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CHANDER NAGORE
1842 - 1847

BOWBAZAR 1843

SERAMPORE 1845-1947

CHITTAGONG
1845 - 1854

DARJEELING

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AUTHOR.....Mother Colmcille.....

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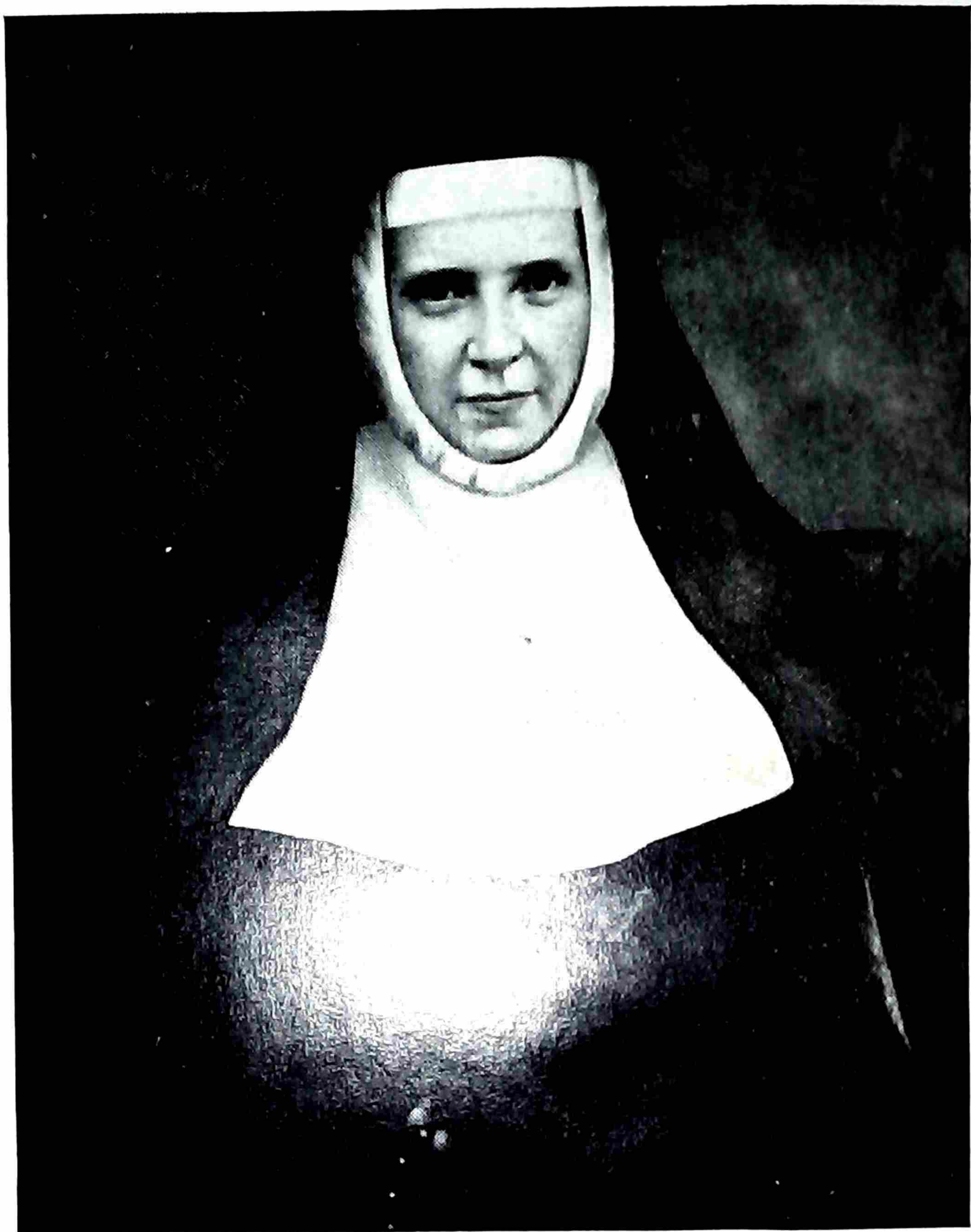
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Rev. Mother M. Delphine Hart, I.B.V.M.
1st Superior, India, 1841

