

# **THOMAS VALPY FRENCH, FIRST BISHOP OF LAHORE**

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## **Chapter 1: Introductory. Burton-on Trent, Lahore, Muscat**

Three thousand or so Pakistanis are camped in the half-built town of Salalah in the Sultanate of Oman. They are helping to construct the second largest city of Oman – most of them live in tents or huts. Their size as a community is matched by the Indian community also helping in this work and in the hospital and health programmes. Among the three thousand Pakistanis perhaps three hundred belong to the Christian community. Forty or so meet for a service of worship every Friday evening – they are organized as a local congregation singing psalms in Punjabi and hearing the Holy Bible expounded in Urdu. A committee of laymen organizes and plans. Earlier in the year they welcomed a guest speaker from the Punjab - numbers increased to 80, the next night to 85 and the next night to 110. Services were held in the open near one of the dormitories – the Punjabi drums and psalms rang out and could easily be heard from the main road nearby. These are Pakistanis of the Dispersion – some of a quarter of a million who have found work in the Arabian Peninsula. Salalah is one of its outposts – a seacoast town in a fifty-mile coast strip of monsoon area – chief town of the province of Dhofar where frankincense can be found.

Salalah has for the last ten years been a restricted area as guerrilla warfare has been carried on by liberation movements in opposition to the Sultan of Oman, his force and allies. Supplies have been filtering through from the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen – a communist controlled land. A recent strategic move to control the narrow coastal plain has resulted in a decrease in fighting and an official proclamation of the end of the war with an amnesty for rebels who surrender. However, one still needs special permission to get in and out of Salalah. The airport, such as it is, is fenced with barbed wire and carefully guarded.

What brings 6000 Pakistanis and Indian to such a remote outpost? In 1966 Oman discovered oil, by 1970 the pipes were flowing and the new riches were affecting the economy. In July 1970 the present ruler, Sultan Qaboos, took over by revolution from his despotic father who had ruled his kingdom from Salalah by telegram, cable and radio although Muscat 600 miles away was the official and obvious capital. The Pakistanis and Indians along with other came to help Oman's development attracted by higher salaries than they could obtain in their homelands.

Oman with a population of about one million is strongly Muslim. The Omani church consists of less than 40 nationals all residing in the Muscat and Matrah area. Until 1970 the country was open only to one Protestant mission – the Reformed Church of America – and they were allowed to reside only in Muscat and Matrah where they had two hospitals and one school – the interior was mainly forbidden territory. In 1970 the Danish Missionary Society started work in co-operation with those already there and the new missionaries of the oil age - including Christian Pakistanis and Indians - moved in large numbers.

The Pakistani Church has had over a century of connection with Oman. The Diocese of Lahore had some rather undefined relationship with the southern Gulf areas including Oman. Thomas Valpy French, first bishop of Lahore, lies buried in a remote cove near Muscat. The Sultan of those days did not wish to waste any decent land on a Christian so he assigned this area of the beach accessible only by scaling a high cliff or by coming in by sea in a small boat. The Sultan today is more generous and favorably disposed and has donated a piece of land in the new town of Ruwi near Muscat where Protestant and Roman Catholic churches have been built – the only such buildings apart from the old church building in Muscat dating from the 1890s.

It is here that we should take a line through history to see how it was that Thomas French lies buried in Muscat. We go back to 1806 when Henry Martyn first landed in India as a chaplain of the East India Company. He was the first translator of the Urdu New Testament. This translation was completed initially in 1808 and was used largely in all subsequent revisions. He had a great concern to bring men to Christ. Every Sunday afternoon he preached to beggars in the garden of his home – 500 sometimes came for a free meal and listened to the preaching.

Sheikh Salih was not a beggar but the Muslim son of a learned schoolmaster in Delhi. His father had taught him Persian and Arabic and he became a language teacher and later a soldier and went to visit his father in Cawnpore. His father was teaching a rich Indian who lived next door to Henry Martyn. He had heard of Martyn's preaching to beggars on the lawn each week and decided to amuse himself by listening. Martyn's exposition of the Ten Commandments so impressed him that he begged his father for work in Cawnpore so that he could hear more. He was introduced to Martyn and helped him in copying his Persian translations. Martyn gave him his translation in Urdu for binding. He read it and was convicted. Just before leaving Cawnpore he told Martyn of his interest in the Christian faith. He went to Calcutta with Martyn and received instruction from Rev. David Brown. On Whit Sunday 1811 at the age of about forty he was baptized as Abdul Masih in the Old Church at Calcutta. Mr. Brown wrote to a friend:

On Sunday last I publicly baptized Sheikh Salih. It was a most solemn and heart –affecting occasion. [...] His Christian name is Abdul Masih, Servant of Christ.

Later another well-wisher, Charles Simeon, wrote to Rev. T. Thomson on 24 May, 1814:

The diary of Abdul Masih has been highly gratifying to my mind. [...] I am astonished at the meekness of wisdom exempli-

fied in that dear man, whom God has evidently raised up for great and gracious purposes. I am quite amazed at what that single individual is doing. [...] this is the only visible effect of Mr. Martyn's ministry to the natives. So neither must we estimate at too low a rate the success of our beloved Martyn; for this one convert may have a progeny, which in a few years may be numerous as the sands upon the sea-shore.

Abdul Masih became the first Church Missionary Society employee working as Catechist for eight years. In December 1825, Bishop Heber the Bishop of Calcutta ordained him. Heber wrote in his Journal that some of the service was translated into Hindustani (Urdu) for Abdul Masih's benefit:

Abdul Masih read the Gospel in that language, and greatly impressed us all, both in that and his answers, with his deep apparent emotion, his fine voice and elegant pronunciation, as well as his majestic countenance and long white beard. He has since returned to his flock at Agra, where he has a little Christian parish of twenty or thirty families, besides many hundred occasional hearers in the neighbouring cities and villages.

He was a consistent evangelist. In his diary he often records how he told fellow travelers how he had found Christ as Lord and Saviour:

In the afternoon we had worship and afterwards fell in with a Moghul traveler who took a Persian New Testament and a copy of the psalms in great thankfulness.

Abdul Masih died in 1827. The Resident who had always treated him with the utmost kindness and liberality read the burial service at his grave, and ordered a monument to be erected in his memory, with an inscription in English and Persian. Among other bequests, Abdul Masih left his books to the Bible Society.

Thomas Valpy French a young Englishman born on New Year's Day 1825 at the Abbey, Burton-on-Trent – less than two years after the death of Abdul Masih – was destined to be linked in the tradition of Martyn and Abdul. Throughout his life he referred to Henry Martyn who was one of his heroes. Preaching at Cheltenham in 1869 and mentioning the proposed Divinity School at Lahore, he said:

The late Dr. Pfander, though not equal to the beloved Henry Martyn in the acuteness and subtlety, was yet a master of practical, straightforward Christian controversy. [...] It was no small privilege I had in being the disciple of Pfander in my youth, a worthy successor of the heroic Martyn.

He was very conscious of the line into which he had stepped:

I [...] have to preach this evening at the old church (In Calcutta), the church of Martyn and Corrie.

He made a missionary tour in Iran following Martyn's route – of this his first biographer wrote:

A call to follow in the steps of Henry Martyn had irresistible attractions; and, as the task had not been a self-chosen one, in spite of his distrust of his unworthiness, he felt he could obey the summons without fear.

Thomas Valpy French's application to the Church Missionary Society (CMS) was accepted on 16 April 1850 for service in India. In a farewell sermon at Burton-on-Trent in the same month he gave the reasons that had attracted him especially to Agra. In Agra Abdul Masih, Martyn's only known convert, had worked successfully; but on his death the work had fallen into decay through lack of reinforcements. This gap and decline challenged French. Martyn's work had been carried on by Abdul Masih; lest Abdul Masih's work should fail, French threw his energies for forty years into the same great field. He became in 1877 the first bishop of the new

diocese of Lahore. In 1887 he resigned because of ill health and having found a suitable successor, broken in health at the age of 63 he returned to England. A couple of years later when CMS called for missionaries for Muscat and Oman, no one responded but French volunteered to go. He was the first missionary to Muscat. After three months he died and was buried on the seashore. On his tomb is written: 'Thomas Valpy French, first bishop of Lahore and first missionary to Muscat' and in English and Arabic are the words of Christ recorded in the gospel of John chapter 12:24: 'Verily, verily I say unto you, unless a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit.'

One might say 'what a waste!' or 'where is the fruit?' but God was working out His purposes. When Bishop French as a missionary volunteer for Muscat was steaming down the Red sea, he found that Samuel Zwemer was a fellow passenger. Zwemer was surveying the Red Sea side of the Arabian Peninsula while his companion James Cantine was examining locations in the Persian Gulf. French also met Cantine as the latter recalls:

Bishop French left Aden a month or two before I sailed, and I well remember his kindly farewell: I understand that you also are intending to visit Muscat and the Persian Gulf coast of Arabia. Do not let the fact that I am preceding you change your plans. I am an old man, and it may be God's will that I can only view the Promised Land, while it is for you to enter in.

After French's death Cantine visited Muscat. He writes:

On the way to Muscat I heard how he had emphatically entreated the ship's officers, who offered him their cabins, to leave him alone in the company of the Arab Deck Passengers. [...] On landing I, of course, reported to the American vice-consul. [...] He was kindness itself, finding me the room so lately occupied by Bishop French, and inviting me to mess with him. I was,

naturally, much interested in the story of the last days of the good old Bishop. He had utterly refused to accept the hospitality of the English political agency, preferring to live among the Arabs, with whom he soon gained a reputation for great sanctity. Unfortunately his Arabic was too classical a brand to be understood by the common people, although they listened most courteously as he gathered groups about him in the city gate. [...] It was mid summer, and exposure, perhaps unavoidable, in a trip by small sailing boat up the coast, resulted in sunstroke, from which he did not recover. He was buried in a small, sandy cove, only a few yards distant from the wide sea, but not wider than his love for his fellowmen; and now lies within sound of its ceaseless waves, a fitting accompaniment for his ceaseless prayers for the children of Ishmael.

Neither Cantine nor Zwemer forgot French and Muscat. Samuel Zwemer started work in Bahrain in 1892 but sent his brother Peter to Muscat where he started a school. In 1894 the Arabian Mission of the Zwemers and Cantine became the responsibility of the Mission Board of the Reformed Church of America. Only they were allowed to work there until 1970 when other missionaries and the new missionaries of the oil age – the Christian peoples of the dispersion joined them.

French set the door slightly ajar in Muscat, the Arabian Mission started by the Zwemers held it ajar for nearly eighty years and now the door is wider open – perhaps this is part of the ‘fruit’ of which the Apostle Paul speaks and there is much more to come. Henry Martyn died at 31 in a remote Turkish town called Tokat; Peter Zwemer died in Muscat at 29, French at a riper age died after his three months pioneer ministry in Muscat. On 21 May 1891 when the Archbishop of Canterbury heard of French’s death he wrote to his widow:

Strange that it should come just when he had buckled his armour on again, like a young man, when by right he should never have been reposing. And how it will go to all hearts that his journey

was crowned at Muscat, close to the last slumber-place of Henry Martyn. What a sign!

Muscat is not geographically near Tokat – they are almost at opposite ends of a wide expanse of Muslim territory but there is a moral and dramatic closeness which others saw – a sign indeed that the buried seed would yield a rich harvest in God's time. It is now harvest time in Oman. Pakistani and Indian Christians are involved in the reaping. We see the thin line through the generations – Martyn, Abdul Masih, Thomas Valpy French, The Zwemers, the unnamed lonely pioneers of the reformed Church, the numerous disciples who now come as tent-makers or oil diggers – a host of Christians from many lands whom God will use for strengthening an infinitesimal church and the establishing of other churches in the south of that great and controversial peninsula of Arabia – controversial as to who are the true children of Abraham. God always has His witnesses to him who said 'Before Abraham was, I am.' John 8:8.

## **Chapter 2: Childhood, youth and early manhood**

Peter French and his wife Penelope were delighted at the birth of their first child on New Year's Day 1825. They called him Thomas Valpy – Valpy after Penelope's family. Thomas' ancestors on both sides could be traced back to the Norman conquerors of England. Peter French was an Anglican clergyman who worked in one place, Burton-on-Trent, for forty-seven years. Today Burton-on-Trent is an industrial town in the Midlands of England where a number of Pakistanis have in recent years found work. Thomas was born before the industrial revolution had really started and so grew up in what was then only a small country town. The pastor's house was the Abbey originally founded over nine centuries ago. The old Abbey had disappeared. Thomas was born and grew up in this rather large old-fashioned house, which had a lovely view of the River Trent, the church and the graveyard.

Peter and Penelope French were a devout couple who brought up their five sons and two daughters in a happy and godly home. They discipline their children but allowed them to develop. The whole family took part in the activities of the church and shared in family prayers. Relationships were good as the regular and meaningful correspondence between family members for many years shows. Beyond the Abbey wall was the market where the young Thomas used to spend his pocket money. Thomas used to like walking with his father to the surrounding villages where Mr. French sometimes inspected church schools. Little Thomas used to imitate his father and write sermons, reading them to his nurse. From an early age Thomas was interested in visiting missionaries and their accounts of work abroad and he learnt to pray for them. When Thomas was fourteen the family moved to a house opposite the church of the Holy Trinity. This house became the Vicarage. However, Thomas was only at home in the school holidays as a year before he had been sent to his uncle's famous school at Read-

ing. When his uncle left Reading the next year, his parents sent him to one of England's most famous schools, Rugby, where Dr. Arnold, the distinguished educationalist, was headmaster. One of his teachers reported that Thomas was not very good at games though he was a good student. He was often teased but he took it good-naturedly even when he was teased for his unwillingness to do wrong. He helped his fellow-students with their Latin homework but found mathematics difficult. After Arnold's death, Dr. Tait became the headmaster of Rugby. It was he who, as Archbishop of Canterbury, was to consecrate French after his appointment as first Bishop of Lahore.

Thomas French won a scholarship to the University College, Oxford in 1843. He was a hard worker. He made time to teach in a local Sunday School. His steady application to his studies was rewarded by his gaining a first class degree. Two years later he won the Chancellor's prize for a Latin essay. That year he obtained a Fellowship in his own college. He was ordained deacon and became curate to his father at Burton, becoming a priest in 1849. During the university term he used to help at St. Ebbe's church in Oxford while on the holidays he worked with his father.

We did not find any account of how Thomas came to know Christ personally. His father was the leading evangelical Anglican in the area. Both his parents shared their deep faith with their children and taught them of the Saviour they loved and served. However, being born in a Christian home did not of itself make Thomas a disciple. What is clear from his subsequent life is that he did experience that new birth without which no one can enter the kingdom of God, and that his relationship to God was worked out in a life of discipleship. One decisive spiritual influence and challenge was the death of his eighteen-year-old younger brother Peter during Peter's first year of college. Peter died of fever. One of Thomas' fellow students later wrote that nobody would have thought it possible that the quiet scholar, undoubtedly clever and able, would one

day develop into the heroic and apostolic character that French became. His aloofness and seriousness were perhaps an unconscious forecast of that devotion which carried him through so many risks and ordeals to a death that resembled that of his hero Henry Martyn. In a way he was too serious, finding it hard to relax. Punjabis always leave some water at the bottom of their small irrigation wells to help the fresh inflow but the observant Punjabis noted that French always worked flat out and left no water in his well.

What were the reasons that led Thomas French to offer his services to the CMS in 1850? God's call was made known to him in various ways. There was the strong evangelical teaching of his parents and the visits and reporting from those who worked as Christ's witnesses in various parts of the world. During his first leave in England, H.W. Fox, the pioneer of the Telegu Mission in South India, addressed a breakfast meeting of men in Trinity College, Oxford. Fox, on his return to India, wrote and urged French to come to India. French was considering the claims of the church at home and the needs of the church abroad. In 1847 Fox wrote to French:

Christ has promised that the gospel shall be preached for a witness in India, China, Persia, and all over the world before He comes, and oh! How He is straitened until this His great work is accomplished, His work which with His last words He committed to His church for ever. [...] Now what I ask of you is carefully to search and examine, that it may not be through unfaithfulness that you decline to enter on an apostle's work. The excuse of the wants of English (people) as an objection to becoming a missionary seems to me one of the most unfaithful excuses a Christian can give; it implies a direct unbelief in God's promise of blessing the liberal. If God's promise be true, the more men will He raise up to bless the Church with, which out of its poverty gives its best to His cause. [...] Consider for some months the missionary question I would further ask you during that time to devote a portion to reading on missions... surely it is no less important for a clergyman to be familiar with modern and present than with ancient ecclesiastical history. If you do not

come out yourself, the let me ask you not to cease stirring up others till you have been the means of sending out at least one.

French's growing influence in Oxford University was one of the reasons that held him back. Fox's death in October 1848 made him rethink the matter. An address by Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, in which he challenged Oxford men to go to abroad, clinched the matter for French. He talked and prayed about the whole question with his friend Arthur Lea and they both dedicated themselves for service abroad. When French returned to Oxford for the next term he heard that Arthur had been seriously injured in a railway accident. He went to him and watched over him until he died. His friend's death deepened his commitment and their mutual vows seemed more binding than ever. One of his ambitions was a College tutorship, and in a few days after he had sent in his final application to CMS he was offered one. Having put his hand to the plough he did not look back and he was accepted by the CMS on 16th April 1850. His parents accepted the decision but at some cost as a letter from his father shows:

Nature shrinks from the idea of parting with a beloved child for a distant land. [...] but he who engages to take up the cross and follow his Master, however feebly, must be content to forgo his own will, and say, 'Thy will, O Lord, be done.'

Thomas French, along with Edward Stuart, was appointed by CMS to found an educational institution in Agra. In his first published sermon preached at Burton-on-Trent in April 1850 French gives his reasons for his keenness to go to Agra. In Agra, Abdul Masih, Henry Martyn's only known convert, had worked for many years but after his death the work declined through lack of personnel. French wanted to help fill the breach. The annexation of the Punjab in 1849 increased the importance of Agra where for many years, orphan schools, a city congregation and bazaar and rural preaching were features of Christian activities. However the educated upper classes were not being reached. French and Stuart

were to found St. John's College, Agra. Such was the charge that Henry Venn, the CMS Secretary, gave at the special CMS meeting held in London on 20<sup>th</sup> August. Dr. Krapf, the well-known explorer and missionary pioneer in Equatorial Africa, was present at the meeting. French and Stuart set out for India in the sailing ship *Queen* in September 1850 and reached Calcutta on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1851. French missed his family and wrote:

Oh, if I could but be at home for a few days at Christmas in our happy fireside circle with my dearest mother in the low armchair in the dining room, and the rest of us in our order. [...] We might now have admitted another into our private circle.

The other person he refers to was his fiancée, Miss Janson. He had first met Miss M.A. Janson, daughter of Alfred Janson at Oxford in the house of Dr. Symons, Warden of Wadham College. In nineteenth century England marriages were not arranged by the parents but they rarely took place without their consent. It was not according to the custom for the suitor to press his suit without the consent of the girl's parents. French followed custom and trusted God to work out for him that, which was dear to his heart. His intention to leave England for India later in the year made the test for him even greater. He writes to his older friend and counsellor, Mr. Golightly, on January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1850:

All the few particulars I have heard have been from Mrs. Symons, with whom I have been in correspondence on a matter of business which she took in hand at my request. It related to a step which I took after much thoughtful consideration: a request which I made to Miss Janson's parents that I might be allowed to become better acquainted with her, with the view of her becoming (in case of consent) my partner in India; not immediately, but some three or four years hence, if I had reason to believe that my health would stand the climate. [...] A very favourable opinion which you once expressed of the young lady to myself, was almost the first thing which led me to think of seriously pursuing the affair. A second refusal of the parents on prudential grounds

has shown me that it is God's will that I should, as far as possible, divest my mind of such thoughts, and it is my present determination not to make any further move towards attaining the object of my wishes; though I perhaps shall not be wrong in leaving myself open for any relentions on the other side.

On 9<sup>th</sup> July Thomas French wrote to Mr. Golightly about the same subject:

You will have heard that September 1<sup>st</sup> is fixed upon as our probable time for leaving England. [...] I should tell you that Mr. Janson entirely refuses the correspondence I wished for; so that all hope of intercourse in that direction is for the present cut off. I cannot but hope that some years hence it may be renewed, but I am able at least to see my path of duty as things now stand. The whole matter has caused me a good deal of pain during the last year: but the submission I have been forced to try to exercise has been, I hope, one profitable result at least.

Less than two months on, on 29<sup>th</sup> August 1850 Thomas was able to write to Mr. Golightly with more cheerful news:

One point of interest to me you will have heard from Mrs. Symons: my engagement to Miss Janson, her father having withdrawn his objections about a fortnight since. I have been staying with her family for the last week: and see in herself, as also in another sister, the most striking instance of Christian devotedness and self-denial. I send you her first note, which I think, will please you. Will you please return it directed to the Post Office, Ryde, where we expect to spend next week, my Father and Mother, with the Jansons, being the party. Monday week I expect to sail. The change of purpose in Mr. Janson still seems astonishing to me. They receive me most kindly. My cabin is fitted up, and outfit is nearly completed. I hope I may be enabled to do some little good during the voyage. I feel much afraid of myself: I know I may count on your prayers. I can never forget all your kindness and affection.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **The Voyage, First Impressions, St. John's College, Agra**

Mail took a long time when French sailed to India. He wrote to Mr. Venn, the CMS secretary on December second 1850 from aboard the ship Queen. Mr. Venn received the letter on February 21st some weeks after French's four-month journey to Calcutta. He wrote:

[...] a general account at least of what has befallen us on our voyage. [...] The effort of a daily Exposition before so large a party of educated people has been felt sometimes as a great tax upon the nerves and spirits; even though Stuart has borne his part sometimes for a few days together. But I have had abundant proof that God's strength is indeed perfected in weakness.

