

Editor's Jottings

Early during the fortnight-long All-India Seminar on 'The Church in India Today,' Bangalore, May 1969, the present writer was approached by two well-known scholars of Kottayam with the request that he introduce a resolution on the need for permitting pastors of different Indian rites to attend to the spiritual needs of their own fold scattered throughout the country and even abroad. The necessary two-hundred-odd participants' signatures for eligibility to move the resolution had already been obtained. (There were 485 participants eligible to vote, including 2 cardinals, 14 archbishops, 47 bishops, 3 prefects apostolic, 4 exarchs ...) This writer introduced the resolution at 7 p.m. on the 24th of May. The discussion "did go through a period of apprehension" is how the official printed report *Ever Ancient Ever New* describes what then took place. In fact the debate boisterously proceeded past midnight till 2. a. m. the next day—with tiny breaks for supper, ice cream (11.50 p. m.), and black coffee (1 a. m.)—overrunning by six hours the allotted time. Finally a compromise resolution had to be moved by one of the seminar secretaries, Fr. Jonas Thaliath (afterwards bishop of Rajkot), which was accepted. "In the debate which preceded this, important people had said that the acceptance of the resolution would be an event of Pentecostal importance for the future of the Catholic Church in India. Great thanksgiving and rejoicing followed the acceptance of the resolution with a unanimous vote," *My Impressions of the All-India Seminar*, N.C. Sargant, Anglican bishop of Mysore.

In the course of the tense hours of argumentation and controversy this writer needed some clarifications on certain aspects of Indian church history. Unfortunately, it transpired to one's disappointment and surprise that many august persons present did not have any clear idea about even the major developments in the history of Christianity in India. Then and there was conceived the idea of putting together a booklet on the subject for the use of individuals in the same plight.

These lines are penned here in deference to the persistent and specific requests made by a large number of important persons curious to know something of the inspiration, methods, and developments which led to the publication of the two companion series viz. the *T En.* and the *Classics* and to the commencement of related projects, especially because no introductions had appeared in the second and first volumes of the *T. En.*, and the editor had appended his own name to no article therein.

In those days the (former) Cochin State archaeological museum was surviving in an upstairs *verandah* of the Trichur town hall, which edifice also housed the town library. Loitering there one day soon after the seminar the writer came upon a dozen or so annual administration reports of the royal Cochin archaeologist which were still on sale for annas two and three apiece. The reports made a deep impression on this writer and influenced him to visit the churches in and around Kanjur. The art, architecture, and artifacts come across launched the writer on a voyage of discovery into the realms and beauties of Kerala's own art and architecture which he is still enjoying with unabated enthusiasm. These incessant wanderings convinced the writer that the envisaged work must surely contain lots and lots of photographs, maps, and other graphics, sadly lacking in the works even of the best writers till that date.

By this time the original intention to write a mere booklet had grown into the decision to produce a full-fledged book.

The Thomas story had always fascinated this writer as it had fascinated every other young Christian of Kerala. Many hours of thought had been spent by one on the various and vexatious aspects of the Thomas question, and solutions which appeared original and even brilliant had been arrived at. But often when perusing some old masters it was found that the same or similar solutions and conclusions had occurred to their authors travelling more or less the same routes. This convinced the compiler that if the work done by earlier writers were better known, and readily available, much scholarly energy, time, and money could be saved to better purpose and scholars beginning to research on related problems could build on the work of those who had gone before, instead of doing the same work over and over again in fact, greater heights of scholarship and knowledge could be scaled standing as it were on the shoulders of the pioneers. (This was one of the considerations that prompted the inclusion of an item reproductions from the classics in the scheme published in early 1970 of the *St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India.*)

It was further observed that even doctoral scholars often could not find the complete books from which they frequently quoted depending generally only on the very same passages quoted repeatedly by earlier writers. Such hackneyed quotations in many cases had, in passing from author to author and printer to printer, lost much in accuracy. Also it was noticed that English-speaking students even when working at Rome or Louvain or Lisbon were mostly making use of material from English books only. And for students in India even such books were practically out of reach because not even the three or four best libraries in the country own more than a handful of the thirty seven titles here included/represented. These and other considerations went into the decision to reproduce as many classics as possible wholly or partially as part of the *T. En.*, specially for the use of readers in India

Before long it became apparent that one could not at all by oneself do justice to the innumerable and varied topics which had to be covered in depth in a work of the kind now planned. Hence it was decided to seek the cooperation of the best scholars in each area to contribute their special knowledge in their respective fields of specialisation. Thus gradually the concept of the *Thomas Encyclopaedia* evolved and matured. To help and encourage further studies on various topics connected with the history and development of Christianity in India it was also decided to add, at least to each major article, detailed bibliographies and exhaustive

end-notes. And instead of the usual dictionary type entries the, perhaps, more appropriate chronological or other such arrangement of Major Articles was resorted to. There were also Minor Articles, alphabetically arranged, for quick reference. This Macropædia-Micropaedia arrangement was soon found to be more useful by other encyclopaedists also.