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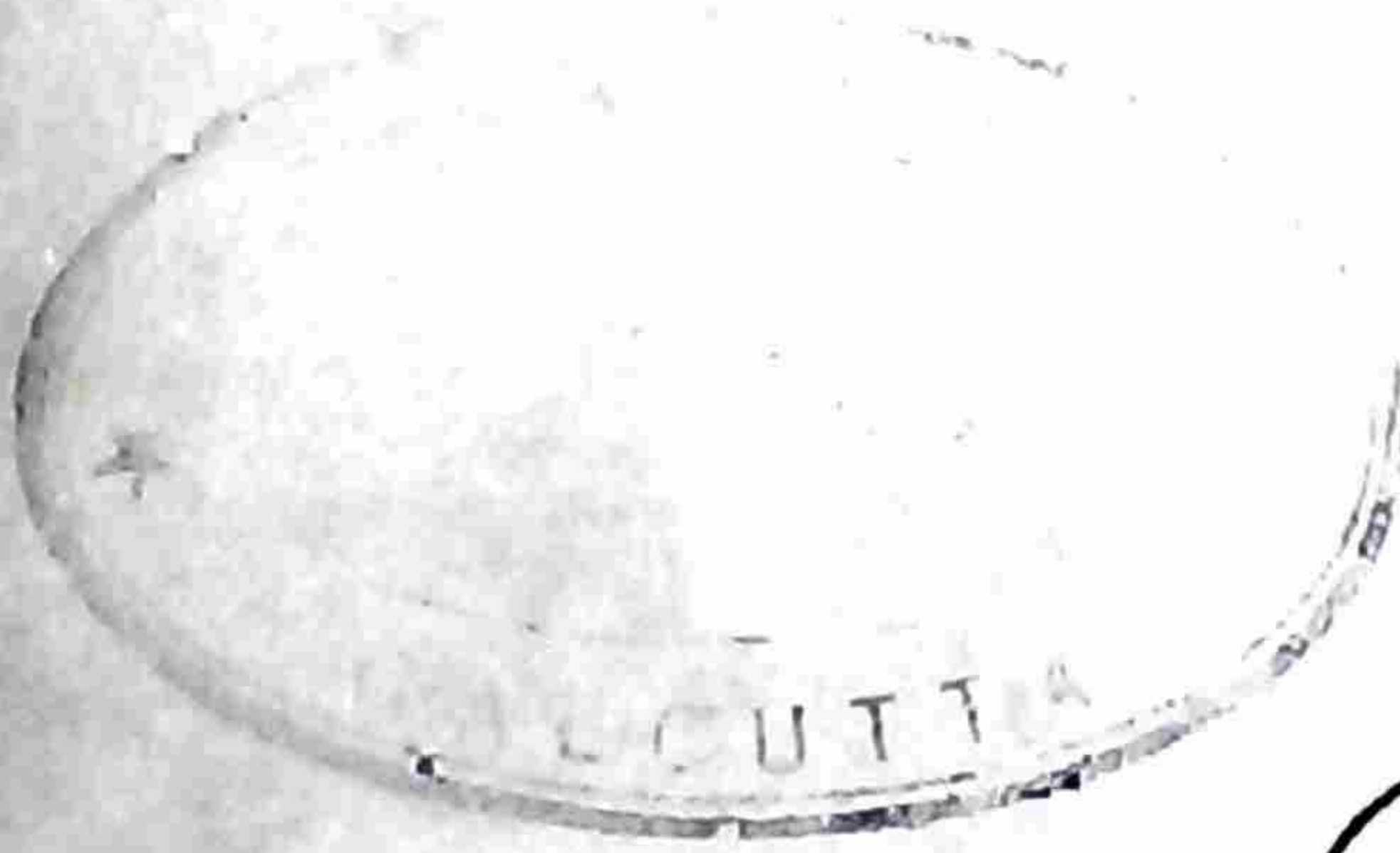
FIRST THE BLADE

*History of the I.B.V.M. (Loreto) in India
1841 - 1962*

By
MOTHER MARY COLMCILLE I.B.V.M.

"The Kingdom of God is like this: A man scatters seed on the land—and the seed sprouts and grows... first the blade, then the ear, then full-grown corn in the ear."

Mark 4: 26-28



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✠ ALB. V. D'SOUZA
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FOREWORD

IN India to-day, "Loreto Nuns" and "Loreto Schools" are household words. Everyone knows the five big Calcutta Day-Schools managed by the Irish Branch of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (commonly called "Loreto Nuns"), and its Boarding and Day Schools strung across the plains in Entally, Asansol, Ranchi, Lucknow, and across the hills in Darjeeling, Shillong and Simla. The graduates of Loreto University Colleges have their recognised place in the world of education. Yet, how many, even among Loreto pupils, know anything of the history of Loreto in India, that stirring record of the hundred and twenty-six years since the first Nuns landed in Calcutta on December 30th 1841? Do they, for example, know that these Sisters were the first ever seen in northern India? That Loreto House, Calcutta, was the first European Girls' School in that region? Loreto, Entally, the first Convent-Orphanage? and Loreto College, Calcutta, the premier Women's College in the sub-continent? Have they heard that Loreto Sisters pioneered in Dacca and Chittagong, Vellore and Ootacamund, Saugor and Hazaribagh, that they followed fast on Fr. Lievens' heels into Chota Nagpur, and arrived in Darjeeling thirty-five years before the Darjeeling-Himalayan Railway? It is this story, and especially the tale of pioneering days of Loreto in India, that I would like to tell Loreto's children, past and present.

I owe a debt of gratitude to several of our Sisters who have contributed reminiscences and made helpful suggestions, and to the librarians of St. Xavier's College, Calcutta, for allowing me to use the Goethals Library. I am deeply grateful, also, to Fr. M. Vermeire, S.J., for sharing the fruits of his research. My thanks are due also to Frs. A. Dontaine, S.J., and C. Vriethoff, S.J., for their valuable criticisms, and to my patient proof-reader and best critic, my sister, Miss Katie Payne.

MOTHER MARY COLMCILLE, I.B.V.M.

INTRODUCTION

"THERE is no life, faithfully recorded, but is a heroic poem of its sort, rhymed or unrhymed", wrote Carlyle at the time the history of the Loreto Nuns began in 1841. Since that year, Loreto House, 7 Middleton Row, Calcutta has been the headquarters and Mother House of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Irish Branch) in India.

