; *Niraṇam* probably represents *Nelcynda*,¹ which was the chief port of the Pāndya kingdom ; and *Quilon* is a harbour to this day. We may regard *Chāyal* as his first station planted at a distance from the sea. It is thus perfectly clear that his work was closely related to the sea trade, and above all to Muziris and *Nelcynda*.

It is very noteworthy that he was not restricted to the kingdom of Kerala. Where the frontier between Kerala and the Pāndya realm lay in those days, we do not know precisely ; but we are told by the *Periplus*,² and also by Pliny,³ that *Nelcynda* belonged to the Pāndya kingdom. Thus both *Niraṇam* and *Quilon* were in the Pāndya land. That he was able to evangelize in both kingdoms is a fact of much significance.⁴

VIII. We have no history, even in outline, of the Apostle's work in South India : all we have is the knowledge that his activity on the west coast preceded his work on the east, and that his voyage to the Far East took place shortly before his death.

Nor have we any tradition as to the extent of territory covered by his work on the east or the number of churches which he planted. The Christian community of the east died out during the fifteenth century : if its tradition had survived, it would doubtless have been illuminating. No details have come down to us, except the brief narrative of his death.

It is therefore all the more noticeable that his martyrdom is said to have happened at a point in the vicinity of the most northern of the three ports of the Chola coast. These, beginning from the south, were *Kāviripattanam* ⁵ (*Kāviriport*), at the mouth of the northernmost

¹ What the exact position of *Nelcynda* was is not known. It stood some fourteen miles from the sea, and seemingly on the same backwater as that on which Kottayam now rests. A subordinate port named Bakare stood on the sea front, probably not far from where Alleppey is to-day. Thus *Niraṇam* is within a short distance of the ancient *Nelcynda*, if it is not on the very site.

² Section 44.

³ *NH.*, VI., 26.

⁴ See below, p. 31.

⁵ Called *Khāberis* and *Cāmara* in classical writers.

branch of the Kāviri delta, *Poduca* (Newhaven), probably identical with Pondicherry and *Supattanam*¹ (Fairport), close by what is now Madras. At Mylapore on the south side of Madras, stands a Roman Catholic Cathedral covering the place where, according to the tradition of South India and also of Edessa, his body was laid ; and to the S.W. two low hills,² respectively two and four miles distant, are associated in the tradition with his life and his death. Thus, according to the tradition of both Edessa and S. India, one of the centres of the Apostle's activity on the east coast was quite near Supattanam.

This is so like his work in the West that one wonders whether, on the east coast, during the early centuries, there was not a line of churches stretching from Kāviripattanam³ to Supattanam. In any case, if the Apostle actually laboured there, he must have won large numbers of people ; for the Christian community which he is said to have founded lasted down to the fifteenth century.

Here then, as well as on the west, his work rested on the ports ; and, in all probability, he had won for Christ many from the foreign communities in those busy towns, in addition to all his Indian converts.

One further remark may be made. If there was a line of Churches connected with the three Chola ports, then his work on the east reflected the same methods as his work on the west ; yet the two fields were not opposite each other : the churches of the east were a good deal farther north than the churches of the west. Mylapore is about 175 miles farther north than Palur, the most northerly of the seven churches. Yet, if we have conceived his work as it really was, he had played the wise master-builder. He had occupied the most strategic positions in the whole southern territory. If, when he was finally offered up as an offering and a sacrifice on behalf of the Church of God in India, another man of like devotion, spiritual energy, and

¹ *IWW.*, 122 ; *T.R.*, 71.

² Cf. *The Acts* (W., 294 ; J., 436) where the king says to the soldiers, "Go up on this mountain and stab him."

³ From Mr. T. K. Joseph of Trivandrum I have heard of an interesting fragment of ancient Travancore tradition reduced to writing about 1800 A.D., according to which Vellāla Christians, resident in Kāviripattanam, were so seriously persecuted for their faith that groups of them migrated to Quilon in Travancore. The dates given are round about 300 A.D. The Vellālas were one of the chief groups in the population of Tamil India in the early centuries (*C.H.I.*, I., 596), as they are to-day.

strategy could have stepped into his place, what might he not have done for Christ in South India !

When his work in the east had begun to take root and grow, Thomas would wish to write a letter to Edessa, to tell the Church which had thought of him and prayed for him about his new venture ; and some commercial friend in one of the ports would readily take charge of it and would send it by the first ship sailing to Charax Spasini, whence it would be carried by road to Edessa. This would then be the third of those letters of his which are mentioned in early Edessene literature.¹

These Apostolic letters would be frequently referred to in the Church services, and would now and then be read ; so that every Edessene Christian would know about Thomas.

We have already noticed that no history of the Apostle's operations in South India has come down to us. The work on the west coast was well begun before the work on the east was started at all ; but no more than that is told us. Yet we can scarcely be wrong in believing that Thomas must have gone from west to east and from east to west several times. Paul found it expedient to revisit his Churches ; and modern missionary experience confirms the need with weighty insistence. Thomas would wish to visit the fields in turn, in order to encourage and strengthen the Churches and to help to carry the work of evangelization forward. We can thus see how the two fields might be supervised and strengthened by one devoted man. Those visits would most naturally be made by sea.

We realized above² that, on the west coast, Thomas worked in two distinct kingdoms, the *Kerala* and the *Pāndya*. In his work on the east coast, he was under the *Chola* king. Thus, if the story of his life in S. India is historical, he succeeded in doing a large piece of Christian work in each of the three kingdoms of Tamil land. That he was allowed to continue his work in peace—that he was able to carry on successful Christian propaganda, in three Hindu states, for twenty years, in the latter half of the first century A.D.—these are surely facts of much significance. It is probable that Ḥabbān's introductions and also his well-informed advice and instructions to Thomas had done a great deal to secure this success ; but even these precious

¹ See above, p. 28.