The articles and illustrations for all the volumes of the *T. En.* were ready more or less by Easter 1971. But the work could not be produced as scheduled chiefly owing to lack of finances. To enable as many publications as possible to come out for the 19th Thomas Sheela Death Centenary celebrations the collected materials were given wide publicity through handouts, magazines, and offprints; and the 'Panorama of Indian Christianity' Exhibitions that were organised by the *T. En.* at Ernakulam, Kottayam, Bangalore, Madras, and in a few cities abroad in 1971 and '72. Leaving aside the already printed portions of the first volume of the *T. En.* the second volume was published in April, 1973. The printing of the first volume could be completed only in February 1982. The unbearable financial position had compelled the organisers to detach the 'Reproductions from the Classics' section from the scheme of the *T. En.*

The attempt is made in this volume through the fifteen classics wholly reproduced, to (trace back to their sources the traditions, customs, cultural trends, and historical insights relating to the Nazranies (or the St. Thomas Christians as they are more popularly known in the west) of Malabar in India. Here the origins of those sources, and development from the first crude expression of the idea to its streamlined researched modern form may be seen. In order to make the book more complete, many extracts have been added from twenty-two other works, either because they shed light on some particular aspect, or because they contain a well-known expression of some line of thought, or because they relate to the development of some special group, sect, or denomination. Both the complete *Classics* and the *Extracts* have been generally arranged in the chronological order of their publication, except in the case of two works where the date of (the original publication was in dispute. In a few instances the selections lead back to the 17th and 18th centuries; although many quotations, foot-notes, and references obtain from the very days of Christ and even earlier.

In its original conception, as a part of the *St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India* it was intended to include all Classics which recur frequently as sources of notes and references, and are in the constant quotidian use, of scholars and researchers. It has been already intimated that, as the work proceeded, its scope expanded somewhat, and the temptation was there to introduce sundry subjects which may appear hardly to fall within the original scope of such a work. Hence this companion series of the *T. En.* includes a vast quantity of material not properly gradable and to quote a librarian, 'difficult if not impossible to come across elsewhere'.

Just what is and what is not a Classic is often the subject of learned controversy. We have Twain's "A classic - something that everybody wants to have read and nobody wants to read" at one end, and at the other end the definition given by the youngest dictionary two years old from the oldest publisher, "A classic is a piece of writing which is well-known and of a high standard and lasting value". But this compiler has not concerned himself with finely drawn distinctions. He has permitted himself the widest latitude of inclusion, and has not disdained the lowest sources, as every user of the volume will quickly discover.

For various reasons of time, bulk, price, general utility especially in India and certain other countries, &c. works in languages other than English have been excluded. Again while some of the books chosen are quite irreplaceable one could have perhaps chosen in a few cases certain other books equally suitable instead of the books that have actually been printed. But these selections were finally decided upon as fulfilling the purpose as admirably as any other combination or permutation of books. The classics have been faithfully reproduced, retaining even the mistakes in the original works in the interests of authenticity.

It should not at all be inferred from what has been said above that it was from the abundance of the editor's scholarship that the *T. En.* and the *Indian Church History Classics* were conceived, compiled, and produced. On the other hand it was because, endeavouring to study and understand the history and culture of Christianity in India for their own sake, in their various phases and aspects, in a non-formal ambience, without any academic assistance, the editor could fully understand and appreciate the difficulties faced and the requirements felt by fresh scholars entering the field, that he could attempt to place before them what they would most need. However it is a matter of satisfaction that having collected, translated, corrected, edited, researched, and proof-read hundreds of articles spanning more than a million words and a half already printed, and having visited scores of libraries and archives and museums all over the country and all over the world, and having spent hundreds of hours in conversation with the greatest scholars, in related spheres, and having stayed in innumerable key sites in his photography expeditions, the editor was perhaps in an advantageous position to undertake the tasks that he did undertake. The months and years spent in the company of artists, archaeologists, cartographers, designers, printers, camera and scanner technicians, blockmakers, engravers, computer addicts, etc. also stood him in good stead in the performance of the various jobs. That is the most that could be claimed in this regard.

