

They informed him that they numbered thirty thousand, and that they kept themselves apart from their heathen neighbors as a special community. The following year, 1503, the Rajah of Cochin gave the Portuguese a piece of ground on which to build a fort, and this place soon afterward became a stronghold of the Romish religious orders in India.

Certain relics of St. Thomas are said to be in existence, and the miracles attributed to these relics are worthy of the most flourishing age of medieval superstition. One of these was to the effect that when the Indian bishops annually approached the apostle's shrine to present their offerings, he opened his hand and graciously received these, provided they were presented by orthodox believers, while he sternly withdrew his closed palm from all heretics! When many other absurd and degrading stories abounded, no wonder that the Christian community which delighted in such things gradually wasted away, till its influence on surrounding heathenism became a vanishing quantity.

There are historical notices carrying back the antiquity of the Malabar Christians to a very ancient date; but they possess two documents of the highest antiquity, which prove how very far back we must go to the time of their arrival in India. These documents are engraved plates of copper, supposed to be a thousand years old. One of these, written in Tamil, conveys a grant of land to a merchant who is supposed to have belonged to the Manichean sect. The other is written in Tamil-Malayalim, and also conveys a piece of land to a community connected with a church called Tarisa-palli, or Tarisa Church. These ancient documents show that in those remote times the Syrian Christians were a recognized community, to whom certain rights were accorded.

Unfortunately the intercourse of the Roman Catholic Church with the Syrian Christians is a long story of cruel persecution, in which the secular arm was invoked for the purpose of forcibly compelling submission to Rome, with the alternative of much suffering and sometimes even of death. Mar Atalla, one of the Syrian bishops, was first imprisoned at Goa, and then burned as a heretic in 1654. In 1700 another of their metrans or bishops, Mar Simon, fell into their hands, and was detained at Pondicherry in irons till his death. When the Portuguese had been ousted from Cochin by the Dutch there came relief from persecution in that locality; but the Syrians continued greatly destitute of books, of pastors, and of instruction, and their moral and spiritual tone was lowered through their intercourse with the Jesuits. The native rulers, too, were despotic and merciless, and things were altogether at a low ebb when, in 1795, Cochin surrendered to the British.

Without going further into the question of antiquity, suffice it to say that at the Council of Nice, 325 A.D., a bishop named John signed the decrees then passed as "Metropolitan of Persia and of Great India;" and about the year 200 A.D. Pantænus, who then presided over a college in Alexandria, is said to have himself gone to India and labored there; this