

THE CHRISTIAN PURANNA OF FATHER THOMAS STEPHENS, S.J. Edited by JOSEPH L. SALDANHA, B.A. Mangalore, 1907.

This is a worthy memorial of a remarkable man, regarding whose life strangely little is known. In a very interesting "biographical note" Mr. Saldanha has collected from various sources all the information that he could gather regarding Thomas Stephens, and has corrected some erroneous statements made by previous writers, among them even Mr. A. F. Pollard, whose brief notice in the supplement to the *Dictionary of National Biography* is, however, mainly accurate. It is certainly no credit to Englishmen that to so few of them is even the name of Thomas Stephens known. As an example of this, I may mention that the British Museum Library possesses not a single copy of any of the original editions of Stephens's works, and the solitary book of his that it owns, a modern reprint of his grammar of the Koṅkaṇi language, is entered only under the Portuguese equivalent of his name, "Thomaz Estevão," his real name being absolutely ignored! And yet Thomas Stephens was, as Mr. Albert Gray puts it in his translation of Pyrard (Hakluyt Society's edition), "of all Englishmen *primus in Indis*," and during the forty years that he lived and laboured there was on several occasions of service to his fellow-countrymen (such as Fitch and his companions in 1583) and to other Europeans (such as Pyrard in 1608). Stephens's very birthplace is a matter of dispute, though Mr. Saldanha gives it as Bulston, in Wiltshire, which seems the most probable. He was born about 1549, and according to Hakluyt, was educated at New College, Oxford, but of this there is no proof, and it is probable that Hakluyt has confused Thomas with his brother Richard. I pass over other details of his early life, and only mention that, having joined the Jesuit order at Rome in 1578, Stephens sailed for India in one of the five Portuguese ships that

left Lisbon on 4th April, 1579, and reached Goa on 24th October of the same year. Of this voyage he wrote (on 10th November, 1579) a long and most interesting account in a letter to his father (a leading merchant in London), which Hakluyt fortunately got hold of and printed in his *Principall Navigations*, etc. (By the way, Mr. Saldanha and other writers do not seem to have noticed what a narrow escape this document had of being lost, for in a letter to Hakluyt, dated "Alepo, the 28. of May, 1583," John Newbery wrote: "The letter which you deliuered me for to copy out, that came from Mr. Thomas Steuens in Goa . . . I brought thence with me among other writings vnawares, the which I haue sent you here inclosed.") This letter, which Mr. Saldanha reprints in full (the spelling, unfortunately, modernized) is said by some writers to have exercised a great influence in calling the attention of the English to the importance of trade in India, though there seems to be no proof of this. At any rate, Hakluyt seems to have considered the details it contained regarding the variation of the needle, etc., of such value that in his dedicatory epistle to Sir Robert Cecil he specially calls attention to them. Except for a few lines at the end, this letter contains no observations on India, but the writer doubtless gave these in his next communication to his father. Unhappily, however, all his other letters have disappeared, except one in Latin, addressed to his brother Richard, then a doctor of theology in Paris, and dated from Goa on the 24th of October, 1583. Only a copy of this, however, and a mutilated one at that, exists in the National Library of Brussels. Of this letter Mr. Saldanha gives an English translation; and its perusal makes us regret all the more keenly that we have not had preserved to us, in epistolatory or book form, the great mass of information concerning the people and things in India that this acute observer must have stored up during the forty years of

his residence there. The bulk of the letter gives an account (the first part of which is missing) of the massacre in 1583 of five Jesuit fathers at Cuncolim, containing details not mentioned in *The First Christian Mission to the Great Mogul*, by Father Francis Goldie, who does not seem to have known of the existence of this document. In the last paragraph Stephens, in response to a request by his brother, makes a few observations on the climate of India, and gives a brief description of the coco palm. Among other things, he says: "It yields oil, wine (*vinum*), milk (*lac*), syrup (*mel*), sugar, and vinegar." Mr. Saldanha, however, translates *vinum* by 'liquor,' and, more oddly still, *lac* by 'toddy.' Less than a month after the above letter was written, there arrived at Goa from Ormuz Ralph Fitch and his three English companions, who had been arrested as spies, and were now straightway clapped into prison, where they would have remained, perhaps for years, had it not been for the good offices of Father Stephens, through whose influence they were released on bail, three of them soon afterwards making their escape. Of the doings of Father Stephens during the remainder of his life we know very little, only that, as Mr. Saldanha says: "Having, for a time, been Minister of the Professed House at Goa and Rector of Salsette College for five years, and temporary Socius to the Visitor, Fr. Stephens, or Padre Estevam, as he was henceforth to be known, spent the remaining forty years of his sacred ministry chiefly among the Brahmin Catholics of Salsette." Of his death we have no record; but it is presumed to have taken place in Goa, in 1619, since the governor Fernão de Albuquerque, writing to the King of Spain on 14th February, 1620, casually refers to a statement said to have been made by "an English priest of holy life, while on his death-bed in the Professed House of the Society in this city." That he was buried in Goa it is reasonable to suppose, but the place of his sepulture is unknown.