² P. 29.

helps would not have sufficed, had they not been seconded, on the Apostle's part, by a most modest demeanour, extreme friendliness in dealing with all classes, and very great prudence in teaching.¹

IX. In the Travancore tradition there is one, and only one, element which is demonstrably unhistorical, viz. the statement that Thomas went to China. The sea-route to China was not discovered until about 160 A.D. ;² hence Thomas cannot have paid the visit described in the tradition. Yet, though the report as it stands is unhistorical, it is quite possible that a historical fact lies behind it. The possibility of sailing to the coast of China was not realized in the first century ; yet a great trade was carried on between the ports of the east coast of India, on the one hand, and the harbours of the Irrawaddy and of the Malay Peninsula, on the other.³ Hence, if Thomas preached Christ to the merchants of the great ports of South India both east and west, it is quite possible that his friends in Kāvīrīpaṭṭanam or Supaṭṭanam may have begged him to sail across to Temala (the port corresponding to the modern Bassein) near the mouth of the westernmost branch of the delta of the Irrawaddy, or to some port farther south, to evangelize the foreign community there. We cannot be certain that this actually happened ; but it is quite possible that Thomas took this voyage and returned to the Madras coast. Those who realize how loosely foreign geographical terms are used in India to this day will not be astonished to find China used to include Burma and the Malay peninsula.

X. The tradition then runs that the Apostle's further work in the Chola kingdom was so successful that the Brāhmins became filled with jealousy ; a riot arose ; and one of them pierced him with a lance and he died. This is said to have happened in 72 A.D. ; and the Churches of Europe regard the 21st of December as the day of his death, and celebrate his martyrdom on that day. All the Churches of the East were accustomed to commemorate the martyrdom on the 3rd of July, but that is the day of the arrival of the relics in Edessa.⁴

XI. If now we compare the South Indian tradition with the ac-

¹ Cf. Matt., x. 16 ; 2. Cor. x. 1 ; Eph. v. 15-16 ; Titus iii. 1-2 ; 1 Peter ii. 13-17.

² *TR.*, 72.

³ *Periplus*, 46, 47 ; *TR.*, 71. Ships actually sailed to Burma from Broach on the west coast of India : *CHI.*, I., 213.

⁴ See below, p. 39.

count of the Apostle's work and death in Mazdai's kingdom as given in *The Acts*, the following points stand out clear :—

(a) The tale in *The Acts* is another version of the same series of events which is contained in the South Indian tradition : the new section of India, the Apostle's success, the revulsion of feeling against him, the death by lance thrust and the burial prove that we are dealing with two recensions of the same tale, whether mythical or historical.

(b) The proper names in this section of *The Acts* do not belong to India at all : they are Greek, Roman, Iranian, Semitic : not one of them is Tamil or Sanskrit. Here they are :—

1. Mazdai	the king.
2. Tertia	the queen.
3. Narkia	her maid.
4. Vīzān	the prince.
5. Manashar	his wife.
6. Charisius	the king's kinsman.
7. Mygdonia	his wife.
8. Šifūr	a general.

Of these names No. 2 is Latin, Nos. 3, 6, and 7 are Greek, and all the others are Iranian or Semitic. Since the royal names, Gūdnaphar and Gad, which the author of *The Acts* found in the old document preserved in the Church in Edessa, were Iranian, he evidently imagined that the king of the other kingdom and most of the people of his court would have names belonging to Iran also. Further, since Greeks and Romans were found in all the countries of the Near East, and since the old Edessene document showed that there were Greeks in Taxila, he concluded that an admixture of Greek and Roman names would be quite natural in the other kingdom also. Hence the mixed catalogue of names, not one of them Indian. Like a modern novelist he set in his romance such names as seemed to him suitable. Thus the whole list is fictitious.

Two of the names reflect the author's own country, Mesopotamia : Mazdai was a satrap who ruled Cilicia and Babylonia under Darius III. and Alexander the Great,¹ while Mygdonia was the Greek name of the district of Mesopotamia in which Nisibis stood. Was the author of *The Acts* educated in Nisibis ?

¹ *EB.*, xxiv., 230 b.

(c) The South Indian tradition says it was the Brāhmins who rose against Thomas, while *The Acts* puts down his death to the king. The tradition represents him as slain by the thrust of a single lance; *The Acts* says that four soldiers pierced him with their lances. But there need be no doubt as to which account is the original; for the points in which *The Acts* differs from the tradition both arise from the method by which the writer built up the main narrative of his book; *he makes Thomas's story in all essential points parallel with the story of Christ*.¹ Thus, since our Lord was tried and condemned by the Roman Governor of Judæa, Thomas had to be tried and condemned by the king of the kingdom where he had been preaching; and since four soldiers carried out the death-sentence on Jesus, Thomas had to have four executioners also.

But there is further evidence in favour of the tradition on both points.

(a) It is extremely unlikely that Thomas, after twenty years of strenuous work, distinguished by harmonious relations with the government in each of the three kingdoms, would suddenly be betrayed into such conduct as would draw down upon him the wrath of the Chola ruler. The hot jealousy of the priests blazing out in a sudden unpremeditated riot is thus much the more probable of the two accounts.

