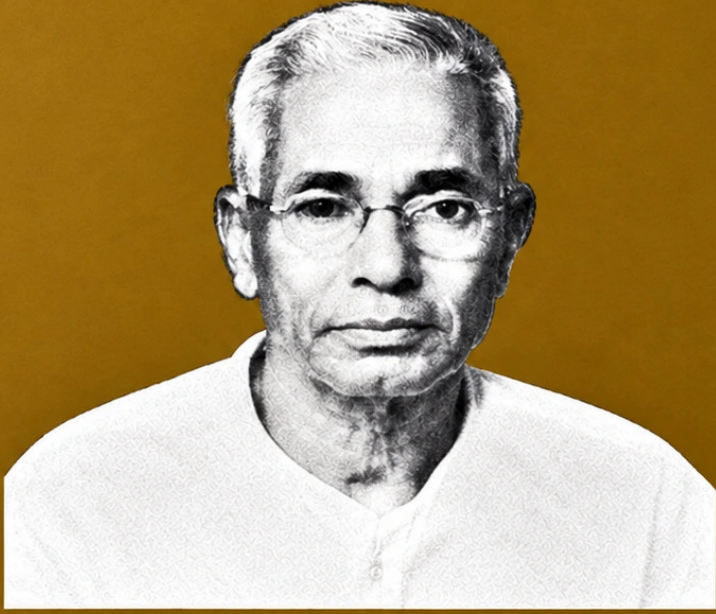




Chithramezhuthu K.M. Varghese

By
K. V. Mammen

Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese



A Biography

K. V. MAMMEN

Translated from the Malayalam original

Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varughese (Jeevacharithram) · 1993

Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese

(A Biography)

Author: K. V. Mammen, retired Assistant Editor, Malayala Man-
orama, Kottayam

First published in Malayalam on 21 July 1993

Publishers: Kottakkal Publishers, Manganam, Kottayam - 18

Printed at Baruch Printing House, Manganam · Price 45 rupees

Copyright: the author

*English translation prepared for the Powathikunnel family
archive, 2026.*

www.powathikunnel.com

Contents

1. The Family	16
2. His Parents	41
3. Childhood and Education	50
4. The Prose-Poet	78
5. Magdalana Mariyam and Chithramezhuthu	95
6. Literary Essays and Historical Stories	118
7. Political Activities	136
8. Services to the Christian Community and the Church	159
9. Change of Church	185
10. A Many-Sided Genius	196
11. Family Life	213
12. Acknowledgements	223

Translator's Note

This is an English translation of K. V. Mammen's Malayalam biography Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varughese, first published on 21 July 1993 by Kottakkal Publishers, Mangalam, Kottayam. The Malayalam text was retyped from scans of a family copy, and the translation was made from that retyped text.

Inline markers such as [p. 46] show where each page of the printed Malayalam edition begins, so that any passage can be checked against the original. The page numbers in the book's own Contents page are given as printed.

Years given without "A.D." are in the Kollam (Malayalam) Era, which runs about 825 years behind the Common Era (so 1088 K.E. is roughly 1912-13 A.D.). Letters, certificates and newspaper reports quoted in the book are translated in full; those written in English in the original are reproduced as printed.

Notes in square brackets beginning "Note:" are the translator's. They mark places where the printed text appears to contain a misprint, where two passages of the book disagree, or where a name or word could not be read with certainty. They have been left for the reader to judge rather than silently corrected.

Preface

I still remember clearly, as one of the listeners that day, what the famous orator and Union Law Minister Panampilly Govinda Menon said in a speech at the Thirunakkara grounds in Kottayam thirty years ago: "To be a good lawyer one need not know the law thoroughly; it is enough to know where the law is to be found." When I thought about writing the biography of the gifted Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese, it was these meaningful words of the towering Panampilly that suddenly passed through my mind.

Although I never had the chance to know closely the brilliant Chithramezhuthu, who lived in the previous generation, it was when I came to understand something, through inquiry, study and research, of where his matchless and exquisite writings in various literary fields lay and what their incomparable greatness was, that some years ago an irrepressible desire took root to set down at least this much about that great literary figure for the generations to come. Chithramezhuthu's literary contributions lie scattered like gem-studded grains of sand along a sea-shore stretching beyond sight, in the newspapers, magazines, books and other publications of the first decades of the twentieth century. Since I had neither the time, the ability nor the means for the daring venture of gathering them all, I do not dare to claim that this is a biography of the kind that great man deserves.

But there remains, here, beyond any excuse, the fact that the ancient community and Church to which I be-

long, and some of its leaders, showed not the least interest in encouraging, honouring or recognising Chithramezhuthu as he deserved — a man of high stature, a devoted lover of the Church, who stood for long as a living pillar of a community that had fallen into the darkness of litigation. There is no use hiding the truth that this daring biographical venture is undertaken by one who, as a member of the Orthodox Church, takes upon himself a share of that unpardonable guilt. The Church, the community, and the newspapers and magazines run by Church members did not properly recognise or encourage others either — the renowned historian Z. M. Paret, who rendered the Church invaluable service; the Mahakavi Puthenkavu Mathan Tharakan, author of 'Viswadeepam'; the well-known poet Kunnamkulam Joseph Cheruvathur and others — yet their lack of culture took nothing away from these writers. When the recently deceased Mathan Tharakan's seven decades of literary service were recognised and honoured in editorials even by newspapers run by cultured non-Christians, the Christian press passed over Tharakan without a single editorial. That does nothing to diminish the greatness of Tharakan, who had become a man of the world. It is also an unfortunate fact that no one encourages those who write and publish Church histories and the biographies of Church fathers who left behind good examples — doing so for the generations to come as a missionary work through the written word, without the least desire for prompting from others, financial help, position or praise.

I know too that I am carrying out, with my limitations, a duty that ought to have fallen to someone among Chithramezhuthu's contemporaries with the ability and the

standing for it — doing so as one who came to know him through others, saw the famous paintings he made, and read and enjoyed his books, articles and other writings.

Having been a member of the editorial board of the Malayala Manorama for nearly four decades, and having mixed with many of Chithramezhuthu's close friends, I was able to learn many things about him. Once I had the good fortune of going to the Powathikunnel house at Mavelikara, accepting his hospitality and conversing with him. After 1950 I had the opportunity of editing some of the articles Chithramezhuthu wrote in the Church Weekly, and of reading many of the letters he kept sending to N. M. Abraham, who was its editor. Above all, I was able to include many details from the history of the Powathikunnel family written by Chithramezhuthu. Besides this, Chithramezhuthu's son George Varghese of Madras, a leading Church historian and a respected senior friend of mine, helped me by sending many documents that could not have been obtained anywhere else. When I recall with pride that the quotations from them are also the foundation stone of this book's authority, my boundless gratitude to George Varghese speaks for itself.

Relevant passages have been quoted, so that Christians may know the facts properly, from 'Magdalana Mariyam Ulbhava Charithram' (The Origin of Magdalana Mariyam), written by P. C. Koruthu — who wrote the introduction to this book and is a senior colleague whom I regard as my guru. That work covers the story of how Vallathol's world-famous short poem Magdalana Mariyam came to be written, and the circumstances in which Chithramezhuthu gave that book the name Magdalana Mariyam and wrote its matchless introduction. I record here my thanks to P.

C. Koruthu for permitting me to include passages from his book and for writing a fine introduction.

Vallathol first named Magdalana Mariyam 'The Repentance of a Harlot'. But Chithramezhuthu pointed out that when a sinful woman truly repented before Christ and obtained forgiveness of her sins she became a saint; that the name the poet had given the book was therefore unacceptable; and that the name it needed was Magdalana Mariyam. Vallathol accepted this. It is clear, then, that Chithramezhuthu had the ability to put a matter plainly even to Vallathol, the Poet Laureate.

It is recorded in the statement of the witty poet Mooloor S. Padmanabha Panicker included in 'Vedaviharam', and in the preface of its author K. V. Simon. It was by constantly encouraging richly gifted and cultured great poets to produce worthy works, and by writing for their fine books introductions of great beauty — in a style as lovely as a spray of dew, poetic, rich in graceful choice of words and sweet with tasteful ornament — that Chithramezhuthu became a leading literary figure.

Those who truly understood Chithramezhuthu's boundless learning in the arts, and his command of placing tender, graceful words exactly where they belonged, and who honoured him greatly and respected him with admiration, were found more in the Travancore royal family than among Christians. The artists of the Mavelikara royal family and the learned writers of the Hindu community must also be specially remembered here.

Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese was a devoted lover of the Church and a man who had truly grasped the heart of the Orthodox faith. Many people may still not know the

unpleasant fact that it was as a result of certain abusive words — wholly unbecoming the high office — from the quick-tempered Catholicos, Baselios Geevarghese II, and of a letter of a kind unworthy of a head of the Church, that in the evening of his life he joined the Malankara Mar Thoma Church, reluctantly, for the sake of a social tie. And so he came to be laid to rest in the cemetery of the Mar Thoma church at Thazhakkara. Nor can it be forgotten that, in the circumstances of that time, a man of his stature — with self-respect, dignity, learning and integrity — had no other way open to him.



In a long letter he sent on 26 March 1961, a year before his death, to his son George Varghese in Madras, Chithramezhuthu says: "Whatever the Mappila of today — full of envy, scheming and grudges — may say, and whatever the Nair of today, in the grip of communalism, may say, none of them can easily deny that I am a person who has done a great deal artistically, politically and historically. In that light it is certain that the Keralites of tomorrow will honour me more. Even my own sons will be able to weigh my achievements only after they have gone out into the arena of the world, fought it out, and gained some firmness and confidence in the business of life and in their own opinions — so it is certain that after my death I shall be remembered more than I am today. — It was thinking that an association was needed for social co-operation that I joined the Mar Thoma [Church]. But there too the Jacobite episcopacy is raising its head. Yet I

have no way of withdrawing from there publicly at once.
(I distrust people.)"

True copy of extract

There is no doubt that the contributions of K. M. Varghese, which brimmed over in painting and in many branches of literature such as the prose-poem, will be an unfailing crystal lake for students of history and literature eager to research them. The thought that chiefly moves me is that, through this biography, I am creating an opportunity for lovers of the language and for people of taste to share in a delicious literary feast. Reminding them that no one else is responsible for any shortcomings in the dishes of this feast, I offer this biography to the lovers of the Malayalam language, and especially to the Christians of Kerala, today — the 31st anniversary of Chithramezhuthu's death — at Mavelikara, the place of his birth, with a pride that will never die, with boundless joy beyond that, and with complete inner contentment.

Manganam

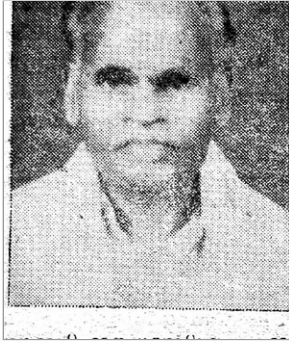
Kottayam 18

21-7-'93

K. V. Mammen

Kottakkal

Introduction



This book is the biography of the illustrious Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese, who raised the flag of victory in the field of Christian historical fiction; who thrilled the world of readers with heart-touching prose-poems; and who, through his inborn gift for the art of painting, painted portraits so true to life that they won the praise both of the great men who sat for them and of all who saw them. I count it an honour to write its introduction. When Sri K. V. Mammen — who compiled this book, was my colleague at the Malayala Manorama, and is a friend who has shown praiseworthy excellence in editing — expressed his wish that I should write the introduction, I could find no reason at all to decline.

Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese and I kept up a close association for more than a quarter of a century. The historical stories he wrote — Mar Mathews Athanasius's Panchakalyani, Thachil Mathu Tharakan's Thangakompan, Valiya Mar Dionysius and the Tharananallur Namboodiripad, The Persecutions of Mar Thoma V, Nellimoottil Ammachi, The Central Pillar of Venad or the Saintly Shouri-

yar, and others — were published through the Malayala Manorama. Of these, when Mar Mathews Athanasius's Panchakalyani had been published, there was some uproar over one or two of its statements. Those protests died down within a year or two.

Sri Varghese possessed a distinctive prose style, dignified and beautiful, that he alone could claim. This exquisite style shows clearly in his prose-poems, his short stories, and the descriptions in his works of fiction. Chithramezhuthu's gift for description is evident in all his works. Reading some of his richly artful descriptions, one feels that the persons, institutions and other things they portray appear before the reader's eyes as in a painting. They are, if anything, even more true to life.

It must be specially mentioned that a great many historical facts unknown to the vast majority of Kerala's Christians have been brought to light in this biography and in his historical stories.

There is no doubt that this small biography of Sri Chithramezhuthu — distinguished and celebrated as a gifted painter, a learned historian and a blessed man of letters — is a great treasure gained for Malayalis and for the Malayalam language.

P. C. Koruthu

Kottayam

10. 7. 1993

Chithramezhuthu: A Remembrance

I first met Sri Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese at the Mavelikara home of Sri A. G. Varghese, advocate, the husband of my mother's cousin. I was a student then. After I joined the Mavelikara bar in 1938 the bond grew stronger. I have felt that a weakness we shared, a "stammer", drew us closer. Though there was a great difference in our ages, we were close friends.

It is because of him that I wrote the biography of Cheppattu Dionysius. The general assembly of the Cheppad church had invited him in order to entrust that task to him; but he persuaded the assembly to entrust it to me instead. He helped me a great deal in writing that book. I remember his heartfelt affection with gratitude.

I do not feel that Sri Varghese — writer, artist and researcher of history — received the recognition he deserved. Though the Christians of Kerala were keen on education, they showed no taste for Malayalam literature. Kandathil Varghese Mappillai worked to nourish the Malayalam language through the Bhashaposhini and the Manorama. Kattakkayathil Cherian Mappillai composed the epic Sreeyesu Vijayam; Sri K. V. Simon, Vedaviharam; and Puthenkavu Mathan Tharakan lit the 'Viswadeepam'. The brilliant prose works of Sri Chithramezhuthu Varghese stand comparison with the service these men rendered to poetry. His works are prose-poems. That dignified and stately style raised him to the ranks of the leading writers of the Malayalam language. His 'Our Ammachi

of Nellimoottil' and other works show how grandly and beautifully even small events can be told.

I have not seen many books in that style since Sri Varghese. Sri K. V. Mammen and the others who have made it possible, even now, to remember this master of style deserve congratulations. I hope this biography will give readers more inspiration to read the books of Sri Varghese.

P. A. Oommen

Muttom

17-6-1993

1

The Family

"All I know is this: sitting alone on the endless shore of the boundless ocean of the universe, gazing with a child's eager wonder at that Magician, the Ruler of all, who plays hide-and-seek for ever behind this white curtain of cloud, I do nothing but draw and scribble in the dust, make pictures and rub them out, and play with handfuls of sand. My lines may have no strangeness, my strokes no loveliness, my hand no skill and my steps no grace; yet my one consolation is that He — the very essence of Being and Consciousness, the embodiment of Art itself, toward the dust of whose feet my inmost soul longs to rush through all the beautiful things of the outer world — will not fail to accept, as an offering of flowers, these grains of sand that fall through the bare fingers of this worshipper of art."

The passage quoted above is from the preface that the gifted artist Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese wrote to his book of prose-poems "Chenkolum Muraliyum" (The Sceptre and the Flute), in the confidence that the Soul of the Universe, the embodiment of love, would accept as an offering of flowers the humble poems he laid at the feet of the Lord of the world. It was because of that genius's worship of God and devotion, which lasted to the end of his life, that the goddess of art embraced this worshipper of art with all her heart.

It is now thirty years since the great man Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese — a devotee of art who showed an uncommon gift, mastery and force of personality in Malayalam literature and in portrait painting in oils, and a man of eminence widely known in the Malayalam literary world and in the community by the popular name 'Chithramezhuthu' (the Painter) — passed behind the curtain of time. Mathan Varghese of Nadakkavil Kampusseri Vadakkethil, pet-named "Kochukunju", was born on 22 April 1888 at the Powathikunnel house, Thazhakkara, Mavelikara — a branch of the Powathikunnel family of Mallappally — as the first son of Kunjunainan Mathan and Achiyamma of the Angadi house, Thazhakkara.

According to the horoscope (jathakam) cast by the astrologer — at dawn on Monday, the eleventh of Medam in the Malayalam year 1064, on the seventh day of the waning moon under the star Uthradam — Varghese's ascendant (lagnam) is Medam (Aries); in the Medam ascendant stand the Sun, Mercury, Mars and Venus; the serpent (Rahu) is in Mithunam, Saturn in Karkidakam, Mandi in Chingam, Jupiter and Ketu in Dhanu, and the Moon in Makaram. Learned astrologers say that when the Sun, Mercury, Venus and Mars stand together in the ascendant, it is a horoscope foretelling great good fortune.

Family History

Chithramezhuthu himself recorded the history of the Powathikunnel family of Mavelikara in his own hand. A few passages from it are quoted below:— "Our most ancient original family was at the Pakalomattam illam compound — Survey No. 64, Sub-division No. 7 in the Government records — in Palayoor desam of the old Neduvirippu

kingdom in South Malabar. From there, many of the Christians of the Pakalomattam illam migrated, for political and Church reasons, to Kodungallur, and afterwards, in A.D. 700, to Kuravilangad. From Kuravilangad one branch, for the sake of farming and trade, came to Athirampuzha shortly before the beginning of the Kollam Era and settled there; and on the strength of that settlement at Athirampuzha, the Thekkedathu tharavad of Athirampuzha is known as our original family in Travancore.

"In A.D. 800 the aforesaid Thekkedathu tharavad founded a church at Athirampuzha. When, for certain reasons, the local lord Ettonnusseri Nambiathiri demolished it, the Thekkedathu family, with the help of the Pazhampally Kaimal, built a church there again in Kollam Era 10. Later they gave over that church, together with the land where the cemetery stands, for common use. In honour of this gift by the Thekkedathu family, the Archdiocese of Verapoly later, with the consent of the parishioners of Athirampuzha, granted as a mark of respect — to be enjoyed for all time as a privilege by members of the Thekkedathu tharavad — remission of the church fee (patharam) for their weddings and of the burial fee (kazhikkanam) for their funerals; and the members of the Athirampuzha Thekkedathu tharavad enjoy this by inheritance to this day.

"Around the middle of the seventeenth century A.D., four brothers of the aforesaid Thekkedathu tharavad, skilled in the use of arms, fled to the southern parts for fear of royal punishment after a murder case. [A man (a nadadi panicker) insulted a young woman of the Athirampuzha Thekkedathu family. Her brothers seized him and

killed him. Fearing royal punishment, the brothers left the place that very night.] Of them, one settled in Kottayam, one in Changanassery, another at Chalakkal in Ithithanam, also in Changanassery, and another moved from Changanassery to Pulinkunnu. Around Kollam Era 850, the one named Varghese, who lived in Changanassery, was taken with his family to Mallappally by a Nair lord famous as Poovana Panicker, who ruled Mallappally with power of life and death — to serve as his bodyguard, and to purify by touch, as was the custom of the time, the ghee, coconut oil and other oils needed for his family temple and his household. The Panicker settled them first in the Poovana family's granary compound that then stood on the Payyampally property. As for the Athirampuzha Thekkedam family now in Changanassery, there are two views: that it was founded by an ancestor who came to Changanassery later from the Athirampuzha Thekkedathu family, or that it was founded by one of the five brothers who set out from Athirampuzha in the first place.

"The man who had settled at Payyampally soon founded his own household and settled on a high compound called Powathikunnel, near the temple at a nearby place called Devankara. Of the two children of this ancestor, Powathikunnel Varghese, the elder, Isahak, lived in the Powathikunnel tharavad, and the younger son, Ittiyavira, on a compound called Palakkamannil. The aforesaid Isahak, by his wife Mariamma, daughter of one Thommi of Kutharappally in Nedumkunnam pravarthi, had three sons — Varghese, Ittiyavira and Thommi — born in the Kollam years 912, 914 and 916. The third of these, Thommi, married Mariamma, the only sister of the grandfather of Palakunnathu Mathews Mar Athanasius Metro-

politan of Maramon — that is, the paternal aunt of Abraham Malpan, the leader of the Reformation; and to them were born three sons, Varghese, Ittiyavira and Mathan, and five daughters. Of the daughters, one was given in marriage into Kurisummoottil at Kanjirappally, another into the Ettor Tharakan house at Vaipur, another into Kothappally at Kuzha, another into Kochi at Kaviyil, and the youngest into Muringasseri at Pandanad.

"Thommi's eldest son, Varghese — my great-great-grandfather (my grandfather's grandfather) — married Eliyamma, daughter of one Chacko Ramacha of the Kulathakkal family of Maramon, and after his father's death lived on at Powathikunnel and managed the family. In those days there was no other Christian family in Mallappally that surpassed the Powathikunnel family in landed wealth and standing.

"Varghese's brother Ittiyavira — who had trained in arms according to the family tradition and was unmatched in bodily strength — lived at the kalari of the Edasseri Madampi house, in the gurukulam of the Mavelikara Thampuran, and underwent higher training in fighting techniques and the use of weapons. Through coming to Mavelikara now and then to enquire after his younger brother and his training, and to visit his brother's masters and present them with gifts, the elder brother Varghese had also come to know Mavelikara fairly well.

"In those days, after Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam, the place of most importance in many respects, quite close to Kollam, was Mavelikara. The royal palaces, the court (kacheri), the markets (Mattathangadi and Thazhakkara Angadi), the toll-house (chavukka), the fort,

the church, the ease of travel by river and by land, the ease of buying cloth (the weaving trade of the Chaliya Chettis of Pulikkathodu was famous; hence the name Chetti Theruvu), and acquaintance with the tenants of the Edappally Thampuran — these and many other advantages especially drew Varghese to turn towards Mavelikara. Varghese realised that Mavelikara offered in every way more comforts of life than Mallappally, and more scope for prosperity. Accordingly, on the 12th of Makaram in Kollam Era 982 (A.D. 1807), Mallappally Varghese and his four sons came to Mavelikara.

"Ittiyavira — skilled in combat and fiercely bold — after completing his training in arms at Mavelikara, which lasted more than seven years, returned home and started questions, quarrels and disputes with his two brothers over the management of the family and the accounts of the family income and expenses. As a result, the quick-tempered Ittiyavira's quarrel turned to violence and brought about the untimely death of his youngest brother, Mathan.

"Not only did Mathan's wife, his elder brother Varghese and their mother grieve deeply and suffer great anguish over this; but, with Ittiyavira on one side and Varghese, Varghese's four sons and Varghese's mother on the other, there was again argument and strife, and the matter ended in a great fight in which Ittiyavira — though immensely strong and a master of fighting skills — suffered a heavy defeat.

"When the furious and vengeful Ittiyavira made it plain that he would not rest until he had paid them back, Varghese, in fear for his life — lest an untimely death like his

younger brother's should come upon himself or his sons at Ittiyavira's hands — [decided] that for the time being the proper course was to flee to a refuge where Ittiyavira could do them no further harm; "and, at the urging of his mother and the other members of the family, the widowed Varghese, thinking Mavelikara — under the protection of the Mavelikara Thampurans and the Edasseri Madampi — the right refuge for the time being, said a last farewell at midnight, amid tears, to his mother and to the Powath-ikunnel tharavad, together with the four surviving sons born to him, Chacko, Varkey, Mathan and Cherian. He reached Mavelikara on the 12th of Makaram, Kollam Era 982.

"Mallappally Varghese' reached Mavelikara with a reserve of money he had secretly saved from the family income and other sources and kept hidden from Ittiyavira, his mother and his younger brother, and with two jars (jaalika) full of gold that his mother had secretly given him for the protection of her son and grandsons, who were leaving her to save their lives. I am known as the great-grandson of Mathan, the third son mentioned above of this 'Mallappally Varghese' who came to Mavelikara. Apart from Mallappally Varghese's wife, Eliyamma of the Kulathakkal family of Maramon, my great-grandmother, grandmother and mother were, respectively: Elachiyamma, daughter of Pattananathu Mammen of the Mukkathu family of Chengannur; Mariamma, daughter of Cheruthitta 'Paarapilarppan Idicula' (the Rock-Splitter), who moved from Kalladikkuzhiyil, Melukara, and settled at Edanattil, Puthenkavu; and Achiyamma, daughter of Kanakkan Kiryan of the Karipidi house, who was adopted into the Angadi Kochuveedu of Thazhakkara, Mavelikara.

"Besides the Powathikunnel tharavad, the families of Vattasseril and Payyampally survive today in Mallappally as branches of our ancestral family. Houses such as Thekkemannil, Vazhayil, Thuruthippally and Nedumpilakkal are generally known as their sub-branches. Through one Ittiyavira — a descendant of the brother among the five who came south from Athirampuzha and settled in Kottayam — who came to Prayikkara in Kollam Era 1011 with Rev. Peet, the C.M.S. missionary who came to Mavelikara, and settled there, the families of Konnathu Nalukettil, Thattasseril Thekkethil and Vanchippuzhasseril, being of Ittiyavira's line, are also related to me."

Chithramezhuthu recorded that the knowledge needed to write the history of the Powathikunnel family of Mavelikara, a branch of the Powathikunnel family of Mallappally, came mainly from a great many eminent people in his father's family, both living and dead, whom he knew well, and from his own direct inquiries. They include: Chandy Ouseph of Athirampuzha Thekkedathu in Ettumanoor taluk; Geevarghese Kathanar, son of the elder brother of Vattasseril Mar Dionysius Metropolitan; Jacob Kathanar of Edathamanayil; Mathai Varghese of Nedumpilakkal at Powathikunnu in Mallappally; Chithramezhuthu's father, Kunjunainan Mathan of Nadakkavil Kampusseri Vadakkethil, Mavelikara; and his grandmother Mariamma of the Chunkathil tharavad, Arattupuzha, Puthenkavu. On his mother's side they include Koshy Kunjupotha of Edichandipparambil, Thazhakkara; Chacko Varghese of Pilammoottil, Thazhakkara; Chithramezhuthu's elder sister Mariam Mathai; and Barsleebe Kathanar of Kadapra Karikkottu, Mannar. They also include C. M. Sebastian of Athirampuzha, Ettumanoor; Luka Mathai of Pi-

lathottathil, Athirampuzha; Chacko of Kadapra Kal-lodikkuzhiyil in Koyippuram pakuthy, Chengannur, the son of his father's maternal uncle; Geevarghese Kathanar of Chunkathil, Arattupuzha; Chacko of Kadapra Pulikkakkuzhiyil, Kumbanad, the son of his grandmother's sister; the husbands of his father's sisters; and, from related families, Koshy Koshy of Nadakkavil Palamoottil Vadakkethil, Kunjunainan Mathai of Nadakkavil Palamoottil (Pilammoottil Unnunni), and Pothavarkey of Kallumpurathu.

Only one story has been heard that praises the courage of Mariamma, the mother of the Mallappally Varghese who went to Mavelikara; it is given below. Once, when only the mother and the children were at home, a huge tiger got into the chavadi (outer hall). In those days there were plenty of tigers, leopards and wild boars in and around Mallappally. The mother saw it through the door of the house that adjoined the chavadi. At once she shut the children inside a room and closed the door; then, taking the big gun that her husband had kept loaded for hunting, she came stealthily to the front of the chavadi, pushed the sliding bar across and shut the door. The chavadi's three sides being of heavy bars, once the door was shut the tiger had no way of getting out. On seeing someone, the tiger tried to smash the bars of the chavadi so as to leap out. That brave mother, without the least fear, brought the fearsome tiger down to the floor with a single shot. Her husband, returning from the fields and near the house, heard the shot and came running in alarm — and saw his wife standing smiling with the gun in her hands, and the great tiger lying dead inside the chavadi. Only when his wife's smile told him that the children were

all safe did he breathe freely again. This story was told by Chithramezhuthu's grandmother.

In the family history, which runs to five hundred and sixty-two handwritten pages, Chithramezhuthu says: "I began my inquiries for writing this history in the year 1090. On many occasions I travelled to many places — Ettumanoor, Athirampuzha, Kuravilangad, Mannanam, Mallappally, Kalloppa, Changanassery and others — and made many inquiries. Only what seemed true and trustworthy has been included in this book..... The historical knowledge I had earlier gathered about the kingdoms of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar and their early history, about the Syrian Church, and about many Christian families of standing in their localities, in the community and in the state, has also proved helpful to me in writing this book."

After Chithramezhuthu's great-great-grandfather, Mallappally Varghese (son of Mariamma, who was the daughter of Palakunnathu Mathan of Maramon and the mother of Abraham Malpan), settled at Mavelikara with his sons in A.D. 1807, corresponding to Kollam Era 982, Varghese acquired a good deal of land in the Puthiyakavu and Nadakkavu parts of Mavelikara. These included 380 para of puncha paddy land at Vettatheri, Karippuzha; one acre of garden land at Velloor, with forty para of double-crop paddy land adjoining it; the Kampusseri garden of about an acre at Nadakkavu, with the large nalukettu house that Varghese built there handsomely of fine timber; the Pattarethu garden of an acre with its nalukettu; the Kampusseri Vadakkethil garden; the Pulinilkunnathil garden; the Kottayil garden; and the Palamoottil Vadakkethil

garden of more than half an acre. All of these had been held in common, without partition.

After Varghese's death his son Cherian (who was an official of the Paravur District Court) started a large-scale tobacco business at Nadakkavu. It was the brother of Cherian's childless wife who ran the business. Being an official, Cherian could not give the business enough attention. Large quantities of tobacco bales were brought by boat, on Cherian's credit account, from a Konkani Brahmin of Kollam named Huna Pai. The first two years' trade brought a good profit. For the trade after that, Cherian kept taking tobacco on credit from Huna Pai for large sums each time. Because tobacco bales had been stockpiled in great quantities, much of the stock crumbled with age and was lost, and as a result Cherian became indebted to Huna Pai for about three thousand rupees.

In those days — 168 or 169 years ago — three thousand rupees was an enormous sum. Since Cherian and his brothers had no way of paying the debt at once, Huna Pai sued for the money in the Mavelikara District Court and obtained a decree in his favour. Under the court decree the Vettatheri puncha fields and much dry land were lost at auction. The Kampusseri garden and the nalukettu that Mallappally Varghese had built on a grand scale were taken at auction by a Konkani Brahmin named Anantha Prabhu. That nalukettu, which combined the beauty and the grandeur of the craft of traditional architecture, was bought outright by the then head of the Kochupurakkal family of Kottayam. Chithramezhuthu says in the family history that the Kampusseri property and building were lost a few weeks after his grandfather's wedding. Because

of this, Chithramezhuthu's father, Kunjunainan Mathan, had to endure financial hardship.

Chithramezhuthu's grandmother, Mariamma of the Chunkathu tharavad, Arattupuzha, was a jewel of a woman, very brave and self-respecting.

A well-known story praising that lady's fierce self-respect is given below:— "The wife of Thumpunkal Kunjukoshy, the Judge [who retired from service in the year 1012], used to go to the Puthiyakavu church in a palanquin (mena). It was usual for the palanquin to have peons and maidservants on either side. As the palanquin went by, its bearers chanting, the women of the houses along both sides of the road who were sitting down would rise and pay their respects. After all, was she not the wife of a Judge, who had the power to punish and to protect? One day my grandmother was sitting on the verandah (thinna) shelling beans when the Judge's wife came that way in her palanquin. My grandmother looked into the open palanquin, and the Judge's wife looked at my grandmother's face. The Judge's wife at once resolved to teach a good lesson to this woman who had not risen to honour her even though she had looked straight at her.

"When she got home she sent some people to fetch my grandmother. Not knowing what it was about, everyone at home was alarmed. Since those who came to fetch her insisted that it was only to ask about something, Mariamma, as her mother-in-law told her, went to Thumpunkal, taking a neighbouring woman with her. The moment she saw her, the Judge's wife flared up and said very harshly: 'So you sit puffed up on your verandah like some great royal lady, and your business is to insult people of

standing — is that it? Who are you? When everyone else, man or woman, rises from their seat to honour me, you sit squatting there and insult me. Well then, let us see how far this goes.'

"My grandmother, paying no heed whatever to the Judge's wife's arrogance, answered on the spot: 'If I am a royal lady (amma thampuratti), I am the royal lady of my own house. That costs no one else anything. Whether you go in a palanquin or a litter, I am not the one who has to lift her backside and bow. I will not do any such thing, and you need not expect me to. For me to do that would be a disgrace to you, ma'am. My father is of Kalladikkuzhiyil at Melukara; my mother is of the Chunkathu family of Arattupuzha. I too was born in a family of standing and have married into such a family. Do not count me, from now on, among those who lift their backsides.'

"Some of the neighbours set out for the gate of Thumpunkal to learn why the Judge's wife had sent for my grandmother. Her father-in-law, Mathachan, was among them too. They saw my grandmother coming towards the gatehouse with a swollen, flushed face and a somewhat fierce look, so that anyone could tell that something had happened there. Within a short while the questions and answers had spread all through the Nadakkavu market. Neighbours and some of the elders of the family came to the house and spoke to Mathachan and to Elachi [daughter of Pattananathu Mammachan of Mukkathu, Chengannur] in high praise of my grandmother.

"From the next Sunday, the custom of people rising to honour the Judge's wife when she went to church in her palanquin came to an end. The men and women of the

Nadakkavu and Puthiyakavu markets did not keep up that practice any more. For some time afterwards, whenever my grandmother went to church, many women would gather round to hear the story of that exchange and enjoy it. Besides my grandmother herself telling this story, in my childhood, to me and to my elder sister Mariam, I also heard it from my parents when I was grown. The Judge's wife was not at all wrong to call my grandmother a royal lady in scorn: until she died of the illnesses of old age in Kumbham of the year 1074, she was every inch a royal lady — in her bearing, her walk, the way she sat, and in every other way." This incident took place not long after Mariamma's marriage.

In the family history, Chithramezhuthu says this about his grandmother Mariamma: Paarapilarppan Idicula of Kallodikkuzhiyil had married a woman of the Chunkathil tharavad of Arattupuzha, east of Puthenkavu, a family famous for its antiquity and its wealth. Idicula's wife was the eldest daughter of a man of the Chunkathil tharavad who had four sons and three daughters. Her brother's son was a priest, known as 'Chunkathil Achen'.

Idicula's wife's younger sister was married into a house called Vazhayil at Mangalathil, near Puthenkavu, and the third into a house called Puthenpurakkal at Puthenkavu. Idicula, after his marriage, for the convenience of life, came close to his wife's home and settled at a place called Edanattil, west of Arattupuzha. He had one son and four daughters, and it was the third daughter, Mariamma — a jewel among women — whom my grandfather Kunjunainan married. The first daughter was given in marriage into the very well-known Vadakkedathu family at Edanattil itself, the second into the Kurampilethu family at Venmani,

and the fourth into the Kadapra Pulikkakkuzhi tharavad at Kumbanad.

Mariamamma — the third daughter of Paarapilarppan Idicula and this writer's grandmother — was truly a woman of uncommon beauty. Her fair, golden body remained a home of good health until her death. It is agreed by all that there was no beauty in Nadakkavu to match Mariamma. Anyone who saw her golden form, unusually tall, and her thick, long hair could not help feeling a deep regard and reverence for that jewel of a woman. Born in Kollam Era 1000, she died in Kumbham of the year 1074.