The Loreto Nuns were the first European Nuns to come to Northern India, welcomed by a predecessor of mine, Archbishop Carew. In the last 125 years, the Institute has opened Houses in 22 towns, mostly in North India: not a few were closed when circumstances altered and prompted the change. This is normal in the history of any living organism, which adapts itself continually to the needs of the time. To serve the women of India was ever the guiding principle behind these changes in location and teaching methods, and the success of their efforts down the years is in no small measure due to their work being subject to the Will of God, the good of the Country and of the Church.

It is for this reason that I propose this History of the Loreto Sisters, which also records the history of Calcutta, Bengal and Northern India, to all past pupils of their Schools; they will surely be interested in this historical survey of the last 125 years and appreciate the spirit behind the endeavours of the Religious, many of whom they would have known personally, and who so generously devoted their whole lives for the formation and enlightenment of Indian womanhood.

May Loreto in India ever flourish and grow and continue to help the women of our Country—that is my prayer; and I thank them too for all that they have been and are to the Archdiocese of Calcutta in particular.

† ALB. V. D'SOUZA
Archbishop of Calcutta

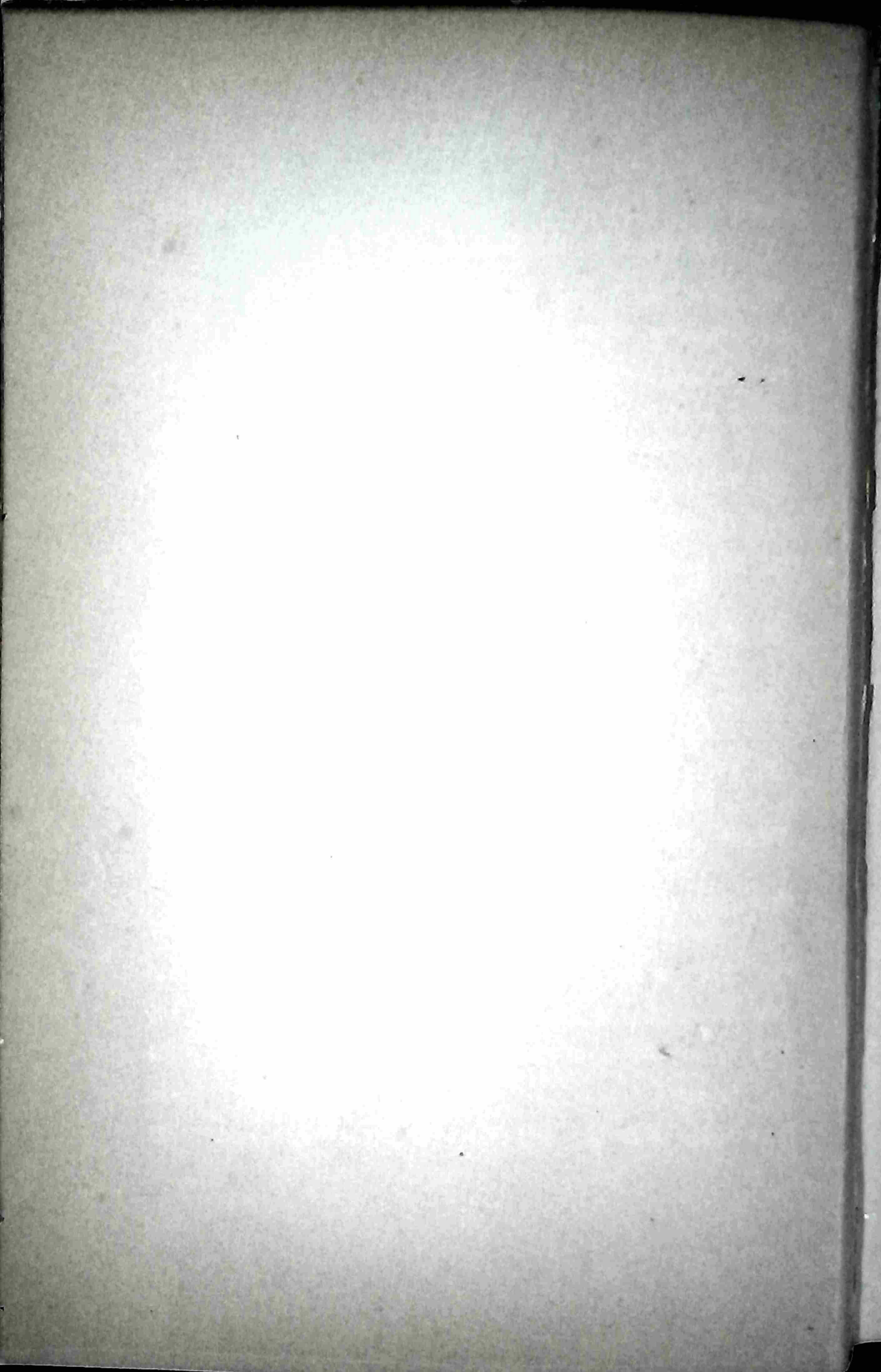
Archbishop's House,
32, Park Street,
Calcutta-16
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Correction