(b) With regard to both points we seem to have conclusive evidence: the Edessene tradition clearly ran that he was killed by the thrust of one lance; for the Nestorian Liturgy reads so;² also the Monophysite;³ and Assemani, the great eighteenth century scholar from the East,⁴ also speaks of the single lance.⁵ From Edessa the single lance passed to the West;⁶ and when the Portuguese reached Mylapore early in the sixteenth century, they found the old tradition still there.⁷

There is also an old Syriac MS.⁸ which says that the Brāhmins killed him. So the ancient tradition about the Brāhmins was also spread in the east from Edessa.

These facts seem to be explainable in one way only, viz. that the story of the Apostle's death, brought to Edessa from India with his

¹ See my former paper, p. 8.

³ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶ Medly, 62, 68.

⁴ *E.B.*, II., 779.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 133.

² Medly, 23, 24, 41.

⁵ *B.O.*, IV., 33.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 152.

relics, constantly repeated in the Church services there, and thence spread all over the East and also the West, was that "he died a martyr, pierced by a single lance in a sudden attack made on him by Brāhmans."

It thus seems to be plain that, in these two points, the tradition of the South Indian Church is *original*, and the tale told in *The Acts* *secondary*.

If, then, we are right in our reasoning, this version of the martyrdom, which is common to South India and Edessa, is earlier than *The Acts*, and therefore goes back to the second century at least.

The Apostle's remains, according to the tradition of S. India and also of Edessa, were buried at Mylapore,¹ in the vicinity of the spot where he was slain.

The Acts contains, in the account given of the martyrdom and what followed, another statement which is demonstrably false. We are told that King Mazdai, eager to use one of the bones of the Apostle to cure his son, who was possessed of a devil, went to the grave where he had been buried, but found that his remains had been already removed.² He therefore took some of the dust of the grave and professing faith in the Lord Jesus, hung it upon his son, who was thereby cured.

It is quite clear, as we shall see, that it was at a much later date that the remains were stolen and carried to Edessa; so that here once more, whether through sheer carelessness or of set purpose, the author perverts history. But, though he paid scant respect to history, he took care to build up a dramatic climax for his romance!—*The remains are stolen away; the king wishes to use them to cure his son, and has to be content with the dust of the grave instead; the dust proves miraculously efficient; and King Mazdai becomes a Christian!*

The whole narrative of *The Acts*, including the removal of the relics to Edessa, is thus kept within the limits of the Apostolic age;

¹ See above, p. 34.

² The Syriac text reads, "And he did not find the bones, for one of the brethren had taken them away secretly and conveyed them to the West," while the Greek text reads, "And he went and opened the sepulchre but found not the Apostle there, for one of the brethren had stolen him away and taken him unto Mesopotamia."

and the illusion, that the book was written in those early days also,¹ remains possible. The writer, doubtless, had both these ends in view.

XIA. We may at this point also call attention to other features of the Travancore tradition as a whole. It is *exceeding primitive, absolutely in accordance with first-century facts*: the Apostle's two groups of Churches reflect the sea-trade of the first century, the western related to Muziris and Nelcynda, the eastern to the Chola ports. Thomas is not said to have built a church nor to have consecrated a bishop. There is in it no reflection of the close connection with Edessa and Persia, which at later dates dominated the churches of the South. Another striking characteristic is this, that it contains no miraculous incident. Another is that not a single point in the tradition comes from *The Acts*, although, necessarily, that work has been well known in South India from a very early date. There is one detail which is worth special notice: Thomas is not called "Judas Thomas" in the tradition: and I can myself testify from personal observation that in Travancore to-day he is invariably called simply Thomas.² The fact that the Syrian Church has kept its story of the Apostle uncontaminated by statements from *The Acts*, although the book has been well known from an early date, shows how conscious the people are that they are custodians of an original tradition.

XII. We return to the Apostle's letters: if they were actually received in Edessa, they would create a bond between him and the Church of Edessa; and his martyrdom would deepen the attachment. Since ships from the Persian Gulf constantly visited the ports of South India,³ merchants from Edessa would from time to time arrive amidst the stream of travellers. Then, from the end of the first century, when the labours of Addai had built up a considerable Christian community in Edessa and Osrhoene, *Christian* merchants from

¹ The first sentence of the Greek version of *The Acts* reads, "At that season all we the apostles were at Jerusalem," thus definitely asserting the apostolic origin of the work. J., 365.

² We may therefore conclude that during his lifetime in S. India, he was, in ordinary circumstances, always called Thomas. Only in personal letters or in legal documents would his name Judas be used.

³ See above, p. 31. In 117 A.D., Trajan, when in the East for the Parthian expedition, travelled to the mouth of the Euphrates and watched the ships spreading their sails for India. Dion Cassius, lxxvii., 28. I owe this reference to *IWW.*, 127.

Edessa and Charax Spasini would occasionally come to Muziris, Nelcynda, and the ports on the east coast, and would join in the services of the local churches with great joy. Thus the centres where the Apostle had laboured and the place where he lay buried would be perfectly well known to a few mercantile Christians at least belonging to Edessa and the Gulf ports.

