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**To the Ancient Throne and the Holy See
of
St. Thomas the Apostle and Martyr.**

The Catholicate of the East.

Grateful acknowledgement to :—

The Statesman, Delhi

The Mail, Madras,

The Malayala Manorama, Kottayam

Allahabad.

Catholicate Day, 1953.

INTRODUCTION

A displaced person from West Pakistan from near Quetta narrated the following story.

He with his family members once went to Sangam, the confluence of the Ganga the Yamuna and the Saraswati for a holy dip. The 'Pundas' approached these visitors. The business tricks of these veritable pundas are well known in North India. As usual they had their time with the visitors. After a volley of questions one of them claimed that the ancestor of the visitors the 'Dewan saheb of Kalat' came to Sangam some years back. My friend and his people were simply amazed. The elderly lady in the company however narrated the story of one of their ancestors who did come to Sangam during the days of the Mughal Emperors but who did not return to Quetta.

The 'Punda' continued his legend. He told them besides that his ancestor was the person who ministered unto that Dewan Centuries ago and therefore he is the right person to minister to them now. My friend yielded of course.

Family traditions are always based on facts. Elders in the family pass down to their children for generations without break, the family adventures although recorded history may not the least approve of or support, due to lack of concrete evidences.

In India an event took place nineteen hundred years ago. That was the arrival of St. Thomas the Apostle of Love who brought Good News to this Great land in 52 A. D. But due to the fact that our historians have not done justice to the event in their volumes of Indian history very few know that an Apostle himself came to India to preach the Gospel of Jesus the Christ.

In December 1952 news papers carried reports of the Nineteenth Centenary celebrations of the arrival of St. Thomas in India. Most people might have just turned it over as one of the news items, especially as it was about a 'Western religion'. Periodicals which have given publicity of the subject are entirely Christian and thus found a very negligible circulation amongst the majority of the reading public. This pamphlet therefore is an attempt to serve as the 'digest' of such reports to take everyone by the hand and to tell the History so far inadequately recorded in the history texts of the country.

An Olive sapling from the soil of Socrates was planted in Rajghat in 1952. Another sapling was brought from the land of Abraham Lincoln in the same year. But the Nineteenth Centenary of the planting of the sapling of the 'Tree of Love' in the fertile fields of U. S. (T. C.) was celebrated in 1952 all over the sub-continent.

It is often said that Christianity was introduced in India by the Imperilists of the West, but it is seldom realized that this country had her own sons as Bishops, Priests and Deacons before any of the Western nationals landed here.

In its leading article dated December 5, 1952 the Church of England News Paper, London wrote "Today we are beginning to appreciate one of the most far reaching results of the war; it has been described as the 'retreat of West'. Japan may have been defeated, but she achieved one outstanding success: she demonstrated for all time what she intended to do, namely that the white man is not what he imagined himself to be. His prestige has fallen from its pedestal in Asia and can never be replaced. So great is the fall indeed that whereas to a past generation it was an advantage to a missionary to India, for example, to have behind him 'the British Raj,' to day his freedom from it is his greatest commendation to the people whom he seeks to serve. No longer can we speak with a sense of superiority of the Christian West and the Heathen East."

How the East is revolting is clear from the following :—

Sri K. M. Munshi the Governor of U. P. speaking at the reception given by the Lucknow Christian Council to the delegates to the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches which met at Lucknow in January '53 said :—

"In the beginning" (this may be corrected to read—After the sixteenth Century)—"the influence that the missions acquired was somewhat the result of the tacit alliance between the white man in power and the white man who preached a new Gospel. Often they came with an aggressive proselytizing zeal and in some cases, they came with a self-assurance that they were bringing salvation to a benighted people."

The Governor continued : "Such attitude is a relic of the past and I am sure, when you have finished your tour of the countries of Asia, you will realize that in Asia a new ambitious nations have risen, that their religions and cultures may be modernized by contact with Christianity but cannot be replaced by it."