Kochukunju of Velloor

Mathan, the third son of Mallappally Varghese, lived at his father's bidding on the Velloor garden land east of the Velloor double-crop paddy field, which lies south of the Puthiyakavu church. At some time before the year 1023 he moved to Nadakkavu. Recalling the Velloor garden and fields and the time when Chithramezhuthu's great-grandfather and others lived at Velloor, the popular name in use for the Kampusseri Vadakkethil garden at Nadakkavu, where Chithramezhuthu and his father lived, was 'Velloore Purayidam' or simply 'Velloor'. Many gentlemen of Nadakkavu called Chithramezhuthu's father 'Velloore Kochukunju Chettan'. Because the Nairs of Puthiyakavu and Kottarkavu addressed Chithramezhuthu's grandfather as 'Velluran', some Nairs came to call Chithramezhuthu's father, and Chithramezhuthu himself, 'Velluran' too.

K. M. Varghese says in the family history: "The people of Nadakkavu still address me as 'Velloore Kochukunju' when they speak to me."

The Lamp Lit by the Goddess of Art

He says that it was through a journey by water that Kochukunju made in his childhood that the goddess of art first blessed him. He lays open that experience, movingly, before all who love art. It goes like this:— "When I was eight years old my father took me to see Alappuzha. It was then, for the first time in my life, that I experienced the darkness brooding with its wide black wings spread over the vast stage of water, and its indescribable beauty. The countless stars in the sky stretching beyond sight, the cool breeze of dawn, and the dark, mist-veiled banks filled my heart with a wondrous freshness and joy. It was then that I first beheld the glory of the rising sun, like a king lifting his head from the pillow at the edge of a blue velvet bed. Seeing that great king raise his face, wearing a red crown, at the head of the puncha fields that lay spread endlessly like a silken quilt, I was carried away with delight. The grassy banks of the river, the ripples dancing coyly in the gentle breeze, and the little waves that broke on the banks with a gurgling sound awakened a new life in my heart. Never before in my life had I felt so powerful an emotion. For almost the whole day I sat on the boat's step, dipping my fingers in the water and enjoying it. My one longing then was that the water I stirred with my fingers, and the little bubbles that rose in it, should always remember me. That cold, crystal water should remember for ever the story of how I travelled over it to Alappuzha. And my heart said: 'Nor shall I ever forget you.' The bustle of the Alappuzha canal, the rush of the steamboats, the whistles of the oil mills, the buildings on both sides of the canal, people in all kinds of dress, Banyas going by in single-bullock carts with heads shaven

but for a tuft at the crown and with pot-bellies, the huge shops, the crowds and the crush, all of it together created a new world in the realm of my heart.

"On the way back I kept gazing eagerly at place after new place. Boats under sail cutting through waves that glittered like molten silver; at dusk, near the Ennakkadu palace, farmers with ploughs on their shoulders wading down into the river and climbing out again; some splashing noisily in the water at play; others slapping their wet towels on their palms to make a loud crack; and the sun sinking drowsily into the darkness through the edges of the reddened sky — all of these awakened new feelings in my heart. I felt how joyful it would be to stay somewhere there and not go home at all. Whenever the boat brushed against some grass or leafy creeper on the bank as it moved on, I too reached out and caught hold of them and bade them all farewell in a silent language. Carrying the dawn and the sunset, the countless stars of the sky, the natural beauty of nature that they had kindled in me for ever, new thoughts, endless curiosity, an insatiable feeling of joy, blazing emotions, and a new world — unfamiliar, yet one that had stretched out its hand and held mine — I reached home a new creature, with the fresh wakefulness and eagerness of a new vision still warm in me.

"But soon afterwards, when my father went to Alapuzha again, I was filled with a grief I could not bear. It was through those unknown places, through that darkness, through those waves, that my father was travelling, lying in the boat. As the boat crept on through that deep river; as it moved through places where neither eye nor shore could reach, a darker darkness within the pitch dark; while beneath the silence of the sky, at the bottom

of the depths, death lay crouching in its dreadful vow of silence; my heart grew uneasy thinking of the dangers that might befall my father, lying in a boat that stole along in the shelter of the jet-black edge of the trees on the banks, seen here and there in long rows far away between the horizon and the stage of water.

"Would my father come back? In unknown places, among unknown people, in the darkness, on waves wrapped in darkness, what protection was there for my father? Would he come back? My stream of thought about that boat, sunk somewhere in the darkness of some river in the terror of loneliness, and about my father and his companion asleep in it, took on of its own accord a stream of melody and welled out of me as a song of deep sorrow.

"That song had no words and no meaning, yet it was a song — a faint song that softened the heart and, facing fear, held a silent conversation with nature. The melody of that song is my own. Some sorrowful heartbeats from the countless garland of ragas may have melted into it. Many times in my life, in my solitude, I have embraced that song, which fell from the strings of my heart in my eighth year, feeling myself sink deep into its tender beauty and its sweet sorrow. It is my own raga, my own song alone. Even today it is as familiar to me as it was then. The deep silence of the night, the sad beauty of the dense dark, the gentle gaze of the bands of stars, the drum-beat of the waves in the hollows of darkness, and all the stirrings of an unknown, unfamiliar and far-off mysterious world lie immersed in that song. The author and the worshipper of that childhood song, bound by no letters and no words, is I alone. So it was that in my eighth year, in the lap of sorrow, in the sad fear of a swoon of love, in the freedom of a

child in solitude, I became a maker of songs, a singer of ragas. So it was that the goddess of art lit a lamp in the core of my heart."

Culture and Artistic Activities

Chithramezhuthu says: "Antiquity, tradition, culture, fine qualities of mind, and above all noble gifts have honour and dignity in every age. These are not things that can be gained in a single day or bought for a price. In the free course of successive centuries, through the natural friction that comes from the finest training of the intellect and of habits of thought, the body, the blood and the native gifts and the mind acquire, as their own nature, a certain quality of compassion — and that is culture.

"What is culture? What is its outward form? Tenderness of heart, gentleness of mind, a compassion rich in goodness — it forgives everything; it bears everything; it hopes for good in everything; it forgets wrongs again and again. Devotion to the right path; aversion to sinful deeds; freedom from greed in matters of food; pity for the helpless; compassion for the oppressed; great affection for dependants; no infatuation with show and colour; great attachment to good works; a matchless habit of love; boundless generosity; no wish to receive anything free from anyone; intolerance of injustice; generosity of mind at all times and in every condition of life; freedom from pride; regard for everyone; courtesy; great eagerness in the rites of hospitality; moderate speech; scrupulous keeping of promises, without distress at any loss suffered in keeping them; freedom from love of luxury; aversion to bitter words; care to use refined speech; constant remembrance of God; courage in righteousness; perfect purity of heart;

scrupulous truthfulness; and a steadfast mind — these are the outward forms of culture. What is called good breeding (tharavadittham) or family distinction refers to these alone. Those who believe that excellence and distinction can be had through money alone, without these qualities, are bleeding sores on the body of the community."

"Among the mental riches, or mental achievements, of a family, a unique one is an inborn gift and taste for the arts such as music and literature. In a family without a gift for art and a love of art there will never be goodness of mind, gentleness, sincerity or sweetness of spirit. The power of inspiration that makes a person strong to experience life also lies in the love of art. It is more or less right to say that the arts are the combined outward expression of beauty of mind, sweetness of thought and spiritual bliss. A critic has said that the arts are the language of the soul. The principle that one who takes no delight in art, and one who hates art, should at no time be accepted as a friend or a kinsman must be borne in mind at all times. It is certain that a hater of art, in any community and in any age, will be treacherous, unfaithful, deceitful and devilish of mind."

"This gift and taste for art, which is rooted firmly in the great purity of blood of a family's tradition and in its quality of culture, does not fall to every family. It takes shape in the members of a family, in each age, as the direct fruit of the family's ancient moral beauty and of the merit stored up by its forefathers. Such gifts must be regarded as a great blessing of God."

A Family Gathering

On the 17th of Vrischikam 1126, a meeting of the Powathikunnel family was held at the home of Isaac Ittiyavira at Vanchippuzhasseri, Prayikkara, under the presidency of Rev. Fr. Philipose Kathanar of Vattasseril, Malappally. Besides more than two hundred members of the family, many respected leading people of the place took part. On the platform arranged in the decorated pandal in the courtyard of the Vanchippuzhasseri tharavad stood, set on a high pedestal, a full-length oil portrait of the Malankara Metropolitan Vattasseril Mar Geevarghese Dionysius, which Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese had painted and given to the M. S. English School at Thazhakkara; it filled the family members and the many visitors with overwhelming joy and devotion. At the public meeting held at two o'clock, a prose-poem that Chithramezhuthu had written for the occasion was read by a girl of the family, and it thrilled everyone. That prose-poem is given below:—

A Noble Message

...."And so our departed holy souls gathered together at the golden gate of the crystal tower of Paradise. The rustle of their spotless white robes poured a sweet murmur over the golden leaves of the golden trees of Paradise. They said to one another: 'The hours granted to us are few. Yet Jehovah, the Most High, has given us leave to look once more upon the lotus faces of our darling children. Let us set out, then. Let everyone take in the trays in their hands unfailing blessings, fragrant spices, lamps of jewels that never fade, and the never-wilting honey-

sweet fruits of Paradise. Today is our family gathering. Today is our day of blessing.'

"Amid the trumpet-calls of the guardian angels, the cry of Hallelujah rang out at the gate of the tower. That company, moving in the surge of unfading glory — the ancients and the forefathers, the mothers and the maidens, the boys and the little children — flew down to the earth beneath a canopy of the angels' dazzling golden outspread wings, singing a sweet chorus of blessing. The golden tambourines of the maidens sounded their sweet, auspicious music along the pathway of the sky. Jewelled palm fronds swayed in the tender hands of the boys. The honey-sweet lips of the little children rang with shouts of joy. From the censers of the bishops and priests, the fragrant incense spread along the road of heaven.

"Breaking in a single moment through the walls of hours, days, weeks, months, years, centuries and millenia, the holy feet of those departed souls touched the flower-soft sand of the courtyard at Vanchippuzhasseri, where the members of the Powathikunnel family of Mavelikara had gathered hand in hand. The whole air was bathed in a thrill of flowers. Waves of joy rose and stirred in the bosom of the gentle breeze. The flowering plants spread out their petals. The tips of the palm fronds danced for joy.

"At that great moment when, behind the veil of the unseen, within that curtain of illusion, the eyes of the departed and of the living looked into each other and drank in their joy — through the shining white whiskers of our Bava, Vattasseri Thirumeni, the glory of the Malankara Church, the anointing oil of Aaron, the patriarch of the

priestly line, flowed down without end to the hem of his fine robe. The stream of sweet milk that flowed from the breasts of the departed mothers, cooled at the sight of their darling children, poured out and shone all along the white sand of the courtyard at Vanchippuzhasseri.

"And so the members of the family of that world and of this world melted and merged together — eye into eye, cheek against cheek, lip to lip, heart to heart, lotus hand in lotus hand.

In the bliss of oneness, in the lap of a blood-bond that nothing can ever sever, in the single-mindedness of brothers born of one womb, they stirred up the noblest memories of unity and of one family. Ah, memories of glorious deeds, brimming with pride!!

The departed who had come cried out aloud: "Hallelujah! Eternal glory to the God of our fathers. May He bless you, our descendants — bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh — for as long as the moon and stars endure."

Then they went on, quietly:— "Sunrise and sunset give you hours and years. But, beloved ones, for us there is no time, no year, no century. Though you have pushed us back into antiquity and distance by the reckoning of years, to you we are always people of the present day, your contemporaries; and at the centre of our remembrance you are ever new. For us there is no time, no distance; no veil or wall ever stands in our way. We do not weep. Yet there is one occasion when we weep — only when you, who took form from our blood, do evil, in secret or in the open. We have no tears. Yet there is one occasion when we shed tears — only when you, the members of our family, take part in acts of malice and in op-

pressing others. We can see everything. Yet there is one occasion we cannot bear to look upon — the moments when you scorn, mock and grieve the members of your own family.

"Therefore, treasures of our love, kinsmen, darling children, let your hearts be filled with goodness and your hands with good deeds. The more you give up for the members of your own family and for others, the more worthy you become of our blessings. Wealth, peace and well-being are not the fruit of man's labour; they are only the showing forth of the hand of God at work behind it. It is in weeping for one another, wiping one another's tears, binding up one another's wounds and taking pride in one another that the character and culture of our family, rich in tradition, are kept alive for ever.

"When you fall into misfortune, when you are caught in danger, when you lie on a sickbed, when you cry out in hunger, when you shed tears, when you are persecuted, we shall be near you, at your feet. In the holy presence of Yah, the God of our fathers, we shall offer prayers for refuge on your behalf. Darling children, that alone is what we in turn hope for from you, our beloved ones. For the life to come is a free continuation and completion of life on earth — never a state of death or of standstill. To you and to all the members of the Powathikunnel family, our firm blessing and grace. Peace be with you. All good be yours."

A trumpet-call that the ears of us mortal worms cannot hear rang out in the courtyard at Vanchippuzhasseri; in it lay the signal that the time had come for the visiting company to return. Fragrant smoke rose from the censers in

the hands of our departed priestly fathers and spread into the sky. The holy hand of our Bava, the glory of our Church, Geevarghese Mar Dionysius Metropolitan, was raised high in the air with the cross to bless us. And so the banner of victory of our tharavad fluttered and shone in the heavens."

2

His Parents

Chithramezhuthu's grandfather, Kunjunainan, was an accountant, a leading merchant and, above all, a lover of the arts. He acted as a player in the chavittu nadakams (Christian dance-dramas) — "Yakobu Nadakam", "Yausepu Nadakam" and "Urishina Attam" — that used to be staged in connection with church feasts in olden days. Tall and fair in build, he was a man of firm resolve and a very stubborn nature.

Chithramezhuthu tells a story about his stubbornness and firmness of purpose:— "My grandfather was not one to give way to anyone without need. Mathews Mar Athanasius Metropolitan of Palakkunnathu, Maramon — a courageous man who governed the Malankara Syrian Church, installed according to ancient custom by royal proclamation — was excommunicated by Peter, the Patriarch of Antioch. Pulikkottu Joseph Mar Dionysius Metropolitan, set up against Mar Athanasius, had not received a royal proclamation. Therefore Mar Dionysius Metropolitan was unable to lead the Church aright against Mathews Mar Athanasius, who governed relying on the strength of the royal proclamation. By a circular order issued by the Dewan Sir T. Madhava Rao on the 3rd of Masi 1038, saying that those unwilling to obey Mathews Mar Athanasius should build another church and go there, those who

wished to follow Mar Dionysius had to build another church and move.

"So when Vadakkethalakkal Yaunan Kathanar of Thazhakkara founded the Thazhakkara Puthenpally in 1038 (founded on the 26th of Dhanu 1038), two, three or four households in each of the Thazhakkara, Puthiyakavu and Nadakkavu market areas leaned towards Mar Dionysius's side and went from time to time to the Puthenpally.

Because of the purity of Mar Dionysius's cause, they honoured that side in their hearts; yet they could not openly stand against Mathews Mar Athanasius Metropolitan, who held the royal proclamation and the circular order. Vadakkethalakkal Yaunan Kathanar was a powerful man, but they knew that if it came out that they had openly joined Mar Dionysius's side, they would be excommunicated by Mar Athanasius, the Malankara Metropolitan. The other priests of the Puthiyakavu church, and Mathews Mar Athanasius himself, were waiting for the chance to excommunicate those who thus secretly supported Vadakkethalakkal Yaunan Kathanar as partisans of Mar Dionysius, should they be found openly taking Mar Dionysius's side for needs such as baptism, marriage, receiving the Qurbana or burial. Everyone knew how terrible were the social punishments that excommunication could bring. Among those who in their hearts held to Mar Dionysius's side were Kochukoshy of Palammoottil Vadakkethil (eldest son of the brother of the wife of Cheri-an, the fourth son of Mallappally Varghese), Valiya Chackochan of Kuttisseri, my grandfather Kunjunainan, and another householder, Kunjachan of Mulamoottil.

While things stood thus, at the end of the year 1046 the marriage of my father's sister Eliyamma was settled. The sons of Kunjunainan's father's brothers advised my grandfather to hold the wedding at the Puthiyakavu church. But my grandfather said flatly that he would not have the sacrament of marriage performed by priests of the party of Mathews Mar Athanasius, since Mar Athanasius had been excommunicated by the Patriarch and was governing contrary to order. This was a rare courage of mind. Everyone who heard of it tried in various ways to dissuade Kunjunainan. Many described to him the severity of the punishment that might follow. My grandfather declared firmly that, come what may, he would not act against conscience and justice. Though the members of the family warned him in many ways that, should excommunication come, its terror was not what he imagined, that he would have to bear its evil consequences all alone, and that he did not have the strength for it, they could not bring him round. It is enough to say that my grandfather was ready to bear any hardship for the sake of truth and justice. Accordingly, the wedding of Kunjunainan's daughter, my father's sister Eliyamma, was held at the Puthenpally church at Thazhakkara [in the year 1046].

The next week, an order of excommunication from Mathews Mar Athanasius, in the customary form, was read in the Puthiyakavu church: Kunjunainan and his household [that is, excluding the other houses of the family] were excommunicated; no one was to give fire or water to Kunjunainan's house; and washing and shaving for them were forbidden. There were no matches in those days. If the washerman and the washerwoman did not come to wash clothes, or the barber to shave, there was

no way to wash or shave for oneself. By the custom of the time, anyone who helped us in such matters would be excommunicated too. A family cannot live without fire and water, washing and shaving. Many again advised them to admit their fault, make confession, do penance and so escape the excommunication.

My grandfather and my father paid no heed at all. In those days water was drawn from Puthenveedu. Until the Konkanis came to live at Kampusseri, water had been drawn from the Kampusseri family's own well. [The garden south of the Kampusseri garden is the Puthenveedu garden.] Valiya Chackochan of Kuttisseri now stopped it, saying that taking water southwards would bring ruin to his prosperity. With this, the leaders of the other side thought my grandfather would lose his footing and fall at their feet. But my grandfather, paying no heed, bought three or four large earthen pots, and every day, before dawn, at seven and a half nazhikas, he drew water from the Arattukadavu bathing ghat in several trips, carried it home and met the household's daily needs. Only after a long time did others discover the secret that he was bringing water from the river. Fire was kept in the house so that it never went out. My grandfather and my father went to Edanattil from time to time to be shaved. The washing of their clothes was entrusted to the washer-folk of that place.

"So, from the end of 1046 until the death of Mathews Mar Athanasius on the 2nd of Karkidakam 1051, he lived six full years quite unshaken. Many in the meantime advised him to turn back. Members of the family asked why he should stay on that side when Chackochan of Kuttis-

seri, a man of his own party, had denied him drinking water.

"My steadfastness and self-respect are no shallower than Kuttisseri Chackochan's well. I stand not by persons but by principle' — that was my grandfather's reply." (It must also be said that, since the mother of Kunjunainan's great-grandfather was the paternal aunt of the father of Mathews Mar Athanasius Metropolitan, Kunjunainan's change of sides inflamed the Metropolitan's obstinacy, and the Metropolitan's excommunication inflamed Kunjunainan's.)

"So, bearing all kinds of inconvenience and obstacles, my grandfather stood firm for six years without wavering. At last, with the death of Mathews Mar Athanasius, the people of Puthiyakavu itself split into two parties, most of the priests took the side of Mar Dionysius, and things came right. Mathews Mar Athanasius had excommunicated Valiya Chackochan of Kuttisseri and Koshy of Palamoottil Vadakkethil by an order sent from the Old Seminary at Kottayam to the Puthiyakavu church on the 24th of Chingam 1030, corresponding to 1855. That order also states that Koshy had been excommunicated even before that.

"When, even after two years, he did not go to have the excommunication lifted, the priests of the Puthiyakavu church and Mathews Mar Athanasius himself sent people two or three times to tell my grandfather that he should do a merely nominal penance and have the excommunication removed. My grandfather's answer was this: 'It is not only the Metrachen of Palakunnathu (Palakkunnu = "the hill") who sits on top of a hill — I too sit on top of a hill. So

I am not coming down just yet.'" (A pun on Powathikunnu, "the hill".) "In the year 1056, when my father was 28, my grandfather Kunjunainan passed away."

Of his father, Kunjunainan Mathan, Chithramezhuthu says: "He was a man learned in music, deeply devoted to the art of singing. Kunjunainan Mathan was by no means backward in Tamil accounts and in Tamil, but it was in music that he had gained most experience. Ancient Tamil songs (Christian hymns) and the Malayalam kirtanas of Christian poets such as Vidwan Kutty and Mosavatsalam were well known to him. His voice was something special, and his chief teachers in music were the Annavi of Thazhakkara and Mathan Asan (of Thazhakkara). Kunjunainan Mathan's passion for watching Kathakali was something special too. Though he did not know the hand gestures (mudras), he would follow the story from the songs and explain each scene, as it came, to me sitting beside him, in words I could understand.

"My father's love of painting has often filled me with wonder.... My father was guileless, utterly sincere and pure of heart. He was not one of those who used any twists or turns in his dealings — only the truth. Many who knew him, especially many Nairs, often praised to me my father's truthfulness, courtesy and humility, citing many experiences. Though he might sometimes miss the time of evening prayer, he never once missed morning prayer. Morning prayer always began with one or two beautiful Christian songs.

"Kunjunainan Mathan was a capable jaggery merchant. In this work he received a great deal of help and cooperation from his maternal uncle. The first work he took up

was the easy job of landing goods at Alappuzha, Kochi and other places as agent ('melal') for traders of Mavelikara and the surrounding area. Since banking was very limited in Travancore in those days, ordinary people and ordinary traders had no dealings with banks. So all the traders of Mavelikara and the places around it would entrust Mathan with the sums — three hundred, five hundred, seven hundred rupees — that they had to pay each week, according to their credit accounts, at the shops of the wholesale merchants of Alappuzha. His practice was to hand those sums faithfully to the wholesalers when he went to Alappuzha.

All the wholesale merchants of Alappuzha had a high regard for the reliability and honesty of Chithramezhuthu's father. On matters such as how much credit might be given to the credit traders of various parts of Mavelikara, how much time to allow them for payment, and when to post the names of defaulters, these wholesalers all acted only on Kunjunainan Mathan's advice. New traders often came to him and asked him to help them get credit from the wholesale merchants of Alappuzha.

Kunjunainan Mathan, born under the star Makam in the month of Chingam in Kollam Era 1028, died on the 16th of Kumbham 1095. Expressing his sympathy at his death, the Malankara Metropolitan, Vattasseril Mar Dionysius Thirumeni, sent Chithramezhuthu a letter.

That letter:— "From Mar Dionysius, Metropolitan of the Malankara diocese —

— Seal —

5 Meenam 1095

Greetings to our dearly beloved Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese.

Dear one,

We have received the letter of sorrow you sent about your father's death, and having read it, we share in the sorrow of you all. Weak as we are, we pray to our heavenly Father that the merciful God may take this blessed soul to His holy feet, and comfort all of you who are in sorrow, and keep you all under the wings of His grace; and we remember in our Qurbanas and our prayers the soul blessed through its departure from the body.

May the grace and blessing of Almighty God ever increase.

Thus, 5 Meenam 1095, i.e. 1920, from the Vanchithra church.

Mar Dionysius

(signed in Syriac)"

Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese's mother was Achiyamma, a jewel of a woman, daughter of one Nainan Kiryan of the Karipidi house, who was adopted into the Angadi Kochuveedu of Thazhakkara. Achiyamma's mother was the granddaughter of Valiya Chackochan of the Angadi house, long famous in Thazhakkara street as the 'Angadi people'. Since Valiya Chackochan later settled at Pilammoottil, adjoining the Thazhakkara Angadi house, they are also called by the house-name 'the Pilammoottil people'. The Angadi family — Valiya Chackochan and his sons especially — were very well known for their lineage, their market trade and their standing in the locality. Chithramezhuthu's mother Achiyamma was a deeply devout

woman. She died on the 3rd of Mithunam 1101, at the age of 63.

3

Childhood and Education

After learning his letters at Chacko Asan's village school (kudippallikkoodam) at Kottakkakam, Mavelikara, K. M. Varghese, known as 'Kochukunju', joined the Kottakkakam Malayalam High School for his primary education. The headmaster was Narayanan Pandala Sir, an expert in the art of the cane, who kept discipline with a roll of his eyes. Many of Kochukunju's age from Nadakkavu were in his class. In flicking and in mischief Kochukunju was the foremost of his schoolmates; Chithramezhuthu records in his autobiography that his childhood pranks went rather too far. Kochukunju was studying in the fourth class, below the primary class, in the Malayalam school. The class teacher, one Govinda Pillai, was also an actor. It was the time when C. V. Raman Pillai's Marthanda Varma had just come out, and it was their textbook that year. The teacher asked each pupil to say, with the same feeling, a few lines of grief and reproach spoken by the character Sanku Asan. Though many tried, the teacher was not satisfied. But Govinda Pillai Sir liked Kochukunju's words and expression very much, and had him say it several times as a model for the others. Seeing the boy's expression, almost in tears, with the words and acting to match, even the teacher was astonished. Chithramezhuthu was then only thirteen.

Even in his primary school days Kochukunju showed an irrepressible passion for drawing pictures. It was the boy's inborn gift. Although drawing was not taught in the Malayalam school in those days, he drew pictures of Sri Krishna, Saraswathi, Lakshmi and others in pencil, in class and at home, and after drawing them would colour them with ink of two or three colours, and sometimes with colour pencils, and hang them up.

After his primary education in Malayalam, Kochukunju joined the Government English High School at Kottakkam. The headmaster was a European named Hessing. Kochukunju studied English only up to the third form.

Because of his passion for drawing pictures, his attention to his studies began to slacken. Though his father could have kept him at school, he decided to let the boy follow his gift. After giving up his English studies and coming home, Kochukunju spent some time as clerk to the Venerable Oommen Mammen Archdeacon, vicar of the C.M.S. church at Arattukadavu, helping him in his literary work. This was at the beginning of Kochukunju's fourteenth year. Religious magazines — 'Malayala Mithram', 'Jnananikshepam' and 'Kudumbapriya Vadini' — came to the Achen. Acquaintance with these magazines awakened and quickened in our hero a thirst for knowledge. It brought about a great change in the boy.

In those days at Nadakkavu there were Bible readings and 'house prayers' (kudi namaskaram) from house to house. People would gather at the Kampusseri school, south of their house, for singing and Bible reading, and then go to each house in turn for the house prayers. The singing and the Bible reading were the young people's

task, and Chithramezhuthu was always first choice for the singing. At the reading meetings there was a custom of reading the 'Edavaka Pathrika'. In the Edavaka Pathrika, the voice of the Malankara Jacobite Syrian community, there appeared many articles and controversies, on matters of faith and practice and of history, against the 'Malayala Mithram', the voice of the C.M.S. church, and the 'Sabha Tharaka', the voice of the Reformed party. Reading all these, especially the controversies, gave Chithramezhuthu the greatest pleasure, and they helped him a great deal to understand the differences in faith and practice, and in culture, between the various Churches. In short, they kindled in him a great eagerness for debate.

Mukundan Thampi's Chief Disciple

Varghese's gift for painting showed itself very early. It became evident while he was at the Malayalam school. Because in class he paid more attention to drawing than to his lessons, he received plenty of beatings from his teachers. His first teacher in painting was his revered father. Seeing his son drawing on a slate, his father took the slate and said, 'I'll draw you a peacock,' and drew the figure of a peacock. Though it was a crude figure, Varghese drew a number of pictures copying it. His father, who had an uncommon gift for music, also took great delight in pictures. After the slate, his son's painting moved on to the walls of the house and the planks of the grain chest (pathayam).

It was P. Mukundan Thampi — the celebrated artist, Travancore Palace Artist, and disciple of Kilimanoor Chithramezhuthu Ravi Varma Koil Thampuran — who taught K. M. Varghese to paint in oils. Mukundan Thampi was

the son of Avittam Thirunal Udaya Varma Raja of Kochupilla Madam, the senior Raja of the Mannoor Madam palace at Mavelikara and a man of boundless learning in music. [Udaya Varma Thampuram was the maternal uncle of Pururuttathi Thampuratti of Mavelikara, the wife of Ravi Varma Koil Thampuram. Rani Lakshmi Bayi was the sister of Pururuttathi Thampuratti.] He was a gifted painter whom art critics acknowledged as foremost among the painters then living in India. At a reception given him in Calcutta by the Indian Officers, Thampi received a gold medal from the Viceroy of India, Lord Willingdon (*). It was in Chingam of the year 1080, at the age of sixteen, that K. M. Varghese's father took him to Mukundan Thampi's home to study painting.

(*) See "The late Chithramezhuthu Mukundan Thampi" — G. Krishna Pillai, Mavelikara — Manorama article — 29 Edavam 1129.

It was his intense gift and passion for painting that became the main obstacle to Varghese's progress in English education. Because of his father's unwavering interest in painting, and the inborn tenderness of heart that let him enjoy the sweetness of the art, he resolved — without any thought of circumstances or the future — that his son should learn painting. In those days ordinary people thought well only of government service and trade. Varghese says his father's courage of mind in this matter deserves praise, when one considers that even reasonably well-off people thought of painting as merely a pastime fit only for members of the royal family and the very wealthy.

In Travancore in those days, only at Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam was drawing taught as a subject, even in the English high schools. Neighbours and

relatives often blamed Kochukunju's father, saying it was great folly to set out to teach Kochukunju painting. He took no notice of any of it. Kochukunju's father often smiled on hearing the jibe that, instead of seating his son on the verandah to keep a shop, he was going to make him a 'Chithramezhuthu Koil Thampuran'.

The one who first took Kochukunju to Mukundan Thampi was a family friend, a Thuppai (Portuguese-descended Christian) named Joseph Fernandez of Kolelil. He had often spoken to Kochukunju's father in praise of Kochukunju's gift for painting.

Around this time Kochukunju had the chance to see some of Mukundan Thampi's oil paintings. The pictures of a Mukhavathi and of Saraswathi, set on the chariot for the kettukazhcha procession of the Kumbha Bharani festival, imprinted themselves on the boy's mind. Back home, the boy drew them from memory on several sheets of paper. It was with six or seven pictures — these, and copies of some pictures from Indian history — that Kochukunju went with Fernandez to see Mukundan Thampi. Kochukunju's gift for drawing won Mukundan Thampi over at once. The next week his father took his son to see Thampi, and that very day the master received the dakshina (offering) for teaching painting and took him on as his pupil.

It was in a studio set up in the north-west corner of the Kottilappattu compound, south of the Dalavappuram mansion at Mavelikara, that Mukundan Thampi trained K. M. Varghese and M. R. Padmanabha Marar — nephew of Kochugovinda Panicker Vaidyan of Arakkal (Madathil), Pela

Vadakku, Kannamangalam — in painting. The training began in 1904.

After two years Varghese began painting in oils. Mukundan Thampi used painting materials made by the English firm Winsor and Newton — paints, canvas, brushes, palette, palette knife and so on — imported by the Bombay firm 'J. V. Navalakhi'. So K. M. Varghese too used the paints, canvas and other materials made in England, brought from Bombay, both while he was learning and afterwards to the end of his life. At first his father, and later Varghese himself, ordered all of this from Bombay.

At times when there was not enough money to order painting materials, help came to Varghese now and then from his relative Ikkamathu Uppappan of the Edayile house, Kallumpurathu (father of Thomas Mar Dionysius Metropolitan); from Kunjunainan Mathai of Pilamoottil, Nadakkavu; and from Compounder Philipochen of Puthenpurakkal, Mavelikara, related to Varghese's father through the female line (father of Dr. M. P. Philip, owner of the Philip Memorial Hospital). (Of these, Ikkamathu of the Edayile house's father was closely related to K. M. Varghese's great-grandmother: the grandmother of his great-grandmother Elachi was the daughter of one Ikka of Poovathoor, Chengannur, and Thomas Mar Dionysius Metropolitan was her cousin, her father's brother's son.)

The Journey to Thiruvananthapuram

While training in painting as Mukundan Thampi's disciple, Varghese once went to Thiruvananthapuram with Thampi's father, Udaya Varma, to visit his master; Var-

ghese recorded the episode in his memoirs as follows: "For the Pallikkettu (royal wedding) of Pooradam Thirunal Sethu Lakshmi Bayi, the Senior Rani of Attingal, which was to take place on the 24th of Medam 1081, Mukundan Thampi's father, Udaya Varma Thampuran of Kochupilla Madam, was travelling to Thiruvananthapuram by boat at the command of the Maharaja.

"Since Thampi had told me to come to see him, I went in the boat too. At each halting-place along the way the government had a supper feast and a midnight feast prepared in advance. As food or money was provided for the Thampuran and his retinue, I too received food and money as befitted me. On the fourth day we reached the Chakka landing at Thiruvananthapuram. The Thampuran and his retinue went into the Fort, and I went to Perunthanni, where Thampi was staying. He lived near the Ammanathu palace, in a house called Thengammoottil. I stayed there for about a month, painting.

"I had been to Thiruvananthapuram once before, with my father. The stay at Thiruvananthapuram awakened many new ideas in my life. It was then that the need to rise and improve took strong hold of me. At Thiruvananthapuram Thampi had a pupil named Kunjukrishna Pillai. He later gave up painting and took a job in the palace stores. Pappu Panicker (nephew of Arakkal Govinda Panicker of Kannamangalam) and Kunjukrishna Pillai lived together.

"There was a festival at the Palkulangara temple at that time. For the thalappoli procession, a chariot (ther) had to be made of cloth, paper, paint, bamboo and so on and taken to the people of the locality. It was built at the

house where Kunjukrishna Pillai's elder brother lived. The great pains I took in building this chariot pleased the Nairs there very much.

"Just as people called me Kochukunju in my childhood, the Thampuran and Thampi usually called me 'Kochoon-ju'. This common name, which suggested no particular caste or religious name, together with my complexion — a fair white with a touch of red — and my features, led people to take me for a Nair. Because of this I often bathed, with Pappu Panicker and Kunjukrishna Pillai, in the Padmatheertham tank, north-east of the Sri Padmanabhaswamy temple at Thiruvananthapuram. After bathing we would get offerings — puffed rice, plantains and the like — from the Ganapathi shrine beside the northern steps of the tank, and eat them. I took part with Pappu Panicker and the others in the procession round the town for the Pallikkettu and in the splendid fireworks display that night. I also went again and again to see the paintings by Chithramezhuthu Koil Thampuran kept at the 'Karakausala Sala' (School of Arts) and the paintings in the Museum. I was seventeen then. After the Pallikkettu and the rest, I came back to Mavelikara by boat with the Thampuran. A few months later Thampi returned to Mavelikara. He lived at Kottilappattu again and resumed painting as before. I showed him the pictures I had painted in the meantime, and he corrected them for me. Even then, only Pappu Panicker and I were studying there. We were rivals, each trying to outdo the other. I often had occasion to see that Thampi thought more highly of my painting."

First Steps in Painting

"In the early days Thampi drew for me eyes, noses, mouths and ears in various expressions. Then I began copying pictures of animals, people, ships, landscapes and birds from drawing textbooks printed in London. Besides this, he trained me to draw large, round dried leaves, broken, curled and folded in all sorts of ways — first in outline only, and then with light and shade (shading) added.

Once I had a fair command of outline, I began to paint in colour. Thampi had paints, brushes, canvas and so on brought from Bombay for Pappu Panicker and me. Before that I used to write to Bombay myself and order paper, pencil, eraser, crayons, stumps and the like.

"After the paints arrived, Thampi fixed an auspicious day to begin and arranged beforehand that our guardians should come that day. So my father and I reached there at ten in the morning. Thampi put flake white, raw umber and ivory black on the palette and showed us how to mix them; and I offered three rupees as dakshina and received the palette and brush. I think Pappu Panicker gave five rupees. We both began painting in black and white, copying a half-length picture of a woman of the kind Chithramezhuthu Ravi Varma Koil Thampuran used to paint. Before long we started training in mixing colours. For four or five months we painted plants, fruits and human figures. Then we began to paint from photographs."