Page 66, line 19, *For* 17,400 *Read* 7,400

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CHAPTER ONE

FIELDS WHITE FOR THE HARVEST

Calcutta in the eighteen thirties was a rather different place from the city we know today—different, and far more glamorous. It had the same mingling of East and West, but it did not advertise its Western “progress” in neon lights or on cinema hoardings, and its Eastern character was more evident when Indian women were largely purdahed and Indian gentlemen had not abandoned their turbans and dhoties for the drab uniformity of Western man’s attire. From Diamond Harbour, along the river front, you could see the week-end residences of European merchants, for Calcutta was the political and commercial capital of British India, and the wealth from its warehouses and wharves contributed in no small measure to the prosperity of Victorian England. The main streets had been laid out by Lord Wellesley, and the fashionable mansions which fronted Chowringhee had earned for the metropolis the title of “City of Palaces”. From their balconies, you could look across the green expanse of the “Maidan”, which extended, without intersecting tram-lines, from Government House to the Race-course, and see the white sails of the great “East Indiamen” at anchor above Fort William, or the graceful cutters setting out for their race home around the Cape. To the north lay the Indian city, with its own palaces and its fascinating bazaars. There was the same bazaar smell, that mingling of spices and oil-cookery and incense, a whiff of which can evoke nostalgia for the East. Along the narrow alleys, then as now, shopkeepers lolled on snowy sheets, propped against swelling bolsters, in front of an array of brilliant silks, brassware or jewellery. From these bazaars poured out that riot of colour and sound that makes the ordinary street scene a delight to all the senses. Dark eyes flashed in semi-veiled faces, coloured turbans surmounted black-bearded Afghan profiles, saffron-robed ascetics wore strange caste-marks on ash-strewn foreheads, drums beat before wedding processions, before images being carried home for puja, crowds gathered around jugglers, snake-charmers, performing monkeys and little dancing bears.

The servants of the Honorable East India Company carried back with them much of the glamour of the East, and a prestige which was partly the result of their easily acquired fortunes. A "Nabob", even one as stupid and otherwise unattractive as Jos Sedley, was considered by Victorian Mammias a very eligible match for Victorian young ladies; while the red coat of an officer shone with an added lustre if it had been worn at Seringapatam or Chillianwalla. Much the same glamour was carried over into the domestic life of the "Anglo-Indians", as the Europeans living in India were then called. Their big, white houses overflowed with servants in picturesque garb. Gatekeepers guarded the entrance, to keep out beggars, to receive hand missives, and to open carriage doors. At sunset, they were replaced by night-watchmen, charged with parading the "compound", and giving proof of their wakefulness by periodic shout or song—a device guaranteed to keep up their own courage rather than to assist the slumbers of the household. "Peons" sat round, waiting to carry letters, chatting meanwhile with the "Bearers" engaged in light house duties, or passing the time of day with the "Durji" huddled over his dress-making. Ayahs, in trailing robes, looked after the clothes of the "Mem-Sahibs" and minded the children: there was generally one apiece, for the mothers had discovered that Madrassi nannies were not only devoted to their charges but, with their dark skin and bright saris, made a good foil to little pale-faced English toddlers. Squatting to their task, sweepers wielded short-handled brushes with more dexterity than efficiency, or trailed great sheaves of damp jute over the floors by way of scrubbing brush. Punkah-Wallahs squatted, also, to pull the great cloth banners overhead, for that was the only system of air-conditioning available. If they grew tired of squatting, they could do the job just as well lying down, with a cord attached to their big toe. The "Khamshamar" presided over a staff of white-coated "Khidmargars" or table servants, also a wine-cooler and hookah-bearer; while in the Kitchen, a detached building which the Mem-sahib was hardly expected to enter, a set of cooks and scullery boys prepared elaborate and exotic meals.

Out of doors, there was a staff of Malis, including gardeners, grass-cutters and groundsmen, and a Bhistee with his traditional goat-skin for carrying water. Carriage-drivers and horse-boys

were also needed, for even the small boys could not take their ride without a "Syce" running beside the horse. And, if you used your carriage in the evening, you did well to have "Masalchees" or torch-bearers running ahead, for the small oil lamps on the streets served rather to make darkness visible than to reveal pot-holes or pick-pockets. Actually wheeled vehicles other than private carriages had appeared only in 1828 when a strike of the Orissa palkee-bearers had induced a certain Mr. Bromley to attach wheels and shafts to his palanquin, and so put the first "Bromley" or hackney coach on the Calcutta streets. No one walked, in those days, and, certainly, neither the ladies' crinolines nor the gentlemen's broadcloth suits and high cravats were suitable for out-of-door exercise in a tropical climate. But morning rides and evening drives were a long-established custom in the city. Sunday service, too, had become fashionable since the turn of the century—before that they were popular only among young ladies anxious to show off their new bonnets, and young gentlemen alert to help them out of their palanquins; introductions were dispensed with in such circumstances and he who reached the palkee first would stand a good chance of leading the young lady to the altar before many days were passed. But Governor-General Lord Wellesley had set a better example by personally leading his staff to a Thanksgiving Service for the victories of his famous brother, Sir Arthur, later the Duke of Wellington. Clergymen were few, and their services were mostly confined to military chaplaincies, leaving the tardy beginning of the evangelisation of the non-Christian population to the zeal of volunteer groups, and performing little more than sacristy duties for the Europeans.

