

## The Christian Inheritance.

The following is the letter addressed by the Rt. Rev. Dr. Thomas Kurialacherry, Bishop of Changanacherry, to the President of the Travancore Legislative Council:—

“In connection with the Christian Inheritance Bill, now before the Legislative Council, I have the honour to bring to your kind notice the following facts:—

(1) The Syrian Christian Community of Travancore has been in existence for many centuries, forming as it does at present, one of the foremost Communities in the State. The law of inheritance amongst them has been alike clear and satisfactory all along. From time immemorial, the same custom has been maintained intact, property passing on to the male issue, females having no share therein. This fact was referred to so early as 1599 by Archbishop Alexis, in the famous Synod of Diamper, where he says that “only males inherit the property of their father, females have no share thereof”. (Vide Decree XX Article IX).

(2) Another source of important evidence is the “Il Viaggis all Indie Orientali” a book written in Italian by the first Carmelite Missionary Bishop of Verapoly and printed in Venice in 1683 A. D. The keen insight of the writer and the long period during which he closely worked among the Syrians of Malabar fully enabled him to give such a vivid description of what prevailed during his time, that I quote his words below:—

“The sons inherit the property of the father equally. The daughters are given dowries, for which no security is given by the husband. Nor does he use it at will without the consent of the wife or her relatives. Should she die without issue, the dowry is returned to the nearest relations. A widow manages the property without curators or trustees. But she cannot incur any debt without the consent of the nearest relations.” (Vide Book ii chapter V on the Customs &c of the St. Thomas Christians.)

3. Hundreds of years have passed, yet this system has proved so satisfactory that even to this day, people have strictly conformed to it. The documents in private families, (such as sale-deeds and partition-deeds) the various Settlement records, not to speak of Church documents, will all bear out the truth of the above remark, females figuring nowhere therein.

4. Under the proposed change, far from promoting peace and good-will, the moment that a girl is married, she will become a cause of rupture. Her husband and other new relations would be keen about separating her share from the main estate; partition and litigation naturally follow, and united family existence altogether vanishes. The innovation is quite foreign to the spirit of the people here, though it may be all right in European countries. To force it suddenly upon the unprepared Community will be felt as a severe shock.

5. I submit therefore that the prevailing custom has the sanctity of age; it is quite in keeping with the sentiments of the people; it has been tried for hundreds of years and proved thoroughly satisfactory and it affords a reasonable safeguard for the retention of an estate in the family of its original acquirer. The dowry system, as it is, sufficiently protects the interests of women. May I request, in conclusion, that you will kindly see, in the enactment of the law, the following points receive due attention.

(i) Daughters to have right to maintenance and right for dowry at the time of marriage but nothing more.

(ii) A widow whether she be a mother or not be allowed decent maintenance from out of the property of her husband terminable by her remarriage or by her death, whichever takes place earlier.

(iii) A widower to have no title to the property of his deceased wife.

(iv) Maternal relations be not permitted any claim in the family estate.

6. The importance of the present situation and the keen sense that our benign Government is very anxious to know the real interests of its devoted and loyal subjects form my only reasons for having brought the above remarks to your notice.”