The First Painting

The first oil painting Varghese made after completing his training under Mukundan Thampi was of the Malank-

ara Metropolitan, Pulikkottil Joseph Mar Dionysius Thirumeni. In Makaram 1083 the painting was presented to the Metrachen at the Kottayam Cheriyaapally church. It was the church festival that day. The Metropolitan and everyone present were delighted with the painting. "The Metrachen, overjoyed, spoke in great praise of Varghese." After granting a certificate and money for this painting, the Metrachen gave Varghese two photographs and an album so that he could paint a full-size portrait of him. The Metropolitan's blessing bore fruit for Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese for a long time; afterwards he succeeded in every field he turned his hand to.

Before long Varghese painted a full-length portrait of the Metropolitan and took it to the Old Seminary at Kottayam and presented it to the Metrachen. Chithramezhuthu says:— "When the painting was finished, my father and I took it to Kottayam by boat. We reached the Old Seminary around noon and placed the painting before the Metrachen. The stately Metropolitan was very pleased with it. He called everyone in the Seminary and showed it to them. Everyone praised it highly. The Metrachen went inside, brought out eighty-one rupees, called me and said, 'My money has run out; take what there is for now,' and moved on. I received it reverently and handed the money to my father." He also wrote him a certificate in English. Varghese was then nineteen.

About this painting, the editor of 'Suriyani Suvisheshakan', a magazine published from the Old Seminary, printed the following news item at the time (Vol. 6, No. 8 of the magazine, Meenam 1083).

"Good News"

Many great men have tried to paint the portrait of our Valiya Thirumanassu (His Grace). It may be said that none of those painted so far has truly captured the likeness. Last month a young man named K. M. Varghese of Mavelikara painted a portrait of His Grace and presented it; and His Grace, delighted at the strength of talent shining in one so young, granted him a certificate to encourage him and commanded him to paint and bring a full-size portrait of His Grace. Accordingly, last week he brought the portrait, and His Grace was pleased to pay him its price. We must congratulate him on the fact that this portrait is in no way inferior to the six or seven other portraits of His Grace painted by well-known painters of Travancore. How glad we ought to be that people of such talent are arising among our Syrians!

It hardly needs saying that the duty of helping and encouraging this man belongs to every Syrian who reads this."

In Kumbham 1085 the twenty-year-old Varghese painted a portrait of Raja Raja Varma, the Moothakoil Thampuran of Ananthapuram, Karthikappally, and presented it to him. That Thirumeni, famous as 'Abhinava Vagbhata' (the new Vagbhata), was much pleased on seeing it and gave the artist a gift of three sovereigns. With the gift he gave Varghese a certificate in the words below. The high regard for this painting felt by the Moothakoil Thampuran — elder brother of Kerala Varma Valiya Koil Thampuran, the 'Kalidasa of Kerala' — is finely recorded in this certificate.

Ananthapuram Palace

24 Kumbham 1085

"K. M. Varghese of Mavelikara is a disciple of the famous painter Mukundan Thampi and has gained good experience in painting. I happened to see one or two oil paintings done by him. Pleased at seeing them, I asked him to paint a portrait of me as well, and he has painted it and brought it. We are convinced that he has shown in it an intelligence and skill quite astonishing for his youth and his training. Since he is a person of real talent, we have no doubt that if patriotic gentlemen help him as far as they can, it will be to the good both of him and of the country.

Raja Raja Varma
(Signed)

Moothakoil Thampuran"

Honoured by Kerala Varma Valiya Koil Thampuran

In Mithunam 1087 an exhibition was held for the Ochira Kali festival. Many products of Travancore and many works of art were included. Oil paintings, watercolours and much else were displayed.

One of them was an oil painting by Varghese of Balagopalan (the child Krishna). For that picture — painted from his own imagination, showing Sri Krishna grazing cattle on the bank of the Narmada — Varghese received the second prize of three rupees and a certificate at the closing meeting, held on 19 June 1912.

Varghese wished to present that painting to Kerala Varma Valiya Koil Thampuran, and on the 7th of Thulam 1088 he wrote to Thiruvananthapuram for permission. A reply came soon, saying that His Highness would come to

the Haripad palace on the 25th, on his way back after the Vaikathashtami festival, and would be glad to receive the painting then. Accordingly, on the appointed day at three o'clock, Varghese reached the Ananthapuram palace at Haripad and presented the painting. Greatly pleased, the Thampuran said many things and gave Varghese three sovereigns as a reward. A few days later he sent Varghese the certificate quoted below.

(Seal)

Trivandrum

11th November, 1912

"Mr. K. M. Varghese is a young and promising artist. His birthplace like that of a few other distinguished artists is Mavelikkarai. He is able to draw nice pictures in oils, one of which he was good enough to present to me. I find in it the nicety of his artistic taste of a no mean order. It is under that skilled Artist Mukundan Thampi that he has had his training. I have no doubt therefore he will ere long earn a name and thereby public patronage in a large scale. I wish him all success.

(Sd. Kerala Varma)

Valiya Koil Thampuran

C. S. I."

Kerala Varma Valiya Koil Thampuran was then 68, and K. M. Varghese 24.

In 1086, at the age of 22, Varghese painted a portrait of the Maharaja of Cochin who had abdicated. Rama Varma Appan Thampuran, the poison-healer Onpath-amkoor Kochunni Thampuran and others who saw it were all of one opinion that the painting was very fine.

Chithramezhuthu says: "In 1088 I painted a portrait of the Malankara Metropolitan, Vattasseril Geevarghese Mar Dionysius, and took it to the Parumala Seminary and gave it to him. The Metropolitan was boundlessly pleased on seeing it. He asked everyone at the Seminary for their opinion and praised me publicly. This painting was later installed in the hall of the Kundara Seminary. The certificate sent to me at that time by the Metropolitan — a man of profound intellect and great courage — is copied below.

'From Mar Dionysius, Metropolitan of the Malankara diocese

[Seal]

We are satisfied, from a number of oil paintings we have had him paint and from some other pictures we have seen of his handiwork, that K. M. Varghese of Mavelikara is a painter of great talent and experience in the art of painting. He too has adopted painting in the new style of modern times. We especially observe that he takes good pains to bring into the picture the character that shines in the face of the person he paints.

5 Mithunam 1088

Parumala Seminary

Dionysius

[Signed]'

"Vattasseril Geevarghese Mar Dionysius Metropolitan had great love and affection for me, also because I belonged to his family. His Grace spoke to many people in praise of my literary and historical articles. In 1107 His Grace commanded me to paint a large portrait of him, and at his wish I had two photographs taken for the purpose by the photographer E. V. Eesho, who then lived in

Kottayam. The photographs were taken with the masnapsa on his head and a black cassock. It was I who arranged His Grace's pose. One photograph showed only half of the face (a profile), in the thought that it might also be used some day for making a marble statue. The other photograph was so fine that all agreed there was no better one among the many photographs taken at various times in His Grace's life. While I was painting from that photograph, the Metropolitan died of high blood pressure at the Old Seminary, Kottayam, in 1109; so it was the Catholicos Bava (Kallasseri) who received the painting and paid me. I took only a hundred rupees, merely the cost of the paints. The painting was respectfully placed in the committee room upstairs at the Old Seminary, Kottayam. Later it was moved, with some other paintings of mine, to the 'Devalokam' Catholicate Aramana at Muttambalam, also in Kottayam."

In a letter sent from Madras by George Varghese — Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese's son and a leading historian — he says:— "In 1935 my father painted two large oil portraits of Vattasseril Mar Dionysius Thirumeni — one for the Old Seminary, Kottayam, and the other for the English School at Thazhakkara. The one given to the Seminary now hangs in the conference hall of the Devalokam Catholicate Aramana. This painting has drawn the attention of many great artists and foreign visitors. Chithramezhuthu Rama Varma Thampuran of the Mavelikara palace (son of Ravi Varma Koil Thampuran), who had been invited to the wedding of my eldest sister at the Maramon church on the 10th of Kumbham 1110, came to our house two days before the wedding in a special horse carriage; and seeing there the portrait of Vattasseril Mar

Dionysius Metropolitan, which had just been completed, he was delighted and said many things in praise of my father to my father — that remains unfaded in my memory to this day. I should also specially mention that Rama Varma Raja then gave the bride costly silk garments as a present. Rama Varma Valiya Raja gave my father help and support both in matters of art and in certain other affairs concerning him. That great-hearted man, ever kind to those who depended on him, loved and respected my father greatly. I have never heard of the Thampuran visiting any other Christian home in Mavelikara, before or after, except ours."

The Regard of the Vanchippuzha Thampuran

Towards the end of the year 1084, Varghese, together with Mukundan Thampi, was staying in the Kalippura Malika (pavilion) of the Vanchippuzha Madham at Chengannur, doing photographic work with the help of his master's hand camera. At that time R. Kalathu Iyer was teaching English to the Vanchippuzha "Uzhathiraru Thampuran". In those days Chithramezhuthu was able to become acquainted with Kalathu Iyer, and through him to paint a portrait of the Thampuran, who gave him thirty rupees as a reward. After this Varghese painted a picture of Sri Krishna as well and gave it to the Thampuran. The Thampuran was very pleased and, at Varghese's request, granted him a licence on stamped paper entitling him to cut thirty tons of teak from the Peruvanthanam hills. But once Varghese properly understood the trouble and expense of going to the Peruvanthanam hills and having the timber

felled and brought down, he gave the pass for a fairly good sum to a Muslim from Kollam named Hasman Pillai, who held the Peruvanthanam forest coupe of the Vanchipuzha Madham at auction. Chithramezhuthu records in his memoirs that he had expected — and had said so — that the Thampuran would give him a pass to cut timber from the Konni forest, but that in the end this is how it turned out.

The Works of a Master of Art — Mahatma Gandhi's Praise

In 1101 [1926] Varghese painted an oil portrait of Sree Narayana Guru Swami in his earlier years for the Ananda Ashram at Changanassery. When Mahatma Gandhi visited Travancore he saw this painting, was greatly pleased, and spoke in high praise of the artist. The newspapers of the day reported this.

Varghese painted pictures for many public institutions in Travancore and Cochin. Many eminent people had him paint their portraits — Thampurans, community leaders, Hindu religious teachers, great landlords, heads of churches, landowners, distinguished scholars, Europeans, heads of government departments, many senior priests of his own church, friends and others.

Among them: Murimattathu Mar Ivanios (the first Catholicos); Vakathanathu Mar Philoxenos (the second Catholicos); Mar Augen Timotheos (the fourth Catholicos); Parumala Mar Gregorios (Chathuruthi) Metropolitan, the saint of Parumala; Catholicos Baselios Geevarghese II Bava and his parents; Puthenkavil Mar Philoxenos Metropolitan; Mar Osthathios, the Antiochian deleg-

ate; bishops of the Roman Catholic, Mar Thoma and C.S.I. churches; Jacob Chandy (Mattathra?), Sanitary Commissioner of Travancore, and his father John Chandy; the parents of Tharyathu Kunjithomman of Kothamangalam, member of the Legislative Assembly; Dr. Karyalassery; the Mar Thoma bishop; Moolur S. Padmanabha Panicker; C. K. Thomas, Principal of C.M.S. College, Kottayam; the Rev. W. J. Edmund Sahib (LMS); Miss Weston Madamma, sister of Bishop Dr. Weston of Tirunelveli; Valakuzhi Mar Severios Metropolitan; Kandathil Varghese Mappillai, editor of the Malayala Manorama, and his wife; Umbarkattu Kushanda Swamikal; Sreedhara Sanyasi of Kulamullathil, Peringala, Chengannur; the wife of the brother of Elanjikkal Kunjithomman; Padmanabha Iyer, Superintendent of the Travancore Anchal (postal service); Justice K. K. Lukose, Judge of the Travancore High Court, and his wife, the Surgeon General Mrs. Punnen Lukose; Kallivayalil Pappan; Alummoottil Kochukunju Channar (before he was murdered); Alappurathu Namboothiri of Keerikkad; Pottankulathu Scaria of Kanjirappally and his younger brother Thommachan; J. R. Vincent Sahib; the Bishop of Changanassery, Dr. Kalassery; P. C. Mathew, I.C.S., Secretary to the Government of India, and his parents; the mother of K. P. K. Menon, Chief Secretary of Kerala; P. T. Thomas Vakil of Palampadam, and members of the Palampadam family; A. M. Varki, Principal of Alwaye College — K. M. Varghese painted the portraits of some hundred and seventy distinguished people and holy men such as these, and all of them still stand high in the world of art as crowning examples of artistic skill.

At the request of Colonel W. S. Olive, a senior British military officer who served in the Second World War, Chi-

thramezhuthu painted a bust portrait in oils of the British Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill. The Colonel praised it highly on seeing it, and took the portrait with him to London. The title given to the painting was "The Crouching Lion". It was handed over in May 1944. Varghese also painted a portrait of an American military officer named Clebius [*Note: spelling of this name uncertain*], who took it to America; that too is a painting that won praise.

The Mar Thoma parishioners of Thazhakkara, Mavelikara, had Varghese paint a portrait of Abraham Suffragan Mar Thoma Metropolitan, which has been placed in the church school. That painting, which has won the praise of art lovers too, still shines as an ornament of the Mar Thoma Church.

The Palampadam Family Portrait

In 1956 K. M. Varghese painted the Palampadam family portrait. It contains seven people: P. T. Thomas Vakil of Palampadam, his wife, his son Dr. P. T. Thomas (Ex-MLA), his younger brother Eappachan and youngest brother Avarachan, and his sisters Mrs. Kunjankutty and Mrs. P. C. Koshy. Varghese painted it by arranging several photographs into a group. He recorded: "To my knowledge no other person in Kerala has had a family portrait like this painted, and no other painter has painted one. Including the frame it measures 63 by 55 inches; the frame is 3½ inches wide on each side."

This painting has won the admiration not only of the Palampadam family but of a great many art lovers. It is kept at the Palampadam bungalow in Kottayam.

The Portrait of K. C. Mammen Mappillai

A news item published in the Malayala Manorama of 18 August 1954 about the portrait of K. C. Mammen Mappillai, editor of the Malayala Manorama, and his wife is quoted below:—

Kottayam, 2-1-1130

"In accordance with an order given by the Manorama management to Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese to paint oil portraits of Sri K. C. Mammen Mappillai and his wife standing together on a single canvas, the painting has been most beautifully executed and handed over. It deserves special mention that paintings by Mr. Varghese, who has long experience and great skill in the art of painting, are to be found in London, America and Ceylon."

The Portrait of the Holy Virgin Mary

An old painting of the Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God, kept in the Kallissery Knanaya church, had fallen into a very decayed state. When the parishioners asked Chithramezhuthu to repair the damage and repaint it, he stayed at the Kallissery church, restored the painting and painted it afresh. The report published about this in the Malayala Manorama on Saturday, 6 Edavam 1109 (1933), is quoted below.

6 Edavam 1109

"Painting Unveiled

(From a correspondent)

"A painting of the Holy Virgin Mary — installed in the ancient Kallissery Knanaya Syrian church, about three hundred years old, and bought from the Parangis (Por-

tuguese) by Anjilimoottil Ittythomman Kathanar, who was then vicar of the church — has been beautifully restored by Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese, and was unveiled on the 27th of Medam, the death anniversary of that same Ittythomman Kathanar, by His Grace Dioscoros Metropolitan of the Knanaya diocese. At the meeting held on the occasion, Mr. Varghese's skill in painting was praised, and he was presented with a gold medal on behalf of the parish."

Paintings of Ancient Times

In a note on the art of painting, K. M. Varghese says:—"Paintings lead us towards righteousness, contentment and bliss. The 8th chapter of the Vishnu Purana, composed in the 4th century after Christ, deals with painting.

"Much is also said about Indian painting in the Abhilashitārtha Chintamani, written in the 12th century by Someshvara III of the Chalukya dynasty, and in the Shilparatnakaram composed by Sreekumara, a Keralite. The Arthashastra of Kautilya, Valmiki's Ramayana, Bharata's Nāṭyashastra, Bhaṣa's Swapnavasavadattam, Kalidasa's Malavikāgnimitram, Viśakhadatta's Mudrarākṣhasam and Bhavabhūti's Uttararamacharitam contain plenty of examples of our ancestors' gift for painting.

"Yashodhara, the commentator on the Kamasutra, sets out the basic principles of painting as rupabheda (variety of form), pramāṇa (proportion), bhava (feeling), lavanya-yojana (infusion of grace), sādṛishya (likeness) and varṇikabhāṅga (handling of colour). The ancient murals at Ajanta, Bagh, Badami, Sittannavasal, Kanchipuram, Thanjavur, Ellora [in the caves], Nartamalai, Somapalayam,

Thirumala and Padmanabhapuram — from the days of the glory of the Andhra kings, in the second century before Christ — are famous. Red, yellow, blue, white and black were the pure colours; chayilyam (vermilion), manayola (yellow orpiment), the blue of the indigo plant, and a decoction of chappanga (sappanwood) were used in olden times."

The Ravi Varma Tradition

"I must say a word here about the oil colours which I have used for a long time in painting — in painting human portraits — and in which I have come to place firm trust. The oil paints called 'oil colours' in English are now put out by the makers in as many as a hundred and fifty colours. Within red, green, yellow, blue, violet and so on, there are many shades. Among them are permanent colours, which keep their colour unchanged for a long time without being affected by any kind of heat or cold; colours which, some time after painting, change and turn into another colour; and colours which, some time after painting, darken and turn black. Colours produced from metals, earth and the like are not all equally permanent. Even the colours used to mix flesh tones fall into both kinds. Those who have not gained practical knowledge and deep familiarity with the chemical stability of colours use them without understanding, attracted by their passing brilliance; in the end, after some time, the true appearance of the painting suffers. All this time I have used oil colours made in England. Below I give, in English and in Malayalam, the English names of the colours I use for mixing flesh tones — chosen through study and long experience,

through knowing how famous painters use them, and on my master's advice:—

1. Flake White No. 1

Flake White No. 2 [there is also one with more oil added and slightly less body]

2. Yellow Ochre

3. Light Red

4. Rose Madder

5. New Blue

6. Alizarin Crimson

7. Cobalt Blue

8. Vermilion

9. Vandyke Brown [for painting hair only]

10. Burnt Umber

"For the background, Raw Umber is used. Raw Umber, Oxide of Chromium, Ivory Black, Flake White and Cobalt Blue are used as appropriate, in stronger or weaker degree. Half the importance of a painting lies in the background. What is said here concerns the usual kind of background for ordinary fair and dusky human complexions.

"For painting the background, the colours Raw Umber, Yellow Ochre, Oxide of Chromium, Burnt Umber, Lamp Black, Cobalt Green and White are used as appropriate, in stronger or weaker degree.

"Among the colours used for mixing flesh tones, Brown Madder and Purple Madder are also used at the places around the eyes where brown is needed. The effect of this

colour can also be produced with Alizarin Crimson, Cobalt Blue and Light Red. These are better.

"The colours used by Chithramezhuthu Koil Thampuran [Raja Ravi Varma] are the very ones I have noted above. The colours used by his son, Rama Varma Raja, are listed below:—

1. Flake White — 5. Vermilion
2. Yellow Ochre — 6. Burnt Umber
3. Light Red — 7. French Ultramarine
4. Rose Madder — 8. Purple Madder

"For gold and for gold lace (kasavu), (1) Naples Yellow, (2) Cadmium Yellow and (3) French Naples Yellow can be used. French Ultramarine is used in place of New Blue and Cobalt Blue.

"Usually the painting is completed with two coatings and a final touch. First, [if really necessary,] Brown Madder and Light Red alone are mixed in proportion and used to bring out, on the canvas, the parts outlined in pencil and the parts with heavy shade. The painting is left like this for two days, and then the first coating of paint is applied. For the first coating only Yellow Ochre, Light Red, New Blue and Flake White — which are warm, thick and coarse in texture — are used. For the second coating, Flake White, Yellow Ochre, Light Red, Cobalt Blue and Rose Madder are used. [What I said about drawing the outline in paint over the pencil outline is only to avoid mistakes in the early stages. Once one has some experience, it is no longer needed.]

Method of Application

"For the first coating, New Blue and white are mixed to make a grey. Next, Flake White and Yellow Ochre are mixed, Light Red is added as needed, and this is put on the palette. The first coating is done by adding the grey, thicker or thinner, to this second colour. Where much shade is needed, only New Blue and Light Red should be mixed as required. These should be used in all the heavily shaded parts. The more grey is mixed into the colour used for the first coating (Flake White, Yellow Ochre, Light Red), the darker the colour becomes.

"After the first coating has been applied, the second coating is applied only after three or four days, when the paint has dried thoroughly.

"It is in the second coating that the true flesh colour must be brought out. The first coating should be darker than whatever the true flesh colour is meant to be.

"For the work of the second coating, only Flake White, Yellow Ochre, Light Red, Cobalt Blue and Rose Madder are used. Cobalt Blue and Rose Madder are transparent colours — that is, whatever paintwork they are laid over, the paint underneath shows through the paint laid on top.

"Mix Cobalt Blue and Flake White to make a grey, and use it near the skin colour intended as the true colour, blending it into that colour. Rose Madder is added to this grey and laid at the places of the eyes and where darkness is needed. To bring out the reality of flesh colour, the work must be done with New Blue in the first coating and with Cobalt Blue in the second.

"Putting black at the place of the eyes is harmful in many ways. Paint the surroundings of the eyes and the pupils with the grey made of Cobalt Blue and white, with Yellow Ochre and Rose Madder added. To get a little more darkness there, add Alizarin Crimson in place of Rose Madder — that is the very best.

"If the second coating is applied before the first coating has dried thoroughly, the painting will later grow mould.

"If at all possible, do not add linseed oil to the paint. Whether the paint lies thick on the canvas or is thinned with linseed oil and brushed on, it stains with age. Only touch it with a little linseed oil when painting the background, or when, because of drying, the paint does not flow well enough. If it is 'Pappoma medium' [*Note: probably a medium such as 'Roberson's medium' or 'poppy oil medium'; the printed name is unclear*] instead of linseed oil, it can be used without fear. The less linseed oil is used, the better. American painters use only 'Pappoma medium' for oil painting.

"Never forget the principle that what makes a colour look real is also the colour that falls next to it. It is the state of the background, too, that makes a colour look real. Ivory Black, Raw Sienna, Burnt Sienna and Crimson Lake must never be used for flesh colour; all of these lose their colour with age and turn into something else. Prussian Blue is the same.

"When mixing colours for flesh, and when laying the colours on the canvas, whatever colours are used, one must take special care that the 'tone' is right in the way they are laid on.

"Hard colour; outlines that stand out; heavy shading; black for the pupil of the eye; making other parts brighter than the face; laying fresh wet paint again on top before the paint already worked has dried thoroughly (this is what makes a painting bloom); darkening the eyebrows; and using linseed oil beyond what is absolutely unavoidable — all these are to be avoided in oil painting.

"Do not try to increase the number of colours; get the result with as few colours as possible. With just these colours — White, Yellow Ochre, Light Red, Cobalt Blue, Rose Madder and Vermilion — any human complexion can be made.

"Varnish should be applied only after at least six months have passed since the painting was finished. If it is applied at once, the paint will crack and split as though torn. Varnish should be applied as thinly as it can possibly be laid. If varnish is put on thickly, in the end the varnish itself will spread, crack and flake. After that it cannot be removed, and the whole painting will grow dull. If old paintings are wiped with a sponge dipped in petrol before varnishing, the dirt and dust will be entirely removed."

Even art critics have agreed that K. M. Varghese had immense mastery of oil painting. S. S. Pillai, Chairman of the Mavelikara Municipality, says so plainly in an article on Mavelikara in the Malayala Manorama of 14 May 1985. George Varghese writes from Madras:— "One special feature of Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese's painting was that in his portraits of human faces the outline never stood out in the painting. His manner of painting was such that no one could say where the outline of a feature began and where it ended — nor, likewise, whether light

or shade, grey or highlight, where one colour began and where it ended. When one looks at the painting from a distance, one sees the outline and sees the separate colours. Looking from close by, one cannot see the edge of anything; nothing seems to stand out. The colour and the outline one sees close up are not what appears from a distance. The painter worked on the canvas close up only for the sake of the effect the viewer is meant to see from a distance. He acquired this special manner of painting from the training of his master Mukundan Thampi and from long experience. I do not speak here of his artistic imagination and his artistry."

Painting materials made in England — especially paints, brushes and canvas — enhanced the quality of his painting. His was the tradition of the school of Ravi Varma, for K. M. Varghese's master Mukundan Thampi was Ravi Varma's chief disciple. Those who truly understood the depth and beauty of Varghese's art were only a few discerning people: art lovers in the royal families of Travancore and Cochin, and lovers of art in the Hindu and Christian communities. Admirers of art always did nothing but praise him. It may be said without exaggeration that he was a "Joshua Reynolds" of India — Reynolds having been the famous portrait painter of England.

4

The Prose-Poet

It was Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese who, on the horizon of Malayalam literature, wrote poetry through a new movement called the prose-poem (gadyakavitha). Before that, all poetry had been in verse; no one had thought that poetry could be written in prose. It was in this situation that he wrote a prose-poem, "Sukhaswapnamritham" ("The Nectar of a Happy Dream"), in the Thulam 1094 issue of the monthly Athmaposhini. Many welcomed this new movement. Following it, he wrote another prose-poem, "Aa Cheriya Vazhithara" ("That Little Footpath"), in the Meenam-Medam 1094 issue of Bhashaposhini. Mahakavi Ulloor Parameswara Iyer (11-11-1094), giving him assurance in this new movement, and Kunathu Janardhana Menon, editor of Samadarshi, congratulating him (9 Mithunam 1094), each sent Chithramezhuthu a letter. Later, at the conferences of the Samastha Kerala Sahitya Parishad held at Thrissur in Dhanu 1103 and at Thiruvananthapuram in Dhanu 1112, Chithramezhuthu himself recited his prose-poems "Prasthanam Sudhalahari" and "Jaganmanalan". In 1116 the Kalavilasini publishers of Thiruvananthapuram brought out a book containing eleven of Chithramezhuthu's prose-poems under the title Chenkolum Muraliyum ("The Sceptre and the Flute"). Although in the preface the author recorded the book's real name as Chenkolum Muraliyum, the publishers, in view of the enormous popularity

these prose-poems had won throughout Kerala, named the book "Chithramezhuthu's Prose-Poems". The book contains eleven prose-poems: five spiritual visions — Jaganmanalan, Sukhaswapnamritham, Prasthanasudhalahari, Chenkolum Muraliyum and Kavithadevi — and six love-dialogues — Premabhyarthanam, Aa Cheriya Vazhithara, Prema Sayujyam, Virahadaham, Premabhishekam and Soundaryaradhanam.

The prose-poem "Jaganmanalan" was first published in the Malayala Manorama weekly of 20 Chingam 1113. The prose-poem "Virahadaham" was published in Bhashachandrika — issued from Thiruvalla under the editorship of K. I. Mathulla Mappillai — in the Dhanu-Makaram 1097 volume, issues 5-6. The other prose-poems first saw the light in monthlies and newspapers such as Bhashaposhini, Athmaposhini (Kunnamkulam) and the Malayala Manorama.

Chithramezhuthu is the pioneer of the prose-poem in Malayalam. Kesari Balakrishna Pillai mentions this in his introduction to G. Sankara Kurup's collection of poems Nimisham. In the preface to the prose-poem book Chithramezhuthu says:— "It was about 25 years ago that I first set foot in this new movement. Let me take this occasion to state, with great humility, the fact that at that time no other Keralite had attempted to compose poetry freely in this manner. At the time many advised me that, for many reasons, this manner was likely to end in failure. Moreover, an imaginary writer calling himself 'The Future Tagore of Kerala' published, on pages 289, 290 and 291 of the monthly Vidooshakan for 1098 [volume 4, issue 11], under the heading 'My Prose-Poem', a mere mock-imita-

tion of a 'prose-poem', with a long preface heaping excessive abuse on me and my prose-poems.

"But the fact that my dear friends Varikkolil K. Kesavan Unnithan — a fellow traveller on the path of poetry and a famous poet — and M. M. Samuel, B.A. [teacher at Kozhencherry High School], gladly welcomed this new movement did warm my self-reliance in those early days. Besides this, the sincere approval of this manner by the great poets Ulloor and Vallathol, and by Kunnathu Janardhana Menon — a keen critic and a man of literary taste — was in many ways an encouragement to me in the early days."

The introduction to the book "Chithramezhuthu's Prose-Poems" was written by Dr. K. Godavarma Raja — a leading scholar and discerning critic, Superintendent of Sanskrit at Maharaja's College, Thiruvananthapuram.

Dr. Godavarma says in his introduction:— "The prose compositions here, blessed with the heart's delights of the art of poetry, are able to stir thought and feeling alike. A pure heart, a beautiful imagination and a soul full of bliss shine forth everywhere in this work.... Mr. Varghese's style is clear and dignified, suited to his subject. Though some parts may be obscure because of the difficulty of the subject, it is not hard to see that fine waves of imagination spread everywhere. It is not easy for anyone but a man of genius like Mr. Varghese to nourish such a new movement through so flawless a union of beautiful sound and sense."

Read the letter that E. M. Kovoov, B.A., B.L. — a well-known writer and author — sent to Chithramezhuthu about this book of prose-poems on 27 Makaram 1117.

"Where does spirituality end; where does the bodily come into its own; where is the erotic absent; where do grace and skill of expression vanish from sight; where do intelligence and wealth of experience grow less; where do imagination and skill with words stumble; where, in the very foundations of life, does the grip seem not to tighten — dear friend, you who have had the good fortune to become the author of an enchanting book, with inner strength, outward beauty, freshness and a radiance of genius, that can turn and make one turn — no, even make one merge — heart, intellect, imagination and the critical faculty alike towards countless, countless such vital centres: the book you sent for my opinion has reached my hands.

"As for me, caught at least for the moment by the inspiring power of its style — in the dark, thick, hanging tresses of the beloved, in the curls that rejoice, flying the banner of victory at having captured the crescent moon, and there, further and further down, in Ravi Varma's Hamsa — attended by the swan — in the rosy feet that recall Damayanti's toes; here and there, in everything, all at once, reaching, kissing, plunging, sinking, yearning to dissolve — something like the state of a beggar of love, that is mine: thrilled and delighted by the ideas in it and by a manner of phrasing that recalls the strings of a veena showering the joy of silent music; seeing nothing in it, yet seeing everything; reading and turning the pages here and there; saying 'Bale' (bravo) in some places; wondering in others whether the art of drawing out the gold wire of a waist-chain has not gone a little too far; peering closely to see whether it owes anything to the friend of Visva-Bharati (Tagore) — "It needs no word from me to

say that this is a gain for Malayalam literature. Those who know you closely need not be told that it is a fine documentary proof of Chithramezhuthu's spiritual development. What pleases me most is that a Malankara Christian has dared, for the first time, to reach the limits of freedom of Solomon's famous Song. If you want my full opinion, please let me know."

Yours, Kovoov

Pathanamthitta

26-6-1117

On 2 December 1956 the great poet Edayaranmula K. M. Varghese wrote thus in the *Deepika*, Kottayam, about the book "Chithramezhuthu's Prose-Poems": "Among Sri Chithramezhuthu's prose-poems, 'Jaganmanalan' and 'Chenkolum Muraliyum' are especially celebrated. They will always stand head held high among the mystic poems of Malayalam literature. In both the craft of feeling and the craft of form they have a nobility. In them we see love and spiritual thought in harmony. There is not the slightest stench of sensual craving in them; none of Sri Varghese's prose-poems has that fault. They are made in the manner of the Tagore movement. But on close examination it becomes clear that their inner world is wholly Christian. They have something of the culture of the Psalms and the Song of Songs of the Bible. Christ and the Church, His bride, can readily be seen in those prose-poems by a Christian reader of taste. Only those well acquainted with the Upanishads can enter the depths of works such as Tagore's *Gitanjali*; likewise, to understand and enjoy Sri Varghese's poems properly, one needs a Christian culture. The source of all those poems is a distinctive culture formed by reciting David's visionary

songs, Solomon's love songs and proverbs, and the Gospels."

From Painting to Literature

Chithramezhuthu himself recorded that it was the company of the Rev. Oommen Mammen Padre and of Mukundan Thampi, and the Kathakali at the Puthiyakavu temple, that made him a man of letters.

In his family history Chithramezhuthu says:— "Rather than acquiring a scattered and incomplete acquaintance with many arts, it is more rewarding to acquire complete practical mastery of some one fine art. Knowledge of Sanskrit is essential for attaining complete mastery in the arts. The art of one who has learned Sanskrit carries a cultured quality not to be found elsewhere. Syrian Christians are generally averse to Kathakali, the Hindu dance-drama. I have heard the name of only one Nasrani who has put on the costume and performed in Kathakali. It is certain that this most excellent art of Kerala will in future grow in popularity and fame throughout India and the whole world. In the performing arts nothing is dearer to me than Kathakali. In the year 1095, at a variety entertainment held at the B. H. High School under the auspices of the Mavelikara Civic Equality Association (Paura Samathwavada Sangham), I acted a part of Ravana in the Kathakali Ravana Vijayam. It was Kuttappan Pillai — son of the late Karippuzha Velu Pillai, who won fame in Kathakali throughout Kerala, and himself a Kathakali actor — who painted the chutti on my face and dressed me in the costume. He had also brought the people needed for the chenda, the maddalam, the back-up singing, the cymbals and so on. The committee of the Mavelikara Civic Equal-

ity Association paid him for this. The crown was not as heavy as I had thought. Once the costume was on, I was confident that I could somehow carry it off by standing behind the curtain and roaring a fierce cry. Since the notices and newspaper advertisements published beforehand had said that I would be playing Ravana, many people from Karthikappally, Kayamkulam, Chengannur and other places had bought tickets and taken their seats in the hall early to see the variety entertainment. I must have taken no less than fifteen minutes over the thirappurappadu (the curtain entrance). With the air of a long-practised actor, I brought my face right up to the Kathakali lamp blazing on all sides with flickering flames, and acted Ravana's majesty and grandeur. Though I had no proper knowledge of the mudras (hand gestures) at all, I showed some moods with the help of the few mudras I knew for acting Ravana's valour and might. After the variety entertainment ended, a leading government official of the place spoke in high praise of the acting.

Kathakali at the Puthiyakavu Temple

Chithramezhuthu continues:— "When I was small, my father used to take me to the Puthiyakavu temple to see the Kathakali held on the festival days of the 'Nootti-onnu Kalam' (the hundred-and-one pots). From the age of eight I saw the 'ethirelpu (reception) and Kathakali' on those festival days every year.

"Once, while watching the performance, I was utterly captivated by a female character who came on stage. I did not know it was a man dressed as a woman. The beauty and charming graces of that female character attracted me beyond measure, so I kept pressing my father:

'We must take that girl home with us.' Absorbed in the Kathakali, my father did not pay much attention at first. When I pressed harder, he asked, 'Why should we take her home?' My answer was, 'I want to marry that girl.' 'Phoo, you fool, it's an illusion (maya)!' was the scolding that came at once from my father's mouth.

"I was really very foolish. In later years I have often marvelled that at the age of ten I had the wish to live with so beautiful a wife, the thought of marriage, and the belief that if my father wished it he could take that woman home and keep her there in that very costume.