"In India, particularly, there is an ancient culture which has stood the test of time and its spiritual values and technique have given it a universal power capable of securing the highest self-fulfilment. Christianity has, however, tremendous scope as an educational and humanitarian movement, as a force which leads to love, which is Jesus Christ, but its role as a conquering, proselytizing religion seeking to save heathens is out of date and only evokes resistance."

From his earliest days, the Governor said, he had been attracted by Jesus and the religious movements which had influenced the world in His name.

The former part of the learned Governor's speech appears to have been based on the later influence of the Western nationals without giving due consideration to the earliest Christian history of our Great Country. There

has never been any conflict between Christianity and Indian Culture. The fact is made clear in the following pages by authoritative persons in our own land.

The unique position of Jesus Christ is admitted by all. What irritates an Asiatic is the so called 'aggressive proselytizing zeal,' and the rest of it. The history of Christianity in India does not warrant this attitude.

In early January 1953, it was reported that a seal excavated in Koushambi in the Allahabad district is going to amend Indian history to a great extent. So is the Gold coins dug out in U. S. (TC) and Taxila expected to reveal certain historical events hitherto believed to have been in obscurity.

The Nineteenth Centenary Celebrations

At New Delhi

The 19th Centenary of the arrival of St. Thomas in India was celebrated on Sunday December 14, 1952 at Constitution Club, New Delhi. Dr. Rajendra Prasad presided.

The Union President Dr. Rajendra Prasad said that it was on account of the tradition of tolerance that an apostle coming from an unknown land established himself in India and founded many institutions.....

The Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru speaking on the occasion said :—

“ Various religions, creeds and faiths that exist in India are as much of India as any other, and we are all partners and sharers in that great inheritance”...“ The fact that a religion or a truth came from another country ” said Pandit Nehru “ did not make it foreign. Truth was truth wherever it might be.” He believed that every Indian must be conscious of his inheritance. St. Thomas came in the very early days of the Christian era...In India many great religions had their origin.

At Rome

On December 31, 1952, two Cardinals, four Archbishops and over 1000 other priests attended a ceremony at Rome in commemoration of the 19th Centenary of the arrival in India of the Apostle Thomas. The Rector of the Pontifical Oriental Institute of Rome, Father Ignazio Urbino, the main speaker at the function, outlined the historical evidence supporting the tradition of St. Thomas's life in India.

Earlier on December 30, 1952 a solemn Mass in the SYRO-MALABAR RITE was for the first time sung in the Basilica of St. Peter.

At Vatican City

The Pope referring to the ancient Christian communities of Southern India which claiming descent from the Apostle Thomas, have never been united with Rome, said “ To day, when the powers of evil fight in serried ranks and the need for concord among those people who are on the side of God is more imperious, we make bold to call on even the separated brethren : let the division cease ; to you the house is open which the Lord in unmistakable words built on the Rock of Peter and his successors ” (?)

(Christians in India are begotten in Spirit by St. Thomas. To his See in the East they would welcome all from any part of the world as brothers in Christ Jesus to work for his Kingdom in this part of His Vineyard where the work is needed. But his claim of begetting us all in Christ prevails over S. S. Peter and Paul the brother husbandmen for several of the other portions of His Vineyard in the West.

On the Rock of Faith Jesus Christ built His Church throughout the World. And in the East St. Thomas and his successors upheld the Orthodox and Apostolic faith for the past Nineteen hundred Years. The successors of St. Thomas in His Strength will continue to hold the same as brothers to those in the West. The role of the Roman Church seeking to save the faithful members of the Orthodox faith only “ evokes resistance ” on the pattern of the National Church in the United Kingdom resisting Romanism.

Let us hope that Christians in India will unite under the ancient See of St. Thomas, which does not acknowledge the superiority claimed by Rome or any other outside the Indian Republic).

At Ernakulam

The four day celebrations to commemorate the 19th Centenary of the arrival in India of St. Thomas concluded at Christnagar on 31st December 1952. Nearly one Lakh

people assembled in the pandal. A special message of blessing broadcast by the Pope was relayed to the congregation.