If the Apostle, while labouring in the South, had, as we suggest, corresponded with Edessa, it is probable that, after his death, the Christian leaders of the South would keep up friendly intercourse with the Church of Edessa. From 99 A.D., when Addai left Edessa for the East,¹ there was a Bishop of Edessa, the first being Bishop Aggai ; while the Churches of South India had only Presbyters. It is thus quite possible that, from the early decades of the second century, the Christians of South India may have recognised, in some sense, the supremacy of Edessa. As Syriac Gospels and Epistles appeared in Edessa, copies would be sent to South India. It is certainly the belief of the Syrian Church to-day that, from the very beginning, their scriptures and their liturgy have been in Syriac. It is also probable that the earliest Bishops of the Church of South India were consecrated in Edessa.²

XIII. We turn now to the second century. At some date between 115 and 120 A.D., Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, was sent to Rome as a prisoner for the faith. His letters, written at various points on the journey, stirred Christians to the utmost enthusiasm wherever they were read. At Rome he was thrown to the lions ; and his heroic death filled every believing heart with surging emotion. His bones, eagerly rescued and preserved, were carried to Antioch as a precious heritage of the Church and buried. Each commemoration of his martyrdom was a triumph.³

Now to Edessa Antioch was a near neighbour, and the two cities had close commercial relations. The Edessene Church was necessarily much influenced by the example of the famous church for which Paul and Barnabas, and Peter also, had laboured. The death of Ignatius, the careful preservation of his bones, and the great religious

¹ He left Edessa in 99 A.D., and crossed the Tigris to carry the message of the Cross to the countries beyond. See Mingana, *Sources Syriques*, 80.

² See below, p. 42.

³ MacCulloch, *ERE.*, x., 653.

gain won by his commemoration must have made a deep impression on Edessa ; and Edessene Christians would remember their martyred Apostle Thomas, whose remains lay far away in India. The Christians of South India in turn would glory in their martyr and would celebrate his Natal Day (i.e. the day of his martyrdom) with still deeper joy and thanksgiving.

In 155 A.D., Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, was burned to death in his own episcopal city. All that was left of him was buried by the people who loved him ; and every year, on his natal day, *the Eucharist was celebrated on his grave*. "There . . . with joy and gladness, we shall be permitted by the Lord to Celebrate the anniversary of his martyrdom."¹ The result was great crowds of communicants and much religious emotion.

Naturally, every Church which had a martyr's relics within reach imitated the new practice, and each Natal Day became a time of eager worship and fresh Christian experience. The Church of what is now Mylapore, Madras, would celebrate the triumph of Thomas with great joy and many tears ; and the Church of Edessa, accustomed to hear his letters read and the story of his martyrdom told annually, would long with a deeper passion to possess his relics.

Then, about 163 A.D., when the new form of celebration was already well established, a Christian merchant from Edessa happens to arrive by sea in Supattanam, for commercial purposes, early in December.² As we have seen, this port was in the vicinity of Mylapore. As soon as he can spare the time, he visits the Church, and hears that on the 21st the martyrdom of Thomas will be commemorated by the celebration of the Eucharist on his grave. He attends the service, receives the Eucharist, and shares in all the joy and surging emotion of the occasion. Thomas had meant much to him all his life ; but he had never had such an experience as this before. The extraordinary effect produced on the crowds who attended the commemoration marked the day for him for ever.

Soon after, he sails away with his merchandise to the Gulf, and

¹ ERE., X., 653 ; *Epistle concerning the Martyrdom of St. Polycarp*, 18.

² Voyages between the Gulf and S. India would not usually take place during the S.W. Monsoon ; but sailing would be easy from September to the end of May. Thus November and December would be the time when ships from the gulf would naturally arrive in S. India.

thence travels by road to Edessa. There he tells all his friends what he had heard and seen and felt. Clergy and laity are equally stirred. That is what happens at the grave of their own Apostle Thomas, who had honoured the Church of Edessa with his letters !—What would *they* not give to have his relics ?—The merchant broods over the matter in silence and decides, in his own mind, *to act* on the occasion of his next voyage to South India.

So a couple of years later, he starts out with several trusty servants from Edessa, and, in one of the Gulf ports, finds a ship about to sail for South India. The captain, at his request, readily agrees to call at Supattanam ; and in due time they arrive. The merchant goes out the first night, surveys the field of operations, and decides on his strategy. He had had a wooden case prepared to hold the remains. Next night, when the dark is deepest and nobody is about, he and his servants start out, carrying the case and the necessary tools with them. They reach the grave without being observed, open it, take out the remains, place them in the case, and restore the grave with as much care as possible, so that the theft may not be discovered. They then walk back to the ship. In a few days the ship leaves, the Apostle's remains on board. Some time is spent in calling at several other South Indian ports. They then sail direct for the Gulf and arrive at Charax towards the end of May. The merchant and his servants start out as soon as possible by road, call at Nisibis on the way, and arrive in Edessa on the 3rd of July. The reception they received may be left to the reader's imagination ! The remains were buried in the city ; and the Bishop ordained that a festival should be held annually on the 3rd July. It was at a much later date that another commercial city, the mistress of the Adriatic, became possessed by theft of the relics or supposed relics of Saint Mark.

Why do we suggest that the removal of the remains is to be placed about 165 A.D. ?—An Indian Christian named Theodore visited the scene of the martyrdom probably between 570 and 580 A.D., and then went to Europe. Tours was one of the cities he went to see ; and Gregory, the great bishop, received him and had a good deal of conversation with him. He described the martyrdom of the Apostle and then said, *Corpus post multum tempus adsumptum in civitatem quam Syri Aedissam vocant ibique sepultum*.¹ Here we have the

¹ Medly., 69-112.

local tradition, proving that it was long after 72 A.D. before the remains were stolen. With this agrees a hymn by Ephraem Syrus, written in Edessa, where he spent the last ten years of his life, 363-373 A.D. The lines run,

Thomas, whence thy lineage,
That so illustrious thou shouldest become?
A merchant thy bones conveys;
A Pontiff assigns thee a feast;
A King a shrine erects.¹

These lines mean that, when the merchant brought the bones to Edessa, the Bishop ordained that a festival in honour of the martyr should be held annually on the 3rd July and that, at a later date, when the royal family had accepted Christianity, one of the kings of Edessa built the Church of S. Thomas in the city, which Assemani tells us² was there, when Ephraem was in Edessa. The saint, standing in the Church, apostrophizes the Martyr-Apostle in these words. The mention of the Pontiff in the hymn proves that we are right in assigning the theft of the relics to the second century; for there were no bishops in Edessa until the second century. If our conjecture that the relics were brought to Edessa about 165 A.D. is near the truth, then Bishop Hystasp³ may have been the Pontiff who ordained the feast.