In so far as the two sets of books are meant to be of assistance to those who were not fortunate enough to afford to spend as much time as the compiler on the study of the subject, no effort has been spared to include as much material as possible within the limits prescribed by the budget - inviting many reviewers', often just, ire for the inequality of the quality of the contributions, tautology,

reiteration, overlapping ... in their various guises and names. A certain amount of overlapping was inevitable to ensure the ecumenical nature of the work in intent and content and to cover the same subject area from various angles for better comprehension and greater thoroughness.

The organisers, the publisher's, and the editor's hearts swell with gratitude for the great encouragement received from ecclesiastical dignitaries, the clergy and the laity; from the S. Oriental Congregation, the Missio, the S. Congregation Propaganda Fide, and the Archdiocese of Köln in the form of supportive gestures, and from many generous hosts in far away lands and other climes; and from many many others in the work of the *T. En.* from the very time its publication was announced more than a quarter century ago. Thoughts of the respect, regard, and recognition shown by librarians, the press and other media, governments, universities, research institutions and organisations, and our subscribers and readers and especially by the CBCI, the KCBC, the SMBC, and the CRI, and the friendly nuncios truly make us humble. Our thanks are due in a large measure also to the patron, vice-patron, members of the board of editorial consultants, contributors, printers, and a vast number of others connected with the *T. En.* which could not be expressed in just a few words. As we have expressed our indebtedness to our well-wishers in greater detail in the printed and widely circulated speech of the editor delivered on the occasion of the preparatory gathering 'To Thank and to Remember' held in connection with the commencement of the silver jubilee celebrations of the *T. En.* on 1 April, 1997 we may be allowed to terminate that matter here. A word of special thanks however to friends of the older and younger generations who have contributed the special introductions. Each except one has at least one doctoral degree, and they together represent not less than three centuries of Church History teaching in the best institutions and have between them authored at least a hundred books and have a thousand scholarly papers to their credit. Some of the nearest and dearest at home whose sacrifices were great all along may prefer to go unmentioned. We acknowledge our thanks to those who permitted us to use copyright material for the *Classics*. Where we could not obtain such clearance in time for some reason or other, we acknowledge the legal rights of such copyright holders and crave their indulgence for any unintentional infringement of their rights.

It will not be necessary for the editor to dwell on the many difficulties he has had to encounter in pursuing his largely solitary labours, practically unsupported by various assistants who usually lighten the toil of encyclopaedists and lexicographers. Those who understand what it is to be a pioneer in any such area, to be as it were the first to break and clear the ground over a meagerly trodden field will doubtless, in their candour, appreciate at its full value the labour undergone in carrying these volumes to completion. They will also be prepared to expect inequality in execution, and many defects and inconsistencies throughout the whole body of the works. No apology need, therefore, be made for these imperfections.

"Our Church and State are greatly indebted, I should say, to Prof. Menachery, under whose initiative and persevering hard work a number of pioneering research-based publications and projects have seen the light of day. like Veda-Vyasa he had brought together almost all the information that existed as legend, story, fact, philosophy or whatever about Indian Christianity into an ordered whole for the first time in his much acclaimed *Christian Encyclopaedia of India*" —Cardinal Padiyara, the first Major Archbishop.

"Where Universities and Governments have failed, the loving labour of a few has triumphed."—M. G. S. Narayanan in the *Mathrubhoomi* Weekly.

"This Encyclopaedia is a tool worth having for any library, for any scholar interested in the history of Christianity for anyone interested in understanding India and its religious heritage. Prof. George Menachery has really achieved a tour de force in bringing all this material together and putting out a well printed Encyclopaedia which is both ecumenical and reliable. I commend it to you unhesitatingly."—Metropolitan Dr Paul Verghese, sometime president of the WCC.

Such words perhaps are sufficient reward for the trials and tribulations endured for three decades.

Now that a major portion of the heavy financial liabilities incurred has been settled through a number of drastic steps—at one time there were more than half a dozen suits filed by our not so patient creditors—our thoughts went back to the *Classics*. A sort of blind optimism or foolhardy trust in our celestial and also terrestrial well wishers, which has developed in us down the three decades, alone gives us the courage to go forward with the *Classics* and the remaining volumes of the *Thomas Encyclopaedia*. Here we are.

Ollur, Thrissur

21 November, 1997

George Menachery