"Later, while I was learning painting, I had the opportunity to get to know Karippuzha Velu Pillai, the leading Kathakali artist of the time, at Mukundan Thampi's painting studio, and to talk with him often. Velu Pillai's Narasimha (man-lion) role, famous throughout Kerala, was something to be seen. I have never since been able to see an actor so perfectly suited to the costume, so gifted in acting and so rich in artistic imagination. Eyes with broad eyelids and a beautiful mouth were a special feature of Velu Pillai's. It can be said without doubt that this fondness for Kathakali from childhood is what kindled my gift for the fine arts."

The Sahitya Parishad's Medal of Honour

At the second annual conference of the Sahitya Parishad held at Thrissur in Dhanu 1103, the prose-poem "Prasthanam Sudhalahari" written by Chithramezhuthu won the Parishad's unreserved praise. The next day's newspapers predicted that the year's medal for prose literature would go to Chithramezhuthu. At the literary and art ex-

hibition held in connection with the Parishad, Chithramezhuthu exhibited thirteen books, including a history of the Syrian Church (a prose palm-leaf manuscript) that the Malankara Metropolitan Mar Thoma VI, Valiya Mar Dionysius, had had written around the year 952; the Muppathinalu Vritham ("Thirty-Four Metres") written in imitation of Ezhuthachan by the famous poet Konnayil Kochukunju Writer of Kottayam; all the works of the grammarian Geevarghese Kathanar; and some other literary works. (See the article published by Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese in the Malayala Manorama in July 1928 under the title "The First Models of Modern Malayalam, or the Grammarian Geevarghese Kathanar and His Prose Works".) That article records that many hundreds of non-Christian brethren who entered the exhibition hall examined these with keen attention. For this exhibition, Rama Varma Appan Thampuran, representing the Maharaja of Cochin, sent Chithramezhuthu a gold medal on behalf of the Parishad. The relevant parts of two letters from Appan Thampuran on this matter are quoted below:—

I

Ayyanthole Kovilakam

28-5-1104

Sree

"The office-bearers have decided to give Mr. Varghese the medal of honour that had been fixed for the literary and art exhibition held in connection with the second conference of the Sahitya Parishad. Since he was not present at the Kottakkal Parishad, it is still here. Should I send the medal to you? Or would you come here and receive it from His Highness's own hand? I am commanded to ask

which you would prefer. The year and the name have not been engraved on the medal; they will have to be. Please send a reply at once.

By command,
C. K. Rama Varma
Appan Thampuran (signed)"

II

Ayyanthole Kovilakam
9-6-1104

Sree

"The letter that appears to have been written on the 30th of Dhanu reached me only yesterday. As requested in it, the exhibition medal of honour has been sent separately by registered post. On one side of the medal are engraved 'Sahitya Parishad, Thrissivaperoor' and the royal emblems of the Perumpadappu Swaroopam (the Cochin royal house). On the other side only the word 'Exhibition' has been put; the rest of the space has been left blank. There is no objection to your adding the year of the Parishad and your own name there as you wish. You will do what is needed in that matter. Along with the medal I have also wrapped up and enclosed, in my mind, my prayers for Mr. Varghese's future welfare. Though they cannot be seen with the eye, I hope they may be seen in their fruits.

Yours, servant of Kairali (signed)
Rama Varma Appan Thampuran"

A Master of Letters

Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese was a leader of letters who, showing uncommon talent and skill in Malay-

alam literature and creating in such abundance flowers of verbal ornament that spread their fragrance over the vine of the language's literature, nourished the Malayalam language and served literature for half a century. "The delight of the articles of one who possessed a style of his own and a gift for composition won the praise even of his opponents" — so the Malayala Manorama assessed Chithramezhuthu's service to literature in its editorial of 22 July 1962. In its editorial of 16 July 1953, the newspaper Dakshinabharathi said that Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese, N. Gopala Pillai, Sooranad Kunjan Pillai, S. Guptan Nair and P. K. Narayana Pillai were imperishable orbs of light in the firmament of literature.

Chithramezhuthu was a celebrated prose writer, prose-poet, historian, orator, essayist and critic. His style was dignified, beautiful and radiant.

The well-known critic Dr. K. M. Tharakan has recorded, in the book "The Malankara Church in the Twentieth Century" (*), that Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese is one of the few leading writers who passed away after making distinct contributions to Malayalam letters in the twentieth century; that his ability to paint pictures with words was boundless; and that he was able to make prose poetic.

* "The Malankara Church in the Twentieth Century" — publishers Fr. T. G. Zachariah and K. V. Mammen, p. 335.

The Rev. K. Geevarghese Anchal — a distinguished priest of the Malankara Orthodox Church, a writer and a scholar — says in a letter sent on 19 June 1986 to George Varghese, Chithramezhuthu's son:— "Chithramezhuthu was not only an accomplished writer but also a powerful

lover of his community. His works will last for centuries yet without losing their freshness. These articles and notes are a precious deposit for the Malayalam language and for the Malankara Church.... At least the articles and notes of Chithramezhuthu now in hand must be preserved from now on. If termites get into them, or rats gnaw them, or anything like that happens to them, a thinking person can only count it a grave offence against the Holy Church, against literature and against the world. When will another 'Chithramezhuthu' be born!!.... In every word of his one can see pride in his community shining forth.... It was Chithramezhuthu's nature to cut open and proclaim, without fear or favour and in dignified language, truths that touch the quick. No one could effectively oppose his objective opinions and arguments, formed with complete conviction after studying and examining a matter down to a hair's breadth; so he made some enemies. Yet that master of research lived all his life with undimmed radiance, his head held high."

Adv. K. V. Chacko of Muvattupuzha, a lover of literature and an orator, says in a letter he sent to Chithramezhuthu in July 1945:— "I am a stranger to you; there is nothing surprising in that. But you are known to me face to face. I do not presume to claim that I know you, a man of noble life, well; but your flowing and natural prose style is well known to me. The thrilling waves and the little ripples that the beautiful, gentle course of that stream of poetry has set going on the body of our literature have raised some faint ripples in my heart too. I have worshipped that gifted pen in my mind; I have bowed before it. Sometimes I have even adored that divine gift with envy, and seen some daydreams.

I remember too the howls and cries of some jackal-philosophers who roamed freely in the thickets and great forts of the community, and the slaps they earned. So it is."

The Rev. Dr. C. T. Eapen, President of the Syrian Christian Congress, says in a letter he sent to Chithramezhuthu on 5 December 1954 from Northwestern University, Evanston (Illinois), in America:— "I often think of Mr. Varghese. I doubt whether a man so skilled in so many arts has the time or occasion to remember an old acquaintance far away. It is no exaggeration to say that I have thought of Mr. Varghese. What I think is what possibilities there would have been if someone like Mr. Varghese, equally skilled in prose writing and in painting, had reached these American shores. There would have been many people to recognise and encourage Mr. Varghese's talents if he were here; I think Mr. Varghese could leave the narrow bounds of Malayalam and make great inroads into the language of Shakespeare too. One who can write poetic prose in Malayalam can do so in English as well. If Mr. Varghese could write an article in English in a newspaper here, in language as tender and beautiful as he writes in Malayalam, you would see what a rush and crowd there would be for Mr. Varghese. Mr. Varghese's small difficulties would end in a single day."

It was at the age of twenty-two that Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese began to write. In the early years he practised by writing articles in the Nasrani Deepika, published from Mannanam. Later he wrote a great deal in publications such as the Paschimatharaka (Alappuzha), Navabharathi (Thiruvalla), Pracheenatharaka, Keraleey-abhimani (Mavelikara), the Bhashaposhini monthly, the

Athmaposhini monthly, the Suriyani Sabha Kahalam (Kunnamkulam), Sujanamithram, Kerala Kahalam (Thiruvalla), Deshabandhu, the Malayala Manorama, Paura Prabha (Kottayam), Pauradhwani (Kottayam), the Malabar Mail (Ernakulam), Deshabhimani (Kollam), Keralabhooshanam (Kottayam), Kerala Kesari, the Malankara Sabha monthly (Kottayam), Malayala Rajyam, and in the special issues and annuals of the Manorama, the Deshabandhu special issue and the Church Weekly (Kottayam). He wrote articles on a variety of subjects — literature, history, religion, community, church affairs, politics and painting. His political articles touched on the communities suffering inequality in Travancore. The fierce showers of arrows that flowed from Chithramezhuthu's pen were enough to open the eyes of the Travancore Government and remove inequalities.

George Vallakkalil — who wrote a foreword to Chithramezhuthu's novella Chittithalalayal, and who was Secretary of the Suriyani Mahajana Sabha, a scholar and a renowned critic — says: "I first became acquainted with Sriman Chithramezhuthu's literary ventures during my high-school days. The delight that his historical stories then being serialised in the Malayala Manorama — 'Valiya Mar Dionysius and the Tharananallur Namboodiripad', 'Thachil Mathu Tharakan's Thangakompan', 'Our Amma-chi of Nellimoottil', 'Mar Mathews Athanasius's Pan-chakalyani', 'The Central Pillar of Venad, or the Saintly Shouriyar' and others — aroused in me, as in many other readers of taste, is still alive in me today. His later masterpieces of prose-poetry have made his place in the world of letters immortal.

"Deep historical scholarship, an uncommon gift for portrayal, and a dignified, majestic style — these are the distinguishing marks of Chithramezhuthu."

About an article (a true story) by Chithramezhuthu titled "The Noble Serpent That Fell into Samadhi at a Concert", written in the Malayala Manorama in December 1952, the well-known writer and eminent priest Fr. K. Geevarghese Anchal says in a letter sent on 7 November 1986 to Chithramezhuthu's son George Varghese:—

An Emperor of Letters

"I received the letter and the article you so kindly sent. Thank you. I read that article (The Noble Serpent That Fell into Samadhi at a Concert) at a single sitting, twice over. I have a faint memory of having read this article — the story of a serpent's love of music — somewhere long ago. A small incident. But when it flowed through the gifted and marvellous pen of Sri Chithramezhuthu, it became an extraordinary work of poetic art, full of vigour and radiance.

"Effortlessly marshalling beautiful words rich in meaning, he sends through the readers' hearts an endless, unceasing succession of waves — sweet and lovely tides of thought and feeling. Who would not long to rest a while on the enchanting crests of that great ocean of literature, which swells, rises and subsides with the natural loveliness of forest streams running and murmuring? What other pen can give the world of taste such ever-new works of art! Let me quote one sentence: 'That stream of nectar-sweet music — with the sweetness of tone that came, like the call of the koel, from a sweet throat perfect in vocal

quality, and with its ascents and descents flowing, each turning into the other, from sweet majesty to sweet delicacy and from a sweet low murmur to the grand splendour of Mahendra's mountain — plunged Sundara Sastrikal into a flood of rapture.'

"What a beautiful sentence! Delightful and majestic, dignified and brilliant. And this is not peculiar to this sentence alone; every one of them alike carries a full pitcher of the nectar of literature.

"O Mother, the great Malankara Church! Do your children repent, even now, that they could not honour Chithramezhuthu as he deserved — could not make use of him, could not encourage him? When will another 'Chithramezhuthu' take shape in your womb?

"Deep knowledge of the many branches of music, literature, psychology and practical affairs shines through this little article. Many of those called writers today may seem mere little children taking their first steps before that vast ocean of knowledge.

"I stand with bowed head, in admiration and respect, before that lofty and revered emperor of letters."

Mahakavi Kumaran Asan's Praise

In the year 1104 Mahakavi Kumaran Asan said of Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese: "The most celebrated writer living in the Christian community today is Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese. His historical stories are a source of the greatest pride and inspiration to the Christian community."

Prof. Koshy Thalackal says in an article in Bhashaposhini titled "Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese: A Remembrance":— "Standing on the comparatively controversy-free stage of modern Malayalam literature and looking back some four, five or six decades, one fact becomes clear. How much more turbulent than today the literary world of those days was! It was at the very time when the great poetic trio and the giants of prose were blessing the air of Kerala in their different ways that those 'suicide battles' (chaver samarangal) of literature were staged here. Our literary stage then resounded with the brilliant pens of towering scholars. Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese was a man of genius who, standing at the front of 'that' battle array, wielded sword and shield with skill.

5

Magdalana Mariyam and Chithramezhuthu

There is no doubt that, by writing the introduction to Vallathol's universally admired narrative poem Magdalana Mariyam ("Mary Magdalene"), Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese and Vallathol Narayana Menon alike shed greater lustre on the lofty horizon of literature, and shone forth all the more honoured for it. For the benefit of the great majority of Syrian Christians, who have never tried to enjoy the beauty of the enchanting Magdalana Mariyam or even to visit the banks of that river of poetry, I intend to copy here some historical facts, worth reflecting upon, about the source of that heavenly Ganga of verse, before entering the incomparably beautiful stream of Chithramezhuthu's introduction.

It is no secret that Christians, who spend their days with their eyes only on jobs abroad, on rubber, coconut, pepper and cardamom and the trade in them, are unable to recognise the gems in the ocean of literature. The fact is that, though Christians did not buy it, read it and enjoy it, not a single copy of Magdalana Mariyam is to be found in the book depots today. People of other communities buy the book, read it, and guard it like a priceless treasure. That is why the far-sighted Chithramezhuthu remarked in his introduction that Vallathol had carried out a new kind of missionary work through Magdalana Mariyam.

Given below are the relevant parts of the book *Magdalana Mariyam: Ulbhava Charithram* ("How Mary Magdalene Came to Be Written") by P. C. Koruthu — an eminent writer, the author of the introduction to this biography, and my senior colleague in journalism.

How Magdalana Mariyam Came to Be Written

Seventy-two years have now passed since the great poet Vallathol wrote his distinguished and beautiful narrative poem *Magdalana Mariyam*. It was in 1921 that the first edition was published by Pulikkottil Yausef Shemashan (Deacon Joseph Pulikkottil) from the A.R.P. Press, Kunnankulam. The story of how this ambrosial poem came into being — a work on a Christian theme which the community of discerning readers has praised as standing above the great poet's other works, great and small — is an interesting one. What is related here are facts I came to learn directly from the late Pulikkottil Yausef Shemashan, who inspired the great poet to write it. [By then he had joined the Reeth (Catholic reunion) movement and become a Ramban (monk).]

On Saturday, 10 September 1938, the Travancore Government of Sir C. P. Ramaswami Iyer confiscated the *Malayala Manorama*, sealed its press and office, and placed them under police guard. K. M. Varghese Mappillai, the fourth son of K. C. Mammen Mappillai, was then the manager of the *Manorama*. Hearing that the *Manorama* had been confiscated, Pulikkottil P. I. Ittoop — Varghese Mappillai's brother-in-law and owner of the A.R.P. Press, Kunnankulam — hurried to Kottayam. So that publication of the *Manorama* would not be interrupted, he agreed to print the paper at his press in Kunnankulam, in

the State of Cochin. Thus on Tuesday, 13 September 1938, the Manorama was published from the A.R.P. Press. N. M. Abraham, then on the editorial board, and this writer went there to bring out the Manorama from Kunnamkulam. Yausef Shemmashan, P. I. Ittoop's brother, was a man of refined taste and a great lover of literature. We had known each other since the time he lived at the Old Seminary, Kottayam, as a deacon doing his priestly studies, so in Kunnamkulam I stayed in a room in one part of the chapel attached to the Ramban's residence. Among the many literary matters we talked about, Magdalana Mariyam also came up. There was a reason for that.

The Kunnamkulam Manorama

Five or eight days after the Manorama began to be published from Kunnamkulam, Sir C. P. banned its circulation in Travancore. This angered Yausef Ramban. At the Ramban's suggestion I wrote a book about C. P.'s misguided policy. In that book, Irumunavaal ("The Double-Edged Sword"), there is a prayer of repentance by Sir C. P. I quoted in it, as a parody, four lines from Magdalana Mariyam, in the form the Ramban himself recited them to me —

"Lord, I have not walked by Thy commands,
and many are the wrongs I have done;
O Thou who chastenest, forgive me all,
and set Thy servant at Thy holy feet."

The only change was that "handmaid" was altered to "servant". In any case, on the fourth day after the book came out, the Travancore Government confiscated it. That

is how Vallathol and Magdalana Mariyam came up in our conversation.

When Yausef Ramban was a deacon, he ran a short-story monthly, Kathamalika, and a literary monthly, Athmaposhini. The deacon himself edited Kathamalika, and the editor of Athmaposhini was Swadeshabhimani K. Ramakrishna Pillai, who had been banished from Travancore. There was objection in high places in both Cochin and Travancore to a radical banished from the neighbouring State being kept as an editor in the State of Cochin. Around that time B. Kalyani Amma obtained a post as a teacher through the efforts of Palakkattu Tharavathu Ammalu Amma, so Ramakrishna Pillai gave up the editorship of Athmaposhini and went to Malabar. It was while the deacon was looking for an editor of equal standing that he came to have Vallathol. That happened by chance.

Kerala Udayam

Vallathol was then editor of the monthly Kerala Udayam, published from Thrissur. As I remember, its owner was the father of the poet Pallathu Raman. Vallathol published in Kerala Udayam a review criticising Mahakavi Kumaran Asan's "Leela" from head to toe. This displeased the owner of the monthly. Following this, Vallathol gave up his connection with Kerala Udayam and moved to Kunnamkulam. The deacon made full use of the occasion and appointed Vallathol editor of Athmaposhini. The great poet hoped that his connection with the owners of the A.R.P. (Akshara Ratna Prakashika) Press — a good printing house by the standards of the day — would be useful in other ways too, and the deacon hoped to profit from his connection with the great poet. It was at this stage that

Vallathol's narrative poem *Shishyanum Makanum* ("The Disciple and the Son"), which he had already finished, came out from the A.R.P. Press with P. I. Ittoop as publisher.

One more thing deserves mention. Vallathol and Yausef Shemmashan had been friends from earlier days. The deacon and his brother Ittoop affectionately called him "Kuttan Menon". "Kuttan" was the pet name of the great poet Vallathol Narayana Menon.

The Prumiyaon

The deacon had had Cheruvathur Kuriakose Kathanar — a Syriac scholar and nephew (sister's son) of Pulikkottil Joseph Mar Dionysius Metropolitan — translate into Malayalam the "Prumiyaon of Passion Week", from the prayer book of the Syrian Christians. But the progressive-minded deacon was not satisfied with it. He thought he might have the great poet revise the translation. The poet read it through, and he did not like it at all either. In the end the deacon and Kuriakose Kathanar sat beside Vallathol and explained to him the meaning of the original text. Vallathol thus prepared a fresh translation. It took him three or four months to complete. Using his own genius, the great poet beautifully expressed the meaning of even the obscure parts of the original. When the Prumiyaon translation was thus completed, a new idea dawned in Vallathol's mind.

The Story in the Prumiyaon

In the Prumiyaon there is a passage in which a sinful woman anoints the feet of Jesus with fragrant oil and confesses her sins, and Jesus grants her forgiveness. The idea

came to the great poet: why not take this as the theme of a poem? The deacon welcomed the idea and encouraged it. The poet wrote a short piece of some forty lines, under the title Pashchathapam Prayashchitham ("Repentance Is Atonement") — from the line "Lord, I have not walked by Thy commands" to the last line, "Go in peace, my daughter".

Around that time a touring cinema company called either Davis Cinema or Mookkan Movies was holding shows in Thrissur. In those days there were only silent films. Hearing that the life of Christ was being shown there, Yausef Shemmashan and Vallathol travelled eight or ten miles from Kunnampulam to Thrissur in the bullock cart (villuvandi) of a man named Ukru. The great poet, who was deaf, enjoyed the silent film thoroughly. The mansion of the rich man Simon and the feast given there in honour of Jesus; a sinful woman in the bloom of youth anointing the feet of the Virgin's Son with "precious oil", wiping them with her long hair, and weeping as she offered a prayer of repentance; Jesus granting her forgiveness — seeing all this on the screen stirred Vallathol's imagination. Given a single fragment of bone, Vallathol's imagination could clothe it with marrow, flesh and life and create a languid beauty; that silent film was the spur it needed. Returning to Kunnampulam, the poet finished the poem in six or seven days, adding at the end the prayer of repentance he had written earlier. The Prumiya, which he himself had translated into prose, was of great use to him in completing the poem.

Here is a paragraph of the Prumiya that the poet had rendered into prose and then used in making the poem:—
 "...The mercy of Thy Holiness went forth to meet that sin-

ful woman, defiled by impure harlotry.... She ran to Thy Holiness with precious oil, with pure repentance and with fervent devotion. She knocked without shame at the door of Thy grace, and entered fearlessly into Thy presence in the house of Simon. She poured upon the head and the holy body of Thy Holiness the precious myron oil, which she had earned by wicked and sinful trade. With the hands she had defiled she took hold of the holy feet of Thy Holiness, who hadst strength to bear in Thy body the sin of all the world; and weeping for a warm love without stain, she kissed them with her unclean lips and anointed them with eyes full of sorrow. Instead of a towel she dried them with her hair. She prayed and pleaded for the forgiveness and cleansing of her own body."

How It Became Verse

Taking this paragraph of the Prumiyon as his base, Val-lathol wrote:

"The virtuous one entered the house
and reached the place she had in mind

.....
.....

Those golden holy feet, washed in tears
cleansed of all stain, she humbly
wiped dry with her flowing tresses, fine as silk;
and on both of them the lovely one
set red coral kisses
with her soft and tender flower of a mouth

.....
.....

Then from the vessel she had brought
she poured the blessed, precious, fragrant oil...!"

The poet has kept in the poem the Prumiyaon's word "mahaarha thailam" (precious oil). But "kissed with her unclean lips" he changed to "with her soft and tender flower of a mouth".

The Prayer of Repentance

The prayer of that sinful woman may be quoted from the Prumiyaon and from Magdalana Mariyam:— From the Prumiyaon: "My Lord, look with favour on this Thy handmaid, who has fallen into the hands of the worthless robber of the desert, and who was made by Thy holy hand.

"Redeem this handmaid from the tearing vulture, from the snare of the treacherous net, and from the cunning hawk; and make her a true dove in the cage of Thy Holiness, and a faithful turtle-dove in Thy house.... Raise her up who lies sunk in the sea of sin and the pit of wickedness. Lift this wretched one out of the pool of uncleanness and the muddy pit of lust.... My Lord, Thou hast said, 'Knock, and I will open; ask, and you shall receive.' Behold, I knock at the door of Thy Holiness: hear me; since I have been enslaved, forgive all my wrongs.... Turn me back into the fold of Thy Holiness...."

From Magdalana Mariyam

"Lord, I have not walked by Thy commands,
and many are the wrongs I have done;
O Thou who chastenest, forgive me all,
and set Thy handmaid at Thy holy feet.
Remembering how Thou didst truly say,

'Knock, and the door shall be opened',
grant entry to this poor one
who knocks at the door of Thy grace.
A doe that went to graze upon a field of thorns
the deceiver spread to laugh at her for sport
has fallen, helpless, into the thorny pit.
Though I have done what should not be done,
do not cast me away, O Lord;
am I not also made by that holy hand
which can make even fire grow cool?
O Friend of the lowly, swiftly redeem
this wretched dove from the mouth of the wicked kite,
and gather her into the cage
of Thy holy Self."

From the Prumiyon: "Woman, go in peace; your faith
has given you life. Because you have felt great devotion
towards me, I have forgiven your sins."

From Magdalana Mariyam

"Go in peace, my daughter! Cast off your grief;
the faith you hold has kept you safe;
for every sin you did, from time to time,
this repentance itself is the atonement."

The great poet completed that supremely beautiful
poem and named it Pashchathapam Prayashchitham. But
Yausef Shemmashan was not satisfied with that title.
What if it were simply called "Mariya" (Mary)? That would
not do at all. Neither the four Gospels nor the Prumiyon

say that it was Mary Magdalene who anointed Christ's feet. Nevertheless they decided to keep that name.

Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese was in many ways beholden to Yausef Shemmashan. The deacon held Chithramezhuthu's prose style in high regard, so it was he who was asked to write the introduction and notes to Magdalana Mariyam.

Thus the Prumiya of Passion Week was published in 1918 and Magdalana Mariyam in 1921, with Pulikkottil Yausef Shemmashan as publisher. Only five hundred copies of each book were printed at the time.

Criticism

Some time after Magdalana Mariyam was published, Mattathil Kurian Kathanar (later the accomplished writer Fr. C. K. Mattam) published a merciless criticism of it in the monthly Kerala Catholican, which came out from Chavara near Kollam. The critic pointed out, among other things, that expressions such as "the teaching of dharma by Krishna who is Christ" and "like Govinda frolicking with his friends in Ambadi" were not acceptable to Christians. After a while such criticisms died down. Another, somewhat more serious charge: in the narrative poem Magdalana Mariyam, apart from the title of the book, the heroine's name — Mary Magdalene, or Mary — does not appear. After two or three editions someone pointed this out, and Vallathol too was convinced of it.

"Weep, weep, O doe-eyed one,
O comfort of those who weep,...."
The great poet changed this to —
"Weep, weep, O noble Mary".

Though that change is jarring, it still appears that way in new editions today.

Was it Mary Magdalene who anointed Him and was forgiven? Lazarus of Bethany had two sisters, Martha and Mary. The Gospel of John says that Mary anointed Him twice. It reads thus:— "Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick." (Gospel of John, chapter 11, verses 1 and 2)

The village of Bethany is two nazhika (about two miles) from Jerusalem. At the beginning of chapter 12, John says: "Then Jesus six days before the Passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom he raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment."

So we find that Mary anointed Him and wiped His feet with her hair twice — once long before Lazarus fell sick, and again some days after Lazarus was raised to life. That the first "anointing" was in the house of Simon does not say. It states clearly that the second was in the house of Lazarus.

Mary Who Anointed Him

Matthew's Gospel, chapter 26, and the beginning of Mark, chapter 14, say that the house of Simon the leper

was in Bethany. The woman who anointed Him there is not named; it says only "a woman". Both when He was anointed in the house of Lazarus at Bethany and in the house of Simon, we find the disciples complaining that the oil could have been sold and the money given to the poor, and Christ saying that it should be taken as a rite before His burial. If so, the sinful woman who anointed Him must have been Mary of Bethany herself, the sister of Lazarus. But the Gospels nowhere say that she was a sinner or had lived an evil life.

What Luke's Gospel, chapter 8, verse 2, says about Mary Magdalene, however, deserves attention: there she is called "Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils." Neither the Bible nor the Prumiyon says that this Mary anointed Christ's feet or head, or that she was a harlot. That is why Vallathol nowhere names the heroine in his poem. But Yausef Shemmashan, who gave the book the title *Magdalana Mariyam*, thought in a weak moment that the name was right — and, as Pilate said, what he had written he had written. And *Magdalana Mariyam* won a lasting place in Malayalam literature.

Chithramezhuthu speaks thus in his memoirs about writing the introduction and notes to Mahakavi Vallathol Narayana Menon's narrative poem *Magdalana Mariyam*: "Vallathol asked me to write the introduction and notes to the celebrated narrative poem '*Magdalana Mariyam*' written by the renowned great poet Vallathol Narayana Menon, and in 1097 the book came out with my introduction and notes. Both the author and the whole literary world unanimously said that the introduction and notes I wrote were a great ornament to the great poet's book. The manuscript of *Magdalana Mariyam* was brought here, for me

to write the introduction, by Kesavan Unnithan of Varikkolil, Thekkekkara, Mavelikara. I pointed out many slips in the poem to Narayana Menon, and he graciously corrected them. The title the author had given the book was 'Oru Thevidissiyude Pashchathapam' ('The Repentance of a Harlot'). I pointed out that, since the whole Christian world now honours Mary Magdalene as a saint, the word 'thevidissi' (harlot) was unfitting; and I also suggested that 'Magdalana Mariyam' should be adopted as the title of the book. The great poet Narayana Menon accepted my opinion and my suggested title with respect, and published the book on that basis." (Family History, pp. 213-214) *[Note: this account differs from P. C. Koruthu's on pp. 81 and 83, which credits Yausef Shemmashan with the title; the year 1097 also differs from the 1921 (1096) first edition given earlier — both as printed]*

Pulikkottil Yausef Shemmashan, who was then editor of the monthly Athmaposhini, published from Kunnamkulam, had said in a letter sent to Chithramezhuthu on the 28th of Mithunam 1096 (1922 as printed): "The printing of 'Magdalana Mariyam' has begun. The notes are exceedingly beautiful. It was our conviction that notes worthy of this poem of Vallathol's could come only from the tip of your pen that compelled us to ask you for this task, which you call a rash venture. Vallathol too has come to see from experience that you are the only Nasrani who has understood what poetry is."

Magdalana Mariyam: The Introduction

To write an introduction to this poem by Mahakavi Vallathol Narayana Menon, the true Kalidasa of Kerala today, would surely be an unpardonable offence on my part. But

since I have had the good fortune to serve as annotator and publisher of this excellent poem, writing the introduction too has fallen to me as a duty.

"Magdalana Mariyam" is a stream of nectar-sweet song on a Christian theme that the Christian community of Kerala has received from the genius of Mr. Menon — a fine proof that a true poet, without any distinction of his own self, can transform himself into any human being of any walk of life in the world, of any religion. The subject of this work is the penitent sacrifice, offered for the forgiveness of her sins, of Mary Magdalene, whom the whole Christian world counts holy. I also think that, both in its story and in the refinement of its style, this poem stands above all Mr. Menon's other short poems.

It is a matter of the deepest sorrow that the Nasranis of Kerala — converted in the first century from the noble Hindus of this Kerala — have not, even in this twentieth century, received any verse work worth mentioning based on the Bible, their book of daily reading. Though some Christian poets have tried to raise the Nasrani community out of this sad state, we must admit with shame that none of it has so far borne fruit.

Literary works, and above all works of poetry, have a significant place in the progress of a people. It alone is the power that, lodged silently in the depths of the human heart, ceaselessly drives mankind to strive untiringly for every kind of freedom and advancement, political and social. Morally and spiritually it has great authority over human society. Like an electric wire it constantly sends its power through the workings of conscience that move

mankind to free itself from worldly bondage and from a base way of life.

If we reflect deeply on this, then if Christian ideals do not gain wide currency in step with the course and growth of Malayalam literature, it is only because Christianity has so far gained no place worth mentioning in the world of Malayalam poetry. That this fact has, at least lately, entered the heads of some literature-shy Christian missionaries is indeed a great good fortune!

It is a long time since I began to wish that there might be some poetical works on the life of Jesus Christ or on the themes of the Bible. I have often spoken of this to my respected friend the Rev. Pulikkottil Yausef Shemmachan — a well-known prose writer and manager of Athmaposhini — to K. P. Peter of Ernakulam, editor of Sathy-anadam, and to many other respected friends. It is solely owing to the earnest requests of Yausef Shemmachan, a jewel among men of taste and a man proud of his community, and of many other Christian friends, that the Nasrani community has had the good fortune to receive this excellent work from Sriman Narayana Menon. There is no doubt that the Nasranis, a grateful people, will always be thankful to Mr. Menon — a large-hearted man and a devotional poet — for being willing to make a gift of this fine work to the Nasrani community, with a view to the advancement of Christian literature as well as the excellence of his own language's literature.

Though some young Nasrani poets have lately written poems on Biblical themes, there is not a trace of literary flavour in them, so nobody celebrates them. This work, however, has been composed without the least harm to

the doctrines of Christianity, to the ideas that go with them, or to the intended meaning of the original story; it has therefore become a guide to the young Nasrani poets who are trying their hand at verse.

Taken all in all, Mr. Narayana Menon has shown the Christian community a new kind of missionary work. So long as the Christian community looks upon this path with contempt, it is certain that Christianity will in no way be able to move freely in the flourishing world of Hindu literature.

I am firmly convinced that the Christian community of Kerala will welcome this short poem, which so beautifully reveals the holy heart of Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, cool with compassion; and that it will bring about an awakening in the Christian community, enough to ease the burden of grief of the mother of the Nasrani people, who has never had the good fortune to dry her tears at the sight of a great work of poetry written by a son of her own.

I know that the notes I have added to this sweet and noble poem by Mr. Menon, renowned as the Malayali Tagore, are not at all adequate. But the fear that, if it were published without any explanation of its meaning, its excellence would remain wholly unknown to most of my brethren is what moved me to do this. If my notes are of use to even some readers, I shall be satisfied.

I wish with all my heart that my brethren may read daily this new poem, which fosters devotion and shows the way of right living, and so attain holiness.

Mavelikara

5 Mithunam 1096 (June 1921)

Chithramezhuthu

K. M. Varghese

There is no certain count of how many books Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese wrote introductions for. Most of these introductions, full of poetic grace, are also rich in thought. Only one or two are given here as examples. The appreciation he wrote for Mahakavi K. V. Simon's Vedaviharam is brilliant and of matchless beauty. Equally full of ideas is the introduction that adorns Joseph Cheruvathur's Ashrudhara ("Stream of Tears").

Vedaviharam

The appreciation written by Chithramezhuthu for Mahakavi K. V. Simon's celebrated epic, Vedaviharam.

It was K. C. Mammen Mappillai and Chithramezhuthu who inspired Mahakavi K. V. Simon to write the epic Vedaviharam, which stands head held high in Malayalam poetry. In the book itself the author, in his preface, states this beyond doubt. Simon says:— "I may say that the seed hidden in the soil was not ready to sprout until my respected friend Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese, a connoisseur of literature, and Sriman K. C. Mammen Mappillai, B.A., editor of the Malayala Manorama, pressed me and roused me."

In the same book the witty poet Moolur S. Padmanabha Panicker writes:— "It is because Mammen Mappillai pressed him in this way as occasion arose, and because Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese often urged the poet to the task, that this lengthy poem Vedaviharam has been able to come out so quickly."

Six eminent men wrote appreciations for Vedaviharam, and Chithramezhuthu is one of the six. The other five are: (1) Mahakavi Vallathol; (2) the scholar I. C. Chacko, B.A., B.Sc., M.R.C.S. (London); (3) Professor P. Sankaran Nambiar, M.A. (Honours); (4) Brahmasree Punnassery Nambi Neelakanta Sarma; and (5) the Rev. V. P. Mammen, B.A.

In his appreciation of Vedaviharam, Chithramezhuthu says:— "History clearly shows that the ancient Mar Thoma Nasranis of the Malabar coast — the land of Sree Parasurama — fully deserve to be counted as blood kin of this country, being the true offspring of its high-caste Hindus, the Namboodiris and the Nairs. In physique, customs, dress, language, culture and ways of thought, these Hindu Christians still show a thoroughly Keralan character.

"Their bond with Kerala, and even more with the Dravidian language and the literature of Kerala, is very ancient and very firm. History clearly points out to us that, free of any thought of community or person, and with a truly Hindu frame of mind, they long met with their high-caste brethren in the kalari (school) of Malayalam language and literature.

Not only did the Syrian Christians learn vakyam (astro-nomical tables), paralperu (numerical notation), the Amarakosham, the Siddharupam, the classical poems and so on from Nair teachers, while Nairs and others likewise studied under Nasrani asans; the Nasrani gurus also worshipped the image of Ganapathi, which they had installed in their kalaris as the deity of learning. (Acts of the Synod of Diamper convened by Archbishop Menezes in 1599, Session 9, Decree 13.) That some old Nasrani asans even

today trim and cut the palm leaf and begin with the invocation Hari: Sree Ganapathaye Namah is a surviving sign of this.

"It is well known that the Portuguese, their powerful enemies, worked effectively to drive the Syrian Christians out of the field of Hindu literature. As if that were not enough, by royal power they collected the religious and literary books that had been the community's wealth for fifteen centuries, heaped them up in the churchyard at Udayamperoor and burned them; and they gathered books from Christian homes in every important place the Parangis (Portuguese) visited and consigned them to the fire. Since no such literary loss ever befell the Hindus, while we can clearly know about Hindu poets and their works, it has become difficult to learn anything about Christian poets and their works.