French and Stuart held daily services as well as special Sunday services, a special weekly class for sailors. French describes how he counselled and studied two or three times a week with a French enquirer. In his letter to Mr. Venn, French went on to note:

We get little encouragement from any on board as regards our missionary prospects; and we find now the advantage, of not having lightly or hastily determined to give ourselves to the work of missions. We feel sufficiently assured of our own call to the work, as well as of its being a divinely appointed instrument of gathering in a people to Christ, to be enabled to act independently of what is said and felt by those around us, to depreciate its value. It is our great comfort to fall back upon the promises of God's Word, and find our conviction of His faithfulness deepened.

French and Stuart landed at Calcutta on January 3rd, 1851. French did not again visit Calcutta until the end of 1852 when he came to meet his bride, Miss Janson. A few days later they were married in the Cathedral. French and Stuart had been appointed to found a Christian educational institute in Agra to win the confidence of the

upper classes. Agra was then the seat of government for the North-West provinces of India. French was to be Principal and Stuart his assistant. They arrived at Agra on February 13th, having gained many impressions of their adopted country on the way and also taking advantage of the journey to see various Christian schools. They reached Agra by the light of the moon and were very impressed by the splendid fort and the indescribable Taj Mahal, both Moghul creations of the sixteenth century.

French established his priorities: 'I hope to set vigorously to work, first of all to master the language: then to labour amongst the youth.'

Later French became known as the seven-tongued clergyman of Lahore. His diligence in gaining at least a working knowledge of so many languages is revealed in his advice to another:

You must commence with Urdu or Hindustani, so as to be able to talk to your servants, to help in the services of the church and in the schools. You had better give some six or eight hours a day to that, and also spend two or three hours at Punjabi, to be able to talk with villagers. You should also try and give two or three hours to the study of Persian, which you will find invaluable in the schools, and all your spare time to the study of Arabic, so as to be able to read the Quran.

How French managed to put into practice his own advice as well as establish St. John' College is amazing. Stuart was a great help and undertook much of the secretarial, and treasury work but he was compelled to leave in 1853 owing to his wife's poor health. Somehow they overcame the difficulties of erecting a new building, surviving the rivalry of the Government College, coping with discipline problems and carrying on effective teaching in English for the higher classes and in the vernacular for lower classes. By 1857 St. John's College, Agra was a flourishing concern with an enrolment of three hundred and thirty. Christians and parents gave warm

support and financial help. Sir Henry Lawrence took a great interest in the college. Somehow French persevered with his language study and in August 1851 'Mr. French preached his first Hindustani sermon last Sunday to the native Christians in the city, and was thoroughly understood.'

Winning pupils to Christ from the Muslim and Hindu upper classes was part of the purpose of those who sent French and Stuart to start St. John's College. From this point of view known results were not very encouraging. It was interesting earlier this year to meet in the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan, a Christian Pathan, the daughter of a Muslim Pathan who came to Christ while studying at St. John's College in 1853. French wrote to Mr. Venn in September 1853:

Whenever you have a thorough school man who would prefer such charge as this, will you bear in mind that I should be ready to enter on any more directly pastoral sphere? But I know you will not readily be able to move me. Therefore I will continue at my post, please God, as happily and contentedly as I may be able in His strength." While he worked at Agra French knew of only one convert, a young Brahmin, but later Madhu Ram came to Christ and entered the ministry of the church, while another old pupil who became a school teacher wrote of his baptism in 1873. "I hope you will excuse me troubling you with these few lines. I am your old student of the Holy Bible, was about to be baptized in 1855, but prevented to do so by my mother who is still alive.

In his correspondence with CMS, French outlined his views on the respective contribution of educational work and evangelism. He was at heart an evangelist and pastoral worker. In a letter to Mr. Venn dated May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1852 he suggested that missionaries who had worked for four or five years in educational institutions like John's College and:

[...] have mastered some of the native languages, and learnt some of the native character, might with great advantage be sent

forth to pave the way for fresh missions, to report the most promising, more important openings, more especially to discover in what cities the Lord had a people to be gathered out; but such a plan as this would require a preconcerted and well-digested scheme.

At present every missionary takes his own excursion without consulting anyone, or if he does, it is only a matter of private advice. He goes to a large city and maybe stays for two or three days at the outside; leaves a few very vague and indistinct impressions--for how can they be more, though communicated by men of the most powerful minds? -- awakens prejudice without having time in any way to impart enough to conciliate; meets with little opposition, it is true, because the pundits see it to be the wisest plan not to interrupt, as they know they shall have a year or two to undo all that has been done; has none to leave behind to instruct further those who may desire instruction; and returns with no other consolation than that he has done his best under the circumstances, and has met with some attentive audiences. This is what we appear to be all of us doing, and I cannot see how we can look for any adequate or really encouraging results.

Meanwhile we continue stationary in a city where the gospel has been heard for years, and, with some few exceptions, is only preached to be held up to ridicule and reproach. Surely we have no precedent in the history of missions for thus continuing to force Christianity on those who will not receive it.... If, instead of this, such a plan could be adopted as the following (adopted or course with many modifications and alterations), might there not be more hope.

Suppose then, for two or three years some four or five of the men in the future to be sent to Northern India were to know their destination, and to be preparing themselves especially for it; supposing also that on the spot we were endeavouring for the same space of time to prepare labourers, whether native or other, then what should hinder us to set forth in small bands to make at once for the large towns in Northern India, of which there are many

where the gospel has seldom, if ever, been preached, to stay there two, or four months... After having sufficiently tested the state of feeling in any particular place, and the possibilities of a mission being advantageously planted, we leave one or more of the new laborers, putting, if possible, the more intelligent of the new converts into responsible situations. For this is a point in which it appears to me we have not taken full advantage of the elements of good which the native character does possess. They seem capable of responsibility.

I have little doubt that the missionaries might be driven out of some cities, but this, awakening attention, and giving prominence to our worth, not suffering Christianity to speak with its present weak and subdued voice as if it were afraid to be heard. ..Were such a plan to be contemplated for two or three years, and made known in the universities or elsewhere, might not some be stirred up by the thought of this more arduous and hazardous missionary enterprise, who have imagined that the work of missions alone in India has assumed a more peaceful and parochial character --just village preaching, intercharged with schools and bazaar addressees, under the shelter of a body of European residents?

Meanwhile French pressed on, sharing the good news with the poor, the despised, the Hindu, the Muslim and with any who would listen. He also aided Mr. Pfander in a public religious debate in Agra. Mr. Pfander describes it thus:

Some of the learned Muslims here at Agra have been for the last two or three years hard at work in studying the Bible, reading the controversial books we have published, and searching out our commentaries and critical writers, not indeed with any view of learning the truth, but only to obtain materials for repudiating it. The first fruit of these united labours is the publication of two books written by a young learned maulvi, Rahman Ullah, of Delhi. [...] In January last, 1854, during my last absence, the maulvi came to Agra to consult with his friends there about the publication of those books. During that time he called several

tines on Mr. French for conversation and discussion... Soon after my return, he sent one of his friends to me to propose public discussion. I could not do otherwise than accept the proposal, although I am well aware that generally very little good is done.

The points to be discussed were the Bible, the divinity of Christ, the Holy Trinity, Muhammad's mission and the Quran.

The discussion was carried on for two successive days, lasting two hours each day, and was attended by most of the learned Muslims of the city, as also by a number of our friends and others.

The Muslims claimed the victory but it is interesting to note that of their minor assistants two became outstanding Christians- Safdar Ali, a high-up Government official, and Imam-ud-Din who became a Christian writer and recipient of the degree of Doctor of Divinity from Dr. Benson, Archbishop of Canterbury.

One of French's uncles queried whether his preoccupation with personal evangelism did not hinder his language study. He replied:

The fact is I always spend from three to four hours in the direct study of the languages daily, besides what I gain in teaching others and conversation in the bazaars. It is essential is a thorough knowledge of the languages that they should be learned in this practical -way, and even if it were not so, surely if any work is a missionary work it is that of preaching. One's mind often revolts from the public manner in which it must be carried forward, but I am more and more persuaded that schools must follow rather than lead.

Believing that preaching was the most important work of a missionary he used his holidays for evangelistic tours. He visited the Rajput States on a three weeks' tour. In subsequent years he went eastward towards the River Ganges and also to Gwalior, Ajmir,

Taipur and Tank. Mr. Leighton, who often accompanied French on these short tours, described the work as follows:

We shared the same tent, and read and prayed together every day; it was amazing to see the amount of labour he would go through, and I particularly learned the great pains he bestowed upon preparation for bazaar preaching even in the villages. [...] The patience and labour with which he delivered his message and dealt with the people were a lesson ever to be remembered. It was not a mere address, however earnest and careful, to a crowd standing by, but after the address he would sit on a charpoi in the village square for an hour and a half, talking with a few men, and impressing on them Gospel truths, and urging them to accept Christ Jesus.

What of the response? In a letter to Mr. Venn in 1855 French wrote:

Except in one or two instances, I fear I have only met with way-side hearers though only God knows, and I have borne in mind Justin Martyr's thankful and scriptural expression, 'one must sow in hope of good ground being somewhere.' The ground has been as yet almost unbroken. Occasionally one and another has been brought within the reach of the gospel at distant melas but the lack of interest displayed by the majority is appalling, and I have been filled at times with something not far short of consternation at the gulf which has seemed to separate my hearers and myself... Being alone, too, I have been more strongly possessed with this feeling than had I been accompanied by a brother missionary. I am more and more persuaded of the importance of joint labours in such a sphere.

However, there were encouragements. Both Leighton and French record the story of a poor tailor from Jilaisar. One day when French was traveling alone through a wood this tailor came running up to him saying, 'Oh, sir, I know who you are: you are the Lord's servant.' French enquired, 'Whom do you mean by the

Lord?’ ‘I mean the Lord Jesus Christ,’ the man replied. French then asked him how he came to know the Lord Jesus Christ. The man said that some time ago an Indian preacher had visited his village and told them about the Lord Jesus Christ. At the close of the message he gave a tract to a man who immediately tore it up and threw it on the ground. The tailor picked it up, pieced it together, and learned to read it. He talked to his friends about it and a number of them became his disciples. The tailor requested French to visit his home. He found the tailor’s courtyard filled with enquirers. Every time he traveled that way French visited the tailor who also came several time to Agra for teaching. Finally French baptized him.

French had a continual stream of individual enquirers coming to him for various motives. He received them all with patience and courtesy. During his last year at Agra French records:

I have baptized seven adult converts myself. [...] Two of the converts are munshis of considerable ability and attainments, and are entrusted with the leading of Persian and Arabic classes in the college, which is a source of great satisfaction and thankfulness to me. It may please God eventually to make use of both of them as evangelists or pastors in His church. They have paid very great attention to the vernacular theological and scriptural lectures which I have held twice a week through a the greater part of the year, and are now sharing in the daily instruction which Paul (a convert from Meerut) is receiving from me preparatory to ordination. The regularity or their attendance at all Christian ordinances and intelligent appreciation of the Word preached is really edifying. A third munshi of less powers and acquirements is also about to take charge of one of the lower classes in the college. The whole of them have forsaken all for Christ, and have suffered very bitter reproaches for His Name’s sake. I saw the letter receive by one of them from a mufti, to whose daughter he had been betrothed in early life. In his reply to the request that his conversion might not preclude the intended marriage, the mufti writes: ‘Instead of Fatima, I send a curse

upon your understanding. In my opinion all your family and kinsmen are, because of you, as good as dead.’

Somehow French still found time for keeping his friends and supporters in England informed through his interesting letters, and he started to study Sanskrit philosophy. He kept up his study of the writings of the early Church Fathers:

I usually have in reading during each journey some fresh work... to reinvigorate and strengthen the mind. [...] I am enjoying Irenaeus at present. The writings of the early Fathers do always appear to me like waters drawn fresh from the very fountain, and to contain far more simple and natural expositions of the very living Word of Scripture than any modern divine, almost without exception.

French was a useful member of the Agra Tract Committee and published his first tract in 1856 in Urdu entitled *The Mirror of the Character of Jesus Christ*. It was an attempt to illustrate the character, offices, and disposition of our Lord, from the prophecies of Him, the titles ascribed to Him, the nature of his teaching and of His works; from the main types of Jewish history, the character of converts to His faith, and generally the effect of His Divine truth in the world.

So we see French in his early years in India immersed in some of its languages and philosophies, having established a famous college and having the joy of seeing some of his converts take up this work, busy in preaching, teaching and writing that by all means some might come to the Christ he loved so much.

## Chapter 4

### Agra in the 1850s

French lived in Agra from 1851 until 1858 – a critical period in the history of India. He was remarkably free from the condescension that marked so many Englishmen in their attitudes to Indians. In his interesting book *Twilight of the Mughuls* Percival Spear writes of the period before the eruption of 1857:

All over India the British attitude to things Indian was changing. The old interest in and respect for Indian civilization was changing to criticism and distaste. New intellectual and moral gods had arisen in Europe who frowned upon the gorgeous East. Once men had looked to India as the home of the natural man, of a culture closer to nature than that of Europe...things Indian were laid under a cross-fire of reproach. (pp. 50-51)

Going further back one can see that:

British relations with the Mughuls were over-shadowed by the problem of legitimizing British rule, in Indian eyes. [...] But when in 1813 Parliament declared the Company's Indian dominions to be British territory, and encouraged the Nawab-Wazir of Oudh to declare his independence of Delhi with the title of King in 1818, the breach was clear. (p. 14)

With the retirement of both Afghans and Marathas after Panipat, the way was opened for a revival of local power in Delhi. It is convenient to call this revived but reduced Mughul power the Kingdom of Delhi, to distinguish from the pre-Panipat imperial Government which had continued to exercise some sort of authority over parts of North India until the last Afghan invasion.

The Viceroy Lord Minto well summed up the relation of the British government to this Mughul Kingdom of Delhi as 'the complimentary recognition of a nominal sovereignty.' The last Mughul

King, Bahadar Shah, was above all a poet and a patron of the arts. He had as his pupil and friend Zauq, the rival of Ghalib. The Delhi School of Painting produced Raji Jivan Ram and Husain Nazir.

At one time French was corresponding frequently with a niece of the King of Delhi, who was interested in the Christian faith. It was in this period of the twilight of the Mughuls that French came to Agra. He was to witness the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 and the end of the Mughuls. He preached the sermon in St. Paul's Church, Agra, on the occasion of the death of James Thomason, Lieutenant Governor of the Northwest Province of India. The date was October 2, 1853. It is possible that Thomason along with two others had been poisoned for his part in debarring Jiwan Bakht from succession to Bahadar Shah but this has never been proved. Thomason was a godly ruler. When he was dying he requested that Galatians chapter six to him, and it was from verses 15-17 of that chapter that French selected the funeral text. French paid just tribute to Thomason's Christian integrity and concern for those he ruled, for his staff and for the poor and oppressed. He was the best type of ruler. As French said in his sermon:

From the conscientious discharge of his duties to the State he never separated the sense of accountability to one higher than the State: not acting as though there were two masters to be served, two rules of action, two principles of guidance, to be followed, two irreconcilable duties to be performed. [...] He was accustomed, in every important and difficult matter, to have recourse to God in prayer for direction and guidance. With a mind thus composed, and as before God, arriving at a decision, he had the strongest ground of assurance, which men can have, that his work would be prospered and rewarded: that confidence which produces steadiness of action, firmness of purpose, and can patiently abide difficulties and delays.

He was concerned lest the incessant calls of duty should hinder his spiritual growth. He was very interested in the enlarging of Christ's

Kingdom and encouraged his fellow Christians and took a practical interest in work among orphans.

There were others like Thomason. However the domination of one race by another always has a strain of evil in it and, it was into this delicate situation that French as an Englishman came to Agra to exercise his Christian ministry. He belonged to the ruling race, and had responsibilities as a clergyman to them, but he had the heart of an evangelist and teacher longing to plant and establish groups of Indian believers. French was an exception in his generation and did not share that 'indifference to Indian culture which was the hallmark of the Victorian in India.' (*Bound to Exile –The Victorians in India*, Michael Edwardes, p. 85)

Charles Darwin had written not only on the evolution of man but on the evolution of cultures and had taught the superiority of some cultures to others. Victorian Christianity had been influenced by Darwin. Many English Christians regarded European culture as superior to all others and something to be shared as part of the Christian religion. French was naturally a communicator and, although he was trained in the Victorian Christian tradition he adapted to the requirements of a new situation. This is proved by his deep study of the religions and philosophies of India. Later in his ministry he prepared a textbook on ethics based on Theism for use in the upper departments of the schools and Government colleges at the request of the Senate of the University of the Punjab. He came under severe criticism for this in the pages of *The Civil and Military Gazette* (August 9, 1882) by an anonymous correspondent who wanted a clear statement of Christian morality unrelated to the Muslim, Hindu and Sikh systems well-known in the country. In his reply on August 16, 1882 in the columns of the same newspaper French wrote:

I made it a condition of preparing for the Senate of the University this work of ethics that I should be entrusted with the entire responsibility of the book which should be based upon the high-

est recognized principles of moral philosophy, as distinct from all mere selfish and utilitarian systems, such principles as only in the light of Divine Revelation, and Christian truth, could, have been elicited, promulgated, and understood: and which...would bring the students up by the pathway of purest Theism to the very door of the Gospel of Christ; having brought them to which door I signified my intention [...] of preparing a third volume for use in Christian schools...which should follow up the subject beyond the ethics of pure Deism to the distinction and otherwise incommunicable, morals of the Gospel...I am not ashamed to say that I stated plainly at the same meeting of the Senate, that if I found a passage in the Vedas or Grunths or Mohammedan work of morals, which in its precepts, though not perhaps in its starting-point, was in harmony with the Ten Commandments, portions of the Proverbs, and much of the Sermon on the Mount...and, in general, in accord with the Unity of the general plan, spirit and groundwork of the book; I should feel at liberty to give it a place not only because it was fair and truthful to do so, but because it was a witness to Christian truth in non-Christian records; and the introduction of such passages was, in the judgment of sober and candid thinkers, to the glory of the Gospel rather than to its dishonour. [...] I am not sure, however, that the position defended and adopted by your correspondent, if followed out to its logical extremes, would not lead to the conclusion that not only heathenism as a system of religion was false and corrupt: but that everything contained in its writings was bad and objectionable too: against which view one's whole instinct and nature must revolt; and which, if pursued to its ultimate logical issues, must condemn St. Paul's reasoning in Romans Chapter 2 verse 14; and other like texts; and find grievous fault with him for quoting words out of favorite Greek authors in attestation and verification of the truths he advanced.

So French answered the attack of an extreme fundamentalist. French with his deep appreciation and knowledge of things Indian represents the best of English missions just as Thomason was a model for Christian administration. However, actions speak louder than words and we now see how French in his behaviour in Agra

especially during the siege in 1857 displayed his concern for all men regardless of colour.

On May 10, 1857 the Indian garrison at Meerut, a hundred and thirty miles from Agra mutinied. In an area of a hundred thousand square miles, ninety thousand trained Indian troops threw off their allegiance. There were only forty thousand British troops in India to cope with the crisis. The hot weather aggravated the situation. Finally Hindus and Muslims joined in a brief and rare alliance. The Hindus were told that their cartridges were greased with beef-fat while the Muslims were told that theirs were greased with pork-fat and so the religious sensibilities of both groups were offended. Bahadur Shah was proclaimed Emperor of Delhi but the population as a whole remained neutral, except for some lawless elements. Many villagers, servants and some soldiers remained loyal to the British. As Percival Spear writes in *Twilight of the Mughuls*, p. 194:

In the spring of 1857 Delhi was a prosperous and growing city. The city which was reported to have had two million inhabitants in the days of Aurangzeb's residence and 500,000 in 1740 after Nadir Shah's invasion, had shrunk to something over 100,000 in the early years of the century. [...] A census return made in the years 1845-7 gave a total for the city, suburbs and palace of about 166,000. [...] Delhi was no longer economically a frontier town looking to an alien Punjab and surrounded by an exhausted countryside. It was the metropolis of a flourishing agricultural territory and the commercial centre for a growing trade with the reviving Punjab, and a stable if still feudal Rajputana.

Mughul courtier, Hindu and Muslim merchant and British official lived side by side in a peaceful plural economy. The Court was the cultural centre, the Hindus dominated the commercial life and the British conducted the administration.

The later British administrators had made several mistakes. They had over-assessed land revenues and taxes. Over assessment meant loss of profits, for the landowner (zamindars), expensive loans to meet arrears and administrative pressure resulting in village oppression:

To the nineteenth century administrators to rule well was to improve, to improve was to interfere. Their mistake was as simple as it was great. They thought that the Indian Village had survived down the ages in spite of constant neglect by governments. The reverse was the truth: the Indian village had survived because of their constant neglect. (Percival Spear, p. 114)

The efficient new generation of Englishmen had, in general, a utilitarian approach and, they lacked appreciation of Indian culture and heritage. Militarily, the British made the mistake of stationing no British troops in Delhi but stationed them forty miles away at Meerut, a town of no strategic importance. The mutiny partially succeeded for some months but it appeared to be of little advantage to anybody. Spear is one of the few writers who has described matters from the point of view of the ordinary Indian citizen:

The indiscipline of the troops, the division of authority and the chaotic arrangements for collecting money made the months of the siege for the citizens of Delhi s miserable period of insecurity and extortion. (Spear, p. 209)

Another problem was that of supplies:

The control of the British west of the Jumna had, practically ceased; at Agra and Meerut they were immobile, and when their forces appeared on the Ridge there were no troops available to control more than the line of communications to Ambala and the Punjab. The bridge-of-boats over the Jumna remained open for supplies from the east.

