

A HUNDREDFOLD HARVEST

A Hundredfold Harvest

A Survey of Mission Work in Travancore,
South India, in the Early 1900s

Heinrich Nau
Missionary in Trivandrum,
Travancore, South India

Translated by
MATTHEW CARVER



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HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

BY THE TIME THIS BOOKLET was published in German in 1913 through the initiative of J. A. Friedrich, the mission director of Missouri Evangelical Lutheran India Mission (MELIM), the work of missionaries in India had expanded from Krishnagiri in 1894 to the southwestern region of the country, an area called Travancore. We are familiar with many of the names of these first missionaries because today many of their descendents live among us: A. Lutz, T. Gutknecht, A. Hübener, H. Nau, G. Hübener, J. Harms, and F. Zucker. The Travancore region boasts the cities of Trivandrum (Thiruvananthapuram) and Nagercoil, where these missionaries were actively bringing the Gospel to a Hindu population.

When initially published, this book served the purpose of informing the readers back home—especially those who were the patrons and donors of MELIM—about the specific context of the mission field, including the vegetation and topography and, most important, the people who lived there. Thus chapter 1 reports on the beauty of Travancore’s fauna and flora; chapter 2 introduces the people of the region, who are divided among the castes of Brahmins, Nairs, Shanars, and the two lower castes, the Pulayars and Paraiyars. Chapter 3 focuses on the buildings, the foods, and the clothing. Finally, chapter 4 addresses the readers back home for whom missionary Heinrich Nau wrote this report, encouraging them to support the mission in the Travancore region and beyond.

This report is an important part of the history of the mission work of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in its early stages. Today that work has blossomed into an independent India Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELC), boasting its own seminary in Nagercoil (Concordia Theological Seminary), which officially celebrated its centennial on September 29, 2024.

In honor of the missionaries and the IELC, this booklet deserves to be published and read anew. Thanks to Concordia Historical Institute and Concordia Publishing House for making this brief yet historical jewel available for the first time to an English-speaking audience.

Klaus Detlev Schulz
The Roemer-Baese Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions
Dean of Graduate Studies
Director of PhD in Missiology Program and of International Studies
Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne
September 15, 2024

In Memoriam

Phyllis E. Buehner Duesenberg

(February 20, 1933–June 12, 2019)

Member of the Concordia Historical Institute Board of Governors
(November 2008–June 2019)

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A Hundredfold Harvest

A Survey of Mission Work in Travancore,
South India, in the Early 1900s



His Highness the Maharaja, Sree Bala Rama Varma of Travancore.

FOREWORD

AT THE SECOND GENERAL CONFERENCE, which was held at the beginning of October 1912 in Nagercoil, Travancore, when we discussed how we might stir up and promote an interest in our Indian mission among our Christians, the undersigned encouraged our dear missionaries to produce some interesting writings on the land and people, customs and traditions, as well as our mission work in India. These tracts could then be made available to our mission supporters, either in our newspapers or even in booklet or book form. In early December, when I visited our missionary, H. Nau, and his station in Trivandrum, in the evenings he read to me a few pages of one such article for my evaluation. What I heard pleased me so much that I strongly encouraged him to finish what he had started as soon as possible, according to the plan. The present book is the fruit of his diligent labor.

I have read the book with very great interest, and it recalls to my mind most vividly so much that I saw, heard, and experienced in India. "Travancore and its inhabitants" are presented to the reader here in both words and illustrations in a vivid, tangible, and captivating way. And this will certainly be interesting to our dear mission supporters, since a number of our missionaries work here in Travancore, specifically, Missionaries A. Hübener, T. Gutknecht, H. Nau, G. Hübener, F. Zucker, J. Harms, and A. Lutz. These brothers are working in twenty-seven different localities. In eighteen mission schools, 537 children are being taught by twenty-five native teachers. Already 290 persons have been incorporated into the church of Jesus Christ through Holy Baptism. The missionaries have instructed 1,179 persons as catechumens. In the Institute in Nagercoil, sixty boys are being instructed, of whom most, God willing, will someday enter the service of our mission as teachers, catechists, or evangelists.

In this booklet, the reader is given only a brief introduction to the land and the people living there, and thus, as it were, of the workshop and the material with which our mission labors. If it strikes a chord, other booklets or books will, God willing, follow from time to time, giving more in-depth reports on the work of our mission in our two India districts, their struggles and victories, their sorrows and joys, their lighter and darker sides, their means and methods, and also their particular needs.

Hopefully it will be possible to present to our mission supporters in the near future a booklet in which our “northern region and its inhabitants” will be described in word and image in a way similar to the present volume.

May Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who also loves “the other sheep,” the poor heathen, and has given His life for them and desires to lead them to His flock, even through our insignificant ministry, also bestow His blessing on this labor of Missionary Nau’s and grant that especially through the stirring description of the physical and spiritual wretchedness of this poor people, the hearts of readers may be kindled to even more fervent prayer, more zealous labor, and greater sacrificial boldness for the holy work of the heathen mission in India. God grant it!