On the other hand, since *The Acts*, the date of which lies somewhere round 200 A.D., represents the theft as taking place shortly after the martyrdom, it is scarcely possible to put the date much later than 165 A.D. Clearly, by the time *The Acts* was written, the arrival of the relics in Edessa already seemed to the ordinary man to be long past. Otherwise, the author of *The Acts* would not have dared to place the event so early. If the writer had made inquiry, the Church authorities would, in all probability, have been able to give him the date; but historical accuracy was the last thing he had in view. The history of the rise of the veneration of relics makes the years about 165 A.D. the most probable time for the removal.⁴

Similarly, the general course of Christian history⁴ makes it probable

¹ Lamy, *S. Ephraemi Syri Hymni et Sermones*, Vol. IV., col. 694 (Mechlînîæ, 1902), translated, Medly., 27.

² *BO.*, I., 49. The passage is quoted, Medly., 102-3.

³ Burkitt, *Early Eastern Christianity*, 30.

⁴ MacCulloch, *ERE.*, X., 653.

that it was about 350 A.D. that the earliest church of S. Thomas was erected in Edessa ; and, as we have already seen, it was certainly in existence between 363 and 373 when Ephraem was in the city.

Finally, it is in full accordance with the history of the use of relics in the Christian Church¹ that the *arca* containing the Apostle's relics was removed in 394 A.D. to the great church dedicated to him in the city.²

XIV. *What happened at Nicaea?* During the period before the great Council at Nicaea, no leader of the Church of the West says that Thomas went to India. Origen remarks, in his *Commentary on Genesis*, "According to tradition, Thomas's allotted field of labour was Parthia." Eusebius quotes the passage in his *Ecclesiastical History*,³ and elsewhere in the same work he follows Origen in the matter. Thus far the West expressed itself before Nicaea. After Nicaea also, the historians Rufinus and Socrates follow Origen and Eusebius, saying Thomas went to Parthia : the authority of the great theologian and the first historian was enough for them.

But, after Nicaea, every Western writer, whether Greek or Latin (with the exception of the two historians just named), and all liturgies and martyrologies say that Thomas went to India.⁴ The evidence may be seen in Medlycott.⁵

How are we to account for the changed conviction? At the great Council, the Churches of the East were well represented. Amongst the bishops present there were Aitalaha, Bishop of Edessa, Jacob, Bishop of Nisibis and John the Persian, who signed himself as presiding over "the Churches of *the whole of Persia and Great India*." The phrase "Great India," would fall very naturally from the lips of a Persian ; for a large piece of territory to the west of the Indus was, in those days, frequently called *India*⁶ as well as the great

¹ MacCulloch, *ERE.*, X., 653.

² See *The Chronicle of Edessa* in Assemani, *BO.*, I., 399.

³ Published shortly before the Council met. The reference is III., 1.

⁴ A few writers, it is true, conflate the two statements, representing Thomas as going overland through Mesopotamia, Persia, and Parthia, to India ; but that theory is merely a trick to get rid of the discrepancy between East and West and need not detain us. It is demonstrably unhistorical. See my previous paper, 31-32.

⁵ Pp. 42-48 ; 48-68.

⁶ Sometimes called "White India" : *CHI.*, I., 327.

sub-continent to the east of the river. The reason for this strange usage was that for many centuries, seemingly from the time of the great Darius downwards to the time of Nicaea, it had been ruled by various dynasties, as forming, along with a larger or smaller amount of territory to the east of the Indus, one great satrapy or kingdom.¹ Hence the necessity for distinguishing between the comparatively small India on the nearer side of the Indus and the whole vast country beyond the river.

John the Persian was thus Metropolitan of Persia and of India proper. Under him (besides the Bishop or Bishops of the St. Thomas Churches in South India, if such existed), there were probably several missionary Bishops in India; for by the time of Nicaea, the churches of Mesopotamia and Persia had a vigorous missionary policy for India. We have a clear reference to a man named Daud or David, who gave up the Bishopric of Bussorah on the Gulf to go out to India as a Missionary Bishop. The date of his appointment is late in the third century.² The Church of Travancore has also a tradition that, in 345 A.D., Mar Joseph of Edessa arrived in their midst and became their bishop.³ There thus need be not the slightest doubt that John's Metropolitan see included India properly so called.

John, in all probability, had travelled in India himself. In any

¹ It seems certain that it was the almost incredible revenues which a strong government was able, during those centuries, to draw from the double province that led to its being considered a unit, and also to the many furious wars fought for its possession. Darius seized it, and it was by far the richest satrapy of his mighty empire; Alexander seized it; the Mauryas seized it; then came the Greeks of Bactria; next the Scytho-Parthians; then the Kushāns; and finally the Huns. One of the chief sources of its great revenues was, presumably, the customs, levied on the Indus, at all points from the Himalayas to the sea, wherever the gigantic trade with the West crossed the river, or began its ascent or descent. The chief element in the vast traffic was the products of China, which were brought westward by land and carried over the Himalayas to the Indus valley, whence they were either exported to the West by land or sea, or were distributed over N. India; but Indian goods were also largely exported; and there was a very big import trade from the West. These facts help us to gauge the importance of the position held by Habbān, King Gūdnaphar's Trade Minister.