Amusements, however, were plentiful in this leisurely Anglo-Indian life. Horse-racing had always been popular; card-parties were a suitable diversion for sweltering evenings. Theatres, like "The Sans Souci" in Park Street, brought out English actresses, young civil servants and subalterns held private theatricals. Dinner parties were lavish, and might be followed, especially at bachelors' parties, by performances of Nautch Girls. Young men with too much money, and women with too much leisure provided excellent schools for scandal. Perhaps it was better, on the whole, to leave the children, with their ayahs and bearers, in the country house down the river, till they were

ready to enter society. The boys, when they were old enough, would be sent to school in England, and the girls, unless the family could afford to bring out an English governess, would have little enough education.

Yet this glamorous City of Palaces was equally famous, then as now, as a city of dirt and squalor. "In the back lanes of Chowringhee and Circular Road, the bazaars which have sprung up, irregularly, have become an intolerable nuisance." The complaint has a familiar ring, but it is the Civil Surgeon of 1837 who is speaking. He goes on to tell how he had seen unhealthy slums cleared away to allow Rawdon and Loudon Streets to be built—a select residential quarter—and how, in a few years, the filthy huts and scum-covered pools were back again, and the fashionable suburb becoming uninhabitable. In fact, Calcutta had neither a conservancy system nor a drinking-water supply. Water was purified by dropping charcoal into the great pottery bowls in which it was stored. Sanitation was primitive; the disposal of refuse was left largely to jackals and pariah dogs, to crows, vultures, and "Adjutant Birds", those sentinel storks that were such a familiar feature of Calcutta streets that they seemed to be the guardian spirits of the city. The unpaved streets, with their open drains, were convenient breeding-grounds for malaria and cholera germs. Nothing was known of preventive measures; even ice was not obtainable till 1862, when it was shipped from America, and the era had scarcely passed when an Englishman's life in India was valued at "two monsoon seasons".

What was being done, we may ask, to keep alive the spark of Faith among the Christians of this City? True, Christianity had been brought to Bengal by the Portuguese towards the end of the sixteenth century, but, with the advent of the English, a century later, the Catholics had been pushed back into the Indian and Portuguese parts of the city, into "Black Calcutta" as it was called. These were the days of the Penal Laws against Catholics, and it did not seem strange for Clive, after the Battle of Plassey, to allow the old Catholic church to be used for Protestant services, since the church of Fort William had been destroyed. The East India Company, meanwhile, rigidly excluded missionaries of any Christian Church, and transhipped the few who smuggled themselves into its domain. That is why Carey's

Baptist Mission was obliged to seek shelter in Danish Serampore. When, after a thirty-years' Parliamentary struggle, the ban was lifted (for Protestants), missionaries flocked in—Baptists, Church Missionary Society, Scots Church—and the evangelisation of the non-Christian population began. The newcomers found the children of European and Anglo-Indian parents shockingly neglected. European schools did not exist, if we except a Free School, a military Orphanage, and the "Parental Academy", which was, as its name suggests, a purely private venture. The Indian Gazette of 1833 reports that of the three hundred children of the "Benevolent Institution" and Girls' Orphanage, the majority were children of Catholic parents. They would have been, we suppose, the orphans of Irish soldiers, of whom there were always many in the British army. These poor mites, Anglican Bishop Heber remarks, "made no difficulty about religious instruction, and even went to Church with the others". "They are so ignorant and neglected", he laments, "that many of them have scarcely any other idea of religion than what they learn here."

How, you may wonder, had this state of ignorance and neglect come about, in a country where the Catholic Church had existed, even underground, for over two hundred years? The main cause was a piece of history which most moderns have forgotten. From the discovery of the New World, Portugal had been given a general charge of all missions in the East, and the King of Portugal a traditional right to appoint bishops. In practice, only the Patriarch of Goa could send priests to most parts of India. Now, by about 1800, most of the old missionaries were dead, and no new men came to replace them. There seems to have been a tendency in Goa, as in other old Catholic countries, to think of the Church as a career, to which the average boy of a Catholic family might aspire, rather than as a vocation to absolute dedication and apostolic zeal. The seminaries accepted candidates without too much regard to either character, piety, or the minimum fitness for sacerdotal studies. Now, when the supply of priests from Europe ceased, the ecclesiastical superiors of Goa hurried on the ordination of new priests, and sent them into the mission field. The type offering for seminary training bore no resemblance to the splendid priests that Goa and other South Indian dioceses pro-

duce in our times, and who bid fair to take on their shoulders the staffing of the Church in Northern India. They were, in fact, new converts, of Konkani Brahmin origin, poorly educated, and obsessed still with the consciousness of a superior caste rather than with the humility of the Gospel. According to Fr. Josson, S. J., the historian of the Bengal Mission, "These priests had not always the capacity, knowledge nor priestly virtues that might have been expected of them... hardly knowing European languages... with neither faith nor dignity in the exercise of the sacred ministry, possessing, in fact, little theology beyond the knowledge of the special privileges that the Pope had granted the King of Portugal." How seriously they took these privileges is seen from the fact that when, in 1834, in response to a petition from the Catholics of Calcutta, the Pope appointed in English-speaking Vicar Apostolic, the Goan clergy refused to acknowledge his authority; and thus began the "Portuguese Schism", which, spreading to Goa, remained an open sore in the Church of India till 1860.