"That the first people to compose a farce in Malayalam, freely and in defiance of the rules of the Sanskrit masters of poetics, and to perform it, were the Malanad Nasranis of the fifteenth century, itself points to the kinship and close association of Christians with the literature of the language. (The Land of the Perumals, p. 232.) I have said this much here only to show how groundless is the notion some hold that the Christianity of the Kerala Nasranis and the goddess of Malayalam letters have come to terms only quite recently.

"Many cultured Nasrani elders, now gone to dust, longed with all their hearts for a great song, full of poetry, fit for the Christian community of Kerala to recite daily. What falls upon my ears now is the heavenly stream of nectar-sweet song that pours from the pen of Mr. K. V. Si-

mon, setting their souls aflutter in an ocean of joy. On this golden ladder of poetry — stretched from the golden steps of the many-coloured mansion of heaven down to the earth, and from the depths of the abyss up to the golden garden of Paradise — I see human souls who wander through the Scriptures, mingled with hosts of angels, dancing for joy. To Kandathil Varghese Mappillai and Nidhirikkal Mani Kathanar, who stood longing for entry at the golden gate of the jewelled mansion of heaven, heaven has been granted at this very moment through the stream of your nectar-sweet song alone. The tears of the mother of the Nasrani community are dried; her breasts overflow with milk.

"O great poet! Just as a Kakkassery Bhattathiri arose to defeat Uddanda Sastri and uphold the honour of Kerala, I pray with my whole soul to the Lord of all that the one Lord of the universe, whose very form is Scripture, may make you a keen-edged weapon to hold high for ever the head of the mother of the Syrian community. What Veda Vyasa, Valmiki, Jayadeva and Ezhuthachan achieved, you too have achieved. Therefore my community will proudly sing your illustrious name for ever. As for me, should I outlive you (may the Lord of the world grant that you live long), I will shed tears of pride around your tomb and adorn it with invisible garlands of flowers through my grateful sighs. And not I alone: Nasrani maidens of soft, flower-like limbs, their young shoulders weary from drawing water for the bitter-gourd and snake-gourd vines, will sit on the green carpet of grass before that stone tomb where your blessed body takes its eternal rest, and in the moonlight that spreads its milky rays everywhere they will softly sing the poetic hymns of Vedaviharam; and the

Christian young men, men of enterprise and taste, will stroll there in holy thought for peace of heart."

Given below is the introduction Chithramezhuthu wrote for Ashrudhara ("Stream of Tears") by the well-known poet Joseph Cheruvathur of Kunnamkulam. It was Advocate P. C. Mathew of Pulikkottil, keenly interested in church history, who found it at my request and sent it to me.

Appreciation

Human life, carried within the tear of joy, dissolves for ever into nature as the stream of the last tear. Here, through the artist's pen of the well-known poet Mr. Joseph Cheruvathur, the story of the untimely death of a great soul — who passed away on the 4th of Kanni 117, plunging into an ocean of grief not only his own family, relatives and friends but the whole Malankara Syrian community — flows into the hearts of men of feeling as a shower of "Ashrudhara" that will never run dry.

The man remembered here was a noble soul who had won in full measure the boundless love, respect and regard of the Syrian community: a true servant of the Church; an excellent priest devoted to the duties of his office; a scholar of theology esteemed by the learned; the darling of many thousands who loved their community; and a most devout and excellent teacher who laid a golden stairway for the success in life of the future citizens of the great town of Kunnamkulam.

The poet's love for him is deep and sincere. Every verse of Ashrudhara shows how each of the virtues that shone without flaw in his life sets waves of feeling surging

in the poet's heart. One can see that the poet has portrayed reality most beautifully, with an intensity of feeling that would bring tears to the eyes of the hardest heart. Among the many verses that display the imaginative poet's artistic observation, a few stanzas describing the moment of his passing may be quoted here.

"The open eyes closed for ever;
the life left its nest and flew away;
within the fold of half a moment
the infinite truths stood gathered in.
The breath stopped, the blood congealed;
the glowing ember burned down to ash;
the body grew cold, turned pale, and lay
like an empty shell whose pearl is taken.
The mirror cast of gentleness and humility
joined together is shattered and scattered;
the flower that bore the clear honey of kindness to others
bloomed — and alas! at once withered and fell."

Many of Mr. Joseph Cheruvathur's works have already shown him to be a gifted poet, a master of his art and rich in talent. Ashrudhara indeed shines as a precious garland that the goddess of poetry has hung about his neck.

The virtuous and saintly wife of the subject of the poem, the Rev. Father T. K. Thomas, B.D., is now living with their only son in this town of Mahabali (Mavelikara), in the residence of her father, the Rev. Vilanilathu Mathai Kathanar. The breeze of the sky reverently gathers in its hands the holy water of "Ashrudhara" that flows unceasingly from the eyes of this honoured family, overwhelmed

with grief at his untimely death, and daily offers it in worship at the resting place of the dead in the far-off Arthat church. Yet they may take great comfort in this: that venerable tomb will stand as a proud treasure — an echo of the greatness of the life of that ideal priest, upright alike in thought, word and deed — able one day to bring tears of joy to the eyes of his beloved child. Is not that the true inheritance from a father? Is not that the wealth a wife would most desire?

I wish every success to this short poem by Mr. Joseph Cheruvathur.

17-1-118

Mavelikara

K. M. Varghese
(Chithramezhuthu)

6

Literary Essays and Historical Stories

If we examine Chithramezhuthu's literary works and essays, we find that most of them are connected with history. Five historical stories were first published in the Malayala Manorama: "Valiya Mar Dionysius and the Tharananallur Namboodiripad" [1927], "Our Ammachi of Nelimoottil" [1927], "Thachil Mathu Tharakan's Thangakompan" [1926], "The Central Pillar of Venad, or the Saintly Shouriyar" [1928], and "Mar Mathews Athanasius's Panchakalyani" [1926]. The Manorama Company later bought the copyright and printed these historical stories in book form. Chithramezhuthu's reply to Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai's critique of Panchakalyani — the series of articles "The Political Service of the Nasranis of Kerala" — was first published in instalments in the Manorama (1935), with an editorial by Sri K. C. Mammen Mappillai. It was later printed and published as a book at the Kalavilasini Press, Thiruvananthapuram, with John Peter Thottam as publisher. His other books are: "The Syrian Christians and Their Valour in Defence of the Realm" [1932]; Chenkolum Muraliyum ("The Sceptre and the Flute") ["Chithramezhuthu's Prose-Poems"] (1941), a collection of prose-poems; Sucharithamukuram ("A Mirror of Noble Lives") (1950), a collection of short stories; Chittithalalayal (1946), a novella; and the historical story "The Persecution of Mar

Thoma V, or The Treachery of the Dutch" (1987). The political, historical and literary articles he wrote over more than half a century in newspapers, magazines, special issues and elsewhere are reckoned at around three hundred. Sucharithamukuram was published by Adv. K. O. Mathew Vallakkali of Mavelikara, and the profits of the book were given to the charitable work of the Syrian Christian Congress.

The introductions were written by K. C. Mammen Mapillai for "The Central Pillar of Venad", by P. C. Mathew, I.C.S. — Secretary to the Government of India and Cabinet Secretary to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru — for Sucharithamukuram, and by E. M. Kovoov for the novel Chittithalayal. Chittithalayal was first published in the Malayala Manorama; later P. C. Koruthu, owner of the Bhagyodayam Press, Pulikeezhu, bought the copyright and published it as a book. Thachil Mathu Tharakan's Thangakompan, Panchakalyani, and Valiya Mar Dionysius and the Tharananallur Namboodiripad were republished in 1987 by M.O.C. Publications, Kottayam. The same publishers also printed in book form in 1987 the series of articles (a historical story) he had written in the Paura Prabha, Kottayam, under the title "The Persecution of Mar Thoma V, or The Treachery of the Dutch".

There are a great many literary and historical articles by Chithramezhuthu that have never appeared in book form. Apart from the prose-poems included in the book "Chithramezhuthu's Prose-Poems", nine of the literary and historical articles that have been found are included in "Selected Writings of Chithramezhuthu", published by Paul Manalil from Kottayam in June 1992.

Sucharithamukuram contains five short stories: "Boobili, or the Natural Priesthood", "The Maramon Convention", "The Darkness of Unfreedom", "Pappachi, or the Devout Mendicant", and "Christudasan and Sathyadasan". All except "The Darkness of Unfreedom" were published in the Manorama.

Among his literary articles, besides the prose-poems included in the prose-poem collection, are —

1. The Twenty Great Men of Bhashaposhini
2. An Opinion on the Malayalam Language — Deepika, 16-3-1917
3. The First Models of Modern Malayalam, or the Gram-marian Geevarghese Kathanar and His Prose Works — Deshabhimani, July 1928
4. The Great Kozhencherry Meeting as I Saw It. [An article on the great political conference of the Abstention (Nivarthana) movement held on the Maramon sands on 11 March 1933. Chithramezhuthu has recorded that there were young men in Chengannur at the time who could recite this article — which won great fame in the literary world — entirely by heart.]
5. Prathikara Vellidi ("The Thunderbolt of Revenge") (short story) — Manorama, March 1957
6. Navabharathikkunju (a pen-portrait) — Navabharathi, 23 March 1953
7. The Twenty-One Metres of Karuthedathu Thomas Sas-thrikal — Keralabhooshanam, 7 and 13 October 1956
8. The Noble Serpent That Fell into Samadhi at a Concert (a true story) — Manorama, 25-12-52

9. Ananda Bhairavi (short story; Deshabandhu special issue)
10. Thuppoothaarattu (short story about Karthiyani Amma, wife of a householder named Kallelil Kunju Pillai of Chengannur, written in Athmaposhini, issues of Karkkidakam 1094 and Chingam 1095; republished in the Deshabandhu special issue of 2 October 1953)
11. Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow (prose-poem; Navabharathi, 1098)
12. In the Mother's Presence (prose-poem)
13. A Wedding Blessing (prose-poem)
14. Before My Eyes — the Alappuzha Orthodox Syrian Church (1124)
15. An Appreciation (on the music of K. B. Sundarambal), 1109
16. Poshini Bhashanam (a criticism of T. V. Srinivasa Sastri — Athmaposhini monthly, issues of Edavam and Mithunam 1097)
17. The New Parasurama's Uplift of Kerala [a prose-poem on Mannathu Padmanabhan's Liberation Struggle — Malayala Manorama Weekly, 17 December 1960]
18. Karippuzha Velu Pillai Asan, Kathakali Actor (pen-portrait — Manorama Weekly, 26 October 1957)
19. I. C. Chacko [pen-portrait — Manorama Weekly, February 1961]
20. Our Newest M.P. [pen-portrait of George Thomas Kottukappally — Pauradhwani newspaper, 5 December 1953]
21. The Ranks of the Advertising Army — the Borrowed Ornaments Some of Them Pile On (Keralabhooshanam, March 1945)

22. Introduction to Mahakavi K. V. Simon's Kristheeya Sangeetha Ratnavali ("A Garland of Christian Songs")
23. Appreciation of Mahakavi K. V. Simon's epic Vedavi-haram
24. Introduction to Mahakavi Vallathol's narrative poem Magdalana Mariyam
25. Archdeacon Mullamangalathu Koshy's Service to the Malayalam Language —

All these articles have won the praise of men of taste and of lovers of the language and its literature. They are fountains of literary nectar, and their freshness will last for ever.

Chithramezhuthu was a close friend of Brahmasree Kunjan Pillai Chattampi Swamikal. The memorial volume published on 24 Chingam 1129 for the Swami's birth centenary contains articles by 71 writers; apart from Chithramezhuthu's, no article by any other non-Hindu was included in it. At the Chattampi Swami Jayanthi meeting held at Panmana [*Note: printed as "Pathmana" — probably Panmana, where the Swami's samadhi is*] on 30 August 1953, Malloor Govinda Pillai said in his speech that the best article in the book was Chithramezhuthu's. The Malayala Manorama of the day reported Malloor's speech: "The most reasoned and the finest article in the Chattampi Swamikal memorial volume is that of Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese. It makes special mention of how Chattampi Swamikal broke the dominance of the Brahmin priesthood."

Consider the two or three paragraphs quoted below from the short story "The Maramon Convention":— "So as to soothe and cool to their very depths the threads of

thought on duty and righteousness that surge every moment in the inmost heart of the Malankara Mar Thoma Church, the sweet stretch of the Maramon sands — spread out like a white silk sari on the bank of the goddess Pampa, giver of every plenty, who lies languid on the emerald breast of Central Travancore, and towering proudly on every side — shines in the whiteness of the cool season, clear and gleaming, cool as far as the eye can reach. Fifty thousand — no, sixty thousand; not even that; eighty thousand is too few — more than a hundred thousand people can sit together there at one time, without touching one another, to search their souls. On that vast, crunching expanse of sand, under the broad, flat-roofed pandal resting its head on countless pillars, how many human hearts have not beheld the face of God! How many sinners have not been turned into pure souls, crushed by repentance! How many women stained with sin have not washed and caressed the lotus feet of the All-Merciful with a flood of their own tears! How many human lives have not reached, through conversion, the summit of salvation!

"Thus for a whole week, man purifies his way of life by passing it through the fire in the presence of God — from the mire of evil ways to the jewelled temple of the good way, from blind darkness to a stream of spiritual light, from the foul shapes of devilry to the radiance of heavenly beauty. Under the whole of that pandal, a shining, inspiring wave of holiness that sets every person astir sends out a current of spiritual electricity.

"Every year, famous and venerable religious scholars, rooted in lives of goodness, come to those sands from the centres of learning in the civilised continents to proclaim

the well-known message of Sree Jesus Christ. And the ever-growing multitude that gathers there day by day is beyond counting — greater than any other crowd that swells and gathers in any corner of the nations of the world. Thus, drawing on history, religion, science, philosophy and political thought, those preachers of the Gospel lay open before that vast multitude, like a great book spread wide, every aspect of the holiness of the life of Sree Jesus Christ. What happens there then is an indescribable, tremendous revolution of the heart: the echoes in the mind of a great moral war, an uprising of great spiritual awakening." (From Sucharithamukuram.) The prose-poem "Kavithadevi" ("The Goddess of Poetry"), included in the book "Chithramezhuthu's Prose-Poems":—

The Goddess of Poetry

The sweet tinkling of golden bangles studded with the nine gems broke the silence of the night and came rushing towards me. That soft, delicate, lotus-fibre-tender note let fall drops of sweet, smooth fresh honey into my ears. A lovely fragrance that filled my inmost soul with bliss entered my nostrils.

I opened my eyes and looked with eager wonder. It was a most marvellous sight. Lighting up the vault of the sky with an indescribable radiance, a beautiful form shining like gold was coming slowly, slowly towards me. Two golden hands, soft as tender lotus stalks, were stretched out towards me in compassion.

The mass of tresses, thickly curled, danced as it languidly embraced those golden shoulders. Golden rays, glistening and streaming every moment from that smiling

face, washed the pathway of the sky in molten gold and made it shine. And those large, tremulous holy eyes — ah! — showering the pure nectar of grace to every horizon; in their sockets of faint coppery glow they flashed and hid, melting into smiles with the sweetness of their glances; with those holy eyes, deep blue, He lovingly blessed the cool white moonlight. In His holy hand was His golden flute. Overcome with wonder, I asked:— "Lord, who are you, coming through the pathway of the sky on this lovely night made beautiful by the moon?"

"Little red lotus flower, am I not the giver of your life?"

"The giver of my life?"

"Yes! Who else am I but the giver of your life, who has given you the redness and the softness of my own palms?"

"My Lord, forgive me; I was so overcome by my brief dance of joy on these garlands of ripples that I could not recognise you."

The holy face blossomed into a gentle smile. In the flood of grace that flowed from those holy eyes all my doubts came to an end. I realised that He is the Creator of all things moving and unmoving, and the giver of my life.

Between the full breasts of the goddess of night, her garments loosened in the play of her dance, the stars hung shining like crystal necklaces. As the silver bowl of milk that had been set on the throne of the sky to quench the thirst of that enchanting one, sighing in her weariness, overturned, the orb of the moon poured streams of milk over the green beds of grass and the treetops and shone with delight everywhere.

The little ripples of the flowering stream then turned, in the golden radiance of the giver of my life, into something like pure molten gold. His crimson silk tunic, adorned with dazzling bands of gold lace and with golden tassels glittering and rustling in the air, was reflected here and there in the water like red-hot embers seen amid flames. The rich splendour of the gold pendants and pearl necklaces that hung swaying on His holy breast scattered a wondrous lustre over His silk upper cloth of faintly rosy hue.

I swayed, thrilled with delight.

The whole of the day had been most refreshing to me. The pleasant warbling of the birds flowed all around me, and the intoxicated bees worshipped me with sweet and solemn conch-like humming. From a Pulaya hut nearby, the humming songs of the little Pulaya children — who, waiting for their fathers and mothers to come back from the fields where they had gone to work, laid the youngest baby on their shins and tried to lull it to sleep — spread a very soft music through the sky.

When my beloved, the evening breeze, came near to embrace me, singing sweet songs of love, I bowed my face in modesty and covered my breast with the silken folds of the ripples; and when, with a lover's sigh in a lovers' quarrel, he went past with a sulking face, I raised my head in the joy of victory and drew him back with keen side-long glances; and when he came near again, bound by hope, I cheated him once more. A little poem came from his lips, praising my lips as adorned with drops of nectar. With a heart-melting ache of separation and a

pounding heart, he went on offering that piteous song for a long while into the ears of the butterflies.

Princesses from the royal palaces had come to the flowering stream in a little boat, looking for lotus flowers to adorn their jewelled couches. Even the flowered cloths that hung over their young shoulders, revealing the swelling fullness of their bosoms, felt too heavy for them, so they drew them from their breasts and hung them over the seats and sides of the boat. So those golden hems of their garments trailed slowly forward with the boat, blessing the lotus leaves and the dancing ripples. Their bosoms became a playground for the light glances of the setting sun; with his hands of red rays he adorned those lovely breasts with kumkum powder. Kavithadevi, the presiding goddess of the flowering stream, watched all this with delight.

Ah, how blissful human life is, I thought then. I marvelled at the skill of the Creator's workmanship. If only I had been born a princess, to enjoy every good fortune of the royal palace — but to part from my goddess of poetry: I cannot even think of it. I grew up as that mother's darling. Even in sleep my head rested on the pillow of that blessed one's arm. She watched the gentle movements of my limbs with the greatest delight. She observed with tender anxiety my every mood. She cannot live a single moment without me. Long before I was born, she had made her home in that flowering stream. Turning the spray into pearls in the gentle breeze; drawing the music of the veena from the strings of lotus stalks amid the drum-beats of the little waves; adorning the rainbow with flowers of many colours; sprinkling silver dust on the drops of water standing on the lotus leaves — these are

the goddess's playful pastimes. To part from that tender-formed one who brings bliss to every living thing in the flowering stream would wound me to the very core.

"And yet I felt envy of human life. I marvelled utterly at the radiance that brimmed and quivered on the lovely bosoms of those princesses. I believed, too, that those full and lofty breasts must ever be blessed by the joyful dances and festivities of the goddess of poetry. Why should I now hide this longing of mine from the giver of my life? Is He not the great soul who truly grants all desires? Is He not the Father of the universe, who changes the forms of all living things?

"From His Grace's golden flute a sweet, full, rich note came forth and began to fly everywhere through that flowering moonlight. All living things awoke and were overcome by that simple music, dripping with flower-honey. Even the delicate form of the goddess of poetry was clothed in a thrill of rapture.

"I stood still, all attention.

"Lord, play on! Play on! That music, full of divine sweetness, is dearest of all to me. Your skill in unfolding the raga is beyond description. How very beautiful is the voice of your flute, which waters the heart with a stream of divine nectar! May I rest all my life in the shadow of this golden flute, which gives life even to things without life?

"But what return am I to give you? Shall I make fine bracelets of lotus-stalk rings and lay them at your holy feet? Shall I strew the pathways of the sky with my little

petals, so that the small wheels of your golden chariot, adorned with topaz, may roll on unhindered?

"Ah! Command me! Command me!! See, my heart is melting with a flood of gratitude. Until a little drop of the nectar of your grace falls from your bimba-red lips upon my parched tongue — O giver of my life, what priceless thing on earth am I to offer at your holy feet? What lovely thing am I to go in search of? See, my heart aches in its ignorance; my inmost depths are splitting with the intensity of my longing.

"Yet, O Lord of my life, play until I am satisfied! Go on with this song until, in my great joy, I fall into a light slumber on this jewelled couch of water! So that you may not pass on, may I bind your holy feet to these lotus stalks with lotus threads? If these tender threads are not soft enough to touch your holy feet, may I bind your feet with the tendrils of light that scatter in every direction from the stars? And if those too are not gentle enough, may I spin the gentle breeze into soft threads and wind them about your holy feet?

"Ah, peerless is the sweetness of your song, which calms the fierce wind, stills the swaying of the trees, fills the lotus buds with drops of honey, and makes veena strings in the throats of the male koels!

"My Lord, I bow to you! I bow to you for the voice of your flute!! I bow to you for your songs, one after another!!!"

"A gentle smile played on His Grace's lips. The white rays scattering from the pearls of His teeth caressed and

embraced the flowering moonlight with a dazzling silver glow.

"His holy feet drew near to me. The whole sky was filled with fragrance by a stream of scented vapour.

"In a sweet voice His Grace asked:— "What does my darling want?"

"O giver of my life, bless this servant of yours! Let your servant enter that blessed human life, full of good fortune!"

"His Grace smiled broadly. Stretching out His holy hands, He blessed me.

"A drop of nectar-sweet sound — 'Go forth' — cooled my ears.

"I fell into a dream. His holy feet rose into the sky. I saw the golden wheels of His wondrous chariot resting on a vast cluster of golden clouds. All the paths turned to flowers. A few jewels among heavenly maidens danced around His Grace, holding golden veenas, garlands of flowers and little tambourines in their lotus hands. The radiance that came from their moon-faces and from their many golden ornaments spread a dazzling veil of light across the sky. Their dancing and their hymns could be heard from far away. The hems of their flowered silk robes, kissing their full hips and trailing long behind their heels, brushed the pathway of the sky very softly with a lightning gleam that flashed now and then. The goddess of poetry, too, went a little way after them. With half-closed eyes I watched that sight until it was veiled by a golden mist. At last, without knowing it, I fell into the arms of the goddess of sleep. Yet the sweet voice of the

giver of my life — 'Go forth' — echoed long in my inmost soul.

II

"I found myself a human being in a little heaven on earth — in a royal palace. I do not know how I came to be there. I asked the gentle breeze that wandered in the flower garden about it; but he only smiled and passed on without a word. The sound of veenas and of music was heard all around me. From my maids' rooms came the soft clinking of many golden ornaments, echoing on every side. My velvet couch was most lovely with perfumes and silken coverlets. The golden table beside me was laden with the most delicious sweets and lovely sweet fruits. The ministers of the council enhanced the glory of my infancy with the insignia and seals of rank that showed that the kingdom would be mine after my father's death. I became the darling of the citizens.

"My infancy soon came to an end. I became a young woman. The rosy colour of my cheeks deepened day by day, and so did the fullness of my hips. The firm swelling of my breasts and the soft coppery tint of their tips — ah! I am ashamed even to speak of it. So I grew into a divine form, a delight to the eyes of the young. All who saw me agreed that the name 'Kamalam' (Lotus) suited me best.

"But where is my goddess of poetry? Where is my Mother? Only now — only in this youth — have I remembered the goddess's story. Alas, goddess of poetry, where can my Mother be? Is she still in that flowering stream? Has that divine form flown away to the moon, clinging to the wings of butterflies? Or has that giver of

supreme bliss ridden off on a grasshopper to the garden of Nandana?

"Mother, I believed in vain that in every state you would be with this darling, this treasure of your love!

"Ah! Mother, are you in some corner of this jewelled palace? Are you hiding somewhere about the throne? Are you clinging to some precious jewel in the royal crown? Are you lying asleep, at peace, among the musical devices of the royal singers?

"No, no — Mother has no need of any of these. None of them is worth so much as a single smile of hers. Nothing of this would please Mother as much as the jingle of the brass anklets of the Pulaya children, or the beads of sweat that gather on the firm, dusky breasts of the lovely Pulaya maidens whose young shoulders are worn out with sowing grain in the furrows.

"Mother, goddess of poetry, see, I am coming back to the flowering stream to see my Mother. I have no wish for any life without Mother. There can be no happiness in any kind of life away from Mother's breast.

"Father of the world, appear once more in this flowering moonlight! In your kindness lead me to that flowering stream where the goddess of poetry dwells! Set me free from this sorrowful human life!

"In the cool, flowering moonlight that flows so softly from the orb of the moon shining in the sky, let me lie on the lovely breast of the goddess of poetry and listen to the silent songs of the stars! On the rippling waves that sparkle like polished silver tokens, let me dance a dance of music together with the goddess of poetry!!

"Father of the universe, what else in the world is as glorious as the red lotus? Its petals show mankind the pure fingers of your hands; its fresh redness carries the divine light of your cheeks; its tender grace points to your holy face, which spreads rays of golden colour across the sky; the nectar that fills it is like the divine sweetness of the ambrosia of your mercy; and what do its soft blue-green leaves resemble, if not your divine palm-leaf fans?

"Therefore, O Merciful One, change me into a red lotus itself! So that the goddess of poetry may caress me with the holy strains of song that rise around your holy throne, let me kiss the red lips of that divine one, overcome with love!

"O master craftsman, who makes white tunics of white foam for the young grasses that play along the shores; O holy jewel, who travels through the sky with the gentle breeze tied to the sides of the intoxicated bees; O master of music, who brings forth the seven notes from the veena-boxes of the crickets — let me behold my Mother's divine beauty! Let me hear Mother's lullabies!

"See, on this lovely night, cool with moonlight, I have left my marble palace. I have flung my necklaces of the nine gems onto my bed of gold-embroidered silk. I have given up my priceless wealth and the royal crown itself, to regain my former birth.

"I am filled with longing — to worship, in the early mornings, the bright redness that surrounds the rays of the young sun; to set a white plume on the noble crown of the goddess of poetry, at midday, with the white feathers that have fallen from the wings of the lady ducks, drunk with delight, resting by the edge of the flowering stream;

to listen to the soft song that lies hidden in the fluttering wings of pairs of butterflies, skilled in the arts of love, dancing their love-dance on the vault of the sky; and in the silence of the night — in the deep darkness in which the coconut fronds, with blurred outlines and in utter stillness like a dim landscape seen in a magic-lantern show, stand against the sky worshipping the Creator of the world; at midnight, when the tips of the darbha grass weep for pearls together with the clusters of light that shine in the sky — to gaze, leaning against my Mother's shoulders, through the windows of the stars that open towards the world of the living, upon the crystal floors of the mansion of heaven.

"Therefore, Mother, giver of supreme bliss, embodiment of joy, come near! Come near!

"There, there — that sweet voice that showers nectar! That sound of the flute, full of divine song! The tinkling of golden anklets! The rustle of gold-bordered silk! The radiance of carpets of golden cloud! The clatter of the small wheels of the golden chariot! Ah! Ah! How lovely is the joyous tumult of the coming of the giver of my life!

"O Maker of the seen and the unseen, giver of unfailing joy, fountain of grace, bless this servant of yours! Show me the way to that flowering stream, full of every good fortune!"

"A musical voice — 'Go forth' — fell upon my ears from the pathway of the sky.

"A little breeze blew. The scent of musk spread. The light of the stars grew dim. I slept a little, and woke re-

freshed. My feet stood at the edge of the flowering stream.

"Mother, goddess of poetry, where are you?" I cried aloud.

"My darling, here, here I am — come!" Speaking softly through that gentle breeze, the goddess, enchantress of all, stretched out her lovely, graceful arms and embraced me.

"At that very instant I became a red lotus, glowing with the rosy colour of the twin holy feet of the Lord of the world, who is pure bliss itself, and clung for ever to the side of the goddess of poetry."

7

Political Activities*The Civic Equality Movement*

Chithramezhuthu wrote a great many articles on political, historical and church subjects. In Travancore the Devaswom (temple) department and the Revenue department were administered together, so the Government was not prepared to give Christians of the State posts in the Revenue department. Non-Hindus — Christians, Ezhavas, Muslims and others — and the avarna (lower-caste) Hindus suffered great inequality in this respect. The first to begin an organised campaign against this policy, demanding that the unequally treated classes of Travancore be admitted to the Revenue department, was Jacob Kurian of Padinjarethalakkal, Puthiyakavu. Articles, editorials and the like on this subject were published one after another in the *Keraleeyabhimani*, Jacob Kurian's own newspaper. Most of these articles and editorials were by Varghese and Jacob Kurian.

The Nair newspapers, except for one belonging to the Nair community, raised the counter-argument that since Revenue and Devaswom were joined together, non-Hindus and avarna Hindus must not be admitted to the Revenue department; and that because the State of Travancore had been "dedicated" (*thrippadidanam*) to Sree Padmanabhaswamy by Maharaja Marthanda Varma, no one had any authority to bring a new system of administration into

a department where the two were joined. Only Samadarshi (Thiruvananthapuram) said this argument was unjust. None of the Christian newspapers was able to expose historically the emptiness of this "dedication" argument and break its backbone.

Because the civic equality movement belonged to Jacob Kurian and the Keraleeyabhimani, the Malayala Manorama kept silent on the subject in the early days. The other Christian papers, such as the Nasrani Deepika and Navabharathi, kept silent, as if there were no point in contending with the Government over an impossible matter, though they sometimes wrote something in favour of civic equality. Even so, no one came forward to demolish the argument of the dedication of the State. In these circumstances Chithramezhuthu published under his own name a long article, titled "Equality of Civic Rights", in the Keraleeyabhimani of 12 Medam 1093 [volume 5, issue 32], refuting the arguments put forward by the Nair papers on the dedication of the State. Once this article came out, the Nair papers withdrew from that baseless argument. It was only when the civic equality movement gained strength and it became clear that it would become an all-Travancore question that T. K. Madhavan (an Ezhava), P. S. Muhammad and others openly supported it. Jacob Kurian did much on this matter from the front line with his pen and his writing. Chithramezhuthu too helped the movement by writing many articles, both anonymously and under his own name.

In 1095 a cabal based in Thiruvananthapuram, seeking to bring down the administration of the Dewan Raghavaiah, pushed college students forward as their weapon. The Dewan suppressed the student agitation using the army,

and many students were injured. While the Christian papers hesitated, not knowing what policy the Christian community should adopt on the matter, Chithramezhuthu wrote a long article in the *Keraleeyabhimani* titled "Why We Do Not Support the Student Riot". Only after that did the Christian papers express an opinion on the matter. At the Mavelikara civic equality meeting of 1094 [*Note: printed as 1094; the student agitation is dated 1095 just above, and the Kaumudi editorial below is dated 1097*], G. Raman Menon, editor of *Pauran*, moved a resolution against the Government on this matter. Varghese opposed it. The editorial on this in the *Kerala Kaumudi* (8 *Vrischikam* 1097) is quoted below:— "The argument that a committee should be appointed to inquire into the student agitation and the events that followed is right, Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese has written a long and entertaining article in the *Keraleeyabhimani* explaining why Christians are not taking part. Since it was Varghese who opposed the resolution moved by G. Raman Menon at the civic equality meeting held at Mavelikara, urging the need to appoint a committee, it fell to him to explain his reasons. In passing, Varghese has also hinted a little at the *Kerala Kaumudi*. We do not think we need repeat again why the *Kaumudi* says a committee is needed. We are not much convinced by Varghese's argument that, since cases are being heard over the student riot and the truth will come out from the decisions in those cases, no special committee or inquiry is needed to find the truth.

"The judgments of courts may sometimes fail to bring out the whole truth, or may even be contrary to the truth. We cannot say for certain whether our friend Varghese will agree with this, or will argue us down...."

The Great Civic Equality Meeting

The chief organisers of the great civic equality meeting held on the 24th of Kanni 1094 on the north side of the C.M.S. church at Arattukadavu, Mavelikara, under the presidency of Elanjikkal John Vakil and Nidhirikkal John Vakil, were three: P. Jacob Kurian, K. I. Varghese Mappilai (Puthumadom) and K. M. Varghese.

In the end the Kottayam people took the infant civic equality movement into their arms, and the Manorama was ready to take the lead in working for it. Accordingly a great civic equality meeting was held at Kottayam and elected a committee [the Christian Mahajana Sabha], with John Chandy as secretary. The civic equality committee decided to ask for the help of well-known writers in the Christian community to nourish the movement with their pens, and in keeping with this the secretaries John Chandy (Mattathra, Kottayam) and P. K. Kocheppen Tharakan, on the 1st of Vrischikam 1094, sent Chithramezhuthu a registered letter. After that he wrote many articles with an eye to the success of the civic equality movement and to the pride and advancement of the Christian community. He also wrote many articles in newspapers such as the Malayala Manorama, Navabharathi, the Kottayam Prathidinam and Kerala Sevakan [only in Kerala Sevakan's early days].... Following this, Chithramezhuthu wrote these historical stories in the Malayala Manorama: "Valiya Mar Dionysius and the Tharananallur Namboodiripad", "The Ammachi of Nellimoottil", "Thachil Mathu Tharakan's Thangakompan", "Mar Mathews Athanasius's Panchakalyani" and "The Central Pillar of Venad, or the Saintly Shouriyar". The Manorama people later published them in book form.

Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai's Critique

These five historical stories greatly stirred the pride and spirit of the Christian community. But one section of the Nair community did not like this at all. As a result, Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai — leader of the Nair community and President of the Nair Service Society — published a whole book criticising the historical story Mar Mathews Athanasius's Panchakalyani.

That critique was a work that scorned even the proper principles of the art of criticism. In it can be seen a naked dance of personal abuse and threats. In answer to it, Chithramezhuthu published in 1111 a book titled "The Political Service of the Nasranis of Kerala". Young Syrian Christians living at Kuala Lumpur, "in Singapore" [*Note: as printed — Kuala Lumpur was in the Federated Malay States, not Singapore*], contributed about five hundred rupees to Chithramezhuthu towards publishing this reply. When the reply came out, Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai's tower of historical argument collapsed altogether, and the emptiness of his hollow reasoning became as plain to everyone as a gooseberry in the palm of the hand. Chithramezhuthu had intended to answer the "Panchakalyani critique" in two volumes. He had prepared all the notes, with the historical documents needed to refute a thousand times over every historical argument Sri Padmanabha Pillai put forward in the critique; but once the first volume ["The Political Service of the Nasranis of Kerala"] came out, neither Padmanabha Pillai nor the Nair papers in general replied with a single letter or ventured another critique, so the purpose was achieved without the need for a second volume.

As there was some delay in bringing out Chithramezhuthu's reply to Mannam's critique, a small history by Chithramezhuthu, "The Syrian Christians and Their Valour in Defence of the Realm", came out in 1107 from the John Memorial Press, Chengannur, with an introduction by the Sanitary Commissioner Jacob Chandy.

Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai's critique of the historical story Mar Mathews Athanasius's Panchakalyani was published without a break over six months in the Service, the daily newspaper that was the voice of the Nair community. When this critique appeared, tension between the Nair community and the Christian community in Travancore rose to a dreadful pitch. The Nair papers began to abuse Chithramezhuthu and the Manorama very harshly. Moreover, the Nairs began a boycott of the Manorama in many places. Because of this the Manorama withdrew from the venture entirely, so Varghese's reply spent about a year without seeing the light of day. At last, when the Christians began the Abstention (Nivarthana) movement [against the Government], Mammen Mappillai, editor of the Manorama, asked for Varghese's reply and published it serially in the Manorama with an editorial. Only after that did it come out in book form from the Kalavilasini Press, Thiruvananthapuram.