At Madras

"Among the sensible facts of antiquity, few there are which have in their favour more numerous and weighty arguments than those referring to the apostolate and martyrdom of the Apostle St. Thomas in India" said His Grace most Rev. Dr. L. Mathias Archbishop of Madras-Mylapore presiding at the 19th Centenary of the arrival in India of the Apostle St. Thomas at the Christian College High School Chetput, Madras. His Grace said "THUS THE CROSS OF CHRIST AND HIS GOSPEL WAS PLANTED IN THIS SOIL BY ONE OF THE TWELVE AND IT HAD GROWN SINCE. THIS FACT STANDS FORTH DEFIANT INCONTROVERTIBLE. WE ARE NOT OF YESTERDAY, WE ARE NOT LATE ARRIVALS; WE ARE NOT RECENT INTRUDERS; WE CLAIM A RIGHT OF CITIZENSHIP 1900 YEARS OLD."—(AND OUR allegiance is to NO ONE outside the INDIAN REPUBLIC.)

At Calcutta

The Governor of West Bengal Dr. H. C. Mukherji, addressing the Christian people from U.S. (T. C) at Calcutta said :—

"The first thing I would like to emphasize is that the Syrian Church has proved that there need not be any conflict between Christianity and Indian Culture. Your Church is Indian in membership, in leadership, in financial support, in worship and in its general outlook. You have priests and Bishops drawn from your own people...."

"Protestant missionaries came to India in the 18th Century and Roman Catholics in the 16th Century, but your ancestors were Christians long before the British and some other European nations had embraced Christian faith."

"Your Church has clearly proved the incorrectness of the view prevalent in certain quarters that Christianity denationalises Indians and makes them disloyal to their cultural heritage."

"I recall the fact with gratification and pride that among the patriots who suffered and sacrificed in the fight for India's freedom under the leadership of Gandhiji was one of your illustrious leaders, Mr. George Joseph, Bar-at-law at Madurai."

At Bombay

During the year 1951 the city of Bombay witnessed the opening of a new Church consecrated to the Blessed Virgin Mary by His Holiness the Catholicos of the East the successor to the Apostle St. Thomas. (The same was witnessed throughout India on the screen). When in many parts of India Churches are being closed due to various reasons the Orthodox Church in India founded by St. Thomas is building up new churches. Thus the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church in India strengthened by the Catholicate of the East Consecrated a church in the Industrial city of Bombay during the Nineteenth Centenary year of the arrival of St. Thomas the Apostle of India. In a country of India's heritage, ascribing due sanctity to all places of worship, it should be the pride of every Indian to subscribe for such houses of worship throughout the Republic. The Orthodox Church-building at Bombay is a monument to this truth; for the construction of which Indians of all faiths subscribed. (Historians are not agreed on the exact year of the Apostles' arrival in India, i. e. 1950 or 1952).

At Kottayam

His Holiness Moran Mar Baselios the Catholicos of the East, presiding over the Nineteenth Centenary Celebrations exhorted the people to take home the eternal Message of St. Thomas who built a palace in Heaven for the king Gudnapher by giving away the riches to the poor outside the city!

On December 20, 1952 about one Lakh of Christians participated in the celebrations commemorating the 19th Centenary of the arrival in India of St. Thomas, the Apostle in the "little town of" Kottayam under the joint auspices of the different denominations. The leaders and delegates attending the world Conference of Christian youth—then in session at Kottayam—were also present.

A procession headed by elephants carrying portraits of the Apostle was taken through the principal streets of Kottayam. Dr. John Mathai, former Union Finance Minister, referring to the glorious heritage of St. Thomas Christians in Malabar, stressed the imperative need for joint action by various denominations for the advancement of the Christian Church.

His Holiness in his presidential address referred to St. Paul and his Epistles and said that the claim of St. Thomas as the Apostle of India is unquestionable and has been historically established.

"For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit which ye have not received or another Gospel which ye have not accepted ye might well bear with him." "For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles."