Until the British could relieve Delhi it was unlikely that they would be able to help the loyal, beleaguered people in Agra. Two battles were fought near the fort at Agra and the European population endured a blockade lasting several months. On May 20th the troops at Aligarh only fifty miles from Agra had rebelled. An English eyewitness, Mr. Raikes, describes the scene in Agra:

I must record the impression made upon me by the calmness and coolness of Mr. French. Every Englishman was handling his sword or revolver. The road covered with carriages, people hastening right and left to the rendezvous at Candaharie Bagh. The city folk running as for their lives, and screaming that the mutineers from Aligarh were crossing the bridge. [...] Outside the college, all alarm, hurry and confusion.

French calmly continued teaching the Bible. Many well paid, and, highly trusted officials joined the rebels:

[But] the Students at the Government and still more at the missionary schools kept steadily to their classes; and, when others doubted and fled, they trusted implicitly to their teachers, and openly espoused the Christian cause.

On May 30th the troops at Muttra, where French had begun his new mission school, rebelled. Muttra was only thirty-five miles from Agra. The next day the two native regiments in Agra were disarmed. Later it was discovered that that very morning the sepoys had planned to overpower the European regiment when it was in church, to capture the guns and then to plunder and burn all Agra. Soon all the land on the right bank of the Jumna had declared against British rule and Agra was completely cut off. French wrote on June 17th:

We have had no occasion to stir from our house by night or day, though many, from perhaps unnecessary precaution, have done so. [...] After school in the morning I am able now to make good progress with my preparations for the work I wish to write, and

can get on with languages also, besides catechist's classes; so that only the preaching department of our work is absolutely closed. Inquirers are, of course, fewer.

On July 2<sup>nd</sup>, the enemy was known to be marching against Agra and the brigadier decided to strike at them in the open. The Christian population crowded to the fort in Agra. The course of the battle was watched anxiously from the walls of the fort. The British had to retreat but the enemy was harassed enough to move off to Delhi. Judge Raikes described their quarters in the fort.

We had three rooms, each about fourteen feet square. No windows, but a wooden door to each, and a verandah on either side. Our party, besides Mrs. Raikes and myself, consisted of two families --the Rev. Valpy French, his wife, and two children; Major Raikes, Mrs. Raikes, and one child. There were also two nurses and three women-servants. One room served for the gentlemen at night, and for our dining room at day. The other two rooms were given up to the ladies and children.

While the ladies were serving in the canteen, French had gone to the gate of the fort to watch events. The Indian Christians of Agra had, been given protection in the Fort the day before but the Christians from Secundra were not yet provided for. They stood in front of the gates imploring the guards to let them in. One eyewitness, Mr. Leighton, records:

Our native Christians were still outside the fort, certain of massacre if they spent the night there. Mr. French made one more effort: all authority was now in the hands of the military officers.

French obtained verbal authority to bring them in.

I was with him at the fort gate, bringing in the native Christians and taking from them their swords and muskets as they entered, when the commandant of the fort and his aide-de-camp appeared, and, roughly stopped them, demanding Mr. French's

authority. The commandant refused to listen, as there was no written permission. Mr. French said, with the greatest dignity and earnestness, 'I am an English clergyman, and claim to have my word taken. It was in vain, however; the direst confusion prevailed.'

French then declared his unalterable purpose to stay outside with the Indian Christians and face death with them if they were refused entry to the safety of the fort. The aide-de-camp instructed French to get a written order from the brigadier, which he did and so the Indian Christians were admitted to the fort. Then about forty of them immediately volunteered to go with Mr. Leighton to a bungalow half a mile away to collect a large quantity of medical supplies. The blazing bungalows on all sides gave adequate light in the darkness. All returned safely and took their share, day and night, in nursing the wounded in the hospital. Meanwhile the released prisoners and some of the rebel police plundered and burned the whole city of Agra. A small body of British troops restored order and re-established British administration amid the ruins. About twenty-two English, Indian and Eurasian Christians remaining in the city had been killed. The siege of the fort now dragged on for months. The beleaguered group was a great mixture of races and backgrounds that had suffered such. On September 20th the British recaptured Delhi. Urgent appeals from Agra resulted in a relief force of three thousand being sent. After an uncertain surprise battle outside Agra in October, the blockage was nearly ended.

Things had been difficult for French and his family. On October 19th Mrs. French gave birth to their fourth child called Alfred Henry Lawrence. Mrs. French was dangerously ill, near to death, for some days and took a long time to recover her health. On New Year's Day, 1858, his thirty-third birthday, French moved out of the fort to the ruined college buildings. As soon as possible after that he took his wife and family to Calcutta to send them to England while he himself returned for another year's work before joining them. In August he heard that a college friend was accepted as

a missionary for Agra. After Mrs. French's departure French shared in the work of rebuilding, facing problems of financing and shortage of staff. To start with, only a third of the student body returned to St. John's College. He and his colleagues concentrated all their effort on reviving that college.

Soon French was to publish his first volume of sermons entitled *The Lord's Voice unto the City*. Some of the sermons were preached during the siege of Agra. French dealt with current evils like the unfair treatment of servants. He spoke of:

[...] a one-sidedness of view which looked only to the making of the most of another's services; a pressuring upon one's power over another, which amounted, to an abusing of it, whereby men too often come to think of their fellow-men as existing only for them, as created to serve them and to minister to their ease and gratification; as men whose duty it was to sacrifice every other object of life to the one object of pleasing and obeying them... There is nothing more weak and degrading, nothing more unmanly and unchristian, than the petty exercise of tyranny over those that are weak.

This last year in Agra was a busy one for French. He got his sermons printed, carried on bazaar preaching, teaching the increasing number of enquirers and looked after the pastoral needs of the Indian congregation. He experimented with preaching 'extempore' in church, departing from the custom of reading one's sermon. He spent a great effort in raising funds for a Native Pastoral Fund. He was clearly in need of home leave after a year's separation from his family, some bad attacks of dysentery, a severe fall from his horse and some trouble with his eyesight.

Writing of the future French said: 'My great hope would be in returning to India to get a few promising youths to journey with me, and thoroughly to initiate them into the work of an evangelizing ministry.' Writing of the past he stated the need for more repen-

tance for grievous failure, the pain of failure to win people for Christ, a sense of unworthiness and the sin of a rebellious and, murmuring spirit, which he hoped more completely to quell. On his journey to catch a ship to Karachi he visited Lahore and Multan for the first time. He recognized his need of rest and wrote ahead to England: 'Do beg people not to think of asking me to undertake any meetings or head work too soon, for I do feel I want rest. I long to know my two unknown children.' He made his headquarters to start with at his father-in-law's home near London. Mr. Leighton wrote of French's first term of missionary service:

The influence which he exercised through St. John's College, combined with itinerations, was felt from east to west of that great belt of historic India. Ho has left an example, which, by its lofty excellence and incredible labours, almost depresses ordinary men. Yet there are those who, at whatever distance they follow, are thankful to have been associated with him.

## Chapter 5

### French's First Furlough and His Call to the Derajat

French was soon involved in meetings, reporting to the churches in England of the work of missions in India. He obtained little rest but had a short holiday in Italy with relatives. In March 1860 he became curate at the parish church of Clifton near Bristol. A fellow curate wrote of French:

As a preacher his sermons were always much valued by thoughtful Christian people, though they were, not much appreciated, by people in general... He was very fearless in the enunciation of his opinions, which were by no means invariably in accord with those about him, and his way of expressing them generally made a deep impression. At the same time there was a winning affectionateness in his manner which put everyone at their ease, and a depth of sympathy in his nature which was specially valued by those in trouble.

Some of his sermons of this period were published under the title *Remember How Thou Hast Heard*. They contain only a few references to his life abroad but he occasionally drew on his knowledge of comparative religion. One quotation from a sermon on Mark chapter eleven verses eleven and fifteen will give an idea of his style:

And true it is, that buying and selling (by which I mean pressing secular avocations) whether in the clergyman or the layman, is not in itself favourable to a life of faith, and a lively, steadfast appreciation of things unseen; and, yet that it is possible to be diligent in business and, fervent in spirit, how many lives that are before us, both of professional and, businessmen, can testify! Among the latest, the life of Havelock, whose last recorded words were—'For the last forty years, I have so ordered my life, that when my last hour came I might not be afraid to die.

French's sermons were always Biblical, often drawn from the Old Testament and stressing the sovereignty of God. His preaching was more often expository rather than topical and his teaching shows him as an evangelical.

He bade farewell to his flock in Clifton on October 30, 1861 but was delayed three months before returning to India. His doctor ordered a period of rest at Brighton. Writing to a friend he said:

You will be surprised to learn what difficulties I have had in coming to the conclusion that I ought to return to India, or I ought rather to put the matter in this way--it has been difficult to me to prove conclusively to others that I could not abandon the work without a further trial of it. My poor wife has undoubtedly been a great sufferer, and our family is large (a sixth expected), and I have probably expended twenty-five years of strength in the eight years I have lived in India; yet I do feel it is a sad discouragement to Christians at home to see missionaries soon disheartened, and my wife is now certainly greatly improved in health, and, I feel myself to possess considerably increased vigour. I feel, too, that we must be prepared to suffer and to risk something...It will be an unhappy time for our missions when it becomes the fashion to go out for seven years or so in the romantic days of youth, and then to return and live upon the credit of past efforts! ..but I don't consider the Church of England alive as yet upon the missionary subject.

So French spent his last few weeks in England resting at Brighton and pursuing to some extent his medical studies.

1861 was a year of great financial difficulty for the Church Missionary Society but through the generosity of a Christian soldier, Colonel Reynell Taylor, they were challenged to start a new pioneer work in the Derajat area of the wild frontier. One can distinguish three strands in the establishment of Christian work after the British annexed the Punjab in 1849. First, there was the official contribution of the British Government of India, which, while re-

maintaining strictly neutral in relation to Indians, contributed to the work of Christ's Kingdom by establishing station and garrison churches wherever concentrations of British troops and officials were to be found. Secondly, there were a goodly number of distinguished Christian soldiers and administrators who in their private capacities, like Colonel Reynell Taylor, did all they could to forward the Christian cause. Among these military and civil leaders were numbered John and Henry Lawrence, Sir Herbert Edwardes, Sir Robert Montgomery and many others. Sir Robert, writing about the North West Frontier, expressed his ideals in this way:

We have held the frontier for twelve years against all comers, and, now, thank God, we are at peace with all the tribes. Now is the time to hold out the hand of friendship and to offer through the missionaries the bread of life... I rejoice to see Missions spreading, and the Derajat is a fitting place for the establishment of one.

So the third strand was the missions themselves.

In England, Sir Herbert Edwardes urged CMS to start a mission in Derajat. On October 15th he wrote to Mr. Venn:

The Derajat is that long reach of Punjab frontier which lies between the east bank of the Indus and the eastern slopes of the great Sulimane range, which separates British India from Afghanistan. It extends from the Salt range, which is the southern limit of the Peshawar division, to the north-east frontier of the province of Sindh, and may be more than three hundred miles long by fifty or sixty broad. The name Derajat means literally "the camps, and arose from the conquest of the country by three chiefs, Ismail Khan, Futteh Khan, and Ghazi Khan, who parcelled it out between them.... Houses replaced tents, and towns grew up, but the whole tract embraced by the occupation of those invaders is still called "The Derajat"...Dera Ghazi Khan and Dera Ismail Khan...derive their commercial importance from the fact that each stands opposite mountain passes on the border,

through which the products of Central Asia are passed down into the Punjab and Hindustan and of England are pushed up into Central Asia.

Sir Herbert, after whom Edwardes' Lines in Bannu are still named, ended his appeal:

This proposal to found a new mission comes from one who is responsible for some three hundred miles of the furthest and ruggedest frontier of British India, and he who bids the proposal *God Speed*. (Sir Robert Montgomery) is responsible for the province.

In those days the Derajat and Bannu were included in the province of the Punjab. Sir Herbert concluded in addressing the CMS committee through its secretary Mr. Venn:

As one whose lot is cast in with theirs, I felt thankful even to read their letters and to carry such plans before you; but I am doubly thankful to your Committee for yielding to their appeal in the midst of your world-wide difficulties... May these difficulties be lessened, not increased, by your answering this call from the Derajat.

In a letter to Sir Herbert written on August 14, 1861, Colonel Taylor wrote:

The kind of man I picture to myself as likely to do good is one who should be well acquainted with Muslim history, creed etc; one who could say, 'Come, I have got a story to tell you which is well worth your hearing!' He would certainly get hearers, as the whole community are idle enough, and if the speaker be equal to telling his tale with all the force that belongs to it, and his telling be blessed, there would be results sooner or later, but whether in our time in India or not it would be to hard say.

Meanwhile French had, again offered himself to the CMS to go wherever they chose and he readily accepted the commission to go to the Derajat and start a work for the Lord. At the farewell meeting of the Society on January 24, 1862, Mr. Venn told how God was blessing as they undertook a new project in faith:

Not only have the means been provided to equip and maintain the additional missionaries needed for this new venture of faith, but the Society's general funds are reaping the benefit. Then again, the Committee have the more confidence in enlarging their missions in the Punjab, because that province has been from its very first annexation consecrated to the Lord, Even before that, Bishop Daniel Wilson, as he sailed down the River Sutlej, stretched out his hands towards the west bank of the river with the words, 'I take possession of the Punjab in the name of the Lord.'

French set out for India without his wife and family. The difficult parting took place at London Bridge Station on February 7, 1862. The next day he wrote his wife:

The more I was borne away from you, the more did my thoughts travel towards you, and dwell upon the sad and desolate home at which you would arrive on reaching Brighton; for sad it would be in spite of the bright little faces to cheer you. I shall ever cherish the precious memories of which our late, as well as our early, years have been so full. Your love is a treasure to me, over which I do increasingly rejoice, and for which I praise more than ever our good and gracious God.

To his friend Frost he wrote a little later:

I must write to tell you how much I regret the impossibility of meeting with you, as I am for the present directed to proceed to the Derajat to initiate the proposed mission there. My route, therefore, will lie by Karachi, Hyderabad, and Multan...I forget whether any one wrote to tell you of the birth of our third little

son, Basil by name, which took place about four weeks before I left England. My dear wife was sufficiently recovered to go up with me to London for three days before the painful separation from her took place. She behaved like a heroine, suffering intensely, but determined to strengthen and comfort me to the uttermost. I fear it will be nearly two years before we can hope to meet again, but it is an unspeakable source of thankfulness that God has permitted me such a treasure, though the present enjoyment of it is sometimes denied. Six little infants are no small charge upon her hands, and I feel that her time will have to be shared between me and them for the next six or seven years.

On reaching Multan he heard of some home problems. After a sleepless night he wrote to his wife:

I never so thoroughly realized the anxieties and harrowing perplexities which a family entails, and the load of which I might be suspected by some of having too readily thrown upon your shoulder...SO far from shrinking from the load, it is one I should have loved, to bear... I trust the sacrifice we thus make of some of life's happiest years, the years when joy is intensest, may be graciously accepted for His sake.

French often thought of his children and their education. In his letters to his wife he described simple matters that would interest the children. Of the Indus he wrote:

I have seen no crocodiles to tell the children about: only one firefly. That was last evening. How I should have liked to send it home in a letter, but it seems only to give light when it pleases, and, when it pleases it looks like any other little fly. I hope the dear children will be like a bright firefly, always liking to give light, i.e. to set a good example.

On the same journey he wrote the following prayer for his children to use:

O Lord, suffer me to come to Thee in the name of Jesus Christ thy dear Son. May His precious blood cleanse me from all my sin. Give me Thy Holy Spirit to take away the heart of stone, and to give me a heart of flesh, and to renew me day by day in the likeness of Jesus Christ. Make me so strong by Thy Word abiding in me that I may keep myself, and the wicked One may not touch me. May I always speak the truth. Make me gentle and lowly, loving and obedient, hearty and diligent in business, and holy in word and deed. May I try always to do the thing that pleases Thee, and to remember that Thou, God, seest me. May I be found ready when Jesus comes, that I may see Him and serve Him for ever and ever in heaven. Amen.

On reaching Hyderabad he enjoyed a long discussion with the well-known convert Abdullah Athim on the views of one of the church Fathers—Hilary--about the doctrine of the Trinity. Years later French tried to put Hilary's treatise on the Trinity into Arabic. French spent some of the travelling time studying Pushtu and preaching to the crew as they went up the Indus by boat to Multan. Each evening when they went ashore he consecrated each landing place to God with prayer. French and his companion Cooper made the difficult journey from Multan to Dera Ismail Khan taking camels, horses and a buggy as Cooper could not ride. At the last stopping place before Dera Ismail Khan the roads were said to be impassable due to heavy rain. With difficulty they obtained a boat and crossed to Dera Ismail Khan too late for an Easter Day service. French found some opportunities of preaching Christ to the Muslims on board the boat. The journey from London to Dera Ismail Khan, begun on February 7th, ended on April 20th. French felt unworthy of this task and regarded himself as a "stop-gap till someone of more unflinching courage and bolder faith is sent to occupy the new land more permanently." French stayed in D.I.K. until August when he went on a brief holiday in the hills. The missionaries spent their time studying Pushtu, preaching in the bazaars and buying land and making arrangements for the buildings. The riverside was a favourite place for preaching as the crews of the

cotton boats and other craft belonged often to tribes and races never yet visited by any missionary. At Whitsun French was encouraged by the coming of Mr. Bruce. At that time Sir Robert Montgomery wrote to them:

Study the language, and make yourselves masters of it, even if you have to lie by for a year or more. Till you know the language you will be weak, if you are there for years. I should like to hear occasionally how you are getting on, and whether I can aid in any way. It is uphill work at first, but you have all Central Asia before you, if your voices can reach the people there. Be very discreet in all you do. In fact, be wise as serpents and harmless as doves; and may God bless your labours, and give you strength, and faith, and patience to overcome all difficulties.

After his holiday in the hills, French sought to cut himself off from European society and live as much as possible among the nationals. He itinerated in a wide area and at the end of October 1862 reached Bannu which he describes:

Bannu and the country around is strangely different from Marwat; the hills, enclosing it more or less on three sides at an interval of four or five miles which seems really nothing at all, ensure a perpetual supply of fresh, good water.

In Bannu there was a large fort and walled bazaar in the centre of ten or twelve Pathan villages. A weekly cattle market held every Friday and frequented by Wazirs and other tribal peoples gave good opportunities for preaching. After a brief visit to Dera Ismail Khan in December, French set out again

[...] to search out the Povindah Afghans in their tent villages, which are scattered over the country, hidden in the jungles, but chiefly near the Indus banks. It taxes ones nerves and strength heavily, for they are a strange race. I have unfortunately been rather broken in health by a long attack of intermittent fever,

which renders me less able to bear the constant exposure this sort of life requires.

About people's religious beliefs he wrote:

I was reading a hymn of theirs a few days ago, in which were abasing confessions of sin till the last stanza, the import of which was, whatever our shortcomings, we have this to fall back upon, we are ahl-i-Islam (Muslims).

Just after this French collapsed unconscious in the jungle and was providentially found by Dr. Fairweather who brought him to D.I.K. for medical care and nursing. On December 30th he managed to write to his wife:

The doctor will hardly give me leave to write one line...I was brought in here, where I am under charge of the doctors, who say I have been snatched from the very jaws of death, and there is no hope for me but in leaving for England as soon as the opportunity of a steamer occurs.

He was concerned that this new field would not fail because of shortage of sowers and waterers. The doctors thought that he would never be able to work in a hot climate again. When Arch-deacon Pratt visited D.I.K. soon after French's departure he wrote in the record book admonishing Mr. Bruce to be warned by the example of French who through his own rashness was lost forever to the Frontier. Seventeen years later, on his first visit as bishop, French was amused when this entry was pointed out to him:

The wide diffusion of the tenets of Sufism, which numbers twelve sects among them, some being systems of the wildest skepticism, and others of abstrusest mysticism, has induced a free-thinking spirit among them, which, though not favourable to depth of conviction, yet renders them not indisposed to hear, to tolerate, and even to examine. I think I have discovered traces also of a higher view of the character and work of Christ, than is

common among Muslims. I felt a pang of deep regret at being withdrawn from that work. It has been begun in great weakness, but under prayerful auspices, and, on the highest and most scriptural principles. None can say how important a bearing its future may have on the entrance of the light of the glorious gospel of Christ into the regions of Central Asia.

Since French's pioneer efforts the stations have been held even if understaffed and work continues at Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan and in other newer centres. As Birk, French's first biographer wrote: "Perhaps the devotion of French may still bear fruit in calling forth recruits." More are still needed.