"The result was inevitable", continues Fr. Josson. "The fact that the Goan priests were held in little esteem reflected in an unfortunate manner on the religion of which they were the ministers. Their avarice, (they were landowners in the name of the community), their idleness, their lack of zeal for the salvation of souls urged a great many groups of Catholics to apostacise." There seems to be no exaggeration, then, in the remarks of a writer in the "Calcutta Review" 1844, when, referring to the bad old days of the preceding decade, he writes, "We remember the time when the Roman Catholics, in spite of their numbers, had practically no moral influence.... They were known to have two or three churches, a few "Portuguese" priests, some respectable middle-class families, and a great number of Indo-Portuguese adherents, known only as being almost at the last degree of ignorance and degradation.... They seemed to have had only one school, opened in 1830, consequently, many of the more respectable parents used to send their children to Protestant institutions.... While in religion, in education, in everything that concerned the prosperity of India, all was movement and activity, the voice of Rome was not heard. The body was present, but, in the spiritual and intel-

lectual sphere, that voice was silent, it had been forgotten, and its absence was not even noticed."

If we have painted, even in outline, the picture of those dark days, it is that the reader may realise, as we often fail to realise, how bad were the conditions that the nuns found on their arrival, and how extraordinary was the change their coming brought about. The darkest hour is just before the dawn: and the dawn can be said to have broken with the arrival in Calcutta, in 1834, of the Vicar Apostolic, Fr. Robert St. Leger, S. J., and his band of English, Irish and French Jesuits. During the next six years, they had fanned out over their vast mission-field—it included what is now East Pakistan, as well as Bengal, Bihar and Orissa—receiving, in some districts, the submission of schismatic Goan Fathers, baptising, reconciling, marrying, the lapsed Catholics, and setting up, first near the old Portuguese Church of Our Lady of the Rosary, then successively in 3 Park Street and in Chowringhee, St. Xavier's School for Catholic boys.

It was in February, 1840, and on the initiative of Fr. Chadwick, S. J., Rector of St. Xavier's, that the idea of a Catholic school for girls was first mooted. Mgr. Tabert, Vicar Apostolic since 1839, took up the plan with enthusiasm. The collection of funds, and the search for nuns to teach the girls, was put in the hands of a committee of ladies, known, quaintly, as the "Ladies of the Nun-Committee". The names of these ladies suggest the cosmopolitan society of Calcutta. There were Irish Madams O'Brien and Prendergast, the Lakersteins classed as Portuguese, as was Mme. Rosario; Mrs. Cornelius must have been Armenian, and Mrs. Rootan probably had Dutch blood. They seem to have been a business-like set, for while their men folk were involved in interminable disputes about the ownership of church property, and the status of the older missionaries, the ladies got together a sum of Rs. 1,200 to begin with, and sent a request to the Ursuline nuns at Cork, Ireland, to please send six members "for the education of the upper classes as well as of the poor". This request the Ursulines had to refuse for lack of members. In September, 1840, Dr. Bakhaus, the Military Chaplain of Hazaribagh, was travelling to Rome on business of the Vicariate. The ladies commissioned him to be sure to get nuns, and handed over to him the funds they had collected as travelling expenses for them. He went first to the Ursulines, but they

again had to decline as they had just depleted their community to found a convent in South Carolina. The reverend gentleman was not going to face those determined ladies without *some* nuns. Loreto Abbey, at Rathfarnham, near Dublin, was fast establishing its name as a first-class school. Its nuns had been introduced into Ireland by the holy and zealous Dr. Murray, Archbishop of Dublin, who now lent a sympathetic ear to Dr. Bakhaus, and encouraged him to present his case to the Superioress, Mother Mary Teresa Ball.

Let us look at Loreto Abbey in February, 1841. It was not yet twenty years since Dr. Murray had brought to the beautiful old house his protégée, Frances Teresa Ball, whom he had had trained in St. Mary's Convent, York, with the express purpose of introducing into Ireland the historic Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This Order, founded in 1625 by the heroic Yorkshire woman, Mary Ward, for the special needs of England in the penal times, was widely spread on the continent under the name of "The English Ladies." It had existed in England since the Foundress's lifetime, quietly and unobtrusively carrying on the unenclosed apostolate of teaching and other works of charity which she had devised. "The Bar Convent", York, established in 1680, was the only convent in England before Catholic Emancipation, and many an Irish girl had gone there for her education. It was there that, as a schoolgirl, Frances Ball had first imbibed the spirit of the Institute. There she had done her novitiate, and from its hallowed walls she had come back to become one of the pioneers of modern convent education in Ireland. During the last eighteen years, she had enlarged the Abbey, and founded three more convents and a big day-school in or around Dublin, spreading out her scanty numbers to cater for the needs of rich and poor in her educationally-starved mother-land. That year, she had set a crown on her work by building the beautiful Abbey Church, dedicated to the Sacred Heart, and, when the first Mass was said there, on Lady Day 1840, she may well have envisaged for the Institute years of peaceful expansion on Irish soil.

