ART. XXVII.—*Notes on Malayalam Literature.* By T. K. KRISHNA MENON, B.A., M.R.A.S.

MALAYALAM is the language of the south-west of the Madras Presidency. It is the third most important language of the Presidency, the first and the second being Tamil and Telugu respectively. It is spoken in Malabar, Cochin, and Travancore. Out of a total of 5,932,207 inhabitants of these parts, 5,409,350 persons are those who speak Malayalam. These countries, taken as a whole, are bounded on the north by South Canara, on the east by the far-famed Malaya range of mountains, on the south by the Indian Ocean, and on the west by the Arabian Sea.

The earliest Malayalam writing of which we have any knowledge was in *Vatteluthu* characters. This was subsequently modified into *Kōleluthu*. The present script is called *Malayalam Grantha*.

No sketch of Malayalam literature can be complete which does not make mention of the Malayalees who have won renown by their works in Sanskrit.

Kerala claims among her sons VARARUCI, the great progenitor of astronomical science in Malabar, and BHARTṚUHARI, the renowned author of the three Śatakams. The early literary history of the Malayalam language contains so many stories about them that it would be impossible for any one to believe that they were not Malayalees. They may be placed in the seventh century. The great theologian and philosopher, SANKARĀCĀRYA, was born in the eighth century, at Kalati, on the banks of the Ālwaye river, in Travancore territory. *Yudhīshthira Vijaya*, a *Kāvya* of a peculiar structure, is the work of VĀSU BHATTATHIRI. He was, like Sankarācārya, a Namburi, which means a Malayalee Vedic Brahman. The *Kāvya-mālā* Editors have done an injustice to Malabar

by ascribing the authorship of this poem to a native of Kashmīr. Karingampīlī Namburi, the author of *Suka Sandēsam*, lived about A.D. 1480. He gives us vivid sketches of many parts of Malabar which are dear to every Malayalee. VILVAMANGALATH SWĀMĪĀR has written a Kāvya of singular interest. It is in Prākṛit, and every verse serves as an example of a separate rule on grammar. Kāḱassēri Bhattathiri, Mānavikrama the Strong, and Eḷaya Rāja 'the learned' of Kodungallore, were also natives of Malayalam. MĒPPUTHUR NĀRAYANA BHATTATHIRI, a poet, grammarian and scholar of unquestioned ability, wrote, in 1587, *Nārāyanīyam*, which treats of the life and teachings of Sṛī Krishṇa, and is, more or less, an abridgement of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. His grammatical work *Prakriyā Sarvasva* is much more lucid than Bhaṭṭōji Dīkshita's *Sidhānta Kaumudī*.

MĀNAVĒDAN RĀJA composed the *Mānavēda Campu*, which treats of Mahā-Bhārata legends not treated of in the *Bhārata Campu* by Ānantakavi. MAḶAMANGALAM NAMBŪRI was the author of the famous *Bhānom* called after his name.

ARŪR BHATTATHIRI produced *Uttaranaishadham*, a complement to the work of Sṛī Harsha. K. Rāma Warriar, who may be appropriately styled the Mallinātha of modern times, has written various commentaries. The *Visākhā Vijāyam* and *Thulābhāra Satakam* of H.H. Kerala Varma, Valia Koil Tampuran of Travancore, are interesting examples of Sanskrit as it is now written in the Malayalam country, and his nephew and pupil Mr. A. R. Rajaraja Varma, M.A., bids fair to become a good second to his uncle. Mr. Kochunni Tampuran of Kodungallor's *Vipra Sandēsam* and *Bhānam* should be mentioned in this connection. Mr. Mānavikraman Ētan Rāja, of Calicut, is a good scholar and poet. Mr. Punnasseri Neelakandha Sarma edits a Sanskrit journal which reflects great credit on his Sanskrit scholarship and philanthropy. The Sanskrit College and the Text-book Committee of Travancore show the profound interest which the Sovereigns of the Model State take in the cause of Sanskrit and Malayalam.

It is a matter for congratulation to the Malayalees that we see the beginnings of Malayalam prose literature as early as A.D. 200. Deeds then granted to the Jews and Syrian Christians by contemporary kings are written in prose, and there are court chronicles which claim to go back to those days. Many songs, too, are supposed to have been composed at this period for the people to sing when they worship, when they plant, and when they reap. Some of them, and also certain early ballads, are very popular even in these days. Of these the most popular are those that sing of the deeds of Thatchōli Kunhi Othēnan. Kunhi Othēnan was a Nāyar, which is the common appellation of the ordinary middle-class Hindu of Malabar. Nāyars, it may be said parenthetically, form the major portion of the population of Keralam. Othēnan, according to the ballad, was a man of fine physique and skilled in the use of arms. He went about redressing wrongs and helping fallen humanity, and is said to have met with his death by a treacherous shot.

The history of the Malayalam language really commences, however, with *Ramācaritam*, the oldest Malayalam poem still in existence. This is the work of a Mahā Rāja of Travancore, who lived in the thirteenth century. Another work of possibly the same period is KANNASSA PANIKER'S *Rāmāyaṇam*. And we hear of many Nambūries who then wrote works on astrology, architecture, ethics, grammar, and other subjects. But little is known of them now save their names and the names of their works.