The Story—The Tradition

Historians, in their critical mood might wish to have greater evidences, but the tradition so well kept and revered for centuries, is greater and stronger than any other document. Historians and writers, have to bow to the facts and we can point to the truth that Christianity in India is as old as the country itself.

Tradition is that the Saint landed at the port of 'MUZIRIS' (now Cranganore) near Cochin in the year 52 A. D. exactly Nineteen hundred years ago, when few in the Western World knew Christ. His success in preaching the Good News in this country led to the establishment of seven Churches within a short period. The places where these historical Churches situate are at Niranam, Palur, Cranganore, Parur, Kokkamangalom, Quilon and Chayal. Although most of these Churches with their 1900 years' old bricks and mortar have not survived the Sun and the tropical monsoons, the Church in its actual meaning of the term survived them amongst the millions who inhabit those places.

One of the traditional acts Thomas the Apostle did in India is an incident at the earliest conversion.

Nambudiri brahmins in their early morning worship along with their morning bath in a pool near the temple were engaged in throwing water into the air in adoration of the Sun God. The Saint watching all these entered into a conversation about his Lord and his God the "Light of the World." They were not convinced until the Apostle did the very same act of throwing water up into the air praising his God and Saviour. To the surprise of our ancestors, the water thrown up remained in the air like marbles and the depression on the surface of the water remained visible....

Truly the Saint had to grapple with the intellectual section of the Indian people and probably that accounts for the existence of an indigenous Church in the midst of an overwhelming majority of non-Christians for the last Nineteen Hundred years.

During his ministry in India the Apostle appointed and ordained a person from one of the converted families to carry on the Christian obligations establishing the Priesthood in the family. Thus it is believed that the ecclesiastical Orders continued in India in succession from St. Thomas the Apostle himself through that family. Evidently this system of priest-hood was copied from the Indian tradition of the then converts themselves. A person born in a brahmin family—first born—inherits the family priest-hood. Descendants of the family which obtained the Orders from the Apostle still exist.

The practice however is never known to have existed any where in Christendom except in India. May be the Apostle yielded to the custom of the land. It had the sanction in the Old Testament wherein the Levites alone were to minister unto the people.

By contact with other Orthodox branches of Christs Church however the system died out leaving the tradition in certain families on the South West coast of India.

Some have declared that St. Thomas travelled to China as well as Brazil in America. Indian tradition is that he suffered Martyrdom at Madras in 72 A. D.

Recorded History of the Arrival of St. Thomas in India.

The story of St. Thomas's missionary journeys is recorded in one of the oldest monuments in Syriac Literature of the early second or third century or nearabout, called the Act of Thomas which is translated into several languages especially Malayalam in India. It records that the Apostles met in Jerusalem after the ascension of Christ Jesus. They cast lots to decide where each should go to preach the Gospel in the then known world. The East—then probably known as India—fell to the lot of Thomas. He was unwilling to obey the call. Jesus Christ appeared to a merchant called Habban an agent of King Gudnaphar and who had business connections in India.

Thomas a carpenter by profession was sold to the merchant by his master for 20 pieces of silver. Habban took him to India. King Gudnaphar ordered Thomas the carpenter to build a palace for him and gave a large sum of money for the purpose. The Saint instead of procuring the building materials for the palace, gave away the money to the poor outside the city. When the King asked Thomas he replied that the money has been given away in charity and thus had built a palace in heaven. The King however shut up the saint and the merchant in prison. Just then Gad the King's brother fell ill and in his illness had a dream in which he saw the wonderful palace in heaven built by Thomas. When he heard of his brother's dream King Gudnaphar's heart was changed. The king and his brother were baptised, and the Saint was allowed to preach in the kingdom.

Recent excavations near Taxila have brought up coins with this King's name and established him as a real person in the Parthian Dynasty who ruled in the first century A.D.

After the conversion of the King and his family, the Saint is believed to have visited Malabar, the land of spices on which there was thriving business with the outside world. Thus the recorded history is connected with the well kept tradition.