² *Patrologia Orientalis*, IV., 292-3. I owe this reference to Dr. Mingana.

³ I owe this to Mr. T. K. Joseph, B.A., L.T., of Trivandrum, Travancore. Mar Joseph, in all probability, is only one in a long succession of Bishops sent from Mesopotamia or Persia to S. India.

case the Missionary Bishops who were working in India under his supervision would travel widely and would send him frequent and full reports. He thus had all the facts before him. Aitalaha of Edessa knew the whole story of the connection of Edessa with Thomas ; and the Bishop of Nisibis would also be well acquainted with it. Further, John the Persian knew, with absolute certainty, that Thomas had never been in Parthia : neither Edessa nor Persia had ever had such a tradition ; and there was not a scrap of evidence to be found in Parthia itself in support of the Alexandrian story.

It thus seems extremely probable that the question of Thomas's apostolate in the East was raised at the Council, and that these three men were able to lay conclusive evidence before the Bishops. Clearly, the scholars of the fourth century had had evidence of such a decisive character presented to them that they felt that the great authority of Origen and the Church historians *had* to be discarded. In any case, since then, the tradition of the West has been that Thomas founded the Church of Christ in India.

XV. *Is the story of Thomas as reconstructed historical?* We shall now endeavour to consider judicially the question, is the story of Thomas in Alexandria, N. India, and S. India, as we have reconstructed it, a myth or a genuine piece of history ?

As we have seen, the whole Church from Edessa eastward, long before Nicaea, believed and taught with the utmost consistency that Thomas had laboured in India and had died as a martyr there ; and, after Nicaea, the Western Church held the same tradition.

Yet, such grave difficulties seem to stand in the way of an acceptance of his Indian apostolate as historical that modern scholars, with almost complete unanimity, have pronounced the tale mythical. They have stated :—

A. THAT, UNTIL THE FOURTH CENTURY, THERE IS NO CLEAR EVIDENCE OF THE EXISTENCE OF THE CHURCHES WHICH THE APOSTLE IS SAID TO HAVE FOUNDED IN SOUTH INDIA.

Strange though this fact may seem at first sight, if the churches were actually founded in the first century, there are two weighty considerations which go a very long way towards accounting for the lack of definite historical proof, in the literature, of the existence of the churches in those early days.

(a) The Church of South India throughout the whole course of its

history, has been a living witness for Christ, but it has done very little indeed for literature or theology ; while practically all the Christian literature which the Church and the people possessed was burned by the Roman Priests in 1599 A.D., after the Synod of Diamper.¹ The character and the history of the Church must be recognised. Lack of literary evidence from Travancore is inevitable.

(b) From Edessa, itself, the fountain of Syriac literature, very little has survived from the first two centuries. The destruction of the earliest Church of Edessa by the violent flood of the river Daisan in 201 A.D.—a flood which overthrew the walls of the city, the royal palace, and a large proportion of the houses of the wealthy citizens and drowned two thousand persons²—necessarily robbed the Church of all the early MSS. kept in the Church building. How much Christian literature, kept in other buildings, must have perished in the same overwhelming disaster ! Of the few pieces of literature belonging to the second and third centuries, which have survived, each bears witness in one way or another to the interest of the Edessene Church in Thomas : there are only two exceptions, the *Diatessaron*, which was written in Rome, and Bar Daisan's *Book of the Laws of Countries*. All the others—*The Sinai Palimpsest*, *The Curetonian Syriac*, *The Acts of Judas Thomas*, *The Doctrine of Addai* and *The Didascalia*—mention him in one way or another ; and the last-named document implies that the priesthood created by him was still existent both in India and the East.³ Thus the extreme scantiness of the surviving literature of Travancore and Edessa reduces the absence of definite evidence of the existence of the churches in S. India to a fact of very little weight. To this general judgment, there is, however, one notable exception : it does, in the circumstances, seem very strange that there is no mention of the Churches in Bar Daisan's work, *The Book of the Laws of Countries*, in which that scholar mentions Christians in other lands of the East.⁴

¹ Milne Rae, *The Syrian Church in India*, 251 ; Adeney, *The Greek and Eastern Churches*, 529.

² See *The Chronicle of Edessa* in Assemani, *B.O.*, I., 390.

³ Nau, *La Didascalie des Douze Apôtres*, Paris, 1912, p. 232 ; Cureton, *Ancient Syriac Documents*, 33.

⁴ The fact that he describes the ethical customs of the Brāhmins and also of other Hindu groups leads the reader to expect an account of Indian Christians also : can a sentence have dropped out of the MS ?

B. THAT THE CHURCH WAS PROBABLY FOUNDED BY PERSIAN CHRISTIAN REFUGEES, FLEEING FROM THEIR NATIVE LAND TO ESCAPE THE TERRIBLE PERSECUTIONS WHICH THE SASSANIAN GOVERNMENT INSTITUTED AGAINST THEM, FIRST IN 327 A.D., AND AGAIN, MUCH MORE SERIOUSLY, IN 343.¹

The historical parallel of the Persian Zoroastrians, who, at the beginning of the eighth century, fled to Western India to escape the sword of Islam, gives this conjecture a certain plausibility ; but no scrap of actual evidence for such an immigration exists. There is less evidence for it than for the Church of St. Thomas. Further, the theory is now quite untenable. From the evidence which we have just given about Bishop David, who was sent from Mesopotamia to India towards the end of the third century, and about John, Metropolitan of Persia and India, in the first quarter of the fourth century, who was present at the Nicene Council, it is now clear that, whatever may be the truth about the story of Thomas in India, the Christian movement in India was already in existence² some considerable time before the Sassanian persecution broke out.