## Chapter 6

### Six Years in England, 1863-1869

French, having been invalided back to England, was to spend over six years in his own country. Many thought, including some doctors, that he would never be able to return to India. After some further recuperation by the sea he helped in a parish in Beddington in Surrey while the regular clergy took holidays in turn. After three months there he was offered the living of St. John's Church, Cheltenham, and then a short time later, when the more important parish of St. Paul's needed a clergyman he accepted that and remained there for just over four years. Hr. Hardy, French's curate during part of this time, wrote of him:

[The] most striking characteristic of Bishop French has always seemed to me to be his wonderful zeal, self-devotion and self-sacrifice... Beside the duties of his own cure (parish), he often took journeys to preach missionary sermons or speak at missionary meetings in various parts of the country... At missionary meetings his habitual modesty led sometimes to disappointments: He would often talk about work in all quarters of the mission field, omitting entirely that part in which he had been himself engaged, which was what his audience most desired to hear about... His sermons were always burning with zeal, and were distinguished by a fine historical imagination and most striking personal applications. In my judgment, the most perfect because the most compact were those which he preached on Saints' days, on which occasions he adhered most strictly to his subject. His sermons on Old Testament characters or on prophetic imagery were most original, and fresh, and practical, being made more life-like by his own Asiatic experiences; no one who heard such sermons as those on Absalom, and on the man with the ink-horn in Ezekiel chapter nine, could ever forget them. On Sunday evenings, on the other hand, he had the habit of adding extempore pieces of missionary information or spiritual entreaties, which made the sermons seem disconnected, and to some minds wearisome... During his stay in Cheltenham he regarded himself as an

evangelical, and his warmest interest was in the CMS, but he was on the watch against the narrow partisanship which was prevalent at Cheltenham, uniting with Rev. J. Fenn in support of the S.P.G., and always advocating breadth of sympathy and union. While he was zealous for every kind of missionary work, his most eager desire was for the conversion of the Muslims... He never tired of speaking of great missionary leaders like...Raymond Lull. All the time he was at Cheltenham he continued to work at Arabic, hoping that it would prove of use to him in the mission field, as was notably the case in the last two years of his life.

Before he left Cheltenham French published a volume which contained some of his best sermons entitled "The Old Commandment New and True in Christ – Sermons illustrative of the vital unity and harmony, throughout of the Old and New Testaments." Sample from two sermons may give an idea of the quality displayed. He preached two sermons on Romans 8: 26-27: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself interceded for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searched the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." We see his originality in the following extract:

Suppose for a moment that a recording angel could make a list of all the prayers offered up by this congregation today, and a complete account of those prayers could be read aloud in our hearing; what indignation, what shame, what grief would there be in many!

He makes use of his knowledge of the East in his illustrations:

All these things help to illustrate, though very far from exhausting the force of the words 'unutterable groanings', which expression reminds us that the stirring and impulses of the Holy Spirit, whenever experienced, are far in advance of the best human

speech which was framed before-time, because of the new needs and yearnings awakened, which no power on earth can wholly stifle and repress, as an Afghan proverb expresses it:

Sooner may you stop the sea's mouth with wax,  
Than stifle the prayer which proceeds out of the heart of  
love.

French was also deeply conscious of the Christian pioneers in India—Henry Martyn was a great hero of his. In the second sermon on Romans 8: 26-27 he says:

I was struck in reading lately some of the words of that devout and loving spirit, David Corrie, of Madras, ' In general my mind has been too much occupied in outward work. I have lived too little in habits of ejaculatory prayer, and contented myself with very little spirituality of mind, so that if success had depended on me, it must have utterly failed. But the spiritual temple grows up not by might, nor by power but by my SPIRIT, says the Lord of hosts.' And again Corrie says, 'My own folly and perverseness appear in the preference of outward labour and bodily exercises to spiritual obedience and mental discipline,' I am sure that he lesson of working less and praying more may be a very needful lesson to a child of God, and is taught him sometimes in stern and painful experience.

During the four years at Cheltenham French also wrote a small hymnbook for his congregation. However, India was never far from his thoughts. He hoped that God would send him back to India. Meanwhile he reflected much on the subject of theological education and presented a paper at a meeting of seventy clergy in the presence of Mr. Venn, the secretary of the Church Missionary Society. The paper was called *Proposed plan for a Training College of Native Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers for North-West India and the Punjab*. In 1867 he published a condensed version containing the main points some of which are quoted or summarised as follows. Most of what French said had a very modern ring and is applicable today:

We need an improved and higher system of theological training for our more advanced converts, with a special view to their preparation for holy orders, and to their being efficiently entrusted with the work of pastors and evangelists...

This question was closely related to the following point:

How the native church may be caused to strike its roots deeper and to ramify more widely... how we may anticipate and make provision for India's church of the future, may consult for its stability and permanence... heightening while it is yet in its infancy its sense of responsibility, and the duty laid upon it towards the generations unborn.

It is clear we must not compromise the future character of the native church, by attempting to trammel it with too rigid adherence to our institutions, holding it thus swathed, as it were, and bound tight to our leading strings. Its growth in the main must be free and spontaneous, natural and unwarped, if we would see it healthy and vigorous. There are on the other hand, some leading features common to the spread and development of all infant churches.

On looking into the histories of the early church of Christianity, we find it was an object, straightway and from the very first kept in view, to fix upon convenient centres which should form rallying points for the promotion and diffusion abroad of the light of the Gospel. In these a small body of Christian teachers devoted themselves to the more complete establishment, and firmer building up in the truth and doctrine of Christianity, of a portion of the choicest and ablest converts, with a view to their becoming in their turn teachers and preachers of the Word. The raising up of such men was not left to be a desultory and discretionary work, occupying the spare moments, the mere residuum of energy of missionaries otherwise occupied in a multiplicity of labours. It was rather an object definitely pursued, in the most favourable localities, under the guidance of the best instructors... drawn chiefly from among the ripest and most practiced veterans.

It has been on my mind for some years that something of this sort should be attempted in North-Western India... A part of our mission field which has for so many years been highly esteemed and reported of for the massive intellect of its pundits, the acuteness and subtlety of its mullahs, the wide scope of its literature, the intricacy of the problems, religious and others, may well demand of us one or more centres or headquarters.

Things fail in India, as elsewhere, by being commenced on too grand and imposing a scale; on the other hand, they sink from being commenced on so insignificant a scale as to betray a want of faith in those who start them in the probability of their success, and a sense of the extreme hazard of the experiment. I ask, then, for £5,000 to be raised, if possible, in large sums and distinct from the Society's ordinary funds... of this sum £500, say, might go to the purchase of land, £2,000 to the building, £500 to the library of the institution and £2,000 to an endowment fund of junior (native) professors.

... It is essential that the college should be as strictly as possible vernacular, by which I imply not that all the instruction should necessarily be imparted in the native tongue, but that wherever an English course is going on, there should be a corresponding and collateral course in the vernacular... The college I propose should be dedicated to the purely native church—to its building up, its strengthening, and encouragement. A Muslim convert, brought up all his life in distaste and prejudice of English, should here find his want of English does not disentitle or incapacitate him for perfecting his curriculum of theology up to the full measure of perfection which the college course reaches. Here Christianity should be domesticated on the Indian soil, and be able to reckon on a home and hearth of its own. Here, where it is possible to obtain them, should be found men who, by a severe and close attention bestowed on Muslim and Hindu literature, can express the delicate shades, the nice distinction of thought, which some, at least, of our standard works of theology involve. Not the smallest or least practical result of painstaking knowledge thus stored up would be the opportunity afforded for the improvement of some of our Indian versions of the Bible by

well-proved and practical translators, able to detect nice correspondences and divergencies of sense between English and native words by continued intercourse and sympathy with native minds, quick to discover what each word and phrase and idiom suggests when uttered in native hearing. The plan of instructing our native teachers in English, without putting them in possession of the power to express themselves on Christian doctrine correctly and accurately in the vernacular, is quite abhorrent to the general practice of the Church of Christ from the beginning, as well as to right reason itself. To be mighty in the English scriptures, their exposition and interpretation is very different from the power to expound them freely and with confidence to the vast masses of India... employing appropriate and expressive words the every counterpart of the ideas and truths to be communicated.

...None can tell the constant and very serious difficulty which the want of a sufficient library entails in a missionary's experience, when sharp, shrewd objectors are buzzing like bees all round him, taunting him with seeming discrepancies of the sacred text... an indispensable appendage to the college would be such a library.

Both Hindus and Muslims have had their institutes corresponding with our English universities or theological training colleges. I came across one... about thirty-five miles from Agra. There was the aged mullah's house, the president or principal, whose learning and grey hairs and acknowledged sanctity encompassed him with almost awful reverence. There was the doctor, apparently a part of the establishment; open rooms for lectures; a mosque, the college chapel; small houses, huts or sheds of a superior kind, the dwelling-houses of the students; all enclosed within walls like a city within a city. I spent an hour or more with the venerable mullah... We shall consider it, then, but an act of justice to give our converts as fair opportunities of becoming thoroughly acquainted with Christian truth as they enjoyed previously for becoming conversant with their own religion.

In writing of the wide range and wealth of Indian literature French questioned:

Is it more profitable to Christianity, more analogous with the economy of God's former providential dealings with men, that this store should be thrown away as valueless for the purpose of Gospel extension ... than that we should try to act upon the principle enunciated in so many forms in Holy scripture, I will consecrate their gain unto the Lord, and their substance unto the lord of the whole earth? Is the wealth of India's literacy treasures less available, less capable of consecration to the highest and holiest purposes than the merchant spoil of Tyre? Is it not hard to suppose that God has suffered that vast mass of erudition and result of mental force to accumulate for so many ages to be utterly purposeless towards setting up the Kingdom of His dear Son?... Is not the attempt to use it for the Lord's service worth making, even though our utmost expectations should not be realized? Have we not been in danger of making the Gospel an exotic?

To the objection that there would not be sufficient students forthcoming French argues that the beginning would be slow but progressive. "The few that gathered effort, if we set about it humbly and prayerfully in the patience and perseverance of faith." French now devoted any time that could be spared from his work in Cheltenham to developing his plans and gaining support for it throughout England.

He managed to convince his doctor to let him return to India. On December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1867 he received an invitation from the Lahore Conference to start this work. In February he met Mr. Venn and the CMS Committee.

After two hours the Lahore college came on. I was surprised and taken aback by the unanimity which prevailed in supporting it as a whole... The feeling was to give me *carte blanche* (freedom) as to 1) choosing a coadjutor, 2) the funds required (£1,000 per annum one member suggested), 3) the place at which the college is

to be established, 4) aid rendered to me personally for the education of my children.

He was soon encouraged by Rev. J.W. Knott's acceptance of the joint presidency of the college and by the generous financial contributions. Knott, at the age of forty-six, infected by French's zeal, had volunteered to join him. He spent a long year making arrangement for his children's education, for his parish from which he did not finally resign until after his return to India as he had been advised to obtain a locum tenens (substitute) and continue as vicar. His bishop felt that French was occupying a very useful position in his diocese, and that his return to India was a venture of faith which possibly his health might not be found to justify.

In letters he received from India, various counsels were given about the location of the college. French recorded:

I feel that Benares is an impossibility as regards the sort of college we propose. It is for Persia and Afghanistan that we have specially framed the project, believing that in these quarters is the right material for a strong and spirited missionary agency.

Amid the many meetings in which French took part the most notable was the farewell meeting for his future colleague, Mr. Knott, at the University of Oxford. It was an unusual meeting:

[Owing] to the remarkable intimacy which had existed between dear Knott and men of the most varied phases of opinion at various stages of his career, and the extreme respect with which they still regarded him when he had emerged to fuller light and deeper views of truth than themselves, and the consequent interest they felt in the step he was now taking, forsaking health, home and honours, and a very wide circle of influence, for the work of a plain, unremunerated evangelist in the distant East so late in life.

At the CMS farewell meeting in London French mentioned the sacrifice made by his wife and eight children in sparing him: I could not be struck the other day on reading the passage in the Roman historian Live respecting the going forth of the Roman army on a new expedition... A veteran soldier said to his centurion:

I am a veteran of more than twenty campaigns, and might fairly claim exemption from the service. I have eight children, two of the young, two daughters unmarried; therefore I might legitimately claim release, but as long as there is a Roman general worthy of setting out against my country's enemies, I shall always be ready to offer for that work.' I do wish that the clergy, especially the younger clergy of this country, would only feel that they have much grander and nobler motives of action than those by which the Roman veteran was expected(???) and would try to carry them out into practice with somewhat of his self-sacrifice, but in the more subdued and chastened spirit of the gospel.

The night before he sailed for India, French wrote to his father-in-law, Mr. Janson. He was concerned at leaving him and his own mother in an uncertain state of health:

I feel quite unable to say much this last evening; my mind is so oppressed and overpowered with the anxiety and sorrow which this sad farewell brings with it, that I can only cast I tall upon God. I do not believe, however, that I shall be disappointed of the hope I entertain that those whom I love most tenderly will not be suffered to reap any real loss or harm from that which, for the present, brings them such deep trial.

So French set out for India after more than six years in England. However his prolonged stay in England was perhaps more permanently fruitful for India than any time in his career in that he evolved and developed the plan for the Lahore Divinity College.

## **Chapter 7**

### **St. John's Divinity School, Lahore**

French reached his destination--Lahore--on March 14, 1869. After fourteen hours of journeying from Multan he arrived after dark:

This provincial capital did not furnish a single gari or vehicle of any sort to convey oneself or goods from the station to the city, two miles off; and it was only when I folded my arms, and stated that I should not leave the station till some conveyance was produced, that at last a hand-barrow was discovered, on which my baggage was bestowed, and I walked slowly and drearily to the Dak bungalow, which I found so full that I feared I should fail of accommodation there; but chiefly through the civility of one of my fellow- passengers... I was taken in and got a very decent supper and a sofa to rest on. I was rather done up and poorly, and spent a very restless and troubled night.

The next day a friend lent him a tent and then he proceeded to look for a house. After several moves he eventually found a small house which suited him. Knott and French moved to Murree at the end of June where they spent more than three months, preaching in the bazaar, lecturing to the soldiers and preparing college courses. French also made evangelistic tours in the villages around and below Murree. From Murree, French and Knott sent out a printed circular letter to all the missionaries in North India giving details of the proposed college and its opening. The response was discouraging. It was difficult to find suitable students and support for them so the opening was delayed for a further year.

French spent the last months of 1869 on evangelistic tours of the Yusafzai area. Mr. Ridley, a missionary from Peshawar, accompanied him on much of the tour and records:

We had a delightful season of work and profitable communion one with another. At once I felt that I had met with a master in our Israel. It was a page in my life's history on which I often look back with gratitude, for the holy stimulus to service it inspires even until now. The best and ablest among Europeans and natives quickly recognized his worth. I will remember hearing one of India's great rulers describe him as the most attractive of all the traveling companions he had ever met with. On another occasion, he and I met with a Muslim gentleman of high rank in the army, and after a long conversation on the loftiest of topics he left us, when my native acquaintance remarked to me that he thought God has his favourites among men of all religions. Then, pointing to French, he added, 'I think that is one of them'. Our plan of work was to meet for Bible study very early in the morning. Then he came to my tent for breakfast, after which we prayed together, then separated for the day. He went out to one village, I to the next, and worked on in opposite directions until we met at some other village, after completing the circuit of the district around our camp. Then we fixed on another centre, and so on, until we had passed over the two great districts of Hazara and Yusufzai, leaving no village unvisited. Each evening, after dealing with enquirers, who sometimes came to our tents, we met for further reading and prayer, and then sought rest in sleep... On another occasion I overlapped his part of the circuit and found him sitting on the boundary wall of a mosque, reading some Scripture aloud, though not a soul was visible. I waited on and on in surprise for more than an hour before he stopped. Then on our way back to camp he told me how he had gathered a great crowd of eager listeners, and how a passing mullah had given the word, and in a very few minutes it had vanished away, but that there were very many still listening, though concealed from view.

French writes of the tours:

I found no plan so successful for gathering a good and attentive audience as making straight for the mosque and inquiring for the mullah. Instead of hanging about the village and having one's object suspected, this was a definite and straightforward object;

and besides often meeting in this way on equal terms with the mullah, the Khans and other respectable villagers would congregate in the mosque...

The Lahore Divinity School project was never far from his mind. Although the starting of it was delayed and he was to spend twenty months in India this time before actually starting the work he realized the value of the experiences he was having. He wrote of his hostess at Christmas in Rawalpindi that she

[Seems] to wish I were fairly at my expected work, and does not appear to see of what unspeakable importance to my future it may be to get all the familiar acquaintance I can with tribes and peoples and languages out of which the material of a future divinity school may be gathered.

After a few weeks in Lahore he filled a vacancy in Multan for some months. He spent two months traveling and preaching in the Bahawalpur State. He found an enquirer who had memorized a poem about the Christian faith and noted:

Most of the knowledge these poor people have of anything bearing on religion is couched in poetical couplets and I long to see some good Christian poet arise who can represent Christian voice in song. Few things under God would carry the Gospel wider and fix it deeper.

In July French sought release from the heat of Multan by going to the hills. Suddenly, the news reached him of the death of his friend and colleague, Knott, in Peshawar. Knott had "seemed entirely the man for India's present needs, quite apart from the Lahore School." French went for a long walk and composed a Latin poem in honour of his distinguished friend. Ridley wrote that for health reasons he had to leave Peshawar:

[To] my great sorrow, Knott elected to take my work and remain permanently in that then most unhealthy city. I begged him to

go with me, or follow on as soon as possible. His answer was that as it was clearly my duty to go, so it was his to remain... 'You cannot survive long in Peshawar,' I almost vehemently urged, but he calmly said, 'I came out here to die. This is God's providence. I must remain.' Almost the first news I received on reaching England was the telegram, 'Knott is dead.' And so the row of graves in God's acre spread out, each narrow bed eloquent today of self-conquest and sacrifices for Christ. But French went steadily on alone, no doubt with a wounded heart, yet undaunted and ever consecrated for new duties.

French wrote in his diary:

That such a life as Knott's has been devoted to the Divinity School is surely a pledge of its beginning and prospering, not of its coming to disastrous issue or never beginning. Surely he is beckoning onward, not backward.

French immediately wrote to his friend Mr. Golightly about a suitable epitaph for Knott to be placed in his college chapel in Oxford and

In the second place two studentships in our Divinity School at Lahore to bear his name, and to remind us and many to come after us how true a lover and benefactor he was of this cause, the training of native Evangelists and Pastors would, as it seem to me, be an appropriate, lasting, and serviceable memorial of our departed brother. Supposing the joint value of the two studentships to be £30 annually, £1,000 or £950 raised for this purpose and vested, would supply the requisite resources... I cannot doubt but India would contribute its portion; but Oxford should have the honour of taking the initiative: and would be twice blest in doing so. I am emboldened to put this matter before you for your prayerful consideration, because of the many years of almost fatherly kindness received from you which I look back upon with thankfulness and real value.

The question of a site for the proposed divinity school became a matter of prime importance. In April 1869 French had in view some gardens near the city. French did not delight in business but he was well supported by the CMS committee, even so there was a delay in getting the necessary funds and he battled again with serious illness. The gardens today are known as Mahan Singh Bagh and some of the original buildings still stand. The purchase of this site was completed on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1870 and French wrote in his diary:

May the Lord be pleased to take it for His own, and His eyes and His heart be there perpetually. May the fruit of this little effort be to His great glory and to the furtherance of His truth and His Kingdom. May He bless its provision, and cause never to be wanting a due supply of men qualified to serve God (especially of our native brethren) in connection with this door newly opened.

French had just been discussing the question of a colleague to replace Knott when a telegram from Robert Clark arrived saying, "I will start to help you on November 19." French was very grateful for this provision. Concerning the school he wrote:

What we want for this school is, that it should be for God and Christ; not for science and philosophy, or even languages. This we could command, did we desire it; but it must be sacrificed: we must be fools for Christ. It should be a house of prayer; a home of prayerful, simple, biblical students; a place where earnest intercession goes up day and night for the growth of Christ's Kingdom... November 21... today our first four students have been examined... They are a very promising band of the whole, though small; but two or three more are likely to come to us shortly, besides one or two who, having other work in Lahore, are to attend part of the classes, but not the whole of the course. We are putting up tents for the unmarried in our compound, and the married will take up their abode in the garden towers at once. I have pretty well arranged, too, what the courses will be:

Church history, general history, Christian doctrine, Christian evidences, the liturgy, Hebrew with exegesis of Old Testament, Greek with exegesis of the New Testament, lectures on Hinduism and Islam. The latter two ere long will be handed over to native professors, but time must lapse ere this can be effected. Philemon, Ebenezer, Yakub and Sadik are the name sot those already here; Shere Singh, Kasim Masih and Benjamin are likely to come. Tomorrow morning is fixed for lectures to begin.

And so on November 22, 1870, the Lahore Divinity School started.

The roof of the building used as a chapel collapsed after some years and a new chapel which stands today was built. French, as Bishop, consecrated it on February 24, 1883 and preached on Zechariah 6: 12-15 – on the Lord as the builder of His temple. It was an occasion for a gathering of local Christians and some of the old pupils of the Divinity School. From the early days a pool in the grounds was used as a baptistery. In the first year of the Divinity School there were five baptisms. A school teacher of Arabic and his wife were among them. French recorded;

The mullah was much beaten by a nephew last week with shoes, and then the same man used all the violent language he could think of to induce the wife to abjure Christ and desert her husband, and her father and mother were most imploring. She said, "I am your child, anything else you bid me do I will do, but I will never forsake my husband and his faith." Some two years later their little girl was christened in the same garden tank. The man's name was Noorullah (light of God), the young wife's Rahmat (mercy).

The garden was a delight to all, one of the students prayed "that this garden in which we are gathered might have four streams, like the Streams of Paradise, flowing forth all ways to refresh the barren wastes around." The students were able to take recreation in the garden in bathing, cricket and other games. Other buildings were added as funds permitted. Mr. Golightly helped in every way

he could and in 1871 sent his own contribution to the Divinity School. French replied:

My colleague, Mr. Clark, and myself, thank you most sincerely for your kind contribution to our Lahore School of Divinity; both for the value of the gift, and because it is a pleasure to us to reckon you among our contributors and sympathizing helpers. We have yet to build a classroom for lectures, and some additional apartments for students. We have very little sympathy from English residents in India.