Given below is the review written by the editors of the Navabharathi (Thiruvalla) of 17 Kumbham 1111, and of the Malayala Manorama, of the reply Chithramezhuthu gave in his book "The Political Service of the Nasranis of Kerala" to Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai's "Panchakalyani critique":—

"The Political Service of the Nasranis of Kerala"

(Part One)

"It is clear from the introduction that this work is a collection of the historical series that Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese — a researcher of history, a practitioner of literature and the other fine arts, and a celebrated prose writer — published in instalments in the Malayala Manorama at various times with a particular purpose. There is no doubt that historians free of prejudice who read this work once will agree without argument that the author has fully established his view — that the Christians of Kerala, and especially the Nasranis, the St. Thomas Christians, rendered political service in Kerala in many ways and lived with honour — quoting abundantly from the works of historians both Indian and foreign. Modern political thinkers hold that every good deed, and even every thought, of any citizen for the welfare, prosperity and peace of the nation is political service. It is a truth acknowledged by ancient writers that, in the early days of the four-fold caste order, the worship of God, war, agriculture, trade and so on carried out by the four castes for the uplift and defence of the nation, and the other occupations followed by the sub-castes in their support, were all of equal importance, each great and complete in its own place. Whether because of its style, or the arrangement of naturally beautiful words, or the sweetness of its musical prose, or the freshness and elegance of its ideas, or the excellence of its presentation, or all of these together — once one begins to read Mr. Varghese's works, many will find it hard to put the book down before finishing it. At the end of the book he mentions in passing the names of many Nasranis who served the nation. It would be best if Mr. Varghese himself told the interested public, through

the newspapers, the true histories of these men. Since there are no 'depressed classes' among Christians, the expression 'depressed-class Christians' troubles many. Likewise 'baptised Christians' (njana snanan) has not become a usable expression either. (The typesetters changed the 'tha' in 'njana snathanmar' to 'na' — K. M. V.) It can be said without doubt that this work of Mr. Varghese is both a blessed necklace for the lady of the Malayalam language and an undeniable historical record of their political service for the Christians of Kerala. We have not the slightest doubt that, if the members of the community living today fail to value properly the matchless intelligence and literary skill Mr. Varghese has shown in gathering historical evidence and bringing the glory of his community's past to light so wonderfully, and fail to show their gratitude for it, future generations will count it a great shortcoming on their part. We also believe that Mr. Varghese will not fail to receive from his own community the encouragement he rightly deserves. We fully agree with this opinion in the introduction, wish Mr. Varghese every success, and trust that the second part will be printed as soon as possible. The book can be had for one rupee on application to the 'Kalavilasini Book Depot', Thiruvananthapuram."

The Malayala Manorama's Book Review

Kottayam

30-9-1111

"The Political Service of the Nasranis of Kerala"

Part One

Author — Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese

"Considering that most of the essays in this book were published in these columns, and that we spoke at length at the time about the circumstances that gave rise to this series, there is no need to say anything special about it now. But since anyone who reads this book will see that it is only when the parts of an essay that appeared in the newspaper columns at different times are gathered and read together in book form like this that one can grasp the true shape of the subject and properly value its reasoning and arguments, we believe it will not be out of place to look at it as a historical work in its own right and to discuss its merits and faults. In this book the author establishes, on the testimony of many historians, that the statement by Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai, Secretary of the Nair Service Society, in his book 'Mar Mathews Athanasius's Panchakalyani and Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese' — that the political service of the Nasranis of Kerala in military service is a mere sky-flower or a hare's horn (an impossibility) — is contrary to the facts. Besides the statements of Western historians, the book quotes many pieces of evidence given, explicitly or by implication, about the Nasrani armies by Mr. V. Nagam Aiya in the Travancore State Manual, by Mr. K. P. Padmanabha Menon in the History of Cochin, and by poets such as Kunchan Nambiar and Kunjikkuttan Thampuran. Since it is crystal clear that this evidence is not fabricated, and that these authors were not moved by communal feeling or did not make those statements to serve some particular purpose, the fact that the military service of the Nasranis is a true historical event is established. This being so, that someone should set out to write a whole book denying it can only be due to ignorance of history or to an

inability to see merit in others. In any case, it is our firm belief that this book is sufficient to rebut in a calm voice the baseless charges of the other side, reveal the truth, and remove the misconceptions of superficial readers.

"In controversies of this kind on communal subjects, authors are liable, in their eagerness to establish their own side and in their swelling pride, to use very unreasonable language in a harsh tone. Only the establishment of a thesis done in a way that gives no room for this charge — with respect for the opposing side and with strict care to avoid personal animosity — is pleasing to the learned world. What will win the author respect in the hearts of impartial parties is how far Mr. Varghese has shown restraint and self-control in this matter. Looked at in this light, a paragraph on pages 142 and 143 and some expressions in a sentence at the end of page 10 of the book under review may seem unreasonable. But when compared with the tone and language of the opposing statements that provoked them, it will seem that no apology is needed for them. It would not be inappropriate if such statements, harmful to the excellence of a work of history, were removed from future editions of the book. The price of this book, printed at St. Mary's Press, Athirampuzha, and published by the Kalavilasini publishers, Thiruvananthapuram, has been fixed at one rupee."

Political Articles

Chithramezhuthu wrote many articles in the newspapers on the civic equality movement and on the political rights of the Christians of Travancore. Among them: "The Misguided Viceroy Memorial", in the Bharatha Pathrika of 32 Mithunam 1110 [Note: "32" as printed]; "Is the Travan-

core Government a Hindu Government?", on civic equality, in the *Keraleeyabhimani* of 13 Medam 1093; "Civic Equality and the Glory of the King", in the *Deepika*, Kanni 1095; "World Culture and the Establishment of Civic Rights", in the *Keraleeyabhimani* of 26 November 1919; "Who Were Those Who Shed Their Blood for Travancore?", in the *Navabharathi* of 15 January 1932; "The Accounts Officer and the Christian Community", in the *Malayala Rajyam* of 23 May 1936; and "Against Accounts Officer Neelakanta Pillai", in the *Dakshinabharathi* of 6 Edavam 1109. These witty, weighty and thought-provoking political articles brought about changes in the dangerous political policy of the Travancore Government.

Early Articles

Only some of the articles Chithramezhuthu wrote in newspapers in his early years have been found. They are: "Ramayyan Dalawa" (*Paschimatharaka*, 5 July 1913); "This Is My Lost Horoscope!" (*Pracheenatharaka*, 21 June 1913); "Rice-Water Set Out for the Bulldog" (*Pracheenatharaka*, 15 February 1913); "The Art of Photography" (*Nasrani Deepika*, 11 July 1913); "The Beggars of Kerala" (*Keraleeyabhimani*, 18 August 1915); "A Legend, or Ramayyan Dalawa" (*Keraleeyabhimani*, 4 October 1913); "Stammering" (*Deepika*, 15 September 1915); "The Ideas the Aryans Had about Painting" (*Deepika*, February 1913); "Why Pictures Should Be Included in Novels" (*Deepika*, 20 October 1914); and "The Painting of Kerala and the Way to Its Advancement" (*Deepika*, 1914). Almost all the articles are very long.

The Honour from the Christian Mahajana Sabha

In appreciation of the valuable service Sri Chithramezhuthu had rendered in politics, history and literature, at the second annual meeting of the Samastha Kerala Christian Mahajana Sabha held at Thiruvalla on 4 Medam 1107 (1932), the President of the meeting, Dewan Bahadur Dr. Varghese, presented Chithramezhuthu with a gold medal of honour weighing three and a half sovereigns. P. K. Kocheeppen Tharakan — poet, playwright and writer — had undertaken to give a medal of honour, in memory of the renowned Manorama editor K. I. Varghese Mappillai, to the writer whom a committee agreed upon and nominated as the most distinguished in literature in the Kerala Christian community at the time. The Christian Sevaka Samithi had entrusted this to a committee of a good many people: Rao Sahib O. M. Cherian, T. K. Joseph, I. C. Chacko, K. V. Simon, P. Jacob Kurian, K. C. Mammen Mappillai, K. N. Daniel, M. P. Varki, K. M. Mathulla Mappillai, E. T. Thomas and K. M. Kocheeppen Mappillai. Accordingly, the "K. I. Varghese Mappillai Memorial Medal" was given at Chengannur in 1931 to Mahakavi K. V. Simon for his epic Vedaviharam.

It was because the committee unanimously decided that the next year's medal should go to Chithramezhuthu that the Mahajana Sabha presented him with the medal of honour at its fourth meeting on 4 Medam 1107 [*Note: printed as "fourth meeting" here and "second annual meeting" on p. 117*]. Before the presentation, O. M. Cherian, Kocheeppen Tharakan and Dr. Varghese spoke in praise of Chithramezhuthu's literary, social and political services. The medal, an inch and three-eighths in diameter, was inscribed on one side "Presented to K. M. Varughese by Ko-

cheeppen Tharakan" and on the other "'K. I. V. M.' Memorial Medal — C. S. L. Bhashasahithyam (Malayalam Literature) — 1932". About twenty thousand Christians attended the great meeting that day.

A paragraph from the Malayala Manorama [6 Medam 1107], which carried the report of that fourth day's great meeting, is quoted below:— "It should also be mentioned that the President then presented the gold medal prepared by Mr. P. K. Kocheeppen Tharakan in memory of the late Varghese Mappillai to the well-known prose writer Mr. Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese; that Mr. Varghese accepted it with a speech of thanks; and that the audience showed their joy with applause."

The Samastha Kerala Christian Mahajana Sabha later became the All-Kerala Christian Sevaka Samithi and held one or two annual meetings. But the committee did not venture to propose the name of another universally accepted writer.

"Chithramezhuthu" was a great man of his generation, blessed by the Lord of the world in both painting and literature. Above all, in the history of the Christian community of Kerala and of the Syrian Church, he had earned high renown throughout Kerala. It is widely acknowledged that he stood at the very front among the many Christian writers of his generation.

Given below is the review of the conference that Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese wrote in the Manorama on 11 March 1933 about the great political conference held on the Kozhencherry sands at three o'clock on 4 March 1933, to voice the general protest of the Christian, Ezhava and Muslim communities against the reform of

the Travancore Legislature that gave the right to vote on the basis of land tax. This poetic and brilliant account shows how far the writer's beautiful and meaningful imagination and style captured the fervour and spirit of that conference.

The headlines of the Kozhencherry conference report published by the Malayala Manorama on 6 March 1933 are also given below.

The Kozhencherry Joint Political Conference

More Than Ten Thousand People Attend the Meeting

Christian leaders of every party present together

The greatest political conference ever held in Kerala

An inspiring message from Rajasabha Bhooshanan K.
Chandy

The Abstention resolution passed unanimously

From our special reporter
Kozhencherry, Saturday, 21 Kumbham

The Great Kozhencherry Political Meeting as I Saw It

Like the Maramon sands lying silent, their exultation spent, after the world-famous Maramon Convention ended — here was another Maramon riverbank, spread full of sweet, glistening gravel. Like the stream of foam-flowers that pours down, blazing, when the white rocks gathered on the upper reaches of the majestic Pampa crack and grind together and burst into bloom — like the

white-hot lava that could burst from the summit of Kariyannoor Mountain, the Vesuvius of the Vanchi kingdom, which stands swollen and heaving in the pangs of labour with thunder ever throbbing in its womb, and rush down every way — a great stream of people, more than fifteen thousand agitated heads raised high. Countless citizens' faces pouring contempt upon the devilish, arrogant throbbing of a great power that has lost its way. Countless pitchers of fire in their eyes, showering sparks against slavery and against the monstrous domination of a single community — a great dance of the spirit, not of endurance alone but of hatred of obstruction; not of manliness alone but of fearlessness; not of loyalty to the king alone but of abundant love of country; not of spirit alone but of the glory of heroic, invincible strength; a flash of electric light revealed; a brilliant reflection that set the whole atmosphere trembling beyond measure; a swelling. A mysterious pulse of heart knocking upon heart and dissolving into the subtle ether. Ah me! That vast flood of people, fully displaying a readiness so mighty that the sheer heat of its thought could turn crags into worthless gravel, was shaking even the chain of restraint fastened to its leaders. Who could calm this great multitude, melting and blazing beyond number like a seashore tossing and foaming with waves! Who could control it!

It was half past three. The evening breeze circled, singing the Saranga (war) raga, carrying into every Christian vein the stirring, valour-rousing atoms of the body of that embodiment of the spirit, the priest-emperor of Malayalam who lies at eternal rest in the white tomb of the Maramon Syrian church — Mar Mathews Athanasius Metropolitan. The bold spirit of T. K. Madhavan, in whom

the spirit of Simhala (Ceylon) [*Note: as printed — perhaps a figure for the Ezhavas' traditional Lankan origin*] had taken form, danced invisibly in the sky, swelling with joy. The inner spirit of Kazhakuttam Bava, the Muslim leader who bore in his heart the justice of Akbar and the valour of Aurangzeb, shone down from above the half-moon that clung to the edge of the sky. Each moment seemed to quiver in expectation of the auspicious prelude to a great event.

A shout went up. The band struck up. Cheers rent the sky. Under rows of pearl-umbrellas with shimmering fringes, the great champions who were the revered leaders of the Syrian community, followed by the members of the reception committee, entered the arena, vast as an ocean. Ah — the most venerable grey heads, the finest treasures of wisdom, the noblest centres of counsel, the richest fields of culture, the incarnations of the power of inner strength! O mother of the Nasrani community, your heroic sons, who for so many centuries had stood ready to fight one another with daggers in hand, now raised those daggers to the sky to cut the fetters not of their Mother alone but of the sister communities; shoulder to shoulder, cheek to cheek, bathing one another in tears, as those who share a claim in the womb of one mother, who tasted the nectar of the same breast, bound by a firm chain of love that nothing can ever break, they appeared hand in hand on that great people's way — that one sight was a supremely great golden union that came to pass in the Mother's presence after a succession of centuries. Ah! Why did the walls of that church not burst apart, to clear the way for the body of Mar Mathews Athanasius Metropolitan, blazing with manliness and pride, to come and

behold it? Why did the clouds not part for the inward gaze of that supremely wealthy master, Thachil Mathu Tharakan — defender of his country, who gave a helping hand to the Vanchi royal house in its hour of greatest peril, and who stands at the door of Paradise showering a pitying, scornful smile upon certain Nair farce-writers who girded themselves to smear tar on his moonlight of fame, sending his betel-spittle at them like an arrow with a single 'phoo'? A sweet shower of smiles on the marble tomb of the great Kandathil Varghese Mappillai! A song of congratulation on the gold-lettered tomb of Nidhirikkal Mani Kathanar!

What a magic spell! What sorcery! The moment it saw those noble grey heads raised above the canopy of the crowd, that great ocean, surging and full, grew wholly calm, like a forest thicket fallen silent after a storm. Silence everywhere. What was seen there was the seal of the complete obedience and devotion to their leaders of the Nasrani young men — bold in their opinions, living in many stations and conditions. This devotion to their leaders of the young Nasranis, in their thousands upon thousands, made it abundantly clear that victory was not far off in the righteous struggle they were waging justly to protect their lives, property, freedom and rights.

To the right of the President's seat, foremost of all, sat Rajasree K. C. Mammen Mappillai, B.A. Like a lion that has left the dark depths of its cave, shaken its black-and-grey mane and roared and then fallen still, he kept his eyes — sweet with thought — fixed on the ground, from beneath the thick, overhanging bush of his eyebrows tangled like loose white wire. This chariot of intellect, who appears only behind the curtain, unwilling to make

himself or anyone known or to be known by anyone, sat motionless there, like a gleaming engine once uncoupled. Next to him was the great Balakrishnan of Kuravilangad, Rajasree John Nidhiry, B.A., B.L., with the inner strength to tip even five hundred kandi of teak to the riverbank with a single well-aimed shove. Resting his beard on the head of his own dignified walking stick, smiling with pride so that his kambalanga-seed (teeth) showed, he stood there like an old tusker swaying its head. Next were seen Naduvathussery and Thelly, refined in blood with the Azhvanchery Thamprakkal, firm in ancestry and gleaming with Namboodiri pride. Fawns in the courtyard, Panchanana (lions) on the battlefield, fierce tigers if their communal pride was touched, Yudhishtira and Arjuna if political disability struck them. Rajasree N. V. Joseph, behind the army, on the manner of battle was quietly deep in thought. Rajasree T. J. Mathew, for his part, wore the look of a bloodhound that runs thirty-five miles and catches its quarry by scent. Next was Vellappally. Mr. Joseph — a prince among wits, who can recite all 236 verses of the Unnuneeli Sandesam in a single breath — stood struck with wonder, looking at the tens of thousands spread out before him as though at Aladdin's marvellous lamp. Sriman K. M. Mammen Mappillai, shining like a gold coin smeared with lime, looked like an Arab horse that will not be held by the reins and leaps forward at the sound of the band. Like Bhima, who sat gazing without blinking at his wife fallen before Keechaka; like Bhimasena the mace-bearer, who thought he could lift Hanuman's tail aside and cross over but, when things grew tight, recognised the true state of affairs — Mr. K. I.

Kocheeppen Mappillai sat calm, ready to offer his breast for anything.

The elders of the tharavad (the family) consulted and decided, and installed Sriman A. C. Kuriakose in the chair. Standing tall on the table like a waterspout risen above the waves, Mr. Kuriakose turned his cannon-mouth to all four sides — Shiva! Shiva! — and that well-placed war-drum, pouring forth for half an hour like thunder so as to shake the sandbanks of the Pampa, for what did it not make that great multitude ready? Awakening swelled everywhere. Even the round boulders lying in the river sand were roused and fell to sneezing.

It was the second act. The leader Mr. N. V. Joseph — noble and bold, bold and heroic, bold and calm — stood up on the table. The moment had come for the volcano to burst open. As he beheld his own blood, never seen before — his own bone, his own flesh, his own brothers — the leader's face changed colour with many emotions. All the fire of pride that the community's history of the past nineteen centuries could stir rushed into his body at once. Words — words like a great war — the terror of slavery, the justice of rights, the holy effort to be made for progress; a reflection of a vast revelation of the past and the present. The hearts of the people began to heave like rising waves. A scattering of red-hot sparks from a volley of fire-arrows, enough to scorch the whole atmosphere. The multitude as one heard what it had to hear and saw what it had to see. Ignorance became understanding. Doubt became firm resolve. Cowardice became courage. Wavering became a solemn vow. A roar of acclaim burst forth. The drum-roll of clapping hands sounded.

Holding the hearts of the fifteen thousand — their power of thought, the whole assembly — in the palm of his hand, Mr. Joseph leapt down, his task accomplished, like Napoleon dismounting from the side of his war-horse. The iron fortress was half built. What took place there was a lesson by a Mr. Lloyd George — a class in political training — pointing out every ill effect of the present scheme of administrative reform and teaching it scientifically and practically. The holy souls of thirty thousand blameless Nasranis — whom Velu Thampi Dalawa and the great minister of Cochin, when the British Government demanded tribute beyond the treaty, had taken in crowds to the western seashore, bound hand and foot and thrown into the Arabian Sea to drown, for the sole reason that the English and the Syrian Christians were of the same religion [*Note: this claim is as printed in the original*] — showered invisible flowers from the sky. The martyr Devasahayam Pillai pronounced his blessing; Samuel Thampi, the younger brother of Ummini Thampi Dalawa, sang a song of congratulation.

It was time for the resolution to be moved. A clear display of manliness, spirit and fearlessness. A fierce look at injustice, even while the heart was cooled with loyalty to the king. The whole multitude cried out that Abstention (Nivarthana) alone was the only path of safety, the means of saving their lives — indeed the all in all — of the forty lakhs of Travancore who were without refuge, forsaken, without influence, thrust outside; on which the very freedom of their children to breathe wholly depended. From all four sides came the echo that they had nothing to fear from bars, handcuffs or lathis — from any devilish, cruel

weapon that injustice and brutality conceive and bring forth.

The last resolution, that Sir C. P. should be sent away from Travancore, was the first rite in the setting up of a pillar of communal victory by fifteen thousand people together. The one who moved it was a big man packed into a small body. The multitude growled that no greater C. P. than the Portuguese governor Menezes [*Note: as printed — Archbishop Menezes is meant*] had ever set foot in Kerala. Every face showed that they knew by heart the earlier histories, ending in defeat, of the emperors who had freely played with instruments of slaughter — sword, knife, spear, tongs, molten boiling metal, lions' fangs, stakes, burning coals and nails — to persecute the Christian community. Thirty thousand eyes of fire made it plain that they had laboured for centuries, with a loyalty to the king that boiled over without any wish for reward, to increase peace in the land, prosperity for the communities, good fortune for the royal house and honour for their own Government. An unspoken word was heard there: that their giver of food was not Sir C. P. but the merciful Kulasekhara Perumal. So ended the great thunder that went on for an hour or two in the face of Mr. O. C. Ninan. The resolution was passed.

The electric power of Kottayam surged in waves into Kozhencherry. The two great meetings were two broad silver wings of the forty lakhs, flying up the path of advancement. Speaking of the Christian community alone, what has happened in this century is a great unity that the proud Nasranis of old, gone to dust over the past 279 years, longed to see and shed tears for. The Christian people as a whole have now seen the vital centre of their

strength. They have come to know their might. They have gathered into one the growth of the four centuries since 1599. Like a heroic warrior roused from sleep, they have risen to their feet. Their circumstances have become so hard that they cannot take a single step back. They can never again be divided; time can only make this bond of love firmer. They have no hatred, no inner spite. They envy the progress of none — not of the sister communities, nor of any of the high-caste communities.

They are ready to grant the just rights of any community.

Where religion slept, the nation woke: what religion could not do, the nation accomplished. The nation united them. What the nation has united, the nation must make grow. It is long past time for the wise to understand that no community here can enjoy well-being while the Christian community — sunk in poverty through lack of political support and through unemployment — is kept as a thorn in its side. The time when one community could play the elephant and frolic on the back of another is over. The nation sinks only together; it rises only together.

The Kottayam and Kozhencherry meetings were the century's writing in fire that the time is at hand for the Travancore Government to give up its delusion that it can keep the Ezhava, Muslim and Christian communities pressed under its sandals, to sacrifice them to the rule of a single community's domination. Agitated, yet never crossing in the least the bounds of restraint; showing impatience, yet moderation; stirring, yet mature — the fifteen thousand, representatives of the forty lakhs, rose up like Arjuna drawing his arrows to establish their birth-

right, looking fiercely and unflinchingly to all four corners of the field of righteousness. And the sun of that day, mounted on the clouds of sunset, went on its way towards the path of dawn.

8

Services to the Christian Community and the Church

In matters concerning the Christian community of Malankara, and concerning the Roman Catholic, Mar Thoma and Orthodox churches, Chithramezhuthu carried on a great deal of correspondence in his time with the learned men and the heads of churches who were his contemporaries, and published many articles, essays and controversies on these subjects in the newspapers. Though a great many of the letters are lost today, some important letters and articles have been preserved. In the manuscript of his family history Chithramezhuthu says: "A considerable part of my humble life was spent wholly in securing the honour and the rights of the Christian community in the state of Kerala."

Two letters sent to Chithramezhuthu by Mr. K. K. Lukose, B.A., B.L., Judge of the High Court, about the writing of a history of the Malankara Syrian Church, are relevant here.

Navanagar, Thiruvananthapuram, 15 Medam 1115

Dear Mr. Varghese, I received the letter you sent on the 29th of Meenam. It is because I was on circuit that I have not been able to reply until now.

I gather from your letter that you are very keenly interested in the writing of a history of the Church, and that you are ready to give whatever help you can.

I congratulate you for this, and thank you for it in advance.

What I am going to do (just as you remark at the end of your letter) is to remedy the shortcoming that "it is very sad that we sit by without any effort while people of all other religions write their histories." To put it more plainly, what I intend for the present is to have Mr. E. M. Philip's English book printed in English just as it is, and to bring the history up to date by adding, separately and afresh, the recent part that he did not write.

In this second part, if there are any documents that strengthen Mr. Philip's views [whether Dutch records, local historical records, manuscripts, local histories or traditions, it would be fitting to discuss them]. I trust you will have read Mr. E. M. Philip's Malayalam history. If you could find and give me any documents in keeping with his thinking [but which he was not able to know of], it would be very useful. If they are contrary, I doubt whether there is any choice but to add them as an appendix.

But it seems to me now that it would not be fitting to include matters of community and culture in this work. In any case, it would be good if you wrote a Malayalam book including the parts you wish. I hardly need to remind you specially that only true facts should be its foundation. I too will give whatever help I can.

My undertaking is only to produce, from within our own community, a history of the Syrian Church for the use

of those who know English — and where the facts cannot be known, to show also what the community's genuine understanding is; and I am ready to receive all such things gladly. If the book were in Malayalam, since I doubt whether there is anyone in the community able to write as effectively as you, I trust you will not fail to undertake it.

I would specially remind you that all these matters are confidential.

Yours Sincerely

K. K. Lukose

Another letter sent to Chithramezhuthu by Justice K. K. Lukose concerning his presidential address at the Syrian social conference:—

Nawa Nagar, Trivandrum, 3-2-1120

Dear Mr. Chithramezhuthu Varghese, You know that the Syrian conference is on the 9th. I trust you will be present that day.

I am sending herewith the proof (by book-post) of my presidential address. I am sending the proof because the final copy is not yet ready. I send it in the hope that you will study it even before then, since in the rush of the conference it will not be possible to study it properly or to review it.

It should be criticised from the standpoint of a listener. It has been printed for private circulation — for our Syrian family only, without formal publication.

I trust that you, who have the spirit of scientific history, will understand its "rasa" — its flavour. You will see that many historical "secrets" are revealed in it — with care that it should be an undeniable record, founded on true

history alone, yet not seen (elsewhere) before. In particular, our "Muppirippal" connection, the connection with Mar Thoma the Apostle at Edessa (Urhai), the connection with the common martyr (sahada), and the evidence (through circumstances) from our principal churches (Puthuppally, Mavelikara, Niranam, Angamaly etc.) are, I believe, priceless for our Church history and more. Then, how all of it fits together? I am waiting to know what you conclude. If possible, on the day after the address, if you would send a review to the Paura Prabha or elsewhere — in whatever way seems true to you — and have it published, I feel it would be good for the conference, for the Syrian Church and for the conscience of our faithful; that is why I ask this. No church must be "displeased". I also admit that I have not revealed the whole truth; but that might become an obstacle to union. Yet everything I have said is wholly true and can be proved by documents.

There is no need to reply. If you do reply, send it

C/o Mr. P. M. Jacob, M. D. Seminary, Kottayam

Yours Sincerely Sd. K. K. Lukose

Letters on Church matters sent to Chithramezhuthu by the Malankara Metropolitan, the glory of the Malankara Church, Vattasseril Geevarghese Mar Dionysius:

I

No. 1210 — 23 Vrischikam 1098

"From Mar Dionysius, Metropolitan of the Malankara diocese:— "May grace and blessing from God abound to our most beloved Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese.

"Beloved, we received the letter you sent on the 13th of this month. We were very glad to read it. Many people

express opinions and write about us in many ways — some out of the sincerity of their hearts, and some with ill intent. We bear no feeling of hatred in our heart towards those who act from sincerity of heart. If we come to think that people are acting with ill intent, it is only natural that we should feel some pain about them. Since our beloved has now made it clear in writing that what came from him was not with any ill intent, our sorrow has now turned to joy. We, who are weak, pray to the Almighty to forgive our faults and failings, done knowingly and unknowingly, willingly and unwillingly; and we pray that we may forgive those who do anything against us. Therefore be fully assured that nothing of this kind remains in our heart as hatred against anyone (especially against a member of our own family). Though we are weak, as head of a Church we have certain responsibilities concerning the Church, so we must consider the good of the Church above our own honour. We make that clear whenever we speak and act with that care. Therefore we have one request to all: if anyone is dissatisfied with our failings or faults, let them not take these to be faults of our Church and set about breaking up the Church, but count them as our own failings — that is, let them not count our faults as faults of our episcopal office, but believe, as our holy Church has always believed, that that office is without stain. We are very glad to learn that our beloved is also a member of our family. We did not know this. Please let us know the details. The rest later.

"May the grace and blessings of Almighty God ever abound.

"Given at the Syrian church, Thiruvananthapuram, on the 23rd of Vrischikam 1098, in the year 1922.

Mar Dionysius Metropolitan (signed)"

II

No. 661 — 6 Chingam 1099

"From Mar Dionysius, Metropolitan of the Malankara diocese — "Blessing to our most beloved K. M. Varghese.

"Beloved, "We received the letter you sent on the 29th of last month. We had gone to Puthenkavu and returned only yesterday. It seems our Kiriya^{ch}an [*Note: an affectionate name, as printed; the person meant is not identified*] thought that if talks were held while humouring C. J. Kurian, peace might come about somehow. It would be good if our Kiriya^{ch}an has at least now understood that peace will not come about in that way. Nor do we think that, because C. J. Kurian has died, the rest will now give way to peace. Chacko Tharakan, C. J. Kurian's close adviser, is a man of greater obstinacy and hardness of heart than C. J. Kurian. Chacko Tharakan is now the chief adviser of that side. Learned priests of the opposing side, such as Elavinamannil Mikhael, have preached publicly and very forcefully that the office and the spiritual grace of our brother bishops are not valid. That is the chief weapon they have used against us. Unless our bishops are somehow made to bow their heads, it would follow that those men were ignorant or false teachers. The view of Elavinamannil and others is that, however they may speak of the Patriarch Bava, nothing must be allowed to diminish their own pride. There are many other reasons as well. Let us take comfort, thinking, let everything happen as God wills. Let us commit ourselves into the hands of the Almighty; He will lead us as He sees fit. Many of the community's leaders have their own ambitions. Our Kiriya^{ch}an too has an ambition

of that kind. We have long doubted whether that ambition is pure. We never thought that any of you had a part in it, nor do we now. On the 1st of this month their managing committee met at Panampadi. Not many people attended, and those who did parted without agreement. Nor was it a lawful meeting; it was merely something got up at the wish of some of them. Paulo Vakil left in anger. Palampadam Vakil and others were not invited even to the feast. By the grace of God we are well. May God bless you.

"Given at Parumala Seminary on the 6th of Meenam 1099, in the year 1923 [*Note: the heading of this letter on p. 131 gives the date as 6 Chingam 1099; both as printed*].

Geevarghese Mar Dionysius (signed)"

A letter on Church affairs sent by His Grace Mar Theodosius, O.I.C., Metropolitan of the Quilon (Kollam) diocese:—

The Most Rev. Mar Theodosios, O. I. C., The Orthodox Syrian Metropolitan of Quilon

Bethany Asram, Vadaserikara

13-8-1122

"Blessing to our most beloved Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese.

"Beloved, "For some days now we have been greatly wishing that we might meet. We would like it to happen as soon as possible. You will have read the series of articles we wrote in the Church Weekly, 'The Malankara Church's Claim to Independence'. You will also have read the articles criticising it, written by Deacon Abraham, who works at Madras Christian College, and by Thaikkattu Thomas Mathew, B.A., L.T., in the Church Weekly of 23 March. For the security of us Orthodox it is

absolutely necessary that a reply be written to these criticisms — in a very moderate tone, wounding no one, yet speaking plainly. It seems to us that it would not be good for our standing if we ourselves were to open a controversy in the newspaper columns. Our opinion is that, by his knowledge of Church history and otherwise, our beloved is the right man for it. It would be good if the article were not written in words that wound others. But its substance must be like a sharp arrow.

"If our beloved does not have the Church Weekly — we understand that several people in Mavelikara have it — please read with special attention our series of articles, Deacon Abraham's article, and Thomas Mathew's of 23 March. If the Church Weekly's back issues are not to be had, let us know and we will send them.

"Enclosed is a copy of a kalpana (letter of instruction) we are sending to N. M. Abraham, editor of the Church Weekly. We would like us to meet and discuss this matter before our beloved writes the article. This Saturday we have to be at the Valakkodu church, Punalur. We have some small trouble with a leg; if that is better, we will come to Mavelikara before noon on Saturday, and we can meet there. So please wait for us on Saturday. If for some reason we are unable to come that day, we will let you know our programme afterwards. If we do not come to Mavelikara and meet on Saturday, our beloved should send a letter to us that same day at the address here. We shall be here until the end of the fast. The rest later. God bless you.

Sd xx Mar Thevedosios, O.I.C"

A letter sent to Chithramezhuthu on 6 December 1920 by Mookkancheri Mar Pathrose Osthathios Metropolitan, while he was still a deacon.

Rev M. P. Petros, BA, BD, LT.

Madanapalle
S. India, 6. 12. 1920

Dear Mr. Varghese, "I write this letter to ask you to write an essay in the Suriyani Sabha on the subject 'Worship in Our Own Language'. I believe you too must be of the opinion that the shameful practice of our priests reciting the orders of worship of our Church without knowing their meaning must change. This is the time when we must all strive together to make our Church a living thing.

"Your earlier article in the Suriyani Sabha struck me as very interesting. Since you have introduced into Malayalam a new word, 'kandara manassu' [*Note: phrase as printed; meaning unclear*], lovers of the language should be indebted to you for ever!! Though some may think it went a little too far, strong pens must indeed be used to open the eyes of those who, enslaved by custom, stand against the reforms needed for progress.

"I trust you are well. Please send a reply. Your friend,
Deacon M. P. Petros (Sd)"

The Malankara Church Cases — Chithramezhuthu's Help and Co-operation

In connection with the Vattippanam case, heard in the Thiruvananthapuram District Court and the High Court from 1913 to 4 July 1928, Chithramezhuthu carried on a great deal of correspondence with the then Malankara

Metropolitan, Vattasseril Geevarghese Mar Dionysius, the community trustee C. J. Kurian, other community leaders and others. He also published many articles in the newspapers on the reprehensible moves and policy of the Patriarch's party. On 24 Makaram 1099 Chithramezhuthu published a long article, titled "Some Questions to Mr. C. J. Kurian", in the Suriyani Sabha Kahalam, published from Kunnamkulam under the editorship of Pulikkottil Yausef Shemmashan. Kurian was one of the community trustees of that time and had worked against the Metropolitan.

No one can deny that, in the "Community Case" (Samudaya case) — heard in the Kottayam District Court from 10 March 1938 to 18 January 1943, then in the High Court from 18 August 1943 to August 1946, and later in the High Court review until December 1951 — Chithramezhuthu rendered outstanding service to the Catholicos party through his correspondence and through the articles he published. It was Chithramezhuthu's scholarship in Church history that made this possible. Though most of the records containing this correspondence are lost today, a few important letters have been traced.

That Chithramezhuthu should give evidence in court for the Catholicos party in the Community Case — Mar Baselios Geevarghese II Catholicos urged this in some letters given below. The Bava and Chithramezhuthu corresponded on this subject for many years. These letters proclaim that the Catholicos and the community recognised Chithramezhuthu's scholarship in Church history.

I

"Blessing to our most beloved Chithramezhuthu Varghese:— "Beloved, we received the letter you sent....

There are some paintings that Severios entrusted to you, are there not? They have not yet been finished. The paintings at Kundara [Note: "കണ്ടറ" as printed — probably Kundara] must be varnished and put in order. We have often spoken about the writing of the history of the Valiya Methrachan (Vattasseri Thirumeni), the Church history and so on. You must apply yourself to that too. Time is passing. A man's life is short and the work is great. So try to do it at once. The rest later. God bless you.

