

**S. THOMAS, THE APOSTLE
OF INDIA: AN ENQUIRY
INTO THE EVIDENCE FOR HIS
MISSION TO HIS COUNTRY**

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Ch. Egbert Kennet

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CH. EGBERT KENNET

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MISSION TO HIS COUNTRY**

S. THOMAS, THE APOSTLE OF INDIA ;

**AN ENQUIRY INTO THE EVIDENCE FOR HIS
MISSION TO THIS COUNTRY.**

BY

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PREFACE.

THE interest which this little book has recently attracted led to a demand for copies which soon exhausted the small edition of it printed about five years ago. In issuing a second edition now, I have made a few additions of some historical value which may help to make the evidence more complete.

The discovery that the inscription, which surmounts the old stone cross behind the Altar in the Church on S. Thomas' Mount, is in the Pahlavi character, has been made to bear the assumption that the ancient Christianity of India owes its existence to Manichæan agency. But while its early connection with Persia may be readily admitted, we have to wait for more reliable results by further research, if such can be obtained, before we can admit its Manichæan origin. Yet, whether S. Thomas visited this country and died here as a martyr (as universal tradition attests), or not, the discovery of a stone cross of supposed Manichæan origin, confessedly of a very much later date than the apostolic age,

and placed in the Church on S. Thomas' Mount by foreigners who could not decipher the inscription found on it, cannot, on fair principles of historical criticism be allowed to discredit the earlier tradition regarding the Apostle, whether it be considered as only probable, or as supported by evidence amounting to historical certainty.

C. E. K.

SULLIVAN'S GARDENS,

June 30th, 1882.

S. THOMAS, THE APOSTLE OF INDIA.

*An Enquiry into the Evidence for his Mission
to this Country.*

THE mission of one of Christ's Apostles to this country is an interesting subject of enquiry, and it seems fitting that he who was slowest among them to believe the Resurrection, should have sought to make amends for the slowness of his belief by travelling farthest of them all, to preach the Gospel of the Resurrection to distant nations of the earth who were waiting longest for its light. And here, in India, the existence of a large colony of Jews who had settled on the western coast, previous to the Christian era, would have proved an attraction to an Apostle who was himself of the stock of Israel, while the trade which was carried on at the time between India and Egypt would have made access to them by no means difficult of accomplishment. The foundation of a Christian church in Malayála is accordingly ascribed to the Apostle Thomas, who, after having laboured in Arabia Felix and the Island of Socotra, which lay in the

direct line of trade at a little distance from the most eastern point of the coast of Africa, is said to have passed over to Cranganore on the western coast of India to extend the knowledge of salvation. His zeal being crowned with success by the conversion of many Jews and heathen, S. Thomas, delegating the care of the infant church to others, is reported to have traversed the peninsula, and continued his Apostolic labours on the opposite coast at Mailápur, then a rich and populous city under the rule of a Hindu prince. From hence, where the Apostle also raised a church, he extended his labours yet further eastward and reached, according to some writers, the distant city of Pekin in China, where he likewise preached the Gospel and formed a church. From China, if he ever went there, S. Thomas having returned to Mailápur, is found to have been so eminently successful in establishing the Christian faith, that he became exposed to the intense hostility of the Brahmins, who at length stirred up a tumult against the Apostle which issued in his martyrdom. A crowd having rushed upon him with stones, one at last thrust him through with a lance on the 21st December A.D. 68 at a spot in the neighbourhood of Mailápur still venerated

as S. Thomas' Mount. "That it is really the place," observes Bishop Heber, "I see no good reason for doubting; there is as fair historical evidence as the case requires, that S. Thomas preached the Gospel in India, and was martyred at a place called Mailápur." [Journal, vol. iii., p. 212. Ed. 4th]. And Dr. Buchanan, expresses his conviction "that we have as good authority for believing that the Apostle Thomas died in India, as that the Apostle Peter died at Rome." [Christian Researches, p. 134, Ed. 5th]. It is also interesting to note that so eminent an oriental scholar as the late Professor H. H. Wilson, while identifying the *Mihilarópya* of the Hitopadésa with Mailápur or S. Thomé near Madras, accords its value to the tradition which gives S. Thomas to India as its first Apostle. He says: "we need not be much at a loss for its identification, as the name approaches sufficiently to *Mihilapur*, *Meliapur* or S. Thomé, where our own records indicate a city of some consequence, in the beginning of the Christian era, as the scene of the labours and martyrdom of S. Thomas, occurrences very far from invalidated by any arguments yet adduced against the truth of the tradition." [Transactions of the R. A. Soc. vol. i. p. 161].

We will, therefore, now collect the evidence which exists for believing the mission of the Apostle to India.—

And I. It is not a mere isolated or local tradition on which this fact depends. As Asse-mann, an Orientalist of the highest authority, states the matter: "That S. Thomas was the Apostle of the Indies is attested by *all* ecclesiastical records—Greek, Latin, and Syriac." [Dissert de Syro-Nestorianis, tom. iv., p. 439]. The Chaldean ritual celebrates the Apostle thus: "By the blessed S. Thomas the Chinese and Cushites were converted to the truth. By the blessed S. Thomas the Indian idolatries were dissipated. By S. Thomas they received the virtue of baptism and the adoption of children. By him the kingdom of heaven penetrated into China." [Kesson's "*Cross and the Dragon*," pp. 4-5].

And the belief of Syrians, Arabs and Armenians, who have from time immemorial visited the shrine of S. Thomas on pilgrimage is not, we may suppose, to be lightly rejected. It was visited even by the ambassador of Alfred the Great from England, as we find recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle; "This year [A.D. 883] Sighelm and Athelstan carried to