There were times of financial concern. Congregations in England where he had ministered supported his work and the universities of Oxford and Cambridge as well as other friends and relatives. At the end of 1872 French could write:

What the Roman poet said of the Aeneid of Virgil, that it would never have been produced by a man who had to worry himself about procuring a blanket to keep him warm at night, is not a simile wholly inapplicable to the loss of power and of progress in some of our missions where the missionary has to spend his wits and energies in staving off or wiping off debt. This trial, though not unknown to us in our early days, has been wholly unfelt during the last eighteen months.

Buildings and money would have been useless without students and teachers. The four students soon increased to seven. By the end of the first year there were ten students, thirteen the next year and by the third year there were twenty. The numbers did not become large as French kept a high standard for admission, many missions reduced the number of catechists and the few remaining could be spared with difficulty. In 1877 the United Presbyterians founded their own seminary. Also French was not keen that every able Christian young man should enter the ministry. He felt that the future growth of the church depended on people of high caliber being active for Christ in every department of secular life. Writing of those who became students he says:

As regards the character of our students, I think we have even more cause to feel cheered and encouraged. Intellectually, the average excellence is far superior to what I expected, and the power to store in their memories, and to give forth thoughtfully and independently what they have learnt, and think out fresh and original modes of exemplifying and applying principles, has often proved to me interesting and instructive. We have promise of two or three excellent linguists as far as original languages of the Bible go, and about two thirds are making fair progress in both... On the whole, their religious growth and advance in knowledge and love and obedience of the truth has been gratifying and edifying to us.

The students came from different racial groups – Pathans, Rajputs, Persians, Punjabis and Kashmiris. Most had been brought up as Muslims, some as Hindus and at least one as a Sikh. They came from different social ranks. Some had come to Christ as adults after much suffering; others had been gradually influenced in Christian schools, while others were children of Indian Christians. One was a friend and pupil of the famous mullah, Safdar Ali, who had become a Christian after the Agra debates between Pfander and French and the Muslim leaders. This pupil studied Hebrew with his wife and his mother wrote Christian hymns.

French had loyal support from his colleagues – Mr. Clark and Mr. Bateman. Mr. Bateman was especially gifted in helping young men and in guiding them in evangelism. Mr. Wade, translator of the New Testament into Kashmiri, replaced Clark, and Mr. Gordon's arrival from Iran freed Bateman for further direct evangelism. Before French left he was joined by Hooper and Shirreff who became principals in turn. French wrote about Shirreff in October 1873:

It seems my address at Oxford five years ago stirred him up to missionary work, yet I never fought more against going anywhere than I did against that visit to Oxford. How little one knows what God would have one do! But we must simply,

calmly wait, and let Him gird us rather than impulsively gird ourselves.

French battled with much ill-health during the first part of 1872. After more than two months of serious illness he wrote in his diary:

When I was at the worst, the dear students met in the large room and prayed together with tears that God would raise me up again, and from that time my recovery began.

At the end of March he wrote to his wife:

I must admit that I have earnest longings and cravings for home and you: it is a great affliction, and one that seems to me to be more likely felt daily, this long separation, and my love only seems to grow in intensity to you and our dear children.

The doctors wanted him to return to U.K. but remembering his work he was loathe to go and suggested that the students and staff escape the summer heat of Lahore by migrating to Abbottabad.

The people of Hazara, of which Abbottabad is the chief station, seemed not a little surprised at the sudden appearance among them of a band of ten Christian students, always ready to converse with them by the roadside or preach in their bazaars. I could not help feeling that such little migrations as these might on occasions prove very serviceable to the spread of the Gospel.

His health did not improve for some time and he admitted that "some of my lectures are given while writhing in pain." In July he wrote to his daughter:

The last four or five days I have been much better, and seem to have before me some little prospect of recovery, so that it may be yet one year and a half before I look on your dear faces again, except in the photograph. But you would not wish the work to be broken up, and none in these parts have given that same alter-

native study to divinity in several branches and to the languages that I have done, so I have felt myself bound to stay if the work is to be kept up to the point it has reached.

In the autumn when that staff and students returned to Lahore he seemed stronger but was still at work against the doctor's orders. The next spring he was again violently ill and the CMS committee in London telegraphed for his recall. French decided to remain at his post.

French was greatly loved and respected by his students for whom and with whom he worked so hard.

I do not think many can have an idea of the labour these classes cost. After all the time that I have spent on languages and theological books, I find that, to lecture usefully, an hour preparation for each lecture is scant measure; often many hours are required even for one.

There was sifting of the students:

When I wrote three days ago we had nine new students, but have now only seven. The Pathan youth from Kashmir had left us to learn English and find some worldly employment more lucrative. Another youth from Delhi told me such a tissue of stories yesterday that I was obliged to send him away for three months to Amritsar, to see if good Mr. Bateman could make anything of him, and put him to trial, and by teaching him be the means of ripening his Christian character. So our little band, when replenished, has to be weeded again. Augustine says of his little band of students for the ministry whom he trained at Hippo in Africa, 'I don't expect my house and those that live in it will be better than Heaven, and yet some angels fell out of heaven itself.

French was himself a keen student of church history and he was always on alert lest the Indian Christians should be formed in a

foreign mould instead of developing untrammled in joyful freedom. He was very aware of missionary failure:

The very last thing which had been practiced amongst us as missionaries was what the greatest stress was laid and effort expended on by Hindu sect-leaders, and by early British missionaries, as well as by Muslim mullahs everywhere: I mean, giving a few instruments the finest polish possible; imbuing a few select disciples with all that we ourselves have been taught of truth, and trying to train and build them up to the highest reach of knowledge attainable to us. It is but seldom that this has been the relation of the missionary to the catechist, of the school-master to the student; what the Sufi calls 'iktibas' – lighting the scholar's lamp at the master's light. The perpetuation of truth (must we not add of error also?) has in every age depended on this efficacious method of handing down teaching undiluted and unmutated.

The training was practical as well as theoretical. French wrote:

I am trying to perfect more our arrangements for giving a practical training in preaching and other ministerial work to our students. Mr. Clark and I take one or more in turns out with us to preach at the gates and in the bazaars, letting them preach a little also. I encourage them on Saturday to go out two and two by themselves into the villages round about Lahore, and to distribute books, converse with the people, bring in inquirers if possible, and learn the state of things as regards the preparation of the people for the gospel. One or two are very zealous in this matter, others will be so, I believe. On Sunday morning, before our bazaar service, they stand at the doors and gather the people together by preaching. It will be bad for them to be too exclusively occupied in learning and reading without exercise and practice.

Writing of the response to the gospel in Lahore he said:

I find a great difference here from what we experienced at Agra. Here the opposition is far more bitter and systematic and concen-

trated... One blind mullah, who has a large band of disciples, appears to distribute them in stations along the haunts most frequented by missionaries, to hinder the gospel from being heard and arouse antagonism and disgust by all available means... There is an increasing dread of preaching and its effects, and I am satisfied that, in spite of themselves, many do listen eagerly to longer or shorter portions of our addresses, and carry away impressions...

During the vacations staff and students divided into small evangelistic teams and went on longer expeditions. In July 1871 French wrote of such an expedition in Kashmir in a letter to his wife from Srinagar:

Heavy preaching here in the morning amid much opposition, and then work with students, preparation for future work of various kinds; incessant calls in the way of correspondence, make this seem but little like a holiday, still, the out-of-door life is healthful, and our boat often relieves the fatigue of long distances.

Up in the mountains of Kashmir near Chandunwari, French met an enquirer who having read one of Dr. Pfander's books wanted a whole Gospel, or Law or Psalms. After testing him French gave him his last Persian Gospel. He paid tribute to the help and co-operation of the Bible Societies. He concludes his long account of this tour of Kashmir with words which we may still echo:

Would that Kashmir might soon have added to its world-famed beauty and loveliness, the beauty of the Lord our God; That added to its flowers of myriad shapes and hues which deck its lakes and meadows and hill-sides, and its lavish abundance of fruits in countless orchards, might be added yet those flowers and fruits of heavenly growth, of 'life and godliness,' which might blossom and ripen to the glory of the Great Husbandman, whose true Vine Kashmir had never yet known, and, till it does know, can never know peace.

December 15, 1872 was an outstanding day in the brief history of the new Divinity School when Bishop Milman of Calcutta ordained the first two students who entered the ministry. Bishop Milman noted in the ecclesiastical record book:

Mr. French's college supplies a great need of the Church. It promises to give us really useful candidates for the ministry and educational work of the church – men of ability, devotion, and earnestness, thoroughly trained and prepared for the development of the spiritual life of the converts, and for the necessary controversial work. I recommend that from time to time the native clergy should come in for a month or so in the course of each year to revive their knowledge and deepen their devotion with the college teachers. I think that from these men evangelists might be chosen, who could have the supervision of a small circle of pastors, and so improve both themselves and them, and help forward the future organization of the native church.

The students were soon scattered and took up posts in various places – two near Amritsar, one in Dinapore, one at Bannu, one in the Kangra valley, etc. French kept in touch with them by letter. It is surprising how many of the students died young – one, a medical missionary in Kashmir, was drowned while swimming in the Jhelum. Yusuf, dying of TB in Delhi, testified that he had come to a personal knowledge of Christ during his days at college. Three years later in 1876 Andreas, who was helping Gordon in tours of the Jhelum district died. “Tell Mr. French,” he said, “I have no fear of death, but joy and confidence.” However, many other lived and served.

As one looks back over the history of theological education during the last century in what is now Pakistan, one can see the seeds which French planted in full bloom. Although his Divinity School is no longer functioning, the Gujranwala Theological Seminary was founded by the United Presbyterians in 1877 and, like the Diocese of Lahore, celebrated its centenary in 1977. The Gujranwala

Theological Seminary became a union institution in part in 1954. French mentioned the help, Mrs. Scriven (?), the wife of his doctor had given in working among the wives of the Divinity School students and felt her death in 1873 as a heavy blow to his work. It is interesting that when the United Bible training Centre moved to Gujranwala in 1947 the staff were invited to teach the wives of the students of the Theological seminary thus following a tradition from the days of French. In the last ten years in Pakistan the concept of Theological Education by Extension has spread and programmes set up mainly coordinated by an independent committee. Gujranwala Theological Seminary had several Extension centers and one is reminded in this effort to train church leaders engaged in secular callings as well as those in the ministry that French's Divinity School had some such students who attended some classes in their free time. The concept of theological education by extension had not arisen as such in the last century but some basic principles of TEE were evident in French's acceptance of mature students who were employed in other callings and who did not necessarily enter the ministry. Theological education in its various possible forms is still a matter which is rightly of great concern to all the church. In this area French was a pioneer.

## **Chapter 8**

### **The creation of the Diocese of Lahore**

The Diocese of Lahore celebrated its centenary in October and November of 1977. It is now a much smaller diocese than ever before although it still stretches from Lahore to Peshawar. It is at present one of the four dioceses of the Church of Pakistan which came into being on November 1, 1970 as a union of four denominations and church traditions – Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Lutheran. This new church with its diocese of Lahore, Multan, Sialkot and Karachi is the largest Protestant church in Pakistan today. The original Diocese of Lahore was created in 1877 but we have to go back to the early nineteenth century to understand its genesis.

Calcutta, the largest of all Anglican dioceses in history, was established in 1813 on the basis of the Chartered Act of the British Parliament. Its first bishop Thomas Middleton arrived in November of the next year and was succeeded by Reginald Heber in 1823. The diocese, which included all the territories of the East India Company, South Africa and Sri Lanka, was then enlarged to include Australia. Heber was authorized to ordain Indians – these included Christian David, a Tamil, Abdul Masih, a North India, and Bowley, a Eurasian. The latter two were already ordained Lutherans. Heber wisely did not require them to renounce their Lutheran orders but maintained that Anglican ordination would have the practical advantage of making them more useful in an Anglican Church and Missionary Society. Daniel Wilson (1832-1858) became the fifth Bishop. His task was made more possible by the division of the Diocese and the appointment of the first Bishop of Madras in 1835, the first Bishop of Australia in 1836 and the first Bishop of Bombay the next year.

Daniel Wilson's successor, Bishop Cotton of Calcutta (1858-1866), paid his second visit to Lahore in 1864 and foresaw that La-

hore would become a Bishopric. The question of a better church building for such an important station as Lahore was under consideration as the existing Church of St. James was not suitable in size or position. Bishop Cotton did not think it was then the time to start work on a new church building – “a new Bishop will not be contented without a Cathedral,” he prophesied. Cotton’s successor, Bishop Milman, sided in Rawalpindi in 1876 during his third visit there. He actually died of dysentery but he was worn out coping with such a large diocese. A new territorial diocese was created as a memorial to Milman endowed by a fund raised in England with contributions from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (S.P.G.), The Society of the propagation of Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.) and the Colonial Bishops Fund. The new diocese was the Diocese of Lahore.

The actual creation of the Diocese of Lahore came in 1877 under the provisions of another Act of the British Parliament. Although it was carved out of the Diocese of Calcutta and Bombay, the new Diocese was still very large – all that is now Pakistan and also Delhi, the rest of the Punjab and Kashmir, with some responsibility for the southern states of the Arabian Gulf. Today all the Gulf States come in the Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf of the newly constituted Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East.

The question of the appointment of the first Bishop of Lahore was an interesting one. On June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1877 the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Tait, wrote to the Marquis of Salisbury,

As President of the committee of Lahore Bishopric Endowment and Bishop Milman Memorial fund, I desire to lay before your Lordship the present position of the scheme. A sum of money which is understood to be sufficient for the Endowment of a Bishopric of Lahore has now been raised by this committee. Under these circumstances I feel justified in asking your Lordship, as Secretary of State for India, to consider the expediency

of at once asking Her Majesty to issue letters patent creating the see, and appointing the first Bishop of Lahore.

Lord Salisbury asked Dr. Tait to suggest a candidate for the new Bishopric. Tait immediately suggested Thomas Valpy French. It appears that French was everyone's choice. French was ecumenical before his time and was acceptable outside as well as inside his own church. "The dear Presbyterian brethren Newton and Forman" welcomed him warmly – the same two who had invited the CMS to the Punjab a quarter of a century before. The regard was mutual and French later wrote that he could not be "insensible of, but rejoiced and praised God for the devoted labours and successful ministries of men and women of other bodies than our own." Early in his career, in Agra, he wrote of his fellow missionaries:

We get on very pleasantly with them. They are Germans, and all in Lutheran orders: Three in number now that Mr. Pfander is gone home on furlough.

French was on friendly terms with the Baptist and American Presbyterians in Agra. Throughout his life he maintained cordial relations with other groups helping and co-operating where possible. The Punjab Mission News for January 15, 1888 notes:

In commenting in our last issue on the action of Bishop French in opening the new mission hospital of the American Presbyterian mission in Ferozepur and in giving a donation in aid of the building fund of their projected church, we remarked that acts such as these of our bishop went far to promote that 'unity of spirit' and to strengthen that 'bond of peace' which all those who love the Lord long for. With more such acts of kindly intercourse in the Church at large, we should have less of strife and more of blessing. We have now to note a pleasant return made by our Presbyterian brethren at Ferozepur. They called a meeting, and, after speeches full of kindly feeling for our late honoured and beloved bishop, they collected fifty rupees in aid of

the Bishop French Memorial Fund, as a small token of their esteem for one whose loss they too feel to be personal.

Thomas Valpy French was consecrated Bishop of Lahore at Westminster abbey in London on St. Thomas' Day 1877 (December 21<sup>st</sup>) by the Archbishop of Canterbury. As early as 1874 some of his friends seemed to have an appreciation of the calling that might come to French. Mr. Shackell, an esteemed colleague in North India, wrote in March of that year saying farewell to French as he went on leave:

How great will be your joy, my dear friend, to see your family once again, returning, as you are, worn with toil... Will you give yourself the needed rest? I fear you are only moving from one sphere of labour to another, and that thus it will be to the end. I hope... you will return to us as our chief pastor. To have you rule over us would be a joyful day for the Punjab and Sindh, and I cling to the hope it will be so.

French left Lahore on March 19th, 1874 to go on leave to U.K. where he was reunited with his family in May. After a summer chaplaincy on the continent he became a parish priest first at Erith in Kent for a short while and then at St. Ebbe's Church, Oxford. His health improved and French had it on his heart to return to India. By May 1877 he had formally resolved to go out again as a missionary. French, despite his great humility and feeling of unworthiness, cannot have been surprised when he heard from the Archbishop:

Lord Salisbury has requested me to mention some name to him for the Bishopric of Lahore. There is no name whose claims for the post seem to me so strong as yours, and I have reason to believe that there is no one who would be so acceptable to the Church. I trust that your state of health is such as to allow of your thinking of this great responsibility. Will you kindly let me hear from you on the subject?

French asked for four days in which to consider the matter and to consult. His father and his old friend Mr. Golightly and others encouraged him. French wrote to accept the nomination but on the condition that there would be no prohibition of missionary work. Soon the appointment was announced. Mr. Wright, the Secretary of the CMS, wrote:

I have not one word to say against your acceptance of the post that has been offered you. My full conviction is that it is of the lord, and that you can now serve Him and His cause in the proposed position better than in any other... Under the circumstances, the CMS gladly and thankfully gives you up for this high office.

On Becoming Bishop, French had to automatically resign from CMS. It must have meant much to the missionaries, however, to know that their bishop came from their ranks. French preached his farewell sermon at St. Ebbe's on November 18 and his last sermon in England on January 1, 1878, his birthday, before sailing again for India. He set out on January alone, leaving his wife behind to attend the wedding of their eldest daughter, Ellen, to the Rev. E.A. Knox. Mrs. French followed her husband to India in November taking two daughters, Lydia and Agnes, with her. In Calcutta French got news of his father's sudden death. From Delhi he wrote: "It was with very solemn feelings indeed that I felt, on waking this morning, that I had now entered on my own diocese." On reaching Lahore he wrote:

If Delhi seemed sacred as the first city of my diocese, much more did mine old station in the centre of my diocese, with all its memories of strange vicissitudes, of joy and sorrow, sickness and health, disappointment and realized hopes, seem very, very solemn to me indeed, and as I approached it and passed Amritsar, I could only cast myself as a very helpless and insufficient and unworthy servant on the forbearance and grace of our dear Lord and Master.

He was warmly welcomed. One of the judges' wives said: "The whole Punjab is hailing your appointment." French expressed surprise as he had been so utterly unsociable. The lady replied: "Yes, but, then, we all know your work." French was enthroned in St. James Church, Lahore on March 3rd, 1878 and so the new Bishop started work in his diocese.

## **Chapter 9**

### **The building of the Cathedral of the Resurrection, Lahore**

As a former CMS missionary, French was representative of those who sought to obey our Lord's great commission to spread the Gospel. In being approved by the Queen, the Secretary of State for India and the archbishop of Canterbury, he was the appointee of the British Raj. He had the warm support of many individual Christian soldiers and administrators as well as leaders of other missions. A new diocese could develop new patterns. Added to this French was, as Bishop Westcott wrote to French's first biographer, Herbert Birks, 'a true apostle.' A new diocese and a new bishop – here lay the hope for the emergence of an Indian Church in which Christians of all races could join, French had his responsibilities to the British troops, to the Government and the Establishment, but he was, above all, an evangelist and church planter – a “missionary bishop” in the widest sense of those words. It was fortunate for the Indian national church that one so keen to promote its welfare was chosen when one remembers that the proportion of expatriate to national Christians at that period was about ten to one.

One of the new bishop's great concerns was to build a fitting Cathedral in Lahore. The British Raj spent money on other noble buildings but there was not even a decent sized station church for Lahore. The Government of the Punjab contributed Rs.50,000 but all the rest had to be raised by voluntary donations for the building of the Cathedral. In his letters French often referred to the building project. To Mr. Golightly he wrote:

The new Cathedral for which we still want £15,000 is a source of anxiety and labour and will be so for two or three years to come, I expect. The Bishop of Calcutta sent £100 last week, the Bishop of Madras £25... and I am saving all I can for it. It was begun on the idea it was to be only a Parish Church and to improve on

the plan after it had had some £1,500 spent on it, and it is one and a half feet above ground, is no easy matter.

The consecration of the Cathedral Church of the Resurrection took place on the Feast of the conversion of St. Paul, January 25, 1887. Even then the groined roof over the chapel was not completed. The first temporary wooden pulpit was replaced shortly afterwards by the present stone one. The building was designed by Sir Gilbert Scott and his son Oldrid who was mainly responsible for the final design and supervision. The effort to raise funds for the cathedral and planning for it was a major burden for Bishop French during most of his episcopate. On his furlough in 1883 and 1884 he had set himself to collect £4,000 at least for the cathedral alone. The tablet erected to his memory on the east wall of the north transcript of the Cathedral reads:

In reverent memory of Thomas Valpy French, D.D., sometime fellow of University College, Oxford, and founder of this Cathedral Church.

French was the driving force behind the project and without his resolute purpose and encouragement the Cathedral would not have been finished by 1887. From the time that they annexed the Punjab, the British had been content to worship in St James' church in Anarkali. The building had been first constructed as a tomb for the mistress of a Moghul Emperor. Sir Robert Montgomery, as Lieutenant Governor, obtained the site for a new building and plans were drawn up for a station church of which the foundation stone was laid in 1874. As soon as French arrived in Lahore as Bishop he visited the site. He called a conference of leading people and proposed a cathedral "built worthily of God and a great diocese" instead of the proposed parish church. Mr. Oldrid Scott was requested to draw new plans and adapt the existing foundation as far as possible. The estimated cost of the larger building was more than £50,000. The actual dimensions are 226 feet in length, 153 feet in breadth at the transepts. The nave is 110 feet long and 30

feet broad. The church will seat 800 and its style is decorated Early English. In April 1897 the Bishop launched an appeal for finance to the whole diocese. To his son, Cyril, he wrote:

If you have any rich friends, I hope you will say a word in our favour, as people are really very poor for the most part in the Punjab. Scarcely anybody stays in India who could afford to live at home. Government cannot aid under present distressed circumstances of wars and famines. I don't want to tax our mission funds, but there are some High Church people who dislike missions, and whom a cathedral is a very legitimate object for breaking the alabaster, though I do hope and trust our cathedral will have a distinctly Christian bearing on missions.