J. A. Friedrich
Director of Missions
St. Charles, Missouri
Misericordias Sunday, 1913

CHAPTER ONE

[THE LAND OF TRAVANCORE]

VANJI BHUMI, “TREASURE CHAMBER,” is one of the poetic names which the inhabitants of Travancore have given to their little kingdom in the south of India. The name itself is an allusion both to the extraordinary fertility and consequent welfare of the land, as well as to the ease with which this welfare is obtained by the classes most favored by the government of this land, such as the Brahmins and higher Sudras. Until two years ago, it was still common for the Brahmins throughout the land to be offered a good meal in so-called ootooperas—free inns—at the government’s expense, and the best morsels that the land has to offer still today find their way into the lap of these “favorites of the land.” Travancore is a country whose name is known only to a very few in the United States, and of whose conditions and inhabitants scarcely anyone is rightly informed. Not even we would have had the opportunity to familiarize ourselves better with this land had it not shifted somewhat more into the foreground of our interest in recent years. Since the beginning of a Lutheran mission among the heathen inhabitants of this country, the attention of Lutheran mission supporters in the homeland—and especially the Lutheran mission supporters of the Missouri Synod, which founded the Lutheran mission here and have sustained it and carried it along on prayerful hearts—has been focused on this place, and we are surely not amiss to assume that a great many among them desire to learn more details about this land and its inhabitants.

If we take a school atlas and look at the map of India, or “British India,” in it, our eyes fall immediately to the southernmost point of India, Cape Comorin—or Kanyakumari, as it is known in Tamil. This is where Travancore begins. Now, if we follow northward the coast of the Arabian Sea lapping

Travancore on the west, we come, after passing Trivandrum, to a city by the name of Cochin. This is where Travancore ends. It is a tiny slice of land from Cape Comorin to Cochin, only 175 miles, and yet it takes at least four days to traverse. If the map before us is of a somewhat better sort, one that also indicates the natural geography of the land, we see a relatively high mountain range going from Cape Comorin northward, somewhat closer to the west coast than to the east. These are the Western Ghats, the eastern border of Travancore, which divide it from the Presidency of Madras, toward the districts of Tinnevely, Madurai, and Coimbatore. Travancore thus lies here on the southwestern coast of India, entirely by itself, in perfect solitude, closed in by the sea and the high mountains, reachable only from the north and the south, and that only under great difficulties, because the railway has only made a timid attempt to penetrate the region. The entire length of the railroad in Travancore comprises only sixty-one miles.

And now what shall I say of Travancore's physical beauty? It is one of the most glorious plots on God's wide earth. Whoever wishes to familiarize himself with tropical India, the wonderland of which the ancients make so many remarkable reports, should not first visit the parched south of the



Our missionaries in Travancore (left to right): A. Lutz, T. Gutknecht, A. Hübener, H. Nau, G. Hübener, J. Harms. Unfortunately absent is Missionary F. Zucker, who was sick when this photograph was taken.

Madras Presidency but must come here and see Kerala, "land of the palm trees"; Malayalam, "mountain and valley"; Thiruvithamcode, "the holy Travancore." What a stunning view is offered to the eye when you wake early in the morning at the border of Travancore after traveling in the train the day before and by night in the two-wheeled oxcart through the dry, flat, red-sand plain of Tinnevely, scorched by the burning sun, in which only thornbushes and slender palmyra palms seem to thrive! All of a sudden, everything seems to have changed completely. A regular bottleneck near Aramboly brings us into Travancore, and there, behold, as far as the eye can see, beyond several flower gardens full of jasmines and oleanders, the beautiful broad green rice paddies, interrupted here and there by little clusters of coconut palms and other trees, especially flowering trees, and by countless larger or smaller irrigation canals and ponds. In the north, the majestic Ghats soar upward, almost always shrouded in a thin veil of white cloud and already climbing to a height of 4,000 feet very near Aramboly. Far to the west are visible the edges of painterly Malayalam, "mountain and valley," and far to the south, the endless expanse of the Indian Ocean.

Incomparably more beautiful still is the view enjoyed from the train, which, after Travancore, ferries one to Shencottah-Quilon farther to the north. There, in under a half hour, we are brought from the Tinnevely district into the mountains of Travancore, 2,000 feet high, where one almost imagines himself to be in a mountain station in the Nilgiri or Palani. Far below our feet and far above our heads a thick, ancient forest, centuries old, blankets the slopes of the mountains along which the rail winds its ever-ascending path. Unprecedented giants of the primeval forest with powerful trunks and fanlike leaves, extraordinary in beauty, stunningly fragrant, blooming with red, white, and blue blossoms; majestic ferns; thick bamboo; countless brightly flowering creepers, shrubs, and bushes catch the eye. There is no bare speck of earth to be seen. The lush tropical vegetation sprouts, grows, flourishes, and blooms in one enormous tangle. No mortal has yet set foot in these impenetrable, ancient forests—with the exception of the shy, nimble, half-wild forest-dwellers. Elephants, tigers, panthers, bears, bison, various classes of deer and roe, monkeys of all kinds make their home here in undisturbed solitude. Only the groaning and puffing of the "fire horse" seems to bring the fauna of this mountain out of their rest. A few weeks ago, as we were traveling through these mountains, the train upset a whole swarm of black monkeys, which then, much to the delight of our children and all the passengers, scampered head over tail down the mountain, over the highest