But God had a wider apostolate in view for the Irish branch of the Institute of Mary, and, in the designs of His Heart, the mission field of India was to be linked to Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham. Strange to say, it had been an Archbishop of Bombay

who had blessed the Abbey Church—a bishop of English origin who had his own share of trouble with the Portuguese Schismatics. And now it was a priest from Calcutta who was waiting to see the Mother Superior. The Rev. Doctor Bakhaus, who was introduced by an Irish Jesuit Father, had much to tell her about the state of the Church and of Catholic education in British India. Some of it she may have known already, for it was only two years since the Provincial of the Irish Jesuits, Fr. Robert St. Leger, had returned after serving four difficult years as Vicar Apostolic of Bengal. And India was known in many an Irish home as the place where so many sons and brothers, serving in the British Army, sweltered, and pined, and died in battle, or of tropical diseases.

Yet what had all this to do with her, or her nuns, barely able, as they were, to staff existing schools, and with the bishops of all the Irish dioceses calling out for more? Fr. Bakhaus was a priest of German origin, lent by Propaganda to the Indian Mission. He was evidently a man of resource, as he was of strong character and optimistic temperament. He went later to Australia, and we find his name attached to the pleasant orcharding district, Bacchus Marsh, Victoria, once his property. His account of his visit to the Abbey is pithy. "I went to Rathfarnham, about three miles from Dublin, where the good ladies of the Holy Sepulchre (sic), possess a most magnificent and well-conducted establishment. Having called for the Lady Superioress, a person of great talents, virtue, and majestic behaviour, (a sister of Judge Ball), she received me civilly indeed, yet very coldly. Having explained to her the nature of my visit, she refused my application with an unqualified denial, and that in such a manner that methought the last spark of my hope had been extinguished.... Arguing and entreating for at least two hours of warm conversation when, thanks to God's Holy Providence, I succeeded".

It is easy enough to reconstruct this interview with the Irish Foundress, and to understand the "arguing and entreating" that brought up the temperature of the conversation so remarkably. The priest had tales to tell of whole families lost to the Faith through sheer lack of instruction; there were families in Catholic Ireland in the same danger, Mother Teresa knew, if schools were not multiplied. He was saddened by the lonely lives of children

in Mofussil stations. And what were their mothers doing, the nun wondered; her own early education had been given at home, but there were no clubs for gentle-women in Ireland. The priest knew only too much of the tragedy of young children whose minds were corrupted by immoral servants. But in the pure eyes lifted questioningly to his, he saw no shadow to suggest that she had ever heard of such things: how could she, fresh from an Irish home and the white thoughts of her convent? She had learnt something of the lives of the poor in cities, but the slum quarters of "dear, dirty Dublin" whose children were pouring into her day-schools, were a paradise compared to the bustees of Calcutta. Mother Teresa listened very quietly, turning the matter over prayerfully in her mind, as was her wont. It was always hard for her to turn a deaf ear to the needs of children, but, this time, she must refuse. Her nuns were too few, the work in Ireland not yet on its feet, and the needs around her so pressing. Death had made many gaps in their ranks recently, and though girls were beginning to enter from the school, they were so young! and, far away in India, they would be without the intimate, motherly supervision that she had, so far, been able to give to all her new convents. She was sorry; the answer must be "no". Dr. Bakhaus was, evidently, not the kind of man who took "no" for an answer. He made one last effort. Would Rev. Mother, he asked, hold herself responsible for the souls of all the children whom she was refusing to provide with a religious education? The Parthian shot went home. Mother Teresa begged the priest to give her half an hour in the chapel. At the end of that period, she gave him leave to address the community and ask if there were any volunteers. What would you expect? The Institute to which they belonged had been founded precisely for mission work, though the mission field of its first two centuries had been in Darkest England. They were Irish-women, and the cries of little pagan children rang in their hearts, as in the heart of St. Patrick of old, calling them to come and dwell among them. When Dr. Bakhaus had finished speaking the whole community volunteered for India!

The committee had asked for six nuns, and Mother Superior promised to give them six of the best, though some of those she had in her mind were still only novices. Dr. Bakhaus was jubilant. "These were ladies", he wrote, "proficient in English,

French, Italian, Needlework, Music, and excellent nuns. What can we wish for more?" The plan seems to have been to take his recruits on with him to Rome, where mission business called him, and then conduct them to Calcutta. They were already packed up, but he had still to call on Dr. Murray. The prudent Archbishop laid down two conditions before consenting to the departure of the Sisters:—There should be a suitable house ready for their occupation, and there should first be a new Vicar Apostolic appointed for the Calcutta Vicariate. For Mgr. Tabert had died, suddenly, the previous August, and his successor's name was not yet known. Mgr. Tabert's death had held up the business of procuring a house, but Dr. Bakhaus promised to urge on the matter. It was agreed that the Sisters were to wait till the new Vicar was appointed, and till Dr. Bakhaus was ready to accompany them to Calcutta and continue to act as their chaplain.