"Given at the Kottayam Seminary on the 28th of Makaram 1114, in the year 1939.

(Mar Baselios (signed))"

II

"Blessing to our most beloved Chithramezhuthu Varghese.

"Beloved, we received the letter you sent. We had no time at all to reply. In any case, God has saved us from their trap. We trust He will keep us safe still. As soon as the court reopens, the case must be pursued. We are putting you down as a witness too. It is to prove the history. What has to be told is the history of our Malayalam land (Malankara). It is the history of Ittoop and the others. The Royal Court has decided the case on the basis of the history of Ittoop and others. The burden is on us to prove that it is untrue.

"Since there are not many witnesses for history, you must go well prepared. The rest later.

"God bless you.

"Given at the Kottayam Syrian Seminary on the 3rd of Medam 1116, in the year 1941.

(Sd. xx) Baselios Mar Geevarghese II"
III

"Blessing to our most beloved Chithramezhuthu Varghese.

"Beloved, we received the letter you sent. Not many people know the Church history of our Malayalam land with certainty. Each person tells the history from the Apostle Mar Thoma onwards in his own way. The histories of Ittoop and others are worthless. What must be proved are the Mar Thoma bishops, their ordinations, and the relations with Antioch and with the Catholicate. And you yourselves know what else is needed. You must inquire into and study all of it properly, and give evidence. Even if M. P. Varki knows the history of foreign lands, it is the history of our own land that is needed rather. If M. P. Varki is suitable, he too can be put down as a witness. Proving the history is what we need most urgently, and it is good to have two or three witnesses for that. So you have no excuse. The rest later.

"God bless you.

"Given at the Kottayam Syrian Seminary on the 11th of Medam (1)116 [*Note: printed "116" for 1116*], in the year 1941.

(Sd. xx) Baselios Mar Geevarghese II"
IV

"Blessing to our most beloved Chithramezhuthu Varghese.

"Beloved, all the peace talks have come to nothing. Now the case must go on. There is no money for it. We are putting you on the list of witnesses too, so you must

come here. You will have to sit with the lawyers and study all the matters the witness has to state. The rest when we meet.

"God bless you.

"Given at the Kottayam Syrian Seminary on the 13th of Edavam (1)116, in the year 1941.

(Sd. xx) Baselios Mar Geevarghese II"

V

"Blessing to our Chithramezhuthu Varghese.

"Beloved, we have already spoken and written to you about giving evidence. You are needed to prove the history of the Malayalam land. You said you could give evidence in the month of Chingam. You must prepare properly for it. You will have seen the pamphlet of Abdul Had Ramban and the rest. It seems none of our people are writing any more; all have fallen silent and lost heart. You will know from the newspaper that the resignation has come to an end. They have advertised it in the paper as the Patriarch's command, and made it clear in the Panampadi report. As long as Julius is there, there will be no peace. The rest later.

"God bless you.

"Given at the Kottayam Syrian Seminary on the 16th of Karkkidakam 1116, in the year 1941.

Sd. xx Baselios Mar Geevarghese II"

VI

"Blessing to our most beloved Chithramezhuthu Varghese.

"Beloved, we received the letter you sent. Nothing will be done about the resignation without consulting everyone. The managing committee will meet this very month and do what is needed about it.

"God will turn our foolishness into wisdom. We will do nothing relying on our own intelligence or wisdom. The rest later.

"God bless you.

"Given at the Ebenezer Dayara, Manganam, Kottayam, on the 6th of Chingam 1122, in the year 1946.

Baselios Geevarghese (signed)"

Chithramezhuthu corresponded with N. M. Abraham — editor of both the Malayala Manorama and the Church Weekly — about serialising in the Church Weekly, Kottayam, and afterwards publishing in book form, the Church history written by Mar Thoma VI, Valiya Mar Dionysius, who was Malankara Metropolitan. Two of Abraham's letters are given below.

I

Kottayam 22-5-1958

My dear Mr. Varghese, I received the card you so kindly sent, bestowing heartfelt congratulations. I know there is much in it that I do not deserve, yet reading Mr. Varghese's letters is a joy and an encouragement. I had wanted to reply from the day the card arrived, but being busy with other duties I have put it off until now. Kindly forgive me.

It is a pleasure for me that the Church history of Mar Thoma VI is being published in the Church Weekly. But how to give Mr. Varghese the remuneration he deserves

remains a problem for me — a problem only of inability, not of unwillingness.

I am waiting eagerly for "Prathikara Vellidi" No. 2. With good wishes,

Yours Sincerely
(Sd) N. M. Abraham

The "Prathikara Vellidi" ("The Thunderbolt of Revenge") mentioned above refers to a short story of that name that Chithramezhuthu published in the Malayala Manorama in March-April 1957.

II

Kottayam, 4 Sep. 1959

Friend, As you know, all the first steps have been taken to publish the history of Mar Thoma VI in the Church Weekly. I am unable to say anything definite about the suggestion that it be made into a book.

That the Church Weekly should take up new ventures in book publishing remains even today only a dream. The second matter — that Mr. Varghese should be given some remuneration for permission to publish this history serially in the Church Weekly — stays in my mind as a problem; a problem not of unwillingness but of inability. In any case I would like us to have a clear understanding about it.

My thanks for the friendly appreciation you sent of the editorials I wrote daily during the Liberation Struggle, and especially of the Sunday articles.

With affection,

Yours Sincerely,

N. M. Abraham (Sd)

Two letters sent in November 1955 and September 1956 to Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese, a member of the managing committee of the Syrian Christian Congress, by His Grace Mathews Mar Coorilos, Assistant Metropolitan of the Kollam diocese (now Baselios Marthoma Mathews II Bava, Catholicos of the East), are important on Church matters. The letters follow:—

I

THE ORTHODOX SYRIAN CHURCH

The Rt. Rev. Mathews Mar Coorilos, Asst. Bishop of Quilon

Syrian Seminary, Kundara
(Seal)

"Blessing to our most beloved Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese, member of the managing committee of our Syrian Congress.

"Beloved, "These are times when the Syrian Christian Congress must be very wide awake and active. But it is doing nothing. We would like to meet you together with all the committee members. So we wish you to come to the Puthiyakavu church, Mavelikara, on Sunday the 4th of this December at about three in the afternoon.

"The rest when we meet. God bless you.

23-11-1955, from the Kayamkulam church.

Mathews Coorilos (signed)"

II

Mathews Mar Coorilos, Syrian Seminary, Kundara

"Blessing to our most beloved Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese.

"Beloved, to consider the means needed to strengthen the Syrian Congress, a meeting of its well-wishers is to be held on Sunday the 7th of this October at about three in the afternoon in the Jubilee Memorial Hall of the Puthiyakavu church, Mavelikara.

"Since we wish this, we would like our K. M. Varghese also to be present at that meeting.

"The rest later.

"God bless you.

27-9-56, from the Kundara Seminary.

Mathews Coorilos"

Concerning these letters of Mar Coorilos, Chithramezhuthu wrote the following note at the foot of the second letter:— ["What lies hidden in this letter is an attempt to make the public believe, in a theatrical way, that progressive work is being carried on in the Church in due order. When lay people form some organisation and begin working for the welfare of their fellow men, these bishops start writing kalpanas (decrees) to seize its leadership and its reins. They will not lift even a little finger to do anything. Yet the name, the standing and the honour must all flow to them. Turn it and twist it as you will, the bishops of the Jacobite and Orthodox churches have only two things to say to the people: 'Have you confessed and received the Qurbana? Have you kept the fast?' That is the same refrain always. These bishops have no concern about the many and very difficult problems of the people's social life. They have nothing to say about them; they give

them no thought. The bishops know nothing but how, in the name of Christ, the sacraments and salvation, to grab with an exploiting mind the leadership of every good work, together with money, comfort and public honour, and to sit and flourish in their dioceses and on their thrones. Is it not time for the theatrical services of the bishops to stop?"]

Two Letters from K. C. Mammen Mappillai

I

Kottayam

1.12.1952

"To Rajasree Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese, Mavelikara

"If you write a small book or a pamphlet about the Niranam church, when I said that I did not wish anything about the Thayil family to be in it, it was not mere politeness; I meant it. Many of the parishioners might not like it. I have no wish to upset them in order to gain some (credit). Firstly, my present view is that all such claims to greatness are worthless to me. Secondly, if I wanted it, I could include whatever is needed in the story of my own life.

"Kaniyanthra Kunjenachan has a granthavari (chronicle), has he not? I understand you have a copy of it. I think it would be good to have that granthavari printed in full. Please give me your opinion. Kunjenachan says there are many things about the Niranam church in it.

"Besides that, Mr. T. K. Joseph says that the Greek book called the Periplus and some other books speak of Nakkida (Nelcynda) and the like. I think it would not be bad

to gather all such passages together and publish them in English and Malayalam. In any case there is no time for everything. I write this letter to remind you once more that you should write nothing about the Thayil family that would be unpleasant to others.

Yours Sincerely,

K. C. Mammen Mappillai (signed)"

II

K. C. Mammen Mappillai, Chief Editor, Malayala Manorama

Kottayam

3-9-1952

"To Maharajasree Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese,
Mavelikara

"I read with attention the article you so kindly sent me. It struck me as very, very interesting. But I feel it would not be proper to publish it in the Manorama. Those living now are the children of the people who patiently bore persecution of this kind from this Dioscoros. For many of them it is still unbearable to hear foreign Bavas spoken of in this way. All that can be said is that, through the Manorama's fifty years of propaganda, the opinion of a section of the people has changed. The 'annans' (brothers) of the north will not bear this. My wish is to draw them towards us step by step. I believe your article is something that would suddenly provoke them. My opinion may turn out to be wrong. But I have no choice but to act according to my best belief. If you want it sent back, I can return the article in a separate cover.

Yours Sincerely,

Sd/- K. C. Mammen Mappillai"

Apart from his literary articles, Chithramezhuthu is reckoned to have written and published in the newspapers some seventy-five long articles on religion, the Syrian community and the Church. A list of some of them, and a few of the articles, are given below. Many of the articles are series. All of them deserve to be published in book form.

1. Kathanar or Cardinal? (Nasrani Deepika, 13 July 1920)
2. The Priest — A Reply (23 October 1920)
3. A Live Coal in the Bundle of Straw (Suriyani Sabha Kalam, 10 Kanni 1099)
4. A Matter for Mother (Keraleeyabhimani, 28 July 1922)
5. The Wedding Pomp of the Old Nasranis (Keraleeyabhimani, 24 September 1919)
6. Some Questions to Mr. C. J. Kurian (Suriyani Sabha Kalam, 24 Makaram 1099)
7. A Famous Old Document (Deepika, Medam 1094)
8. The Malankara Church and the Christian Turks (Manorama, 21 July 1931)
9. A Devotion to Duty (Malayala Manorama, 1 August 1928)
10. The Courageous Mar Mathews Athanasius (Manorama, Makaram-Mithunam 1103)
11. The Nasranis of Perumpadappu and Sakthan Thampuran (Manorama, 30 April 1932)
12. Mechuru Tharakan (Deepika, 20 Mithunam 1094)
13. The Buddha and Vishnu — the Ancient Sculptures of the Kundara Valiyapally (Paura Prabha, Kottayam, January 1940)

14. Temple Entry for Christians, or the Thiruvarpvu Temple Road (Paura Prabha, November 1927)
15. The Malankara Nasranis and Memories of Their Past (Deepika, 14 November 1919)
16. Unni Nainar Padatharakan (Keraleeyabhimani, 9 Thulam 1095)
17. The Military Skill of the Ancient Syrians (Deepika, 1093)
18. Ushaprakasham ("The Light of Dawn") (prose-poem) (Manorama, 7 April 1938)
19. Some Special Moments in the Great Festival of the Installation of the Catholicos (Kerala Kesari, 1 Medam 1104)
20. Vijayopaharam ("A Gift of Victory") (prose-poem) (Paura Prabha special issue, 24 Medam 1115)
21. My Mother, or the Mother Syrian Church (Prathidinam, 14 January 1929) — prose-poem
22. The Pope and the Temple Wall of Udayapuri (Manorama, 13 January 1933)
23. Mar Thoma V (Paura Prabha, Kottayam, September 1946)
24. The Magic and Spells of the Kadamattathu Priests (Manorama)
25. The Way to Peace — the Duty of the Patriarch of Antioch (Paura Prabha, September 1937)
26. The Faith of the Malankara Church, or the Correspondence between K. N. Daniel and Me (Malankara Sabha monthly, 1948)
27. The Synod of Udayamperoor (Diamper) (Manorama, 1937)

28. The Migration from Nilakkal (Manorama, March 1957)
29. The Nasrani Judges of Old (Paura Prabha, 1947)
30. Mar Thoma V Metropolitan, Freed from Prison (Manorama, 2 Edavam 1128)
31. The Saintly Influence of the Parumala Thirumeni (Church Weekly)
32. The Twenty-One Metres of Karuthedathu Thomas Sas-thrikal (Keralabhooshanam, October 1956)
33. The Catholicos Party's Episcopacy That Would Make the Malankara Association a Wooden Puppet (Pauradh-wani, Kottayam, 21 and 27 December 1954)
34. The Life and Last Days of Mar Mathews Athanasius [historical story], a series (Paura Prabha, 17 August 1940 – December 1940)
35. Mar Thoma V (historical story) (Paura Prabha, Kottayam, September–October 1946)
36. An Ancient Manuscript Bible (Manorama, 16 November 1960)
37. The Heritage of the Malankara Syrian Community, and the Ancient Manuscript Bible (Manorama, 12 April 1959)
38. The Malankara Syrian Church — What Is the Way to Peace? (Paura Prabha, 28 May 1940)
39. A Wondrous Event in the Sky (Manorama, 17 September 1937)
40. Mappila (Paura Prabha, 23 and 30 December 1944, 30 January)
41. The Copper Plates — the 72 Privileges Granted to Knai Thoma (Paura Prabha, 13 February 1945)

42. Mathichittappan (Manorama special issue, 1960)
43. On the Draft Bill of the Constitution of the Malankara Syrian Church (Suriyani Sabha monthly, Thiruvananthapuram, 1966)
44. Before My Eyes — the Alappuzha Orthodox Syrian Church (1124)
45. The Tricks of Kadamattathu Kathanar (Manorama annual special issue, 1953)
46. The State of the Christian Faith (Margavazhi) in Kerala (Manorama, 20 Makaram 1997)
47. The Royal Privileges of the Nasrani Community (Manorama, Meenam 1999)
48. The Nasrani Armies of the Kings of Kerala

Chithramezhuthu wrote a prose-poem, "Ushaparakasham" ("The Light of Dawn"), in the special issue the Manorama published on 7 April 1938 on the episcopal consecration of Mar Theodosius of Bethany, and the prose-poem "Vijayopaharam" in the Paura Prabha special issue of 6 May 1940 on the episcopal consecration of Thoma Mar Dionysius. His article "Some Special Moments in the Great Festival of the Installation of the Catholicos", published in the Kerala Kesari on 23 March 1929 in connection with the enthronement of Catholicos Baselios Geevarghese II, is one that every Christian should read. These three writings are tokens of Chithramezhuthu's firmly rooted love for the Church. For fear of length, these three poetic writings are left out here.

***On Writing the Biography of Vattasseril Mar
Dionysius***

(Twenty-one years ago, at a time when Chithramezhuthu Sri K. M. Varghese was writing many articles extolling the great deeds of Palakkunnathu Mathews Athanasius Metropolitan, Sri W. C. Mani of Channanikkad wrote to ask him whether he would not undertake to write a history of the late Vattasseril Geevarghese Dionysius Metropolitan, who was known in every way as an excellent Metropolitan. In the reply card Sri Varghese sent, he wrote as follows.)

Sir, I received your letter. Please kindly forgive the delay in replying. My answer to your points is given below.

1. One may find lapses and failings in Mar Mathews Athanasius. That is true. But the only measure I use to judge him is his heroic deeds.

2. Whatever you may say about the native traitors to their own people, history clearly shows that, since the days of the Dutch, it is only the foreigners (Seemakkar) — the greed for money and lust for power of those white savages — that have sown the seeds of the riots and quarrels in the Church. Besides this, another cause is that in the north the facilities for education were scanty.

3. The time has not yet come to write the life of Vattasseril Methrachan. Nor has the man who can write it been born. I, who am only a worm and dust, am not strong enough to accomplish that great task. Lately the Catholicos Bava has often spoken of this and encouraged me. But the incomparable virtues and greatness of the man re-

membered here, and my own smallness, made me draw back. Three people with fair qualifications to write his history are alive today: K. C. Mammen Mappillai, O. M. Cherian and M. P. Varki. I am not worthy to untie the thongs of their sandals. Time will bring out the history of that great man. That is all.

Your humble servant
K. M. Varghese

Powathikunnu

Mavelikara, 20-4-1116

(Church Weekly, 26 August 1962)

None of the three whom Chithramezhuthu thought qualified was able to write the biography. Years later it was Z. M. Paret who enriched the Malankara Church by writing the life of Vattasseril Thirumeni. Paret used to pray that, in his old age, he might be able to write this biography before he died. Paret wrote the last volumes of his books Malankara Nasranikal in haste too; he told me this himself in conversation.

In any case, as Chithramezhuthu foretold, "time brought out the history of that great man."

Years ago Fr. I. Daniel of Kizhakkethil, Evoor, vicar of the Cheppad church, called a parish meeting to ask Chithramezhuthu to write a biography of Cheppad Mar Dionysius Metropolitan. Chithramezhuthu and the retired judge P. A. Oommen attended that meeting by special invitation. Chithramezhuthu declined the request to write the biography, and P. A. Oommen then wrote it. Many did not know at the time that it was because of his great regard for Mathews Mar Athanasius that Chithramezhuthu did not write the life of the Cheppad Metropolitan, who

had opposed Athanasius. Chithramezhuthu declined the request on a matter of principle.

P. A. Oommen has hinted at this in the preface to the book Cheppad Mar Dionysius.

Mar Thoma V — The Power of Chithramezhuthu's Pen

Sri Chithramezhuthu's powerful pen could bring tears to the hardest heart. When His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews I Bava had the newspaper cuttings of the series that Chithramezhuthu wrote in the Paura Prabha, Kottayam, in 1946, under the title "The Persecution of Mar Thoma V, or The Treachery of the Dutch", sent for from George Varghese so that the Catholicate could print it in book form, he broke down sobbing as he read it. Fr. T. G. Zachariah, Secretary of M.O.C. Publications, wrote thus about this in a letter sent to George Varghese on 25-7-87: "His Holiness the Bava read the book on Mar Thoma V. His Grace said that on several occasions he broke down sobbing as he read it, and that at those times he bolted the door so that no one else would see.... He said that it was only on reading this (the historical stories and so on) that he came to understand more fully how great a man Chithramezhuthu was."

9

Change of Church

After the meeting of parish representatives held at the Puthiyakavu church, Mavelikara, on 21 July 1951, Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese was chatting with some respected people when His Holiness Baselios Geevarghese II Catholicos Bava came up to him and twice said, "You are a dishonest man." Not understanding what it was about, Varghese stood bewildered, made a laughing-stock before the others. These insulting words wounded Varghese deeply. Though not a wealthy man, Varghese was blessed, an eminent writer, honest and a pride of his community; he could neither bear nor forgive these words of reproach from the head of his own Church.

Only when one knows the background of this incident does Chithramezhuthu's innocence become clear. A portrait of Vattasseril Dionysius Thirumeni hung in the Kundara Seminary. The Bava had earlier asked Varghese to touch up that painting, which Varghese had made, with a little more paint, and he had agreed. But the aged Varghese was not able to take a bus to Kundara, bring the large painting back and rework it. Varghese had expected that the painting would be brought to his house by the roadside. For the Bava, who travelled through Mavelikara by car every week, it would have been no trouble to have the driver drop the painting off at Mavelikara on the return journey. So some months passed. It was then that the

Bava met Varghese in the churchyard at Mavelikara and twice said, "You are a dishonest man."

The Bava had often asked Chithramezhuthu's help for historical details in the Community Case and other matters; and these words of reproach from the head of his Church could never be forgotten by Varghese, who would not yield an inch where his self-respect was concerned.

Chithramezhuthu later sent the Bava a letter about this, saying that he was deeply grieved at having been reproached publicly in the presence of respected people, and indicating that he expected no reply. But the kalpana (letter) the Bava sent in reply is given below.

No.

Kalpana

The Orthodox Syrian Church of the East

"Blessing to our most beloved Chithramezhuthu Varghese.

"Beloved, "We received the letter you sent. Though it says in the letter that no reply need be sent, we ourselves feel bound to reply. What we said to you there was in jest. We thought that you, and those standing there and others, understood it only as that. If, however, our words wounded you, we ask your pardon and beg you to forgive us. And so that this may not happen again, we have also decided to have no further contact with you.

"The rest later. God bless you.

Given on the 30th of July 1951
at the Kottayam Seminary (signed)"

The sentence in this letter — "so that this may not happen again, we have also decided to have no further contact with you" — hurt Chithramezhuthu still more. Since the head of a Church had written thus to a member who loved his Church as his own life, Chithramezhuthu understood that the apology had no sincerity at all. Without replying, Chithramezhuthu wrote the following on the back of the Bava's kalpana: "For bishops — devout followers of Christ who have worshipped the powerful rich beyond all bounds and have grown used to laying a mat for the man in a white mundu — the time has not yet come to repent of these worldly faults of conduct. How pitiful it is that His Holiness the Catholicos Bava, who prides himself and glories in being a servant of God, should bear the servitude of money and of the moneyed man. For me too it is more comfortable, and no trouble, to have no further contact with such worshippers of wealth alone." That lover of the Church waited seven years to see whether the Bava, who is counted holy, would withdraw the last sentence that revealed the insincerity of his apology. But nothing came of it.

Given below is a letter sent by the Catholicos Bava in 1948 in appreciation of Chithramezhuthu's love for the Church.

No.,

The Orthodox Syrian Church of The East

Baselios Catholicos, Geevarghese the Second, of the Eastern Throne of the Apostle

(Seal)

"Blessing to our most beloved Chithramezhuthu Varghese.

"Beloved, "We received the letter you sent. Today the painting was brought here from the Manorama. Everyone is very pleased to see it; all say it is a very good likeness. Our opinion is the same. We pray that your work may be blessed. We value your love for the Church, and especially your regard for us. The painting cannot be auctioned at once; it will be auctioned in due time. We are now sending a cheque for 150 rupees. If the painting is auctioned we shall take that money back, and if it is not auctioned, the balance of the price will be handed over at the Purogamanam office. The rest later.

"God bless you and your family.

Given at the Kottayam Syrian Seminary
on the 24th of Mithunam 1123, in the year 1948
(signed)"

Chithramezhuthu joined the Mar Thoma Church for the sake of social support, in the light of the clerical tyranny in the Orthodox Church and the conduct of its head unbecoming his office; yet his life and his writings bear witness that he remained an Orthodox believer until his death.

Chithramezhuthu recorded thus in his family history about his change of church: "While I lived as a prominent member of the Malankara 'Jacobite' or Orthodox Church, I began to oppose publicly the attempt of the Catholicos Bava (Roman *[Note: as printed]* Mar Baselios Geevarghese II) to bring into the Malankara Church a new 'episcopal' form of government — abolishing the powers and rights in Church administration that the people had inherited,

disregarding the decisions on Church government — the binding resolutions — of the Synod of Mulanthuruthy, held by Peter the Patriarch of Antioch together with the eight bishops of Malankara and the representatives of the Malankara churches, and sacrificing the people's rights to the supreme authority of the clergy. I strongly opposed the many attempts, in the name of the Church and the sacraments, to seize the people's rights by the greatness of priesthood and to turn the members of the Church into mere sacrificial animals. I argued that there had never been an episcopal form of government in this Church, and that here the Church had been governed by the bishop, the priest and the layman together. When my criticisms became more than he could bear, the Catholicos Bava became displeased and dissatisfied with me. The Catholicos Bava sent me a letter saying he wanted no further connection with me. I waited patiently for seven years, hoping that this letter — unbecoming in the head of a Christian Church — would be withdrawn. In the seventh year I left the jurisdiction of the Catholicos Bava and joined the Mar Thoma Church. I have no place in a Christian Church that robs the people of their authority and rights in the name of God and the sacraments. The Church is an organised community of laymen, priests and a bishop or bishops together. The clergy alone, without the laity, have no right to stand as a Church. It is the Church that ordains; the Church that governs; the Church that excommunicates. Such is the theology of the Eastern Christian Churches. Clerical lordship belongs only to the Roman Catholic Church. With all my strength I protest against today's episcopal movement, which copies that system

into the Malankara Syrian Church to mould it into a Roman Church that lacks only the name of Pope."

The Syrian Christians are a people who neither encourage the writers and men of letters of their own community nor enlighten themselves by buying, reading and spreading their books. There is no doubt that, so long as the clergy and the prelates do not buy and read good books, urge the members of the Church to read them and grow, and read and absorb modern thought, Christian writers have no future. Yet many may not know that among Christians too there are, rarely, those who understand and help those who serve literature.

Many Hindu leaders encouraged Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese, who laboured in the world of letters for half a century. But there is no record that his own community or wealthy individuals gave him any financial encouragement. That M. O. Mathai — a Mar Thoma Christian and private secretary to Prime Minister Nehru — gave him 10,000 rupees thirty-two years ago in recognition of his distinguished services is perhaps unknown to many. Mathai's letter about this is given below.

15 Ferozshah Road

New Delhi - 1

1st July 1961

My dear Chitramezhuth, I was happy to meet you in Kottayam and listen to your talk. I do believe that a distinguished writer, painter and social worker like you should be supported by the State and public bodies in your difficulties and old age.

As a recognition of your significant contribution to public good over a long period of years, I have great pleasure

in sending you a token sum of Rs. 10,000/-. I am enclosing a Bank draft for this amount which comes from the Chechamma Memorial Trust. No publicity should be given to this.

Please sign the attached Receipt and return it to me.

With kind regards,

Yours very sincerely,

Signature

M. O. Mathai

Trustee

Chechamma Memorial Trust

Encl.

Chitramezhuth Shri K. M. Varghese, Mavelikara P. O., Kerala State.

Given below is a letter sent to Chithramezhuthu from Pathanamthitta on 17-9-58 by the great poet Puthenkavu Mathan Tharakan, who died recently.

What the letter speaks of first concerns the portrait Chithramezhuthu painted of Principal Ninan Abraham, who had retired from the college.

Pathanamthitta

17-9-58

Confidential

My dear Keevarchen, "I received your letters. The collection for the photo (portrait) has begun; the portrait will soon be fetched from there. The great majority of the college are now living like a crowd of people forced to live in a place full of vermin — mosquitoes, bugs, wasps, scorpions and centipedes. It is hard for those outside the col-

lege to imagine the burden of this life. The root cause of all this is a corrupt priesthood and the present principal, who lies licking its feet. In my experience of the last few years there is not a single community leader in the Church worth trusting. I have found many to be embodiments of envy and self-deceit. No one among us ever thinks of raising any of us up, nor will they. At this age I am reluctant to turn revolutionary, so I will try to bear it as far as I can. It is God who raised me this far, and I have not grown proud since rising. Let God's will be done.

"I do not like Keevarchen's joining the Mar Thoma Church. I wonder whether that is not a defeatist frame of mind. The Orthodox Church belongs to each one of us, does it not? I feel it is better to stay within it and try to mend its faults. I have sometimes thought, why not embrace Hinduism? But with whom would that be a quarrel? With ourselves — when I think of that I grow calm. So let us stand together. Let us find a way to say what needs saying. I have much to write; I stop here. The rest in the next.

Yours ever,
Mathan Tharakan"

A Letter Worth Pondering

When Deacon P. S. Samuel, then General Secretary of the Orthodox Students' Movement, wrote on 8 March 1958 inviting Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese to speak at the movement's Golden Jubilee literary and cultural conference, to be held on 24 April 1958 at the Balikamadam High School, Thiruvalla, Chithramezhuthu wrote in reply: "What is going to celebrate its jubilee is an associ-

ation that has been run under the name of the Syrian Students' Union, enrolling as members only young men who have studied or are studying English, and pushing aside as of no account young men who have studied Malayalam. It is for the bishops — who have taken it into their heads that saying the Qurbana, holding ordinations and writing kalpanas to the churches is the service of a Christian Church — and for the leading clergy who have gained examination degrees, to scrape the rust off and polish their power over the lay community in the Church, and to keep the community in custody as perpetual worshippers, that the festival and the 'palli-vetta' (temple hunt) are held like this every year; and now comes the procession for the 'ar-attu' (ritual bath). As far as the lay community is concerned, what constructive work have these student-movement people done in all this time? What have they done for the community — for the poor of the community — socially, in employment or financially!

"Let that go — what have they done in the arts? In all this time these bishops and priests have only ever been able to deal with two questions: 1. Have you confessed? 2. Have you received the Qurbana? Have you kept the fast? That is all. They see no question beyond these as needed by the community. The unemployed, the homeless, students who cannot pay their fees, young women who live on as spinsters with no way to marry because they cannot pay a dowry, those crushed by debt, those suffering through lawsuits — about such people neither the bishop, nor the priest, nor the student-movement people have any thought at all. The bishops' attention is on building churches, constructing palaces (aramanas), flourishing in

royal pomp and selling salvation cheap. For these reasons I sent a letter declining the invitation in this letter.

K. M. Varghese
11—3—1958"

The responsibility for editing and publishing the souvenir of this Golden Jubilee conference was mine.

Once, at the request of James Kalassery, then Bishop of Changanassery, Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese painted an oil portrait and went to the Bishop's House to deliver it. Pleased with the painting, the Bishop spoke in praise of Chithramezhuthu and of the articles that appeared in the newspapers, and then said: "Mr. Varghese, your community will one day throw you away like a curry leaf. You and your family join the Roman Catholic Church. We will take responsibility for your future and for your children's higher education. Besides, we will appoint you to the editorial board of the Nasrani Deepika and the monthly Karmelakusumam and give you good pay." Varghese replied: "The true faith that we have kept since the days of the Coonan Cross Oath is not for sale for a little profit."

Mar Ivanios of Bethany had built a chapel at Kallumala, Mavelikara. After he joined the Reeth (the Catholic Church), some mischief-makers set fire to the south side of the madbaha (sanctuary) and did some damage. The next day the Bishop came by car with his brother Mathai Panicker to see the church. As soon as he saw Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese standing in the courtyard of his own house by the roadside, the Bishop stopped the car, insisted that Varghese get in, and went to the church and saw the burnt parts. Then, in the car itself, the Bishop said to Varghese: "Mr. Varghese, leave a Church that

shows such injustice and join the Reeth Church. I will take responsibility for your children's higher education and its cost. What use is it writing articles in newspapers and writing books? Think it over and decide."

Varghese said nothing in reply then. After he got home, the next day he sent the Bishop a letter: "I do not sell my faith for money or a little profit."

Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese, who all his life carried out many researches and wielded a powerful pen for the glory and fame of his community and the upholding of its dignity, was in the evening of his life reproached and driven out by his own community. That man of self-respect, not wanting even six feet of earth from his own community, had earlier asked the then vicar in writing that after his death he be buried at the Mar Thoma church, Mavelikara.

10

A Many-Sided Genius

The services Chithramezhuthu rendered as editor of *Athmaposhini* are noteworthy. Going beyond his role as a well-wisher of the monthly *Athmaposhini*, which had come out under the editorship of Mahakavi Vallathol Narayana Menon, its office-bearers pressed Chithramezhuthu to take on its editorship as well. Accordingly he did that work from Medam 1097 to Medam 1099 [two years]. During this period the "Poshini Bhashanam", which he wrote as editorial comment, and the "Granthaviharam", in which he reviewed prose works, caused something of a stir in the literary world. [The task of reviewing works of poetry had been entrusted to Thalavady Krishna Pillai Sastri.] The *Granthaviharam* that Varghese wrote in the Kanni-Thulam 1098 issue of *Athmaposhini* [volume 13, issues 6-7, p. 168], reviewing the play *Noorjahan* by Sardar K. M. Panikkar [of Chalayil] — who later became Dewan of Pudukkottai — also earned him that writer's displeasure.

Controversies

The controversies Chithramezhuthu raised in the field of literature grew out of deep historical knowledge and reasoned thought. The learned world always acknowledged his arguments, made with respect for the opposing side. The historical work "The Political Service of the Nansanis of Kerala", written as a rebuttal of Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai's critique of Panchakalyani, is a lofty his-

torical record that loudly proclaims Chithramezhuthu's deep historical scholarship and his greatness of character.

Prof. Koshy Thalackal says:— "It was a time when, as in the monarchy, so in literature too the palace reigned supreme. All Malayalam was worshipping Kerala Varma Valiya Koil Thampuran, A. R. Thampuran and others as emperors of letters, laying flowers before them. It was then that that voice was raised: Vallathol Narayana Menon is more deserving of the title 'Kerala Kalidasa' than Valiya Koil Thampuran. And the one who proclaimed it was Chithramezhuthu. Not only that — he stood his ground with courage and argued it. When Chithramezhuthu openly declared what many were afraid to say, supporters and opponents came into the arena and it became an open battle. When the criticisms and satires grew sharp, Vallathol himself intervened and settled matters."

"It was in 1096, I think, that another controversy took place over who was the celebrated prose writer of the day. It was our hero, too, who lit the fuse of that. When Chithramezhuthu Varghese declared that Mayyanad C. V. Kunjuraman was the most celebrated prose writer, many opposed that opinion at the time. But those who came into the arena with weak arguments later beat about the bush and withdrew.

"Another such controversy took place through the Manorama. That dispute was about the earliest Malayalam prose writer. The opposition began when Chithramezhuthu installed the scholar Geevarghese Kathanar in that place. The leader of the other side was Sankara Iyer, B.A., B.L. A heated controversy indeed took place.

When it emerged that the originators of the prose movement in the language were the Christian missionaries and their followers in this land, Sankara Iyer too withdrew from the battlefield." ["The First Models of Modern Malayalam, or the Grammarian Geevarghese Kathanar and His Prose Works" — Manorama, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12 and 14 July 1928.]

With such events, Athmaposhini began to draw the attention of the world of letters. It was in this period that scholars such as Rao Sahib O. M. Cherian, Mahakavi K. V. Simon and Joseph Mundassery began to regard Chithramezhuthu's opinions on works of poetry and other matters as authoritative.

Note how, in later years, Chithramezhuthu Varghese calmly assessed the controversies he had taken part in:—"Most of my literary life has been spent in controversy. I have taken part in controversies on religion, history, politics and literature. It is still a source of satisfaction to me that I never, out of a desire to win, left the straight path in a controversy. I argued for what I believed to be true and right. From the very beginning I was determined never to ridicule my opponents' arguments, or pretend not to have seen them, or put a mask on the face of opposing arguments and answer that so as to pretend I had won, or insult my opponent personally, or build false reasoning, or forge documents."

Chithramezhuthu's memoirs contain much notable and little-known information about the Asan-Vallathol clashes, unknown to the literary enthusiasts of today...

Chithramezhuthu opposed with reasoned argument any line of thought that harmed the essential spirit of his

community. What guided him in this was not intolerance but reason. But those who understood this were few, so some unfortunately came to see him as a narrow-minded communalist.

Believing in the heritage and excellence of the Nasranis of Kerala, he in a way dedicated his whole life to the cause of his community. He wrote a great many articles celebrating the military deeds and political service of the Nasranis of Kerala.

