

# WHAT THE FRANCISCAN GROUP WHO LEFT LORETTO TO SERVE MISSIONS IN INDIA HAVE SEEN

A Letter from the Rev. Father Aquinas Lieb, T. O. R., Son of Deputy Register of Wills and Mrs. Louis Lieb, of Cresson, Who Is One of the Small Band of Franciscan Fathers Who Left Loretto Last Summer to Establish A Mission in the Far East—It Is Interesting and Well Worth Reading.

Bhagalpur, India, January 2, 1939

### DEAR FRIENDS:

There are very few of you who have not yet received a line or so from us since we left our fatherland to come to India. On the other hand those who have answered our letters are few, and for this we are thankful, for we have been busy about many things and have had hardly a moment for answering letters. For those few who have not received word of us since our departure, I shall retrace in but a line or so the course of our travels.

We set sail from New York on September 17th aboard the Saturnia, and reached Naples on the 30th of the month. After a stay of some few weeks in Italy we again set sail on the 24th of November and landed in Bombay on December 6, 1938. Now continue.

I cannot give any impression of Bombay, for although we landed at 7:00 A. M., the whole day was for us a hectic round of baggage checking and last minute purchasing. We waited for the Customs Offices to open at 9:00, and made our declarations. The inspection of our fourteen suitcases consumed no more than five minutes, but time had rushed by with winged feet, for it was eleven o'clock before we had finished. We drove directly to the Mellos Hotel for dinner. After having dined on mulligan stew, hard rolls, and sour wine all across the Mediterranean, through the Suez Canal, down the Red Sea and across the Indian Ocean, we sat down with keenly appreciative appetites to a fine dinner with such delicacies as fresh bread, untainted butter, appetizing fish, bananas, sugar, and even pepper, none of which had passed our lips while we were afloat on the good ship Conte Biancamano.

After dinner we spent four hours trying to get our trunks from the customs officers who did not seem happy to give them up. The trunks had been lying there for almost a month, and the storage on them was unhappily high. With the trunks finally taken care of, we set out to do a bit of shopping. Our black hats and suits were not quite the thing for India. We bought toppees. These are helmets made of cork for protection against the sun's heat. Veterans say that ten minutes in the sun at noon-day, and that in the winter, will give one a headache. I can verify their statement; I have one at the present sitting. Our next purchases were bed rolls or carry-alls. The carry-all is merely a canvas cover with pockets here and there. In the cover are carried a thin mattress, two blankets, and a pillow. The carry-all is like a mattress cover slit lengthwise down the middle for one-third of its length; then it is cut at right angles at either end of the opening, so that both ends of the mattress are covered, while the middle third of one side is protected by the loose flaps. (If you can picture one of these bed rolls from this description, you deserve a medal.) After we had made a few purchases—we ate supper and boarded the Howrah Express for Patna Junction. We took all our luggage with us, and had the trunks shipped by goods-train.

We reserved a second class compartment on the train. At the suggestion of a Jesuit who met us in Bombay, we hired a man to assist us through the difficulties which a stranger encounters at the customs and at the depot. He, unlike the many gyp-artists that one must avoid in such places, was a real hustler, and trustworthy fellow. Before the train left the station we bought bananas, oranges, dates, and Indian sweets, for we were not scheduled to reach Patna until Thursday, and this was only Tuesday evening. Since we had heard that food was bad, prices high, and water scarce on Indian Trains, we had seen to it that we would not starve. Since the compartment will provide sleeping space for only five, we religious, Fathers Eugene, William, Gabriel, Brother Ivan, and I occupied one compartment, while Mr. Zopetti, our journalist, shared his with some Belgian fathers. Our compartment was a bit over one third as a Pullman coach. A green leather seat running around three sides of the compartment, left room at either end for doors. The seats were about eight feet long and about two feet wide. Suspended from the ceiling by chains at the two free corners, and with one side attached to the wall, were two bunks which could be swung up out of the way during the day. There were four windows, each provided with a screen and shutter, on either side of the car. The glass, pane, screen, and shutter worked after the fashion of automobile windows, that is they could be dropped into the lower portion of the wall. There is absolute privacy in the compartment; it opens only to the outside world and to a tiny lavatory. To go to another coach or to the dining car one must descend to the ground and walk along the door of the compartment which he wishes to enter, and ascend again. The coaches have very high wheels, and one must ascend three high perpendiculars to enter them. Fortunately