Both conditions were soon fulfilled. That very week, the Vicar Apostolic of Madras wrote to inform the Catholics of Calcutta that he had been appointed to the charge of their city. His successor in Madras had not yet arrived, so it would be some months before he could travel. Dr. Bakhaus wrote to the ladies begging them to find a good airy house, with walking space, "for Rathfarnham is a princely mansion, and their grounds like a park". The Institute is not in fact an enclosed Order, but Irish custom was that they hardly went out, so grounds for exercise were necessary; they would be more necessary in the tropics. There must be also a private oratory; Mother Teresa had promised to provide the Sacred Vessels. Meanwhile, the new Vicar, Bishop Carew, as soon as he heard of the coming of nuns, was urging on the matter of the convent. He was installed in Calcutta in May, and within a month of his arrival a very desirable residence was secured. It was "A splendid three-storeyed mansion, number 5, Middleton Row a noble building, spacious, airy, and well adapted for the residence of our future nuns, and for the purposes of a seminary (boarding school). It stands on seven bighas (2½ acres) of ground, well laid out with choice trees and shrubberies. The purchase money is Rs. 40,000, which Count Lackerstein thinks a remarkably cheap purchase." This Count Lackerstein, the eldest of five brothers, all rich merchants and devout Catholics, was to be the

Bishop's right-hand man in Church affairs for many years. Indeed, in every new work undertaken, in every fund raised for educational or charitable purposes, the name of Lackerstein heads the list. In the present undertaking, finding that the convent fund was still insufficient, he completed the purchase from his own pocket, and handed the title deeds to the nuns.

Old Loreto House is so dear to generations of Loreto girls that its history should find a place in this chronicle. When it was demolished in 1958, it was actually the oldest house in Calcutta, older, we may say, than the city itself. On the first map of Calcutta, that of 1742, can be seen a cruciform house, with a circular tank in front. No other building is near it, for in those days, Europeans did not live so far from the Fort which then faced the great tank in what is now Dalhousie Square. Whoever the owner was, his domain extended as far as Chowringhee, and from Park Street to beyond Middleton Street. Shortly after the Battle of Plassey, 1745, it was bought by the then Governor, Henry Vansittart, to be his country house, and remained for two generations in his family. In his youth, Vansittart had been a member of the famous—or infamous?—"Hell-Fire Club", within a stone's throw of the Abbey, Rathfarnham. He lived through a stormy period of Calcutta's history, and died in a ship-wreck off the Cape of Good Hope. In a room at the South-West corner of the old house, which some will remember as the Senior Cambridge Class-Room, and others as the "Third Parlour", was a pane of glass inscribed, "George Vansittart, Jr., Born 1768". Since glass windows were unknown at the date, except in the Governor's House, this may well be the oldest pane of glass in the city! The title deeds, extant from the time of the Vansittarts, show a succession of owners who were merchant princes, and whose names are given to the surrounding streets—Middleton and Palmer, Short and McLeod. Its four-foot-thick walls, fashioned of the old-time, small bricks, held most of the city's varied history. "The hospitable old house is vacant", writes a contemporary recording the bank failure of 1822, when the great firm of Palmers' crashed. But it was never vacant for long, and its tenants included some of Calcutta's greatest sons. In Warren Hastings' time it was occupied by the first Lord Chief Justice, Sir Elijah Impey, the same, who, as readers of Macaulay will remember, made history, by ordering the Brahmin, Nanda

Kumar, to be hanged, as a punishment for forgery. In those lofty rooms, Impey brought up his children; to them he returned after his labours in the High Court, and sat down with his faithful Christian Munshi, Gunsian Das, to the study of Persian (then the official language), Sanskrit and Bengali. Lady Mary Impey gave balls in the great pillared hall, which was to become the nuns' community room, while the adjoining chapel was, traditionally the card room.... It is fascinating to picture the guests that assembled those times in the now hallowed precincts. The pale face and slight, brown-coated figure of Warren Hastings was familiar there. Under the garlanded arches of the ballroom, the most dazzling figure was that of his wife, his "Beloved Marian". her gowns sewn with pearls and her auburn hair sparkling with diamonds. There, too, must have danced the "form divine" of Landor's Rose Aylmer, brought out, like many another English rose, to fade all too soon, and be buried in the Old Park Street Cemetery with her lover's verses for epitaph:—

"Ah what avails the sceptred race?
Ah what the form divine?
What every virtue, every grace?
Rose Aylmer, all were thine!

Rose Aylmer, whom these wakeful eyes
May weep, but never see,
A night of memories and sighs
I consecrate to thee!"

Hastings' quarrelsome Councillors must have met there, have discussed his duel with Sir Philip Francis, and prepared the charges that were to ruin him—and to make literature—as "The Letters of Junius." The Macaulays, who lived round the corner, and the Thackerays, who lived in the next street, would surely have been visitors at the dear old house. A more congenial tenant, in 1824, was the Rt. Rev. Reginald Heber, second Anglican Bishop of Calcutta, missionary, traveller and poet, whose diocese extended from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, and who wore himself out touring it, in river-boat or on horseback, till death came, suddenly, in Trichinopoly. He wrote, "We are established in a house so large as quite to exceed all our ideas of

comfort. I feel almost lost in a dining room sixty-seven feet long, . . . (this was later the school-hall) . . . a drawing room of the same dimensions . . . (he did not need a ball room like other tenants) . . . a study supported by arches, and, though low in proportion to its size, forty-five feet square. Yet, these overgrown rooms will, they tell us, be very convenient and comfortable when the hot winds begin". In that study, looking out on the back garden, he penned part of his charming journal, composed his sermons and his devotional poems, and worried over the many Christian children left without schools. We feel sure that he would have welcomed our Sisters.