French had considerable difficulty in raising the funds and one admires his persistence and faith. To his sister he wrote in 1879: "I am sadly disappointed... I have written my hands almost into paralysis, begging and pleading." To his daughter he wrote about the same time that he had been trying to get friends of Lord Lawrence to spend part of what they collect to do him honour with on the Lahore Cathedral, where he won his laurels most, and not all on a monument in Westminster Abbey... "I would rather have a church built to remember me by, than have my marble face looked at in Westminster Abbey." In another letter he wrote:

I am trying to get the present design cut down ... so as to avoid all but what we really require to erect a comely and desirable fabric. But I do feel that, in presence of the great religious edifices of heathen and Muslim, to erect a mean and unsightly building would be a great disgrace to us and stigma on the Church of God, which I could not allow my bishopric to be marked by... in the midst of an architectural people, and most self-sacrificing in what they spend on buildings devoted to sacred purposes, it would be a scandal that we should worship in a tomb belonging to a Muslim past. I am thoroughly convinced of this, and am constrained to act on this conviction, even if I were quite alone in my belief. There is much greater necessity for

buildings of character and distinction, within reasonable limits, in this land than in our own land. I feel at least that their erection wipes off a great reproach, independently of what they represent and effect as centres of Gospel extension and church life. I dare not withhold my witness and that of my office from those who in this country are expending vast sums on schools, law courts, hospitals, museums, but are leaving the house of God to dwell not in curtains but in tombs.

The Afghan wars of 1879 and 1880 hindered the building work and donations were slow in coming in. French decided on a memorial chancel for officers who had died in the campaigns and a memorial chancel for the Indian church in memory of his great friend George Maxwell Gordon. He devoted much of his own income to the work. In 1882 he wrote: "Courage and faith and hope must not so soon give way. I have been brought through some severe issues, perhaps none quite equal to this, but I must not limit" God. The following year he went on furlough. Towards the end of his time in England he heard of a great disappointment and wrote to his chaplain on May 23, 1884:

Is it really so, that the Kashmir timber is only worth £500 instead of £1000 and that this £500 must be added to the sum required to be raised? If so, I must give up my rest the last two months which I looked forward to, and plod and plead on still patiently and exhaustingly.

After his return to India, French received another last set-back in his building project. He wrote on April 26, 1885:

All seems to make against me everywhere at present, and it seems a time of the Lord's controversy with us. I can but humble myself under His chastening hand. Added to the trouble, it now appears that the cathedral, even with one roof, cannot be finished for less than 50,000 rupees more i.e. some £4,400. The finance department seems to have been ignorant that what was

spent on the foundation, which was nearly £4,000 was not an item on the creditor's side.

Eventually French and his helpers succeeded and the consecration was planned for January 25, 1887. The Lieutenant-Governor wrote to Bishop French:

I congratulate you from my heart on the completion of the noble edifice, and pray that it may be blessed by God to accomplish all the Christian objects that you have in view, and to be for all time a centre of light and spiritual like to the province and diocese.

In his diary for January 25 French described the consecration services:

A memorable day, in which God's goodness and loving-kindness was signally shown us. I do not know how to feel humbled and thankful enough. Altogether some Rs. 5,500 collected for offertory, but this was a small thing as compared with the hearty warmth and enthusiasm of the people who crowded together to witness and pour in their offerings. Some 1,100 - others say 1,200- were gathered ... About 250 communicants at least. In the afternoon Indian church service Dr. Imad-ud-din preached.

At the English service French preached on the subject of "A Shower of Freewill Offerings," taking his text from Psalm 68:9-11. He noted the part the church should play in uniting East and West:

Let this church be a mother-church indeed, with all the tenderness and depths of sympathy, the loving place, in the arms and heart and home, of the true mother; and not the chill, distant, jealous regard of the typical step-mother. Let none begrudge the poor and the stranger the provision of God Himself has made for them. Let no bitterness, or invidious exclusiveness of race or station, find place in this sanctuary, of which the word has been spoken, "My House shall be called a House of Prayer for all people.

For French the achievement of building the cathedral was a call to deepened dedication and fruitful, spiritual work. A few days after the consecration he wrote:

Now the great end to be accomplished is all before us; and I feel my anxieties are begun. The material building I left to other hands, but in the spiritual I am called to take my part, and to call others to do theirs.

All through his episcopate French had been concerned with the lack of church workers. When difficulties were at their highest about the building project he wrote from Murree in 1885:

[Some] very hard things are said of me now in connection with the Cathedral, yet the difficulties are, in the main, such as I could not possibly foresee or provide against. However the matter does not trouble me nearly so much as many others. If the rather severe earthquake we had last night had swallowed the cathedral up, it would not have been so hard to me to bear as this want of men.

Writing to his brother in early 1887 he says:

It seems a mystery to me that the cathedral is finished at last. I don't feel the least tempted to any proud boasting – I believe, because my most anxious concern of all it has not pleased God to grant me, i.e. a group of men, mighty in word and deed for pulling down the strongholds of sin, and planting and building up the Church of God. And what are walls without the words of power and love and truth re-echoed from them?

When French was appointed Bishop there were about twenty million Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, twenty thousand Europeans, eleven hundred Indian Christians and sixty clergymen in his diocese. It is not surprising that French wrote on May 19th, 1878 from Multan to Mr. Golightly about the administration of his diocese and his recurring problem of overwork:

It has been very often on my heart to write to you; but it has been utterly impracticable, as there are not only long arrears to be made up, but the whole system of administration of this little diocese has to be settled and arranged afresh: and having no private chaplain as yet, I have an immense correspondence to be conducted wholly in my own hand.

An article in the *Punjab Mission News* for January 15, 1888 reported in the situation at the close of French's episcopate:

His clergy – now ninety-one in number – are composed of twenty nine chaplains, of whom eighteen have been nominated during his episcopate, chiefly by himself; three chaplains of the Additional Clergy Aid Society; forty-two missionaries of the Church Missionary Society, of which thirty have been appointed during his episcopate, and fourteen are natives, six missionaries of the S.P.G. and six of the Cambridge mission at Delhi, of whom all but three have been appointed during his episcopate, and all but two are English; and five other clergy, three of whom are connected with schools. Independently of the clergy there are eight lay English missionaries of the CMS, five of whom are medical; thirty-seven lady missionaries of the Church of England Zenana Society, of whom thirteen are honorary, two ladies of the CMS, nineteen ladies of the S.P.G. and Cambridge mission at Delhi, and three Sisters of the St. Denys' School at Murree. With this staff Bishop French has had to direct the religious teaching of the Church of England among 28.700 Europeans and Eurasians (this number is now probably considerably increased since the census of 1881. its consequence of the accessions to the British army of late years on the frontier), and amongst twenty-three millions of natives, of whom eleven and a half are Muslims, nine and a half millions are Hindus, and one and three quarter millions are Sikhs.

The Civil and Military Gazette of April 2, 1883, paid tribute to French's work:

[He] has done much to create a feeling of unity between the missionaries, who are non-official clergy, and the chaplains of the diocese. Himself a missionary of long standing and of apostolic character, his leanings and sympathies have doubtless been in favour of evangelistic work, but in now as has this phase of his episcopate been detrimental to his duties as a high government official.

He was concerned to get the right men to staff his diocese as he wrote to a friend:

I expect three or four vacancies in the chaplains' list this cold season... I would rather leave the vacancies awhile unfilled than have indifferent men to be clogs on the work for a quarter of a century!

He realized that some men because of financial obligations to their families could not come to India on the low salary of a missionary as was the case of Henry Martyn but like him could come as chaplains who are better paid:

I see no reason why the Martyns and Corries should be supposed to be an extinct race of chaplains, and why men of missionary ardour and devotion, with love of language and Eastern study, should not gladly hail such openings as these eastern chaplaincies present.

According to the census of 1881 there were 475 Anglican congregations in India. The *Indian Church Directory* of the Church of England records 386 church buildings, besides many temporary buildings and rooms used for worship. About 265 church buildings called station and garrison churches belonged to the State, and were maintained by it although often constructed by private donations. The remaining Church buildings belonged to missionary societies and were called mission churches. During French's episcopate several churches were built as well as the cathedral in Lahore

including the following, some of which are in the present territory of the Diocese of Lahore:

Lahore –	Divinity School Chapel New building consecrated February 1883
Peshawar –	All Saints Mission Church 1883
Mardan –	St. Alban's 1887
Murree –	Lawrence College, School Chapel 1881

Funds were raised for other subsequently built churches: Garrison churches like those at Gharial near Murree and at Risalpur were built for the army. In 1879 there were 23,000 British troops in the Punjab. Station churches such as those in the main cities like Christ church, Rawalpindi, Holy Trinity, Murree, St. Luke's, Abbottabad, St. John's, Peshawar, and St. George's, Bannu, were built for civil and military uses. There were Cantonment Churches like Christ Church, Peshawar, and Railway churches like St. Andrew's, Lahore. It is not surprising that cantonment and station churches with their strong links with the British Raj were general replicas of English church buildings. Garrison churches were generally built according to an army design. The Cathedral was typically English, as was its surroundings including the chapter house, the Bishop's palace and cathedral school. However, it was refreshing to see an effort by missions to build something more indigenous like All Saints, Peshawar. French, in building a cathedral in Early English style, was doing the appropriate thing as a high government official in the Victorian era of the British Raj. Mostly, he was remarkably free of cultural prejudice and appreciated and promoted things Indian. Today in an independent nation the church is much freer to develop indigenous types of architecture and again there is a boom in church building, partly because so many Pakistani Christians are sending back contributions for such buildings from Arabian oil lands where the freedom to build churches is severely limited or non-existent.

## **Chapter 10**

### **First Bishop of Lahore. 1877-1887**

Apart from the building of the Cathedral and other churches and the call for more clergy, we will now consider the other main events of French's ten-year episcopate. He invited the Rev. Henry Matthew, a chaplain at Simla, to become archdeacon of Lahore. He wrote to him on April 26, 1878, after hearing of his acceptance of this post.

My dear Mr. Matthew, I thank God that He has disposed your heart to accept the archdeaconry, though doubtless with much conflict of feeling. I cannot discover any divergence worth speaking of, if any, between my general views and your own. I certainly have not adopted the eastward position for celebrating Holy Communion, but when both forms i.e. facing eastward or northward are clearly permissible the congregation will get accustomed to the variation. I cannot bring myself perhaps to the requisite enthusiasm on these minutia (details) of ritual, although I set great store by a reverential worship, conducted as in the presence of the Spirit of Holiness... I am thoroughly satisfied that the points on which we agree are most infinitely in excess of those on which our views differ. Party terms I have always determinately eschewed, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, not forgetting that there is one body as well as one Spirit.

Matthew, who served as archdeacon with distinction, was to become French's successor as second Bishop of Lahore in 1887.

The first meeting of the first synod of the new diocese was held on December 31, 1878. Thirty four clergymen including two Indians and twenty laymen including three Indians attended. The second synod was held two years later and was attended by forty-one clergy and sixteen laymen. The Bishop recorded in his diary: "God be praised for bringing us together and giving us upon the whole

one mind.” A layman who participated in this second synod wrote to French: “Your synod was to me a baptism of love, tenderness, spirituality, and power, as it was, I believe, to everyone present.” French generally weighed the merits of various matters and was often independent and sometimes ahead of his time in his conclusions. For his \_\_\_\_\_ he argued for the admission of laity as co-ordinate members of church synods, and not as mere assessors. The *Church Times*, while commending his address in general, took exception to this departure from tradition. The third synod was not held for several years due to French’s furlough. In January 1883 a provincial meeting of all the bishops in India was held in Calcutta under the Metropolitan who was Bishop of Calcutta. The Bishops of Madras, Bombay, Colombo, Lahore, Rangoon, Travancore and Cochin attended – also the two assistant bishops to Madras. French was criticized for withholding his name from the circular letter issued by the assembled bishops. One reason for this was that he hurried away to complete his diocesan tour before the end of the conference but the main reason was that not enough stress had been laid upon adapting the Church’s work to the modern needs and that adequate credit had not been given to the work of nonconformist Christians. His independent judgement was also shown in his churchmanship. After his death, Bishop Bickersteth wrote of him:

It would be difficult to assign Bishop French exclusively to my section in the church... That in the true sense of the word he was evangelical, and that in all his teaching he laid supreme stress on the possession of personal religion, could not be mistaken by any who knew him or came under his influence. On the other hand, his churchmanship was no mere matter of policy or preference. He was a Churchman by conviction and principle.

French was ahead of his times in his recognition and appreciation of the work of women in the service of the church. Earlier in his career, before he became a Bishop, he wrote to his daughter:

Since I have seen what Mrs.\_\_\_\_ and Mrs. S. and others have been blessed to do in India, I feel more what a great sphere of good and useful service India is for ladies; and though they will have some severe, perhaps bitter and heart-rending trials...yet oh! to suffer for such a Saviour.

Towards the end of this career in India he makes a similar comment, this time in the Ecclesiastical Record Book of St. Luke's Church, Abbottabad, during his Episcopal visit there in May 1887:

Miss Margaret Smith, with her younger comrade, Miss\_\_\_\_, call for the Church of Christ's deepest sympathy and liberal aid in undertaking the infant mission of the CMS in this dark, wild frontier... It is no small strength ...and consolation to a Bishop of the Flock of Christ to come across these faithful cohorts of lady-missionaries in various parts of this wide diocese, and be witness of their simple, unostentatious work, conducted in so much faith and prayer. He gladly wrote a preface for Miss S.S. Hewlett's book, Daughters of the King.

Miss Hewlett was a member of the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society and worked at Saint Catherine's Hospital, Amritsar. Her book was about the ministry of physical and spiritual healing among Indian women and children. Bishop French in the six-page preface congratulates his sisters in Christ "who are deputed by the Lord to fulfill for Him this His threefold office: 'The Lord looseth the prisoners; the Lord openeth the eyes of the blind: the Lord raiseth up them that are bowed down.'"

Bishop French was responsible for the founding of St. Deny's School in Muree in March 1882. Nearly three years before in a circular he had made known the need for a higher class school in which orphans and destitute children might receive a suitable education. In a letter to his sister, Mrs. Sheldon, whose husband was his Commissary in England, he wrote:

There is much to be thankful for in promised help of various kinds but I am compelled, as Bishop , to work irrespectively of parties, and if Deaconesses cannot be found to accept Sisters... the Government are planning Schools of own, which will, in their whole tone, be secular, so that I shall probably be obliged to welcome some sisters, if I can raise funds in the Diocese for the education of the girls.

He accepted the help of the Sisterhood of St. Deny's of Warminster, Wiltshire in England. Sister Frances and Sister Annie opened the School in Murree in March 1st with nineteen boarders and two day-pupils.

In a circular letter the Bishop introduces the Sisters as new workers in the Diocese:

The self-denial which has led the Sisters, long since, to devote their life and gifts, with little or no remuneration to the work of Christian education, we regard as a token of their being God's gift to us, and of their being such character as are likely by steadfastness, and quiet perseverance, to promote the highest interests of their pupils, and to instill into their hearts soundest and surest principles of Christian life and action.

The present estate of St. Deny's was bought in 1894 and the buildings extended. French visited the school several times, looking after the spiritual needs of the Sisters as best he could. When in England he visited the Sisters' Home in Warminster. He never relaxed in his efforts to help the school but was not successful in endowing it. French referred to a book he had recently read on church matters.

It has helped me much on the subject of the dedication of holy women as deaconesses, desiring to take lifelong vows. One of the hardest workers out here has applied to me for this consecration, and it appears to me that, if allowed, it should be regarded as a very solemn act indeed, and not without some unusually sa-

cred ceremonial. One has to be very careful; such acts are not rashly entered upon.

He authorized such a service for deaconesses.

French was often busy itinerating in his large diocese. As Bishop, he made five visits to Peshawar and has recorded his reports in the ecclesiastical record books. In the Ecclesiastical Record Book of St. John's Church, Peshawar, he begins his report as follows:

This visitation I was led, from peculiar circumstances, to divide between two periods of time, spent in Peshawar in 1878 and 1879: a place endeared and consecrated to me by many saintly memories associated with it, of Christian men and women, not the least those of the great missionary Pfander, whose name may well be immortalized and canonized in the Church of God; and of my former comrade John W. Knott, who after one and a half year's labour in India; mostly in Peshawar, fell a martyr to too exhausting and overpowering labour; a man of whom it may be simply and truly said, that he was one of the holiest and most learned Englishmen. India has yet seen or is likely to see.

On May 19, 1887 he noted in the Ecclesiastical Record book of St. Luke's Church, Abbottabad:

I spent one and a half days here from May 17th to 19th, 1887 for the purpose of taking the Ascension Day services, with celebration of Holy Communion, en route, for Nowshera to Murree and in hopes of being able to spend a longer time and making a fuller visitation later in the year. The large bodies of troops quartered in the larger hill stations have prevented my doing justice to the smaller and less populous stations in my diocese. The congregation was not as large as I hoped, about fourteen in number.

Bishop French also included the consecration of burial grounds in his many duties. It is sobering to look through some of these old cemeteries and to see how many in early life succumbed to epi-

demics of cholera including many children. In the early years of his episcopate there were many campaigns on the North West Frontier. The Bishop visited troops on the frontier and in Afghanistan whenever he could. He wrote in 1879:

I have just returned from some of the English camps in the Khyber, and have been preserved from all perils of being smitten by the sun, or by the Afridi arrow which flieth by day, or by the pestilence (cholera) which walketh in darkness. Each regiment has lost its quotum of soldiers, dead from cholera, and left in the little cemeteries extemporized under the rough and frowning rocks. The dear soldiers have always had much of my heart, and they seem to find it out. After parade service this morning (a nice full church of English soldiers and officers) I went over to a cholera camp three miles off the banks of the Kabul River.

On February 21, 1880 he wrote from Kandahar in Afghanistan:

Today I keep quiet to prepare for tomorrow... I was so afraid I might not reach Kandahar before this Sunday. I am sorely pushed for time, as I have incessant sermons and lectures before me. Pray that my words may be Christ's own, and accompanied by His blessing. Feb. 23rd. With eight or ten regiments here, and such a multitude of officers and men, little rest is permitted of any, yet I cannot but feel that it was by God's counsel that I came here, as the more serious part the community so often express their thankful appreciation of the effort.

In the severe fighting of April 1880, French's great friend, George Maxwell Gordon, was killed, while trying to bring in some of the wounded. He wrote:

One of my life's greatest sorrows has in God's providence befallen me, i.e. the death in the battle-field of my beloved brother and friend, and your special fellow-worker, Mr. Gordon... the greatest and noblest of our three Punjab apostles has been taken from our hand... it is a bitter and overwhelming sorrow, for I never had one other friend who threw himself with more single-

ness of heart and entireness of devotion into the cause and work of our dear Lord, nor anyone who espoused my own special plans and purposes with such unabated and loyal confidence, so that everything we did almost seemed mutual and common, shared between us, except the special functions and offices of my bishopric. His death was worthy of his life, for he has joined the noble army of martyrs, and it seems hard to suppose that anyone who has known his character and manner of life should not be better and purer and more single-hearted for having known him, yet how often it happens that ‘the righteous perish and no man layeth it to heart.’ I have never heard anyone, however, spoken of—by officers in the army especially – with such admiration and esteem. I feel his removal has thrown a deep dark shadow over the Church of God in these parts, which in my present freshness of sorrow I can hardly expect to see sanctified.

At the close of 1882 French was requested to visit Iran and encourage Christ’s servants there. He was planning to take a furlough in England and so on his way to England he set out via Iran, leaving Lahore on March 15th, 1883. He wrote to his wife of the

[...] formal commission from the Bishop of London at the request of the Church Missionary Society, to visit their missions in Persia; so I seem to be shut up to that course, and I really have no liberty to decline it. It is a great privilege in one way, yet must involve many heavy crosses and sufferings, perhaps in excess of what I have known hitherto. I dare not hope to reach you before July, I fear, as it is no use pushing through places of such unusual importance, and reached with such difficulty.

Henry Martyn was one of French’s great inspirers and he constantly remembered the “saintly Martyn” as he traveled in his footsteps. In Iran the American Presbyterians established a work among the Eastern Churches but most Muslims remain untouched until Mr. Bruce, French’s old colleagues in Dejarat, entered Iran in 1869. Next year the Americans started work among Muslims also. After French had nearly died in Dejarat and was rescued uncon-

scious, Bruce continued working there. He happened to mention to Mr. Venn, the CMS Secretary that he had heard it was now easier to travel through Iran. He was extremely surprised when Venn, with tears in his eyes said:

Oh, do go to Persia! I am so thankful for this opening; it is one of those things we looked in vain for in times past, but which God is giving us now.

On his return to India Bruce stopped in Persia, improved his Persian and found openings for sharing the gospel. Persians used to come to visit him to talk about religion. As he was preparing to set out for India he received a letter from Venn saying:

If you can see your way to improving Martyn's version of the New Testament, then stay in Persia. Nine Muslims came to him and requested baptism and he took this as God's sign to him that he should remain in Persia. Soon after this Persia was afflicted by terrible famine and Bruce, helped by George Maxwell Gordon, arranged and distributed relief and saved many lives. An orphanage was also founded for children of those who had perished.