C. THAT THERE IS NO SINGLE CONSISTENT TRADITION ABOUT THOMAS'S SUPPOSED EASTERN APOSTOLATE :—

1. The tradition of Alexandria, handed down by Origen, is that he went to *Parthia*.

2. The tradition of *The Acts*, which is a version of the Edessene tradition, is that he preached in *North India* and then in *another unnamed Indian kingdom*, where he also suffered martyrdom.

3. The South Indian tradition vouches only for his work and his death in *South India*.

This problem may be very easily solved. The Alexandrian tradition, that he went to Parthia, is manifestly a mistake for North India.³ The tradition of South India has preserved an account only of the Apostle's work there ; but, as we have shewn, his work in South India is very closely linked to his work in the North, and the

¹ Garbe, *Indien und Das Christentum* (Tübingen, 1914), 153.

² Cf. also the Travancore tradition mentioned above, p. 30, n. 2.

³ See my former paper, 9, 30, where τὸ αἴτιον τοῦ ψεύδους is shewn. Gutschmid and Lipsius long ago recognized that the two traditions were variant versions of the same story : Lipsius, *Die Apokryphen Apostelgeschichten*, I., 278-9.

Alexandrian tradition supports the latter. Thus *The Acts*, which means Edessa, vouches for both the North and the South ; while Alexandria, rightly understood, confirms the North, and South India confirms the South. There are thus two witnesses for each. Both, as the writer holds, are historical ; and Edessa knew of both, probably from the Apostle's own correspondence, as we have seen.

D. THAT THE ACTS, THE EARLIEST WORK IN WHICH HIS WORK AND HIS MARTYRDOM ARE DESCRIBED, IS CLEARLY A WORK OF THE IMAGINATION AND THEREFORE IS NOT TO BE TRUSTED.

It is quite true that, like the other *Acta* of the second and third centuries, *The Acts of Judas Thomas* is very largely fiction ; and we are bound to thrust out all the mythology as thoroughly as possible. Yet, most examples of this type of literature have at least a historical kernel ; and it is now universally acknowledged that there are certain statements in the *Acts of Thomas* which are genuinely historical. We shall therefore fail in our duty, unless we watch with extreme care, lest other historical passages escape our notice.

Though these four difficulties, taken as a group, sound rather formidable, yet no one of them by itself, nor even in combination with the rest, would necessarily be fatal to the historicity of Thomas's labours in India. These considerations influence men's minds seriously, chiefly because *The Acts* itself makes a very bad impression on the thoughtful reader, and the idea necessarily occurs that the whole story may be mythical. Then, when the student hears these scientific objections, which chime so well with the sceptical impressions already in his mind, they seem to seal the doom of the whole story.

Thus the negative conclusion reached by scholars rests upon a considerable foundation of hard facts, even if most of them are explainable. THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT THAT, ON A SURVEY OF ALL THE EVIDENCE AVAILABLE THIRTY YEARS AGO, THAT WAS THE BEST HYPOTHESIS THAT COULD BE REACHED.

Yet, it was but a hypothesis. No evidence was available to prove that Thomas was *not* in India between 48 and 72 A.D. The right statement is that no sufficient evidence existed to prove conclusively that he *was* there ; and, since many particulars seemed to tend in the other direction, the negative conclusion was the best hypothesis possible in the circumstances.

But a number of pieces of fresh evidence, each having some bearing

on the question, have cropped up in recent years ; and the whole situation in the East in the first centuries of our era has received considerable illumination from recent discovery and research ; so that our survey of all the facts may possibly be timely.

It is quite true that we possess no evidence which decisively proves the existence of the Churches at an early date, but evidence exists which carries back the story of Thomas's Indian apostolate to a very early time, as has been shown in my first paper.¹ We can *prove* that the Church of Edessa knew his story by 140 A.D. ; and Edessene statements carry the story back to the apostle's letters.

The history of the criticism of *The Acts* may be of interest at this point. Scholars originally regarded Gūdnaphar, Gad, and Ḥabbān and all that is said about them as purely mythical.

Then, (a) about 1834 an English scholar named Masson found a coin in Afghanistan bearing the name Gondophares ; and it became clear that King Gūdnaphar was a historical king. Later, (b) an inscription was found which fixed his approximate date, and it became clear that he was a contemporary of the Apostle. Still later, (c) other coins were found on which Gondophares and Guḍa are together named as viceroys under the suzerainty of Orthagnes. These date from the years before the accession of Gondophares to the throne ; and they justify us in regarding Gad the king's brother of the *Acts* as a historical person. Finally, (d) it was pointed out in my former paper that in the phrase, "the merchant of King Gūdnaphar," we have another historical reference. The minister in charge of the king's trade was a most important official in early India ; and the great position which Ḥabbān occupied explains *his visit to Alexandria* and *his bold invitation to Thomas to evangelize the Punjaub*. It also enables us to understand *the selection of Tamil India as the Apostle's field*, when the Punjaub became impossible, and *the fine strategy which marks his work in the South*.