After his missionary work on the South West coast he is believed to have gone to Madras where he suffered Martyrdom. St. Thomas mount at Madras is a place of pilgrimage for centuries. St. Thomas is believed to have been buried there; but later on his remains were taken away to Eddessa and thence to Ortona in Italy. If Sri Buddha's Tooth could be restored to India, it is high time that the remains of the Apostle of India is returned to the Indian Church without our asking for them. Let us hope our brothers in the West will duly recognize that the Holy See in the East is the rightful claimant to the Apostle's remains and not any one or any Church outside this country.

It is no wonder that doubts still persist about the Apostle who himself doubted his "Lord and his God" until He appeared to him. It cannot have been a mere coincidence that the Apostle of Jesus Christ the Saviour of the world came to that part of India and suffered martyrdom, from where the greatest Hindu teacher who consolidated Hinduism came. The cult of Sankracharya spread through out the land. So may the Holy See of St. Thomas throw out the Beams of the "Light of the World." to all parts of the country from within her own boundaries.

The Heritage of the East.

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the EAST to Jerusalem saying where is he that is born King of the Jews? and are come to worship him." When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled....."

Even the Jews did not realize that their King is born.....Although the first kingdom to adopt Christianity as its state religion is Armenia, the Easterners are the earliest people to know Christ as He is.

A correspondent writing in the Statesman, Delhi (Feb. 17, 1953) about the first Christian state gives the following story. "King Abgar the seventh monarch of the Arshakoonian Dynasty hearing the news of the death of one of his allies the King of Persia and of the disagreement among his sons as to the right of succession, went over to Persia, and there contracted leprosy, which the highest medical skill failed to cure. Hearing of the miracles performed by Christ at Judah, he sent messengers, inviting Him to Armenia. They returned with a portrait of Christ impressed on a cloth by Himself and a letter beginning "Blessed is he who believes in Me without seeing Me, for it is written of Me that they that see Me shall not believe, and they that have not seen Me shall believe and be saved"....."

"Abgar received both portrait and letter with humility. On reading the letter he believed, and got the distinction of being the first Christian King on earth. He was cured by his faith."

"In 34 A. D. the Apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew went to Armenia preached the Gospel, healed the sick and converted many, though it was not until 287 A.D., during the reign of King Terdat III, that Christianity became the official religion; through the labours of St. Gregory, who in spite of the most frightful tortures succeeded in gaining many for Christ along with the King himself and his sister Khosrovidookt."

Whatever be the claim of other countries and other Churches, India's is an unquestionable heritage which many have not realized. The Holy Gospel declares how the East recognized Jesus Christ at His birth. How much more our forefathers would have adored Him when His Apostle Thomas declared His message in the East.?

Documentary.

Apart from the peaceful conquest of India by one of the Lieutenants of the King of Peace, soon after His ascension : there are other historical events that lead to the consolidation. Christianity arose in Palestine and in the early centuries spread equally into Asia, Africa and Europe including Russia. Flourishing Christian Churches existed in Egypt, Ethiopia and North Africa as well as Syria, Arabia, Armenia, Persia and as far east as China and India.

From time to time bodies of Christians from Syria and surrounding places arrived in Malabar. One such group led by a merchant called Thomas of Cana settled down in Travancore ; which helped the growth of the Church. Of all historical documents on the Christian heritage in India, the Copper plates of the early centuries on which the high tributes paid to the Christians by the Indian rulers witness their existence for centuries before any European set his

foot on our coasts. The Pahlavi inscriptions on crosses found at Kottayam and Madras which go back to the seventh century are further evidence of the antiquity of the Church in India.

In North India to the Non-Christian and the Christian alike the pamphlet is intended to give an outline of early Christianity and to show that India did not welcome Christianity due to any sort of external forces. In the words of the Prime Minister "every Indian must be conscious of his inheritance",—the 2000 years of Christian heritage which few countries in the world could claim.



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