It was not until 1876 that CMS officially recognized Persia as a field of operation. The new field abounded in difficulties. At the time of Bishop French's visit to Persia in 1883, Bruce had baptized thirty Muslims secretly. For this he was criticized but it was the way God guided him in this difficult and pioneer situation. Others believed and were not baptized. Some of those baptized were persecuted and left for India. Bruce, commenting on the difficulty, said: "One can but set before them Christ's own command about confessing Him, and His command, 'If they persecute you in one city, flee to another,' and leave them to judge for themselves." Then there was the problem of the relationship of the new mission to the old Armenian Church. Many Armenians lived in Julfa, a suburb of Isfahan, and their bishop resided there. Despite igno-

rance and lack of spiritual life, they had maintained their Christian faith for centuries on a difficult setting. Bruce set about developing cordial relationships with the Armenians and encouraging them in reformation. He was invited to share in fellowship with a small group and this he did though he never sought to proselytize. Bruce's main work was the revision of Henry Martyn's Persian New Testament and the still older Old Testament. Martyn, after finishing his translation of the Urdu New Testament, had gone to Iran on his way to England in 1811 to improve his translation. He stayed for ten months in Shiraz testing and improving his translation and debating with the Muslim religious leaders at their request. It was this translation which after over half a century now needed revision.

It was to see Bruce and the work now established that Bishop French went on his way to England in 1883. From Lahore he went to Karachi, took a ship to Muscat in Oman and then sailed on to Bushire. Perhaps he did not have much idea that he would return to Muscat eight years later to witness and to die. He constantly remembered Henry Martyn who, taking the same route, had landed there on April 22, 1811 on his way to Shiraz. Of Muscat, Henry Martyn wrote in his diary: "In a small cove surrounded by bare rocks heated through, out of reach of air as well as wind, lies the good ship Benares, "in the great cabin of which lie I." French wrote to his wife from Muscat on March 20, 1883:

I am seated here in the resident's house, having landed for the few hours the 'Burmah' stops in harbour to see the place its curiosities, and to inquire whether any congregation could be gathered, as it is the Tuesday of Holy Week. In both objects I am disappointed... The Bazaars are all roofed in, and only about four feet across, positively insufferable, I should think, in hot weather. The people talk a medley of tongues, chiefly Arabic. Some also Persian, Urdu, and Suashili from Africa... The harbour is a delightfully landlocked and enclosed one... and surrounded with rocks with great boldness and sternness, many of

them crowned with forts, especially two --Jalali and Mirani – of Portuguese engineering, on two opposite rocky crests... The Arab tribes all around continually make raids, and blood-thirsty feuds seem incessantly renewed...Dates are the chief export, rock salt also and donkeys.

French had been working at Arabic and Persian whenever Possible. In a letter to his son he wrote:

I find the mullahs in Muscat understand me fairly. If I had only the more perfect love and holiness of a Martyn, words and thoughts would doubtless find vent somehow. I pray it may not be quite a wasted opportunity of speaking for my Master, if He has people in these cities. To approach the heart of a new people for the first time is not an easy matter. But my privilege has more often been to report on work and to set other to work better than myself than to effect much personally. It is something even to be allowed to screen one's own ineffectiveness behind this shelter, and to rejoice at others' successes may possibly be one of the greatest joys of heaven.

They sailed up the Gulf from Muscat passing near Bahrain and he finally landed at Bushire in Iran. Bruce had sent some Christian friends from his congregation to escort him – two Bible colporteurs and George, an Armenian Christian and agent of the Bible Society, and a helper. French wrote to his sick daughter Edith at a stopping place thirty miles from Shiraz about which he said:

*Henry Martyn's Life and Memoirs* seem to make me quite familiar with it already. Would I could meet some who talked with him, but of that there is no hope, since seventy years have gone by since he was laid in his lonely grave. The Kingdom of God abides, however, though the servants of it pass away.

Of Shiraz he wrote:

I hear Mrs. Bruce writes and speaks Armenian well. I wish there were a Christian girls' school in Shiraz. The city is celebrated for its great poets, Hafiz and Sadi, whose tombs are a sort of place of pilgrimage; but the tombs of dead poets will not make people poets, any more that visiting those of dead saints will make people holy.

To his wife he wrote about his twelve days in Shiraz:

It is a great comfort to me that I was led in India to devote much time with Mr. Bateman and others to the study of Sufism and Persian; and Persia, being the land in which Sufism most prevails, I find myself surprisingly at home with the religious teachers here in the use of words. All they say almost is familiar to me; still, to touch hearts and influence lives is not my work, but the work of the Church's great Teacher, the Holy Ghost.

On April 10, 1883 he wrote in his diary about his conversations with Muslim leaders:

I talked to them about Daniel preaching probably in Persepolis, and Darius' order throughout his Kingdom that men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel...I told them what honour it was that their country had a prophet, and the prophet's words commanded to be circulated through the country by the greatest of their Kings...April 11...Eight copies of the New Testament or portions, sold by Benjamin in the bazaars today. Much time spent in reading Hebrew and Chaldee, Daniel chapters six to eight and the book of Esther." Persepolis was the spring palace of Ahasurus, the husband Of Queen Esther.

French greatly enjoyed looking at the famous ruins of Persepolis...

April 14 Accepted an invitation from a mujtahid to visit him in his garden... the nawab was also there, and other mullahs. I spoke at some length on the new birth, and the Word of God, and the second coming of our Lord. Books, which the colporteur had brought, excited their attention much; and the ten Bibles or Tes-

taments in Arabic and Persian were bought. The mujtahid read out of the first and second psalms, delighted with the similarity of it to the Quran. I pressed upon them the importance of spreading the four great books of the word of God... The passages I had copied out this morning as to the Sufi views of the 'Kalamat' (Word of God) were helpful.

On the way to Isfahan French describes how he met followers of the Bab (Bahais). The movement originated in Iran but has now spread in many countries. He studied the third chapter of John with these men who had founded a religious, political sect and almost worship their original teacher, the Bab. The name Bab means 'Door'. A study of the great "I am" in the gospel of John is profitable for such a group some of whom are found in Pakistan today. In early May French reached Isfahan safely and stayed with Dr. and Mrs. Bruce in the compound which today is the headquarters of the Bishop in Iran, Bishop Hasan Dehqani-tafti, who is also Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem (and neighbouring lands), Cyprus and the Gulf. These four dioceses became an autonomous church in fellowship with but separate from the Church of England in January 1976. In Isfahan French shared in the ministry and on his first Sunday spoke to about ninety people at a Persian service. The Armenian bishop and several of his priests called on French and French returned the visit and promised to convey the Armenian Bishop's message of brotherly love and regards to the new Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Benson. French confirmed sixty-seven people on May 18 and on the 20th he ordained a Persian Christian called Minas as a priest. A few days later he parted sorrowfully and with prayer from his friends and continued his journey, visiting the sacred Shia city of Qum on his way to Tehran. In Tehran he had good fellowship with the American United Presbyterian missionaries and visited their Armenian School. He went from Tehran to Rasht and then sailed on the Caspian Sea to Tsaritsin, going on from there by rail to Moscow (Russia). On July 2nd he wrote to his wife from Moscow:

I leave tomorrow evening for St. Petersburg, finding that is really the directest route homewards via Berlin (Germany)... coming from Calais (France) to Dover (England) and taking the first train"...home.

After French's death, D. Bruce wrote to the *Punjab Mission News*:

On the occasion of his visit to Persia in 1883, French often impressed this upon me: 'If we would win these Muslim lands for Christ, we must die for them.' 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.' Whether this be true of India or not, it certainly seems to be true of Muslim lands... While the present generation lasts the good bishop's visit to us in Julfa, Isfahan, will not be forgotten, and I have no doubt its fruits will last through eternity.

## **Chapter 11**

### **Resignation. Journey to England through the Middle East**

Bishop French's episcopate lasted exactly ten years. For more than two years before he actually resigned he had been thinking about it and discussing it with his colleagues and superiors. He was obviously killing himself in his endeavors to meet the requirements of his office but he was unwilling to relinquish the burden until he knew a worthy successor would be appointed. His choice was his Archdeacon, Henry Matthew. Matthew, for family reasons, needed some persuading, and in fact, his wife died just before his consecration as second Bishop of Lahore. One has the impression from the correspondence preserved in the Lambeth Palace Library that the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Secretary of State for India, desiring to save French's life and respecting his judgment, agreed to nominate Matthew as his successor. On February 8<sup>th</sup>, 1886 French wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. E. Benson:

The request, to be brief, is simply this that on the conclusion of Archdeacon Matthew's allotted term of furlough... I may be permitted by your Grace, with the sanction of H.M. Secretary of State for India, to resign the Bishopric of Lahore, to which I feel my strength both of body and mind growing unequal, in favour of the Archdeacon, who has the confidence and love of the whole Province, of all races and classes, so far as he is known to them: and as a theologian, a preacher, a scholar, an administrator and I may add, as a Saint, has rare and exceptional gifts. As regards myself, though I might manage one of the two great departments of work assigned to the Bishop of Lahore, the European and the native work in the vernacular, I felt that at the age of sixty-three, which I shall then reach, I have no reason to hope I should be able to fulfill the duties of both to the advantage of the Church of God. Even during the last few months, from time to time, my brain has suffered severe distress from the attempt to grapple with the secular and spiritual needs of the two Branches into which the Diocese is divided...I might hope, in case of be-

ing allowed to resign, to find a retreat for a while in some retired spot, within reach of unshepherded Europeans of natives, where I might turn to account what I have acquired by prosecuting the study of vernacular languages rather steadily and diligently: and which I can make comparatively little use of, while the very varied and mixed duties of my office go so near to exhaust my strength, and scatter what I have hardly gathered. It is with no desire to escape from work in India that I regard it as a solemn duty not to delay in preferring this request, feeling that on almost every possible account if accepted it would tend happily to the glory of God, and the well-being and edifying of the Church.

On August 31, 1886 Dr. Benson had written to Lord Cross, the Secretary of State for India:

The health of the Bishop of Lahore (Mr. Valpy French) is somewhat precarious. His life is most valuable. His mission work and the fresh 'idea' which he has brought into Indian Mission life have inspired many of our best men. I hear from those who know him best that he cannot continue his present strains; he would himself gladly resume the place of Mission preacher among native tribes who know and revere him, and continue the preparation of ethical works for use in higher education among the Hindus. His Episcopal work had interrupted these. If he cannot give up the incessant traveling and take to that quieter life, I fear the church must soon lose some of her best men – He would not retire --- would not think it right to do so—under ordinary circumstances. But the Archdeacon of Lahore, Archdeacon Matthew, is a very remarkable man. You would hear a chorus of opinion in his honour and of love for him from all sorts of people, lay and cleric, who know his work... But my own view is that two very unusually good and able men, beyond the common mark would be saved for Indian Church work if it were possible for you (as Secretary of State you appoint to the Bishopric of Lahore) to allow the Bishop to resign with Archdeacon Matthew for his successor – I believe nothing else would make the Bishop give up. And no other call would take Archdeacon Mat-

thew back—He would feel it a very solemn duty to carry on the great work of Bishop French.

Dr. Benson, the Archbishop of Canterbury, was very reluctant to accept French's resignation at first but on September 6, 1886 he wrote to French:

My dear Bishop and Brother,  
I had an interview with Archdeacon Matthew, and, after comparing my impressions with his own I really felt unable to proceed further in the business you so confidently entrusted to me. I hardened my heart to all the pathos of the situation, and I felt sure I had no right to further your love of evangelization at such a loss... as your retirement would be. At a second interview the other day, he showed me your last letter to him, and when I read your real anxiety about your health... I felt that if I had no right to promote your evangelization, I had still less desire to prepare for your canonization. With prayer to be guided aright, and that any mistakes might be over-ruled, and sorrowfully—for I have deeply rejoiced in the power of Christ through His Bishop of Lahore, -- I could not...let myself off from writing to the Secretary for India to ask him simply whether it would not be possible for him to listen to such an application.

His friends too had been concerned. Mr. Bateman wrote on September 22<sup>nd</sup> about French's proposed resignation:

I am sure that you have done right. Ever since I saw you here last year I have longed, in spite of my love for you as my bishop, that you would speedily lay aside a burden that was too great for you. You were nearly dead and did not seem to know it... For your future, it is in faithful hands. Whether in England or in India, God had given you grace to show so many signs of an apostle, that I believe He will put an end to your perils and journeyings oft.

French himself wrote to his son from Lahore on October 2<sup>nd</sup>:

I see nothing better than (for rest's sake and for fulfilling of pledges' sake), to carry out next year my old plan of staying a few weeks at Beirut, and so breaking the thread of the enormous correspondence which has been so oppressing and depressing me of late, and from thence as from a watch-tower looking to see whether and where God has any little work for me to do in my ageing years before I settle down in the old country... whenever God's providence may lead me. I have always been anxious to learn to talk Arabic as it is spoken in so many missionary lands, and either in India or elsewhere I may be able to turn it to account. Anyhow, my friends feel that it would be more becoming for me, that I should absent myself from India for a year. Then if God requires me for any Indian work His call will reach me. If elsewhere I hope I shall be ready.

On December 22, 1887, the day after his resignation was effective, French wrote to his wife:

And so at last the long anticipated day of resignation has come and gone... Now I shall seem to be almost more yours... that I sign myself no longer 'Lahore', but 'T.V. French.'

French left Karachi on January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1888 without being sure of his exact route. As he had only been out in India three and a quarter years this time, he did not feel justified in going straight to England without doing a little more service. He sailed to Bushire, studying Arabic on the week's voyage. After sending his sympathy to his successor on death of his wife he wrote:

I shall hope to learn something in my journeys of what the Eastern and Roman Churches, with the American Presbyterian Missions, are doing in these parts and how far they are at all in touch with the Muslims, whether Turkish or Arabian, and what the Church of England might do, either working missions of its own, or trying to get work agencies and influences in those eastern churches which invoke our aid.

The Bishop went on by ship up to where the Rivers Tigris and Euphrates join, and then up the Tigris to Baghdad. He visited the ruins of Babylon and saw the remains of Nebuchadnezzar's palace. His thoughts often turned to Lahore and England and on February 19<sup>th</sup> he wrote to his wife:

I am so glad you could be at Bishop Matthew's consecration. I have thought much of him today as just entering on the cathedral work of Lahore.

To his daughter Lydia, writing from Iraq, he made the following observation:

Medical missions seem the one licit and unforbidden mode of reaching Muslims.

On his way to Nineveh French passed the famous battlefield of Arbela where Alexander the Great defeated King Darius and overthrew the Persian Empire in 331 B.C. French shared in services with various Christian denominations. To Ellen, his elder daughter he wrote:

Last Sunday was spent in Mardin, in the house of the old Syrian patriarch, whose jurisdiction extends over most of Mesopotamia...He visited London ten years ago, and saw the Queen and Archbishop Tait, whose portraits adorn his walls; but he is very indisposed to reform his Church, or to accept spiritual help and evangelical teaching from either the American Presbyterians or the Church of England.

He journeyed through Edessa, the first ever Christian State and Kingdom in early times. Near Aleppo he turned aside to see Antioch in Syria, the ancient Gentile centre of Christianity in the first century church and then by road and ship he reached Lebanon and stayed in Beirut.

In the Middle East the fixed policy of the Church of England missions was to try to help the already existing ancient churches and not to establish fresh communities in face of the united force of Islam. How far it was to be possible to maintain this position was one of the questions of the day. French wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury at length with his observations and reflections. From Syria he wrote on April 26<sup>th</sup>:

The American missionaries are fairly strong at Mardin, and show a good spirit toward us. Many express their own fears and almost convictions that internal reform is hopeless for the Eastern Churches: They say that they should have preferred to work on these lines themselves at first instead of proselytizing into their own particular body, but that they had been forced reluctantly and inevitably into their present course of action by the persecuting spirit of the Churches and the exclusion with bitterest hostility of those whose spiritual character and views for doctrine reposed their own.

One church leader told French that there were 1,500 Armenian Christian families in Diarbeker and 500 Protestant families. In the ancient Armenian Church:

[...] there is a very decided and growing craving for enlightenment and self-reform, of which there was no sign thirty-five years ago, chiefly on the part of the laity rather than of the priests... There is a decided reaction from the old breaking up of the old; a growing disposition, if only the introduction of more distinctly scriptural and Gospel teaching, and also of practical and ritual reforms, will be borne with and accepted, to join heart and hand in the reformation and restoration of their ancestral Churches, after the type of our English reformation. 'Building up on primitive lines' is the order of thought now, rather than breaking up after American precedents.

French continued in his long letter to Dr. Benson:

I must confess that I set out on this journey with a very unjust prejudice against the American Protestants, but on all hands, and not merely from statements of their own, I find witness borne to the remarkable stirring and awakening which their schools and public services and ministries, with the large circulation of the Holy Scriptures, have brought about among several of the Churches of the East, most of all among the Armenians and Nestorians...Could it be that in God's good providence a college...could be established under the joint management of the Armenian and English clergymen, though with the control of studies in the hands of the latter, either at Diarbekir or at Edessa, the only places unoccupied by the Americans except by their native teachers and occupying such fine central positions, the latter most especially, how rich and abiding might be the blessing to the Armenians and old Syrian Church of the future...But I have no idea that any such request has ever been addressed to your Grace from any of the leaders of the Armenian Church, and until such an appeal should reach you I can well believe that your Grace would not find it in your will or power to make any initiatory movement towards the achievement of such a result.

Some realized that the revival of the ancient Churches might be the means of bringing new life not only to their members but to the surrounding Muslims who could be most effectively approached this way as can be seen in various Middle East lands today when the streams of revival are beginning to flow.

Bishop French spent ten months in Syria and the Holy Land, convalescing, studying colloquial Arabic and becoming familiar with the work of missions. He inspected and encouraged in many Christian schools in Syria and Lebanon. In inspecting he sought to find out how much the pupils thought rather than how much they knew. He noted the need for more personnel in missions. From the hills of Lebanon where he was supposedly taking a little rest he wrote on September 10<sup>th</sup>:

I cannot help thinking that our Church has in the future a path of special usefulness chalked out for it, in the reviving and evangelizing of these Eastern Churches... I think you seem to understand my position here better than most. It is a genuine work entrusted to me by Bishop Blyth, as one of his clergy put in charge of Lebanon work... Some seem to think I ought to undertake some definite post of duty at once! As if my nine or ten hours a day of hard work were mere idling or self-pleasing! The fact is, I don't like always talking about what I am doing, or my life here would tell a different story with its missionary visits to the villages and to the monasteries, with many visits received in my own house, all of which (except the English work on Sunday) have to be in a strange and difficult tongue.

To his son he wrote:

The sense of sin is sorely deficient. Repentance and conversion is all very well for Jews and Druzes, they seem to think, but for Baptized Christians, who have a priest to have recourse to for services and for visits in sickness, such ideas are irrelevant.

French enjoyed the natural views of the Holy Land:

To have, as yesterday, the heights of Carmel, the Mediterranean, the great stretch of the Esdraelon valley, and the first sight of Nazareth, made a day of unique privilege, indeed not soon to be forgotten.

Often he stayed in local inns preferring to live among the people rather than with fellow country-men. In Jerusalem he visited Golgotha, skull-like in shape and now a Muslim cemetery. He enjoyed a walk to Bethany just a few miles out of Jerusalem across the Kidron Valley. He enjoyed the view of the wilderness of Judaea southward with the mountains of Moab and from the hill above looked down:

[...] on the village home which yielded our blessed Lord almost the only human refreshments He allowed Himself when near Jerusalem... Monday evening I spent examining Nehemiah's walls ... and in a visit to the pool of Siloam, which at present is almost dried up, so one could not realize as one could wish the beautiful words of Isaiah the prophet, 'Because this people refuse the waters of Siloam which flow softly.' Still it was a rich treat to stand at the very pool where the blind man was bidden to wash... Friday was to me an enjoyable and solemn day, as I visited the scene of the Lord's agony, under some extremely ancient olives of most weird and rugged appearance, whose roots may have been the original roots of the very trees under which Jesus prayed those fervent prayers 'with strong crying and tears.'

From Jerusalem he went on to Bethlehem:

So I have been enabled by our Father's great goodness to realize a purpose my heart was set upon to spend Christmas Day in Bethlehem...Between the Bethlehem ridge and the next to the east is a smiling valley or rather broad hollow, partly arable, partly planted with olives. These are the fields of Boaz, and afterwards of Jesse, and a spot on the same is marked as the shepherds' field with the spacious caverns where their flocks were said to have been housed for the night when the angel-minstrelsy was heard...I have been many times to visit the scene of the Nativity and the manger.

He visited Jericho:

I traveled by yesterday amid sombre and weird-looking hills, with shelter for any number of bandits in their rocky caverns and defiles like the valleys of the shadow of death. In one fearfully deep cleft one first comes to the Brook of Cherith... The best is that the blessed Saviour's eyes rested on all these scenes, and saw them much as they now are, and His feet trod the very same pathways on that last journey to Jerusalem... Yesterday Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ took me for a walk on the slopes above the lake, and pointed out the sites of Capernaum, Chorazin and Bethsaida.

From the ridge above Tyre the snowy ranges of Lebanon and Hermon, and the expanse of the Mediterranean sea below with its bright blue waters formed a picture of almost unique beauty, which may not unnaturally have enhanced the proud self-esteem of the once mistress of the old world leading the Prince of Tyre to say, "I am God, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas."

French then went on to Damascus, back to Beirut and then to England through Smyrna and Istanbul. He twice narrowly escaped drowning at sea but God, in His grace, reunited him with his wife on April 17<sup>th</sup> near London.