Thomas Stephens appears to have acquired a thorough mastery of Marāṭhī and Koṅkaṇī, and probably also of Sanskrit. Mr. Pollard, in his notice of Stephens in the *Dict. Nat. Biog.*, says that the learned father “was the first to make a scientific study of Canarese, the vernacular Malabar tongue [*sic* !],” that he also learnt Hindūstānī, and that in both these languages he published manuals of piety and grammar. But there is no evidence of Stephens’s having had any knowledge of Hindūstānī, or of his having written any books in that language. And, with regard to the first part of the statement quoted above, it is a blunder (into which various writers have fallen, including Mr. Albert Gray, in his *Pyrard*, ii, 270, note), founded on a misapprehension of the meaning of the words of Ribadaneira—“*Primus Canarinum idioma in regulas ordinemque digessit.*” There is no reference here to Canarese, but to “the dialect of the Canarins,” a very different matter, for, as is duly recorded in *Hobson-Jobson*, s.v. “Canarin,” this word was applied by the Portuguese to the Koṅkaṇī inhabitants of Goa and their language. As a fact, Father Stephens translated into ‘Bramana-Canarim’ a catechism of Christian doctrine, which was published at Rachol in 1622; and wrote a grammar of the Koṅkaṇī language, which, after lying in manuscript for many years, was added to by Father Diogo Ribeiro, S.J., and was published at Rachol in 1640. (In his *Tentative List of Books*, etc., Dr. A. C. Burnell enters this work with a Latin title under the name of “Busten, T. S. de, S.J.,” and with a Portuguese title under “Estevaõ, P. Thomas, S.J.,” in ignorance, apparently, of the fact that “T. S. de Busten” was identical with “P. Thomas Estevaõ,” and that the author’s real name was Thomas Stephens.) A reprint of this grammar, with a lengthy introductory essay on the Koṅkaṇī language, by Mr. J. H. da Cunha Rivara, was published at Goa in 1857, only two copies of the original edition being now in existence. (This reprint is registered

in Burnell's *List* under "Grammatica," with no reference to either of the preceding entries, though under "Estevaõ" the reprint is recorded.) Of this work Mr. Saldanha says: "This first grammar of an Indian tongue by a European must be regarded as a highly creditable attempt, and is undoubtedly a most interesting performance."

With neither of the above works, however, are we at present concerned, but with a third and literally monumental production of Father Stephens's, namely, his so-called "Christian Puráña." This is an epic, divided into two parts, the first dealing with Old Testament history and the second with the life of Christ. It is written in four-line verse, the *Pailem Puráña* (First Puráña) consisting of 36 cantos containing, in all, 4,181 strophes, and the *Dussarem Puráña* (Second Puráña) of 59 cantos, arranged in four subdivisions, and containing 6,781 strophes; or a grand total of 10,962 strophes. The first edition of this enormous poem appears to have been published in 1616 at Rachol, a second edition in 1649 (where, is not known), and a third in 1654 at Goa. And yet (and this is the most extraordinary fact in connection with this work), "barring a few manuscript copies, prized as heirlooms in the ancient families in South Canara, and, perhaps, a few more in Goa and thereabouts, no printed copy of *The Christian Puráña* is known to be extant in India or in Europe." Surely such a wholesale disappearance of three editions of a printed book is unique in the history of literature? The explanations tendered by Mr. Saldanha in his lengthy and most interesting Introduction are not very satisfactory, and he is strangely at fault in conjecturing "that possibly the so-called printed editions were no more than lithographed ones—lithography was certainly cheaper and more common than printing in those days—and, for this reason, necessarily few and rare." I would simply remark that lithography was not invented before the

end of the eighteenth century! Fortunately, however, manuscript copies of the work have been preserved here and there on the west coast of India; and a suggestion having been made a few years ago by Mr. J. A. Saldanha, sub-judge of Alibagh, that the epic should be reprinted, the idea was taken up by some enthusiasts, manuscripts were obtained and collated, the text was copied, the editing was undertaken by Mr. J. L. Saldanha of St. Aloysius's College, Mangalore, other scholars gave their willing help, the expense of printing was guaranteed by Mr. Simon Alvares of Mangalore, and as a result we have this handsome, well-printed quarto volume of some 700 pages, 600 of which are occupied by the text of the epic and a glossary, the other 100 pages containing the Contents, Biographical Notes, Introduction, etc. In the Introduction, besides giving an outline of the poem, Mr. Saldanha deals at length with the language in which the poem is written and the system of transliteration adopted by the writer. To discuss these here would occupy too much space, and I must therefore refer those interested in the subject to the book itself, which is certainly a most interesting one, creditable to all concerned in its production.

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