The Nambūries, at that time, certainly held a practical monopoly over learning, and created all sorts of obstacles in the way of the education of the commonalty.

Cherussēri Nambūri, the morning-star of Malayalam song, wrote his *Krishna Gātha* in the fifteenth century. This work, like almost all the poetical pieces of Malayalam, is written in what is called *Mani-pravāḷam*, which means a string of gems. It receives its name from being composed in a mixture of Malayalam and Sanskrit. The addition, here and there, of common Sanskrit words only gives grace and majesty to Malayalam, which otherwise would be bald.

The metres of Malayalam *ślokas* are the same as those of Sanskrit ones; and those that are peculiar to the language, as in the case of the famous works of Thujan and Kunjan, are determined by the number of *mātrās*.

Kathakalī, or the Malayalam play, is one of the most intensely national departments of our literature. These are written in mixed verse and prose, and are founded on episodes of the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata. The verses simply connect the incidents of the story, while the prose portions represent the words of the characters of the play. The actors, representing the several personages, generally, have all sorts of paints on their faces and are gaudily dressed. By means of certain signs made by their hands and by the expressions on their face, they convey to the audience the meaning of the prose portions when they are sung to the accompaniment of drums and other instruments.

The poet who invented this sort of dramatic composition is one Rāja of the Kottarakara family in Travancore. The subjects of his dramas are episodes of the Rāmāyaṇa. There is a tradition connected with the origin of *Kathakalī*. The then Zamorin of Calicut, for one reason or another, refused to send his troupe of artistes to the southern parts to enact *Krishnāttam*. The inventor of *Kathakalī* produced his first work to make light of the decision of his northern compeer.

The most famous writer of Malayalam is perhaps THUN-JATHU RĀMANUJAN EḷUTHACHAN, a man of the Nāyar caste, who opposed himself openly to the prejudices and intolerance of the Brahmans. He is said to have declared it his intention to raise Malayalam to an equality with the sacred language of the priests. In the prosecution of this purpose, he made, in the native tongue, adaptations from the Rāmāyaṇam, the Mahābhārata, and the Bhagavatham. These are called the *Kiḷippāttūs* (parrot-songs) of Eḷuthachan, who was the first to introduce this sort of composition into the Malayalam language. They receive this name, perhaps, from the introductory invocation, which is to the bird of the goddess of learning.

He wrote many other works besides those already referred to. He had several disciples, too, who carried on his work. In this connection, reference must be made to the name of EḷUVATHU NĀNUKUTTI MENON of Chittur, who, by his translation of *Ēkadasa*, has shown how much he has caught of the literary spirit and religious fervour of his great fore-runner, Eḷuthachan.

KĒRALA VARMA RĀJA, of North Kottayam, is the author of a *Rāmāyaṇa* and of a *Vairāgya Candrodaya*. The brother of this Rāja was also a gifted man, and wrote four Malayalam dramas, called *Kathakalīs*, some poems, and a grammar.

The name of MAḤAMANGALAM NAMBŪRI was previously mentioned in connection with his Sanskrit work. He deserves this second reference for his great work in Malayalam called *Bhāshānaishadha Campu*. In the world of literature he is a great man indeed. His description of the wailings and wanderings of Damayanti after she was deserted by Nala is much admired. But he is very monotonous in his verse and prose, and is not free from the prevailing defect of many Malayalee poets of using an unnecessarily large number of Sanskrit words in their Malayalam works.

Thullāls (literally dances) are sung to the accompaniment of music, pantomime, and dancing. There are three classes of *Thullāls*: *Ōttam*, *Sithankan*, and *Parayan*; but, as the poems of the first class predominate, poems of the other classes are also termed *Ōttams*. They are based on the episodes of *Bhāratam* and *Rāmāyaṇam* mostly. *Ōttam Thullāl*, as the name indicates (*Ōttam* = 'running'), consists of a variety of rapid metres well suited for amusing narratives. *Ōttams* are vigorous, *Sithankans* narrative, and *Parayans* pathetic in style. *Nalacarita* and *Kirātha* are instances of the first class, *Kalyāṇasaugandhika* is an example of the second set, while *Gajēndramōksha* and *Sabhāprarēsa* form instances of the third sort of *Thullāls*. All these *Thullāls* referred to are the works of Kalakkath Kuñjan Nambyār, who invented this sort of composition. Besides fifty or sixty *Thullāls*, he

has composed nine Malayalam dramas, a *Pañcatantra*, a *Srikrishṇacarita*, and parrot-songs and poems in different kinds of metres.

Kuñjan Nambyār is, by the unanimous verdict of his countrymen, second only to Thunjath Eḷuthachan. Patricians and plebeians united in honouring him. He was under the special patronage of the Mahā Rāja, who began to reign in Travancore in the year A.D. 1758, and who, besides being a man of letters himself, encouraged literary men in all parts of Malabar.

Another writer of the same period is UNNĀYI WARRIER, who wrote the *Nalacarita Kathakālī*.