French wrote a pamphlet called *Notes on Travel* for his friends at their request giving some of his reflections on his year of travel. He noted that the Eastern Churches:

[...] have been struck with the high character and expensive, sympathetic views of our recent archbishops... with the excellence of our Prayer-book and its Liturgical services... with our ceaseless and successful efforts in the work of Biblical translation; the increased number of our students and editors of the chief Greek and Syrian Fathers; the kindly reception accorded to some of their Patriarchs and Primates; help given for schools and printing presses, and other signs of closer drawings of heart between our Church and their own... The Muslim power, they frequently said, renders all missionary effort impracticable, it being an indispensable condition of their existence, at least of their toleration, protection, and admission to municipal rights, that they should let Muslims well alone, and make no fresh converts... I have observed with unfeigned surprise, the manner in which the Greek priests and lay-people have accepted, not tolerantly alone, but respectfully, educational help for their daughters, supplied by the American Presbyterians in Syria, Persia, Turkey, as well as the help of cultivated English ladies working on independent lines in Syria and the Holy Land in some highly important centres.

One leader of the Orthodox Greek Church told French that he:

[...] considered the present moment most favourable for forming closer and faster relations between the two Churches, especially in the promotion of the theological study. It would not be so well for their students to come over to learn in England. It would be preferable for some of our best to come out and live among them. A Divinity School of a high order would be, in his judgement, a really cementing bond of love and brotherhood, but it must be done in a candid and tolerant spirit, not polemic and controversial.

French certainly saw the great possibilities of co-operation with the ancient churches of the Middle East which had maintained their existence from before the rise of Islam and which God could use as river-beds in which the Holy Spirit could not just send a trickle but streams of revival. The prophet Joel has foretold: "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophecy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. Even upon menservants and maidservants in those days, I will pour out my spirit," Joel 2: 28-29. French saw the beginnings of this as he travelled nearly a century ago in lands where Christianity began but which are now so strongly Muslim. The trickle of reform and revival is now a stream in some areas. May it soon become a torrent bringing life to all around.

## **Chapter 12**

### **Call to Arabia and Death in Muscat**

In every phase of his career French was a pioneer. He arrived in India in 1851 and founded St. John's College Agra. Then he and Dr. Bruce started the Dejarat Mission in 1862. On his return from several years in England he established St. John's Divinity College in Lahore. In 1877, as we have seen, he became the first Bishop of a new diocese. His apostolic and pioneering spirit was revealed yet again when, at the age of sixty-six, he became the first missionary to Muscat.

After his resignation as Bishop of Lahore and his year of travel in the Middle East he arrived in England just before Easter 1888 and was reunited with his wife and family – “one of the happiest days of my life.” He found it difficult to rest. He spoke at many congregations and groups of people about the work of Christ in other lands, but as he found no settled job and felt that his linguistic gifts and study were not being used, after a year, he started to prepare himself for another period in the Muslim world. He was especially burdened for the Arab world. For two months he looked after a parish in Penzance, Cornwall. While there he enjoyed a visit to Marazion where Henry Martyn had visited Lydia Grenfell. On his travels around England speaking about missions he again met Rev. George Lefroy who was to become the third Bishop of Lahore from 1899 to 1913. Before Lefroy sailed to India French wrote to encourage him:

The fresh wrench of parting from a beloved and honoured parent, the one spared to you, will be sharp in its suffering... small and shadowy resemblances in our poor life's histories, of the blessed Saviour's anguished parting with the Virgin Mother... Begging you to convey from me, though a stranger in the flesh, truly sympathetic regards to your mother, and the thanks of the Punjab Church for the gift to it of her son.

It was not clear to French how he should go abroad this time. He wrote confidentially to his daughter Lydia:

I am a little in hopes of being able to do some little work for Greeks in Egypt, Syria or Palestine, but as yet the precise door is not open. The CMS is closed against me, I fear, as the penalty of my high churchmanship. Bishop Blyth and the archbishop favour my taking the work in Syria and Palestine.

The Greek Orthodox Church tended to turn for help to the Anglican Church rather than to the Roman Catholic Church. They were afraid of being absorbed by the latter but were requesting help from the former. The Archbishop appreciated this and was keen to respond as he accepted French's views that the reform of the ancient churches was significant in reaching the Muslims of the Middle East. In his address to the CMS on its ninety-second anniversary on May 5, 1891. Archbishop Benson said:

It will be our duty to set reform on foot among the Oriental Churches, not to override them and dash ourselves to pieces against the strong rock of Islam, but to trust that by our own exertions and the exertions of others the spirit of reform, of the disintegration of superstition, of return to the Scripture as the foundation of all knowledge, may be set on foot among these Oriental churches, and we may see them themselves become true apostles of the Muslim races. I believe that that will succeed without precipitancy; and there is no special fact that in this matter we shall be guided by the counsels of Bishop French."

Earlier in the same meeting the President had referred to French:

While we pledge ourselves to renewed exertion and effort, we desire to send forth a message of tender, strong sympathy, encouragement and support to those of our brethren in distant lands... to cheer the heart of that grand old veteran, Thomas Valpy French, who, in the fortieth year of his missionary services, unsupported as far as human help goes, is attacking the

seemingly impregnable fortress of Islam in the eastern parts of Arabia, while stretching out his hands to the old Society which has served and loved so long.

This was May 5 and French was in Oman. On May 14th he died in Muscat. We must now see how God guided him in those last months of his life and received him in death.

In his last summer in England French confessed to his daughter Lydia:

I am struggling hard against a tendency to depression, which is such a temptation to overworked constitutions like yours and mine, and I doubt not you often do try to put it on one side by thinking, what act of kindness and sympathy can I perform for some one in need or suffering?

By October his way seemed a little clearer and he wrote:

I propose a journey for a few weeks or months, or more, as God may appoint, to Egypt, perhaps via Tunis, to perfect myself more in the Arabic tongue, and to inquire what is being done for Muslim missions most effectively in those parts. The CMS think me too worn-out to attempt any fresh mission-work, and I am almost of the same mind with them... My pamphlets on the Greek Church have awakened some measure of sympathy, but none have volunteered for active services in that direction. To be heard amidst the Babel of voices in England, so as to reap practical fruit of one's pleadings, is increasingly difficult and almost hopeless.

On October 26, 1890 he wrote to his daughter:

Should I go to Egypt, via Tunis, I shall see the spots sacred to St. Augustine's memory... I sometimes wish my path had been clear all along to return to the Indian frontier. It seems hard at nearly sixty-six to start on a new line of action altogether: but

events prove that I was rightly guided to throw myself into Arabic studies. But for that the world would have been seemed shut against me...Edmonds has put out a valuable article on Henry Martyn's translation of Holy Scripture, and his burning desire to do something for the Arab tongue and races. Mackay's Life is deeply interesting ...He was anxious to see Muscat taken up as a mission station.

To the Archbishop he wrote on the same day venturing to offer one other suggestion:

It is with reference to the late Mr. Mackay's (of Uganda) strong and urgent appeal for the adoption of Muscat on the Oman coast, as one of our chief mission centres, because of the important bearing it has both on Zanzibar, and on the inland territories of our newly-acquired protectorate in Africa... I have the comfort of feeling that I have your sanction and benediction for my present journey inquiry and fresh trial of health and strength in connexion with what has been my life's chief work.

To Canon Edmonds he wrote:

I feel that your attempt to call the Church's rising to a sense of the dignity and excellence and glory of its high commission to possess itself of the Arabic tongue in order to reach the Arab heart, has been most seasonable, and will act as a most powerful constraint to many.

The next day, November 3rd, French parted from his wife and sailed from England never to see her or his native land again. He stayed several weeks in Tunisia. He wrote to his eldest daughter from Tunis:

My chief work is with a learned Arab mullah with whom I read one of their most useful classics, Abd-ul-Kadir: one of their great saints, who lived six hundred years ago at Baghdad, and whose language often testifies to his having been to some extent under Christian influences and teachings, and favourably dis-

posed towards the Gospel. His vocabulary is of infinite use for writers of Christian works for Muslims. Besides, all North Africa down to the Sudan sits at his feet as their favourite and most honoured instructor.

To his wife he wrote about his evangelistic opportunities:

I can scarcely imagine any Episcopal work more important than visits to these little scattered mission churches, if the door of utterance be opened of HIM.

He met some of the missionaries on Tunisia and recorded:

I have been spending this afternoon with them, and reading a specimen or two of a translation into Arabic I am working at with a mullah of St. Hillary's great work on the Trinity, which I have long thought would be likely to be useful to the Muslims... I must soon leave for Egypt, as it is chiefly in response to frequent invitations from Bishop Blyth that my course has seemed shaped hitherwards... But if no definite line of work seems appointed me in Egypt, or beyond it in the Red Sea or Syria, I may yet return here... what is done here, of course, works more or less in harmony and concert with the Uganda, Congo, and Zanzibar at work, only that the builders are fighting and building at different portions of the wall, like Nehemiah and his soldier-masons.

From the Tunisian Islamic centre, Kairowan, French wrote to the church historian, Eugene Stock. He gave the gist in a letter to Mrs. French and expressed his:

[...] readiness at least to go and make a report from personal observation of Muscat as a mission station, saying also that though I thought I was too old, and it would be vain-glorious for me to call myself or be called a leader and founder of a mission there, yet I might see my way, if God prospered me, to accompany the founders and share in their counsels, and use the Eastern languages I have toiled so much to acquire... I have also observed

that I fear Bishop Blyth will be disappointed that the spheres he proposed in his diocese, in Cairo and Jerusalem, are set aside. But I think that I really have waited long enough for some more decisive action on the bishop's part to fix my destination at some center whence action might proceed. I think you will rather like my being all but, if not quite, in my old diocese again. Muscat certainly came twice in my circle of visitation, though on the way home, being quite worn out, I did not attempt to land. I have begged also it may be understood that each second summer I spend, please God, at home with you, for six months or so.

French then left Tunisia and spent three weeks in Egypt visiting Alexandria and Cairo, spending his time seeing mission work, studying Arabic and visiting the pyramids and the famous Islamic university of Al Azhar in Cairo. He left Suez on January 9th by a Turkish ship. In the Red Sea they stopped at the pilgrim port of Jiddah. To his wife he wrote:

The city of Jiddah is full of lofty and handsomely built houses, each house abounding in richly carved lattice works, three or four stages high, chiefly wood-work of elaborate device. Except at the pilgrim season these are mostly closed... the bazaars are crowded as usual as in Eastern cities... I put an Arabic Bible in each of my large pockets, and so ventured forth. I got two occasions to give short Arabic addresses within that city, one in a learned old mullah's house, whom I induced to invite me in and listen to the story of God's plan of salvation. The other opportunity was in a more open space, sitting on the door-step of an old blind man, whose friends gathered round to listen... The mullah wished to have the Bible, so I left it with him. I seldom leave the New Testament without the Psalms and Prophets... The young American on board (Samuel Zwimer) talks of their settling down in Muscat; but, as I tell him, I have pledged myself to the CMS to report on its suitability for founding a mission, according to Mackay's urgent entreaties, and that I preached in the bazaars there in 1884 as being part of my diocese.

At Aden French replenished his stock of Arabic Bibles and visited Keith-Falconer's grave.

On leaving Aden the ship touched at Bombay and the Bishop sent an urgent letter to his successor, Bishop Matthew, explaining his plans and requesting formal recognition and permission. He wrote:

My present object, partly countenanced by the CMS, but timidly and indecisively, is to spend a few weeks or months at Muscat and the adjoining ports, to discover and report upon present openings and possibilities of entrance for our missions, if such indeed there be, and unless – to use apostolic terms, with all humility – ‘ the Spirit suffers us not,’ or ‘Satan hinders’...As things now are this will bring me within your episcopal supervision and make me practically a worker in your diocese.... I must regard myself as one of your clergy, owing you allegiance, and I will request you to be so kind as to send me a certificate of formal and official permission to perform missionary priestly functions in your diocese between Aden and Karachi, along the Arabian shores of the Persian Gulf.

The ship also berthed at Karachi and French's successor, Bishop Matthew, unexpectedly came aboard to see him. He reached Muscat on February 8, 1891. Mackay had written:

I do not deny that the task is difficult; and the men selected for work in Muscat must be endowed with no small measure of the spirit of Jesus, besides possessing such linguistic capacity as to be able to reach not only the ears, but the very hearts of men...The importance of Muscat, as a missionary centre for work among the Arabs, can scarcely be over-estimated; but the post must be held by no feeble staff. As the nature of the case precludes public preaching in bazaars and evangelistic work of the more ostentatious kind, attention should be concentrated in the two directions:

1. Medical, in which the assistance of trained ladies will prove a powerful softener of opposition.

2. Educational, chiefly with the view of training young Arabs to be missionaries to their fellow- countrymen...From the first the staff should have the assistance of a Christian native pastor from Syria, India, or some other Muslim land, one who is an approved worker for Christ. Such a man with two Europeans (clerical and medical) and not less than two ladies, I should consider barely a sufficient staff to begin the work.

French was challenged by this appeal and strategy and sought to keep the door ajar in Muscat until men were found to come and open it. After three months he died and none of his own Church and country follower but Samuel Zwemer and brother Peter started work in Muscat in 1892 and opened a school. Peter died at 29 but by then other Americans had joined him and soon both educational and medical work was established by Christ's servants.

French and his temporary companion, Mr. Maitland, settled in Mutrah, three miles along the coast from Muscat, the capital. Mutrah is the key to the interior of the country. Today the two towns are joined by a coast road but, until recently, the only way of communication was by boat along the sea coast. Maitland reported that there were no Europeans or Christians of any sort in Mutrah. French wrote to his wife:

February 12: "I am pushing on very hard with Arabic, copying out verses to give to more hopeful inquirers to carry home, and preparing a tract of a simple kind on the leading articles of the creed..."

February 27: Now I must close, grieving only that I cannot send you a brighter letter. Still I have much to be thankful for. I cannot expect an effort like this to be easy and everything ready to hand. It is all pioneering work...

In his Diary he wrote on 23 and 25 March:

The work is a great effort, and one has to hang upon God hourly for strength. My Afghan experiences come nearest to this, but I think this beats them all...

I sat an hour in what is evidently the chief mosque of this suburb of Mutrah... The dresses of the sheikh and head imam and his family were all to match, tasteful and handsome. I told them I was come to see the head teacher and I loved all lovers of God and those who sought the true knowledge of Him. I said also that as this was our great festival time and I had no brother in Christ to read his services with, I was come to read the lessons for the season or some of them with him and his friends (Luke 23 and 24)...it was the most learned and aristocratic audience I have yet come across, and to be allowed to read and comment on such chapters in a chief mosque speaks hopefully for the prospect of a mission here being now or eventually opened; but one must speak humbly and softly.

In April the Bishop wrote for more prayer support to the "Watchers and Workers":

I long for the prayers of your little band of intercessors offering this simple request, that as the Arab has been so grievously a successful instrument in deposing Christ from His throne in so many fair and beautiful regions of the East... so the Arab may be in God's good providence at least one of the main auxiliaries and reinforcement in restoring the Great King, and reseating Him on David's throne of judgement and mercy, and Solomon's throne of peace, and, above all, God's throne of righteousness.

French proposed to go a little way into the interior of the country but realized that the difficulties caused by rough roads and wild tribes might make this impracticable. On April 20<sup>th</sup> he wrote:

My chief comfort yesterday was a visit from a good honest stalwart enquirer, who got some books three years ago, at a place on the coast nearer Aden than this, and has stored them up and read them, and seems full of resolute faith. He is a carpenter, and has

promised to take my journey into the interior with me, put up tent, keep guard, and so on.

French reported a happy morning preaching to a number of lepers and wondered if some among them would be among the first to enter the Kingdom of God in Muscat. Some years later Zwemer's Arabian Mission of the Reformed Church started work among lepers and built a hospital for them. Some Omani lepers today are members of the minute national church. French correctly saw himself as an outside doorkeeper for some future porter who may be posted within to give entrance to his Lord. For this he considered his coming would not have been in vain although he felt that his future there was so unsettled and undecided. In early May he set out for a little town of Sib about twenty-eight miles along the coast from Mutrah. From Sib he proposed to go inland and prepare a way for his lord. Today Sib is a large international airport at which many followers of Christ land to start their work as construction workers, doctors, nurses, and teachers for the development of the Sultanate of Oman.

After French's death, Mr. Maitland wrote to Mrs. French about her husband's last days:

Before leaving Mutrah for Sib, Bishop French had been a good deal weakened by fever, and appeared very feeble. Once or twice he had gone into the Residency at Muscat almost prostrate, but had quickly revived to some extent when he had been induced to take food... In May the heat became very great, and the bishop decided not to wait till the end of Ramazan before starting for Sib, hoping it would be a little cooler there... He left Mutrah in a fishing boat on the forenoon on May 6 (the boat was an open one and he had no protection except an umbrella)... Sib is a long, straggling village, scattered through a grove of date-palms with numerous wells and gardens... On the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup> he went out with some books. Some time afterwards, perhaps about 10.00a.m., some men told his servant that his master was asleep in the date-grove... Presently Kadu, the servant, heard him

call out and clap his hands, and on running to him found him insensible. He poured water over his head, and in about fifteen minutes the bishop regained consciousness... later he had a little tapioca made but could not eat it. The next day he decided to return to Muscat. A friend informed the doctor of French's illness. When the doctor arrived French was unconscious apparently from exhaustion. When French had revived the doctor went to the Residency and arranged for him to be removed there. The next day the doctor came again from Mutrah but the Bishop was unconscious and died about 12:30. The funeral was held that evening in the cemetery by the seashore, all the Christians attending. Maitland later wrote on his return visit: "So far as I can judge, it was not any special piece of exertion or exposure that killed him, but the whole task he attempted was beyond his physical endurance. He attempted a mode of life which would have taxed a young man's strength in a climate that crushed him. God has not left him the measure of strength he hoped to have, but that could only be proved by experience. If he attempted to labour above measure for his Lord, God grant us more of the Spirit which inspired him. I was much struck by the way in which people had done everything that they could, and more than he would allow, to shelter and minister to him. You know it was part of his plan of life everywhere, and more than ever at Muscat, not to allow others to serve him either in health or in sickness.

The *Civil and Military Gazette* a daily paper, paid tribute to French in its May 22, 1891 issue:

His was indeed a saintly character, utterly self-denying and unworldly. Single-hearted, devout, and humble, the fire of enthusiasm for the propagation of the Gospel burned as brightly in his breast in those last lonely days in Muscat as it did when he turned his back on Oxford and all it offered, to give himself to India.

Not only the secular press in India, but Muslims in Oman noted his saintliness. When Maitland called on the wali at Sib and described

French as his own spiritual father, one of the men present said of him, "Ah, he had put away this world, and was entirely occupied with the things of eternity." The Archbishop wrote offering sympathy on behalf of the Church of England to Mrs. French. In Lahore Cathedral a brass plaque is still to be seen bearing this inscription:

In reverent memory of  
THOMAS VALPY FRENCH, D.D.  
Sometime Fellow of University College, Oxford, and Founder of  
this Cathedral Church, who from the year 1851, when  
he arrived in India, served the Church of God.  
First, with patient labour as a missionary to the North-West  
Provinces and in the Punjab,  
And then, for ten years as first bishop of this diocese, 1877-1881.  
He died in Muscat in Arabia  
A lonely witness of the Kingdom of Christ, May 14, 1891.  
'A minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the Gos-  
pel of God that the offering up of the Gentiles might be accept-  
able, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost.' Romans 15:16

Later the temporary monument at his seashore grave in Muscat was replaced by one of white marble. I found it in a good state of repair when I visited the cave in 1969. On either side of the gravestone a verse of Scripture is engraved in English, and the same verses are repeated in Arabic at the two ends: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit," and on the other side: "Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." The inscription reads:

To the memory of Thomas Valpy French, D.D.  
Entered into rest May 14, 1891  
First Bishop of Lahore, and first Missionary to Muscat.

The greatest tribute to Thomas Valpy French will be the many from his diocese of Lahore and elsewhere who have and will confess Christ crucified in their own land of Pakistan and in the Gulf States which are the natural fields of the Pakistani Church.

## Some important dates

- 1813 The Diocese of Calcutta created on the basis of the Chart Act.
- 1825 Birth of Thomas Valpy French at Burton-on-Trent, U.K.
- 1837 Accession of Queen Victoria to the British throne.
- 1848 French ordained deacon by the Bishop of Ripon
- 1849 French ordained priest by the Bishop of Litchfield  
Annexation the Punjab by the British
- 1851 French's arrival in Agra and founding of St. John's College
- 1857 The Indian Mutiny or the first War of Independence
- 1858 French's first furlough in U.K.
- 1861 French started the Dejarat Mission of CMS
- 1863 French returned to U.K. for health reasons
- 1864 French became curate at Beddington in Surrey
- 1865 French became Vicar of St. Paul's, Cheltenham
- 1869 French returned to India and founded St. John's Divinity School in Lahore
- 1874 French went to U.K. on furlough. He became rector of St. Ebbe's, Oxford, for three years.
- 1877 Establishment of the Diocese of Lahore  
French consecrated first Bishop of Lahore in Westminster Abbey, London, December 21, 1877.
- 1878 French enthroned as Bishop in St. James Church, Lahore, on 3 March
- 1881 First census in India.
- 1887 Resignation of Thomas Valpy French from the bishopric of Lahore
- 1888 French retired to U.K. journeying through the Middle East.
- 1891 French went as the first missionary to Muscat.  
May 14<sup>th</sup> French died in Muscat and was buried there.

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