The Malayalam Lexicon

For the Malayalam Lexicon, begun in 1955 by the University of Travancore under the direction of Sooranad Kunjan Pillai, Chithramezhuthu, at the University's request, collected some eight hundred words and sent them. Sri Kunjan Pillai wrote letters to Chithramezhuthu about this on 27-7-55, 4-8-75 [*Note: "75" as printed — probably 1955*], 18-10-56, 22-10-57 and 26-10-57. The University praised Chithramezhuthu's contribution, and his name can be seen in the first volume of the Lexicon among the writers who contributed words in this way. The words Chithramezhuthu collected and sent were ones that had not appeared in dictionaries before and were in particular use among Christians. In this connection he went several times to Thiruvananthapuram, at the University's expense, for discussions. In an editorial of 16 July 1953 welcoming the University of Travancore's undertaking to prepare the dictionary, the newspaper *Dakshinabharathi* said that N. Gopala Pillai, Sooranad Kunjan Pillai, Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese, K. Damodaran, S. Guptan Nair and P. K. Narayana Pillai were imperishable orbs of light in the literary firmament, and that these ex-

perts in words, engaged in making the dictionary, were thereby rendering great service to their mother tongue and their land. The Dakshinabharathi editorial makes clear in what regard the learned community of the day held Chithramezhuthu.

Village Court Judge

Though Chithramezhuthu studied only up to the Third Form at the Government English High School, Mavelikara, through steady zeal and untiring effort he gained scholarship in English as well as in Malayalam. From his youth he sought out, read and studied history books published in English, translating the parts he needed, and so gained proficiency in English. He read the English historical works of James Hough, Edward Gibbon, Geddes, Howard, Thomas Whitehouse, Buchanan, Milne Rae, Mackenzie and others. Having acquired deep historical knowledge and command of English usage, Chithramezhuthu recorded in his family history: "Even while I was learning painting, a great eagerness to read books arose in me. I began to read everything I could lay my hands on.... In later years I have struggled very hard to grasp ideas from English on Church history and other subjects. Yet no one could say that I had not learned English; nor has anyone ever thought so to this day. So many ideas have I gained from books in the English language."

In view of Chithramezhuthu's scholarship, maturity and ability, the Travancore Government appointed him on 5 Kanni 1115, for two years, as Judge of the Mavelikara Village Court and Second Class Magistrate.

A Connoisseur of Music

Chithramezhuthu not only had a very well-trained ear for Carnatic classical music; he also had a deep knowledge of the science of Carnatic music. He was a great lover of music. His knowledge was so mature that he could name a raga at the very beginning of its elaboration. His son George Varghese says in a letter sent from Madras:— "Every year, during the festival days at the Sree Krishna Swamy temple at Mavelikara, and especially on the 9th and 10th festival days, famous nagaswaram masters from Tamil Nadu, such as Madurai Ponnuswamy Pillai and T. N. Rajaratnam Pillai, used to give nagaswaram concerts. So that the public could attend the night-time nagaswaram playing, the concert was held on a platform beside the banyan-tree terrace about a furlong east of the temple gate. These concerts began at the time when the deity was brought out in procession on an elephant amid festivities. My father used to take me and my elder brother there as boys and let us listen to this nagaswaram playing until dawn.

"Of the fine arts that refine the human heart, music is the most delicate. Carlyle says that music is the language of God. In temples, worship is offered to God through all three — vocal music, instrumental music and dance. Val-lathol once said that Yajnavalkya had declared that those who have learned the principles of veena playing — sruti and tala — attain salvation. Saint Thyagaraja affirmed in song that the knowledge of music is a path of devotion. Carnatic music is a union of sruti, raga, bhava or rasa, the charm of laya, and tala. The pure notes (suddha swaras) of Carnatic music are the lower forms of the notes ri, ga, ma, dha and ni; the others are altered (vikrita) notes. The

72 melakartas are built on a basis both aesthetic and logical. Since the idea of mixed melas is hinted at in the composite jatis of (Sarangadeva's Sangita) Ratnakara, the possible mixed melas are reckoned to number 5,184. I have heard from my father that the structure of the pure and mixed melas is so complete that no musicologist in the world can find a note not included in it; that musicologists say that in this structure the scale of Western music is the 1,604th mela; and that the number of derived (janya) ragas that can properly be formed from the seventy-two melakartas is reckoned at 1,27,008 (one lakh, twenty-seven thousand and eight). His study was this: the Carnatic raga system is logical and complete; its notes are natural, its positions arise from the principles of shadja and panchama, and its measurements are mathematical, so that it may be called a music of measure. Of the seventy-two melakarta ragas, thirty-six are suddha madhyama and thirty-six prati madhyama ragas, and all the rest are their derivatives. Thodi, Dhenuka, Ratnangi, Kharaharapriya, Ganamurthi, Sankarabharanam, Keeravani, Gourimanohari, Harikambhoji, Kambhoji, Panthuvrali, Mayamalavagowla and Madhyamavathi belong to the suddha madhyama ragas; and in prati madhyama are Kalyani, Hemavathi, Vachaspathi, Rasikapriya, Jyothiswaroopini, Simhendramadhyamam, Shanmukhapriya, Varali, Lathangi and others.

"Masters of the art of music such as Semmangudi R. Srinivasa Iyer, Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar, Musiri Subramania Iyer, M. S. Subbulakshmi, D. K. Pattammal, the Alathur Brothers Chittoor Subramania Pillai, Madurai Mani Iyer, G. N. Balasubramaniam and other famous jewels among musicians — my father attended and enjoyed

their concerts with me at Thiruvananthapuram, Chengannur, Aranmula, Kollam, Mavelikara and elsewhere, at the Music Academy, and especially at the various sabhas of Madras. Apart from some rare ragas, all the ragas and kirtanas that plunge one into inner experience and have won a lasting place in the world of music were dear to him. Besides a great many ragas, he knew many kirtanas well. The kirtanas of Thyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar, Syama Sastri and Swathi Thirunal used to enchant him. The weighty (ghana) ragas Bilahari, Kalyani, Bhairavi, Anandabhairavi, Thodi, Mohanam, Varali, Kambhoji, Harikambhoji, Sankarabharanam, Arabhi, Abhogi, Sriranjini, Janaranjini, Mukhari, Panthavarali, Nata, Hamsadhwani, Madhyamavathi, Vachaspathi, Keeravani, Mayamalavagowla, Purvikalyani, Kharaharapriya, Khamas, Saveri, Begada, Vasantha, Saraswathi, Vasanthabhairavi and Suddhasaveri; and the light, lovely ragas that touch the heart and give joy — Syama, Kalyanavasantham, Devagandhari, Karnataka Devagandhari, Nalinakanthi, Sahana, Kanada, Atana, Surutti, Nattakurinji, Behag, Tharangini, Dwijavanthi, Hindolam and others — were dearest of all to my father.

"M. S. Subbulakshmi and D. K. Pattammal are the two great Merus (mountains) of the world of Carnatic music. If Subbulakshmi's singing — grounded in deep science, with a sruti sweet and dripping with nectar — is a run of soft waves sinking and dissolving into the Supreme, the embodiment of boundless mercy; if it is a fountain of nectar from a koel's throat, sweet as the lovely flow of the Ganga — then Pattammal's, my father always held, is the same, or even more: full of scholarship, mature and steady, never straying from the fundamental rules, up-

holding the tradition of the guru's school, in a sweet voice beyond compare, with the sweetness of the veena's lowest string rising from the depths of the descent and swelling very softly up and up to the great peak of the ascent — a true stream of the nectar of song. The pallavi singing of Pattammal, celebrated by the title 'Pallavi Pattammal', bathes one in an ocean of joy. As for Subbulakshmi, besides the title 'Kokila Gana Isaivani' she has received titles and awards such as 'Sangita Kalanidhi' and a doctorate. Even in her old age the great lady's singing is as it was in her youth — the very Nada Brahma (sound as the Absolute) that brings well-being!!"

Chithramezhuthu kept up a close friendship with Sebastian Kunjukunju Bhagavathar and with the "Sangeetha Ratnam" Karthikappally Mammen Bhagavathar. Whenever Mammen Bhagavathar came to Chithramezhuthu's house, a small concert would take place there. Chithramezhuthu encouraged and helped the Bhagavathar a great deal.

When Kunjukunju Bhagavathar came to Mavelikara to perform Kumaran Asan's play *Karuna*, the two would visit each other and enjoy witty conversation — mostly about drama. In *Karuna*, Sebastian played Upagupta. The gifted actor Ochira C. Velukutty played the female role of Vasavadatta. When Velukutty appeared on stage in silk robes, adorned with every ornament, "she" looked like nothing less than a beautiful apsara. Every mood and every grace of a woman came naturally to Velukutty. When the play was over, K. M. Varghese went backstage, congratulated that young Nair man and blessed him. It was a friend of Chithramezhuthu — a man prominent in public affairs and a wealthy man of the place, known as

"Shappil Kunjukunju" — who arranged and organised Sebastian's plays *Karuna* and *Anarkali* at Mavelikara in those days.

At the request of its organisers, Chithramezhuthu wrote an address of felicitation (mangala pathram) to be presented to Sebastian Kunjukunju Bhagavathar on 6 Medam 1115 on behalf of the people of Pathanamthitta taluk. Six prominent persons represented the public in the address: (1) T. M. Philip Muthalali of Thekkeveetil, Therakathu; (2) K. Raghavan Nair of Thadiyil; (3) P. C. George, B.A., of Parambil; (4) N. Narayanan Vakil; (5) K. M. Ismail Meera, merchant; and (6) M. D. John of Uzhavathu.

The Fine Arts Society

On 25-5-57 the committee nominated Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese to the Governing Board of the "Kerala Fine Arts Society", registered in 1957 as No. 620 and based in Thiruvananthapuram, founded by the artist K. R. Ravi Varma Koil Thampuran (President), T. S. Seshadri, B.A., Superintendent of the School of Arts, A. Padmanabhan, B.A., drawing master at the Training College, and others.

An Expert in Astrology

Chithramezhuthu was an expert in physiognomy (lakshana sastra), in palmistry, and in casting horoscopes by fixing the positions of the planets. In casting horoscopes he was a disciple of Brahmasree Puliyoor P. S. Purushothaman Potti. Many people bore witness to the results that came true according to the horoscopes Chith-

ramezhuthu cast; almost all the predictions he wrote down came to pass in the lives of those concerned.

In her book "My Parents", Dr. Lalitha George Abraham (daughter of Vallakkalil) writes: "Among the books one can find my horoscope, written out at length in a bound book by Sri Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese — the master of a distinctive style in Malayalam literature and a friend of our family — and handed to Appa. Appa, who paid not the slightest attention to horoscopes, astrology, Rahu, omens and the like, never seemed to take any notice of my horoscope either. In any case, I find that most of the things in it have come to pass." (p. 52) Many horoscopes Chithramezhuthu cast are known to have come true in life.

As for physiognomy, Chithramezhuthu set down in his family history, point by point, the bodily marks of girls who are unfit to enter a family by marriage.

The gist of physiognomy is that, if one understands the unacceptable bodily marks, one can to a great extent choose suitable brides. In his family history Chithramezhuthu says: "One should enter into marriage talks only after gaining at least six months' knowledge and acquaintance of the girl's family — especially her mother — of her father's and mother's families, and of the girl herself. If possible, one should marry girls who have brothers and sisters.

"If thin women, or women who are not very stout, are seen suddenly, for no particular reason, to grow plump and stout, it is thought that hard times or death are near for their husbands. This has been seen to come true in the experience of some. If this unaccountable bodily growth

begins to be seen in women, one should hold fast to God for relief from the evil influence of the planets. It should be remembered that, for women and men alike, both sudden growth of the body and sudden wasting of the body without cause are harmful.

"My descendants must never at any time marry from other communities that have fallen away from the faith, or from Hindus, Muslims and the like. There are many stories from experience of those who, moved by misplaced love, wealth or beauty, entered into such mixed marriages and later greatly repented. One should not wish to marry even from other Christian communities of different culture, but only from one's own."

Look at this very beautiful description of a lovely young woman, taken from the book "Our Ammachi of Nellimoottil": It was the time when Anizham Thirunal Marthanda Varma Maharaja, as a boy, went about in hiding for fear of the Ettuveettil Pillamar and others. The three of them — the boy, an aged Brahmin and a Nair chieftain named Kochi Ravi — went into the house of Thachundayil Tharakan at Adoor in Kunnathur taluk to relieve their hunger and thirst. But Tharakan's wife, Andachiyamma, treated the weary, drooping boy and the others without any kindness.... Soon they reached Nellimoottil, another wealthy family. Unnunniyamma, the mistress of the house, received them with compassion, gave them all they needed and cared for them.

After this boy had become Maharaja Marthanda Varma and taken power, to test whether there had been any change in Andachiyamma's old nature, he sent an old man to her house after dusk. To the old man who reached the

gate, Andachiyamma's servant Potha said: "Old man, why are you standing there? I'm going to shut the gatehouse."

The old man: "I am a wayfarer. Give me a mat to pass the night, brother."

At this moment, at the top of the staircase leading to the upper storey, the jingle of the little bells of golden anklets rang out in a single measured beat, and Potha, saying "There — the mistress is coming down," drew aside.

"With the red silk cord, hung with a fringe of viraali and tied round her soft and lovely waist, drawn well in; with the gold-bordered towel, thrown across her breast to her right shoulder past the golden armlets that clung close beside her full, rounded arms — too short to cover the whole lofty mountain of her bosom, it kept slipping and sliding down into the deep valleys — vainly trying to throw that end of cloth back over her right shoulder, Andachiyamma, behind the silver lamp carried before her, left the staircase door and came forward very softly, a golden lamp in the light of the silver lamp."

A Circle of Friends — Letters

On many occasions, distinguished people, scholars, senior officials, newspaper editors and others, in Kerala and beyond, sent letters to Chithramezhuthu and corresponded with him on many subjects: painting, literature, history, Church history, community affairs, the faith of the Malankara Church, the past glories of the Malankara Nasrani community, matters of history, the histories of the states of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar, the lawsuits in the Malankara Orthodox Church, the peace efforts, and so

on. Though most of the letters of half a century have been lost, many important ones are still preserved. The names of those who sent letters: K. C. Mammen Mappillai, editor of the Malayala Manorama; Vattasseril Geevarghese Mar Dionysius Metropolitan; Dr. P. J. Thomas; A. M. Varki, Principal of U.C. College, Alwaye; Rajasabha Bhooshanan K. Chandy of Mysore; C. P. Mathew, M.P.; the Dewan Sir C. P. Ramaswami Iyer; his private secretary S. Chidambaram; N. Krishnamurthi, private secretary to the Maharaja; Mannathu Padmanabhan; the writer Kainikkara Kumara Pillai; E. J. Philipose Vakil, who helped argue the Community Case; Dr. P. C. Alexander, Secretary to the Government of India; P. C. Mathew, Secretary to the Government of India; Mar Baselios Geevarghese II Catholikos; Dr. N. Kunjan Pillai, Chief Secretary of the Travancore Government; Dewan P. G. Narayanan Unnithan; Pathrose Mathai, Principal of the Law College; Sooranad Kunjan Pillai; Rao Sahib O. M. Cherian; Appan Thampuran C. K. Rama Varma of Cochin; Chithramezhuthu Mukundan Thampi; Justice K. K. Lukose and his wife, Surgeon General Punnen Lukose; Kerala Varma Valiya Koil Thampuran; Kunnathu Janardhana Menon; Dr. K. M. George; the witty poet Moolur S. Padmanabha Panicker; Mahakavi Puthenkavu Mathan Tharakan; E. P. Mathew of Edavazhikkal; Pulikkottil Yausef Shemmashan of Kunnamkulam; Ambalappuzha Mahadeva Sarma; Vidwan A. D. Hari Sarma; the writer Thalavady Krishna Pillai; the historian K. N. Daniel; the geologist and scholar I. C. Chacko; Pattasseril Paulose Mappillai; Padmanabha Iyer and T. Joseph, Superintendents of the Travancore Anchal; the historian Fr. Bernard and T. K. Joseph; Mahakavi K. V. Simon; Mahakavi Edayaranmula K. M. Varghese; K. M.

Mathulla Mappillai, manager of Bhashachandrika; the writer Kottappurra [*Note: name as printed; unclear*]; V. C. George of Kuravilangad; the "Sahitya Thilakan" Fr. C. K. Mattam; Karoor Neelakanta Pillai; Government Secretary C. Thomas; the theologian M. T. Ittira Malpan; P. C. Koruthu of Pulikeezhu; M. C. George Vakil of Muvattupuzha; M. O. Joseph of Nedumkunnam; Professor Titus Varghese of Madras Christian College; Jacob Chandy of Mattathra, Sanitary Commissioner of Travancore; P. O. Abraham [Manorama]; K. M. Cherian, Chief Editor of the Manorama; K. C. Eapen of Kandathil; Vidwan T. M. Chummar; K. I. Varghese Mappillai (Puthumadom); N. M. Abraham, editor of the Manorama; K. M. Varghese Mappillai of Kandathil; C. M. Stephen; C. I. Ninan, Headmaster of the B. H. School; P. C. Oommen of Polachirackal, headmaster; the historian and Accounts Officer K. M. Mani; K. K. Kuruvila; Dr. Paul Varghese [later Paulos Mar Gregorios]; Mookkancheril Pathrose Mar Osthathios; Kesavan Unnithan of Varikkolil; George Thomas Kottukappally of Pala; Dr. C. T. Eapen; E. M. Kovoov; Dr. P. T. Thomas of Palampadam; the editor Mayyanad C. V. Kunjuraman; A. Narayanan Thampi, Director of Education; Ponkunnam Varkey; the editor Z. M. Paret; Juhanon Mar Thoma Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church; bishops of the Orthodox Church; Dr. Thomas Kuriyalassery, Bishop of Changanassery; Bishop C. K. Jacob of the C.S.I.; Malloor Govinda Pillai; Mahakavi Vallathol Narayana Menon; Mahakavi Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer; Swadeshabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai; and M. O. Mathai, Principal Private Secretary to Prime Minister Pandit Nehru — so runs their long list.

Chithramezhuthu's library held more than seven hundred books: historical and literary works by well-known authors and writers, ancient manuscripts, palm-leaf books and so on. Among them were a manuscript copy of the Church history of Mar Thoma VI, Valiya Mar Dionysius; the original 1787 edition of Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire"; and Michael Geddes's history of the Malankara Church (an original copy of the work written in 1694). After Chithramezhuthu's death, certain interested parties took possession of all these historical records. Even so, some of the documents gathered in that treasury of knowledge have been found.

The Orator

All of Chithramezhuthu's speeches were scholarly and full of a style brimming with literary flavour. His speech on "The Artistic Wealth of Ravi Varma Koil Thampuran" at the Victoria Jubilee Town Hall, Thiruvananthapuram, on 11 November 1952; his speech of condolence on the death of Rao Sahib O. M. Cherian, at the B. H. High School, Mavelikara, on 14 February 1944; his speech of condolence on the death of Justice K. K.

Lukose, at Mavelikara on 18 Makaram 1120; and his speech of condolence on the death of K. C. Mammen Mapillai, at Kuttanam [*Note: printed "കുറുണം"; perhaps Kattanam*] on 1 February 1954 — all these appeared in the newspapers. His speech on "The Artistic Skill of the Syrian Christians" at the sixth meeting of the Nasrani Parishad, held at the M. D. Seminary High School, Kottayam, under the presidency of Dr. P. J. Thomas; his speech at the "All-Communities Goodwill Conference", held at the same place in connection with the 58th anniversary of the Syrian Chris-

tian Congress under the presidency of Pattom Thanu Pillai and attended by twenty thousand people [Malayala Manorama report, 26 April 1946]; and his speech at the great civic meeting held at Pala under the presidency of Vadakkumkoor Raja Raja Varma to felicitate Mahakavi Pravithanam Devasia, author of the epic Israel Vamsam [Manorama report, 4 May 1953] — all these won the praise of the learned world.

11

Family Life

Chithramezhuthu's first wife was M. K. Saramma, the youngest daughter of Kochitty Vakil of the Mullassery tharavad of the Therakathu family, Chengannur, and the paternal aunt of the well-known historian and archaeologist T. K. Joseph. She was headmistress of a Malayalam primary school. The prose-poem "Aa Cheriya Vazhithara" ("That Little Footpath") was written describing the loveliness of Saramma's feet. Saramma died in 1933 at the age of forty. The marriage took place when Chithramezhuthu was 22 and Saramma 18. At the time that jewel of a woman was studying in the seventh class of the Malayalam school at Chengannur. That gentle, modest girl was the only student from the school to pass the seventh-class examination of 1087. When she passed, the Assistant Inspectress of Education presented Saramma, as was the custom then, with a silk shawl, a copy of the cookery book "Pachaka Chinthamani" and a timepiece. Soon after, at 19, Saramma became a teacher at the Government Primary Girls' School, Vazhuvadi, and that same year (6 Edavam) became headmistress of that school.

Of the wedding, which took place in Chingam 1086, Chithramezhuthu records: "Our wedding passed off most auspiciously. On the wedding day, His Highness Udaya Varma Valiya Koil Thampuran of the Mannoor Madom, the

father of my master Chithramezhuthu Mukundan Thampi, sent a Brahmin to Chengannur, who at the wedding pandal gave a message of blessing, together with two gold-bordered neriyathu cloths and two copies of the Ramayana as gifts for the two of us. It was that Brahmin too who read out the message of blessing. That message is copied below.

"An address of blessing written and sent by Avittam Thirunal Thampuran of the Mannoor Madom palace on the marriage of K. M. Varghese: — Since the said Varghese is our son's disciple and is most devoted, we send for the present a small gift to show our boundless joy on the occasion of this marriage, and we also pray to Almighty God that you may live long in well-being, with increase of learning and with abundance of children and wealth. So given at the said palace,

Avittam Thirunal Thampuran (signed)"

After Saramma's death, Chithramezhuthu married C. K. Mary, daughter of Koshy Vadhyar of the well-known Chenathara family of Kodukulanji. She was a primary school teacher. She died in 1972 at the age of sixty-four.

The eldest son of Chithramezhuthu's first marriage, K. V. Mathew, retired from service as Deputy Controller of Stationery and died in 1989 while living in Thiruvananthapuram. The second son, K. V. Punnoose, worked during the Second World War as a war artist at the headquarters of Lord Louis Mountbatten (Supreme Commander, S.E. Command) in Singapore, and afterwards as Chief Artist and Designer at the Military Engineering College, Secunderabad; he retired from the Central Government service. The third son, George Varghese,

after military service in India and Burma during the Second World War, entered the Madras Civil Service, became Personal Assistant to P. C. Mathew, I.C.S. — Transport Commissioner and Chairman of the Central Road Traffic Board — and later retired as Senior Office Superintendent. The fourth son, Major P. V. Varghese, retired from the Army as a Major. The fifth son, Dr. K. V. Jacob, retired as a Section Officer in the Madras Transport Corporation.

The daughters: Sosamma was the first child. She was married to A. C. Perumal [*Note: name as printed*], of the Poovathur Thottathil family belonging to the Kalathakkal family of Maramon, an Accounts Officer in the Accountant General's Office. The second daughter, K. V. Thankamma, was married to John, son of John Vadhyar of Vettiyyidathu Parambil, Mavelikara. This daughter has died.

Of the four sons of the second marriage, the eldest, K. V. John Varghese, works in a bank at Mavelikara. The second son, K. V. Varghese, is working in Texas (U.S.). The third son, Thomas Varghese, is an Assistant Executive Engineer with the Kerala Electricity Board. The fourth son, Koshy Varghese, retired from the Air Force and lives in Mavelikara. Of the daughters, Saramma Oommen works in the cargo section of the airport at Madras. The second daughter, Susan, is an Upper Division Clerk at the Military Vehicles Depot in Delhi.

Sri Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese

Central Government Grants a Pension of 50 Rupees

"Mavelikara, 23 June: The Government of India has granted a pension of 50 rupees a month to Sri Chith-

ramezhuthu K. M. Varghese, who for the past fifty years has practised painting with skill in the school of Ravi Varma and won fame in Kerala, in Madras and abroad. Sri Varghese, who has written many fine essays and books on literary, historical, political and other subjects, is also celebrated as the pioneer of the prose-poem movement in the Malayalam language. He was 74 years old [*Note: as printed*]."

(From a correspondent)
Malayala Rajyam report

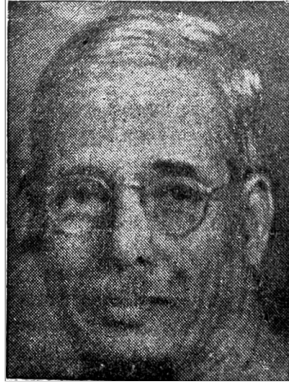
The End of Chithramezhuthu

It was on the 21st of July 1962 that Chithramezhuthu passed away. Five months before that, he slipped and fell at night in his own house, and was treated for some weeks at the nursing home of Dr. M. P. Philip at Mavelikara. After he recovered and returned home, the ailments of old age troubled him from time to time. When his illness became serious, he was admitted to the Government Hospital at Mavelikara and treated there, but his condition did not change. He was then treated for some days at the private nursing home of P. C. Koshy of Polachirackal, and again cared for in the Government Hospital itself. During these days the Valiya Raja of Mavelikara, Chithramezhuthu Rama Varma Thampuram, Z. M. Paret, community leaders, priests, and leading citizens of every caste and creed visited him. At about three o'clock on the 21st that genius set. K. M. Cherian, Chief Editor of the Malayala Manorama, reached Mavelikara the next morning and laid a wreath on the body on behalf of the Malayala Manorama. The body was buried in a grave in the cemetery of the Mar Thoma church, Thazhakkara.

Sri Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese Passed Away Yesterday Morning

Mavelikara, 20 July *[Note: the newspaper report as printed gives 20 July and "8 o'clock this morning"; the text above gives 21 July at about three o'clock]*

"The celebrated painter, historical researcher and writer Sri Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese passed away this morning after 8 o'clock.



"He was 74 years old. For some weeks Sri Varghese had been confined to his sickbed with the ailments of old age.

"Sri Varghese, son of Sri Mathai of Powathikunnel, Thazhakkara, was born on the 11th of Medam 1604 *[Note: as printed — evidently a misprint for 1064, i.e. 1889]*. After his primary education he joined the Government English High School, Mavelikara, but for lack of means could not continue his studies. After leaving school he worked for some time as clerk to the Rev. Oommen Mammen, then Archdeacon of Mavelikara.

The Painter

"Sri Varghese, who even as a student had a great liking for drawing, became in 1905 the disciple of the famous painter Sri P. Mukundan Thampi. One of the most important of his early paintings is that of Pulikkottu Joseph Mar Dionysius Metropolitan. It is not easy to count the paintings he has made since then. His celebrated portraits of many great personages — the Catholicos Bava, K. C. Mammen Mappillai, Raja Raja Varma Raja, Kerala Varma Valiya Koil Thampuran, W. T. Edmund, Sree Moolam Thirunal, Sree Narayana Guru Swami, Dr. Kuriyalassery, the Patriarch Abdul Messiah, Abraham Mar Thoma and others — are crowning examples of Sri Varghese's skill in painting.

The Writer

"Sri Varghese himself has written that it was the company of the Rev. Oommen Mammen Padre and of Mukundan Thampi, and the Kathakali at the Puthiyakavu temple, that made him a writer. Sri Chithramezhuthu's first article was published in the Malayala Manorama, and it was the Manorama too that first published many of his books. Among them the book 'Mathews Mar Athanasius's Panchakalyani' deserves special mention. Sri Mannathu Padmanabhan published a long critique of that book, and the book he wrote by way of reply is 'The Malankara Nasranis and Their Valour in Defence of the Realm'. He wrote eleven books, including 'The Saintly Shouriyar', Sucharithamukuram, Chittithalayal and Nellimoottil Ammachi. He had also completed some books, such as a history of the Powathikunnel family and 'Kallur Philipose Asan'.

"He wrote introductions to a dozen eminent books, beginning with Vallathol's Magdalana Mariyam and K. V. Simon's Sangeetha Ratnavali.

"Sri Chithramezhuthu's contributions to the Malayalam prose-poem movement were valuable.

The Editor

"Sri Chithramezhuthu was editor of the monthly Athmaposhini for about two years. He also served for a long time on the editorial board of the monthly Suriyani Sabha, which began publication in Thiruvananthapuram.

"Sri Chithramezhuthu first married at the age of twenty-two. His first wife was Saramma, niece (brother's daughter) of the well-known historian Sri T. K. Joseph. After her death he married Smt. C. K. Mary, who was also a teacher. He had twelve children by his two wives."

(From our own correspondent)

Manorama, 22 July 1962

The facts in this were written down by Sri Z. M. Paret, who came to Mavelikara and visited Chithramezhuthu before his death, and took them with him.

OBITUARY

Kottayam, July 21

Mr. C. K. M. Varghese

Mr. Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese, well-known artist and writer, passed away at Mavelikara Hospital this morning, after a short illness. He was 74. The Kerala Government recently sanctioned a monthly allowance for Mr. Varghese in recognition of his contribution to art and literature....P. T. I.

The Hindu, Madras

The Malayala Manorama's Tribute

The editorial written by the Malayala Manorama on 22 July 1962, mourning the death of Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese.

"The late Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese was a devotee of art who displayed uncommon talent, skill and force of personality in Malayalam literature and in painting. His paintings, which won a great deal of praise and admiration, were never a subject of controversy in the world of art or of politics; lovers of art only ever praised them. But his work in literature was not merely that of an artist. Many of the works of this staunch champion of his community created upheavals in the political arena of Travancore. The delight of the articles of one who possessed a distinctive style and skill in composition won the praise even of his opponents. When one says that Sri Varghese, who did not study in schools much beyond the primary level, held a lofty place in Malayalam literature and had a deep interest in historical research, one can understand how much he was an artist who rose by his own effort. The Government of India recognised his artistic gifts and was giving him a monthly grant. The bond between the Malayala Manorama and Sri Varghese is well known. His most famous works were published in instalments in the Manorama, and he painted many oil portraits for the Manorama. The death of Sri Varghese, thus one of our closest friends in the arts, is a loss not only to the world of art but to us in particular."

The Church Weekly

Given below is the editorial written by N. M. Abraham, editor of the Church Weekly, in its issue of 29 July 1962, following Chithramezhuthu's death.

Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese

"It may be said that the Syrian Christians who have won fame in the field of art can be counted on one's fingers. Had it been possible to make art an industry or a trade, the Syrians might have entered that field in greater numbers. Agriculture, trade, chit funds and now, to a lesser extent, industry attract them. Nor have they any great objection to becoming priests in churches with a good income. If they could make a profit by running schools, they would go into that too. They have a gift for thinking about and striving for ways of earning a living. But a gift for art is found in only a few. In that respect Chithramezhuthu Sri K. M. Varghese, who became famous by showing taste and skill in literature and painting, well deserves to be remembered.

"Lovers of art have paid unanimous tribute to his paintings. He gave most of his attention to painting oil portraits of distinguished people. But his literary activities became a subject of controversy. Communal rivalry is something that stirs unpleasant memories in the political history of Travancore, and in that rivalry Mr. Varghese's pen left some indelible personal marks. From a moral point of view one may doubt whether that was how an artist's fervour ought to have been expressed. But Mr. Varghese made it abundantly clear how great is the power of literature to stir up the emotions. He had an un-

common skill in composition, a style all his own and a particular skill in the use of words. He took pride in, and wrote with fervour about, many things he thought the Syrian community had, and ought to have, in social life. If his articles and books angered the Nair community here, he thought that this was what should be done to those who had insulted the Syrian community. Many may be found who agree with him in that view; some who write and speak in that way are still to be found in the social and political fields today. Yet in the final analysis one may doubt their usefulness.

"Sri Chithramezhuthu Varghese kept up a close friendship with the Church Weekly. He often wrote to us in appreciation of its editorials and weekly addresses. He did not always agree with our opinions; yet he always remained a friend. That friendship continued even after he became a member of the Mar Thoma Church. He had some definite views on matters of faith, with many of which we could not agree.

"A historical document that Sri Varghese sent us for publication, with his commentary, is still with us. We shall begin publishing it soon. We mourn his passing, and we express our condolences to the members of his bereaved family."

12

Acknowledgements

Among the counsels Chithramezhuthu gave his descendants, he reminded them always to be grateful to those who had helped him. That part of the family history he had prepared earlier is given below.

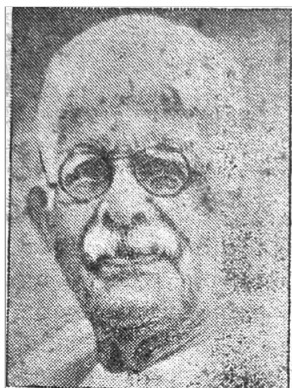
"My master and the object of my reverence, P. Mukundan Thampi, palace artist of Kottilappattu, Mavelikara; and his father, Avittam Thirunal Udaya Varma Raja of the Mannoor Madom, a master of all the arts.

"Joseph Fernandez of Kolelil, who first took me to Mukundan Thampi.

"The great man who gave me a helping hand into the world of letters and led me to a place of honour was the banished K. Ramakrishna Pillai, B.A. That bold lion, then editor of the monthly Athmaposhini of Kunnamkulam, encouraged me, published my articles after making me correct my own mistakes, and gave me guidance. My descendants must be most grateful to that bold patriot and to his descendants.

"It was in the Nasrani Deepika, published from Mananam, that I gained practice in writing articles on politics and history. The encouraging letters of appreciation from Thengummoottil Varghese Mappillai, who was then its editor, spurred me on greatly along this path.

"The next name I must mention is that of K. C. Mammen Mappillai, editor of the Malayala Manorama. It was that great man who caressed, cherished and brought me up. By giving me money, by praising, encouraging and fondling me, he raised me up in the world of letters and made me a treasure of the Christian community; my debt to that ocean of knowledge is very great. My descendants must be grateful for all time to that one noble man — the greatest political thinker and political critic in the land of Kerala, and a man of far-sighted vision —



and to his family and his descendants. He is still with us, blessed with long life.

"I am exceedingly grateful to O. M. Cherian, emperor of Malayalam letters, who, delighted by reading my literary articles, always praised me on many platforms; and to P. K. Kocheppan Tharakan, writer and playwright, who encouraged me a great deal. My descendants must always be grateful to their descendants too. Of these, Rao Sahib O. M. Cherian gave me financial help for my historical researches, and Kocheppan Tharakan, as editor of Bhashaposhini, paid me ample remuneration for my articles.

"My descendants must also be grateful to His Highness the Valiya Raja of Mavelikara, Chithramezhuthu Rama Varma Thampuran (son of Chithramezhuthu Kilimanoor Ravi Varma Valiya Koil Thampuran) — most revered, and ever kind to those who depended on him — who gave me help and support in matters of painting and in some other matters concerning me."



Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese

This book is about Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese, a distinguished portrait painter, an accomplished artist, and a versatile writer. His paintings are marked by depth of perception and artistic skill, and they are widely acclaimed for their realism. He portrayed many eminent personalities, and his portraits are noted for their lifelike quality. As a writer, he excelled in several fields — essays, stories, memoirs, travel writing and reflections on art and culture. His writings combine a keen observation of life with a refined literary style. This book presents a comprehensive picture of his many facets — the artist, the writer, and the cultured personality — and traces his life and achievements. It is an affectionate tribute to the remarkable contributions of Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese to art and Malayalam literature.

The author, K. V. Mammen, is a well-known writer and cultural worker. Through this book, he offers a warm and insightful introduction to the life and achievements of Chithramezhuthu K. M. Varghese to Malayalam readers.



K. V. Mammen

Price: Rs. 45

Published by:
Kottayam Publishing House
Manganam, Kottayam – 18