6. If the plans and enterprises attributed to Ḥabbān and Thomas in this paper strike some minds as almost too great to be historical, the writer would recall the larger background of these events. If our reconstruction is approximately right, then Thomas went with Ḥabbān to the East very shortly after Hippalus had harnessed the S.W. Mon-

¹ Pp. 32, 33.

soon to his will,¹ and while Gūdnaphar's empire in all its splendour and wealth still stood strong. The years he spent in the Punjaub and in the Tamil country coincide with the decades when the sea-trade of the Mediterranean with India was at its greatest,² as the coin-finds of South India testify.³ Hence both North and South India experienced then a time of buoyant prosperity, which favoured intellectual, artistic, and religious progress.

Certainly, in the North, education, literature, philosophy, art,⁴ and the drama⁵ all flourished; and the appearance of a theistic Hinduism in the *Bhagavadgītā* and of a new Buddhism known as the Mahāyāna, both demonstrably created for the cultured laity of the day,⁶ is eloquent proof that a large section of the population was well prepared for the Christian message.

We know far less about Tamil India at this period than we do about the North; but Tamil poems⁷ give us glowing pictures of wealth, comfort, and happiness in the chief cities then, which are corroborated by briefer notices in the classical writers.⁸

7. We have urged above, that in the circumstances of thirty years ago the conclusion, that the tales about Thomas's apostolate in India were mythical, was the best judgment that could be formed on the evidence then available. We would now suggest that it would be reasonable to form a rather different conclusion about the story as we have set it forth in these two papers.

We cannot *prove* that the story as we have told it is history, for there is no conclusive evidence to show that the events of which it consists are each historical. Yet its character is such that it is difficult to believe that it can be other than actual history:—

A. It has not a single facet that suggests legend.

B. According to the most searching analysis, three tales about Thomas arose in the middle of the first century, one in Alexandria, another in the Punjaub, a third in South India. The second and the third were put together as a single history in Edessa. These four

¹ *TR.*, 60, *IWW.*, 109 f.

² *IWW.*, 101-3.

³ *TR.*, 69, *IWW.*, 102-3.

⁴ Marshall, *CHI.*, I., 637-49.

⁵ Keith, *Sanskrit Drama*, 72, 80 ff.

⁶ Farquhar, *Religious Literature of India*, 78-79; 86-91; 110-11.

⁷ *CHI.*, 212, 597; Iyengar, *Dravidian India*, 145 ff.; 190 f.; 219.

⁸ *Periplus*, 44, 54, 56; Pliny, *NH.*, VI., 26.

places are separated from each other by enormous distances.¹ Yet we can now see that the Punjaub story and the South India story fit together in the most perfect way, forming one consistent life-history, the destruction of the Scytho-Parthian empire providing the explanation of the Apostle's flight from the North to the South. Further, our modern knowledge of the Scytho-Parthian kings obtained from inscriptions and coins, enables us to see that the Alexandrian story and the Punjaub story are variant versions of one event² and to decide in favour of the form of the tale which comes from the Punjaub.

C. The whole story, as we have told it, is in complete harmony with all that is known to-day of the history of both North and South India, of the trade between the Mediterranean and India, and of the great harbours of India, in the first century A.D. There is no single feature of the narrative that is in any sense suspicious. How could a mere myth, created in three far-sundered centres, assume the lineaments of history with such success?

Thirty years ago the balance of the probability stood absolutely against the story of the Apostolate of Thomas in India: We suggest that to-day the balance of probability is distinctly on the side of historicity.

There is one prominent feature of the Nestorian Christianity of the far East which ought to be realized by every student who touches the problem of S. Thomas.

Nestorianism spread throughout the East from Edessa and Persia. The Church was most enthusiastically missionary in spirit and achieved almost incredible success.³ Her representatives went preaching, not only in the vicinity of Mesopotamia and Persia, but in every part of Eastern Iran, Turkestan, Central Asia, India, China, Siberia. For centuries there were a great many Archbishoprics covering almost the

¹ It is about 3500 miles by sea and river from Alexandria to Taxila. From Taxila to Muziris by river and sea is 2000 miles; and from Taxila to Edessa the distance by road is at least 2000 miles, while by river, sea, and road it is much more.

² If the story which arose in India and brings Thomas *from Alexandria to India* is a baseless myth, how did the Church *in Alexandria* come to believe that he had gone to the Far East?

³ See Mingana, *The Early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East*, in the BULLETIN of July, 1925.

whole of Central and Eastern Asia. The number of Nestorian Christians in those days must have been fabulously great. No Church has ever done more for the spread of Christianity.

Yet the whole vast community has almost entirely disappeared. War, persecution, and the rude methods of Oriental and Moslem government have sufficed to destroy it. Central Asia, the Chinese Empire, Siberia, India, Iran, Persia, Mesopotamia, all tell the same tale. Nestorianism in each of these lands, once splendidly strong, has utterly perished, or has left only the weakest possible remnants. Even the Church of Edessa—fertile seedplot of the whole amazing growth—has passed utterly away !

Surely this history, at once so noble and so pitiful, is proof that there was something lacking in Nestorian Christianity.

Contrast the Church of Travancore. For centuries it was governed by Nestorian prelates and professed the Nestorian faith. Yet to-day it survives, is strong and healthy, and takes a share in the great task of the Christianization of India. Whence this tough strength, this vital power to survive ? Can we believe that, as founded, it was merely Nestorian ? Must we not conclude that there was in the Church, from the very beginning, a vital faith creating a virile stability which has never marked Nestorianism ?

Thus the history of the Church of Travancore bears witness to the courage and endurance which the Apostolic Founder breathed into her spirit. In her case the word of Christ is fulfilled, "The gates of Hell shall not prevail against it."