ger stations the platforms are level with the floor of the carriages and no acrobatics are required. Once established, we chatted a bit, and then unrolled our bedrolls, undressed, and slept far into the next day.

At every station along the route we encountered vendors of every sort: some sold tea, others sandwiches, sweets, betel leaves for chewing, cigars, etc. Besides the clamor of these, we had the cries of innumerable beggars. These latter would stand with their maimed hands outstretched, and cry, "Salaam Baba," Hail Father. Begging is a tenet of the Hindu religion, but it is too indiscriminate, and consequently is hurtful to the country.

We tried the dining car on the second day out and found very good food—the price of the meal was about \$1.25 (American money). We enjoyed practically the same quality of food as we were accustomed to have at home.

The countryside which we passed from Bombay to Patna was rather level, and devoid of anything which we could call forest-land: the whole landscape seemed to be but a succession of small fields, each divided from the next by boundary lines of small mounds of earth about a foot and a half high. Besides boundary lines these ridges serve also to keep water lying on the fields, water is necessary for rice, their chief crop. The landscape was dotted with trees; date palms, flame of the forest, toddy palms, mango trees, jackfruit, bail, and peipul (pronounced "people"), the sacred tree of the Hindus. There seemed to be small ponds, streams, swamps, and mud holes everywhere, yet the fields were powder dry. Irrigation, though not unknown, is not extensive. When one considers that rain falls here in great abundance in May, June and July, and very, very seldom during the other months, it is not hard to see why the earth is dry and barren. Since we arrived here we have not seen a single cloud or one drop of rain. The days are all the same—sunlight in all its brilliance from 7 A. M. to 5 P. M.

We arrived in Patna on December 8th, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. We said Mass, for the first time in India, at St. Xavier's the Jesuits' home. Then we moved to the Bishop's residence in Bankipore, where we stayed until the 17th of December. During these days we were shown the sights of Patna and vicinity by the Jesuits. They were certainly solicitous for our comfort and we appreciate it. During these days also, Our Father Provincial, Eugene George, went to Ranchi Seminary to arrange for the coming of our clerics to India and for our course in fourth year theology, which Father Gabriel and I lack. It would be impossible for Father Gabriel and I to study privately in one of the mission stations, for besides the constant round of duties, we would lack the help of experienced teachers. Again we can do nothing without the languages, Hindu and Santali, which we must learn. These we can master more quickly with the aid of a teacher. In Patna I went to Father Milet, Vicar General of the Diocese in his daily round of the hospital. The hospital there is a very extensive institution covering about three city blocks. However, most of the buildings are only one or two stories high. Every building is completely surrounded by an arched veranda. From what I recall, there seems to be no doors or window panes or sashes. Even though it is winter here now it is warm during the day and at night the temperature does not go below 50 degrees.

There are fans everywhere. In the house unacquainted with electricity there are large fans suspended from the roof and they are suspended to and fro by servants. The dining room is always equipped with a fan for during the hot weather the only time one remains in the house is at meal time. The rest of the day is spent on the veranda if one is at home. We have not experienced extreme heat as yet, but from the tales that we are told it must be frightful.

We arrived in Bhagalpur, our home, December 17th, three months to the day from the date on which we set sail from America. From there I visited St. Mary's Mission School in Gokhla. Father Bohn S. J. is in charge of this school and now has Father William and Bro. Ivan helping him with his 160 boys. Across the road from the boys school there is a school for girls under the supervision of three sisters of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary. For some reason these sisters are commonly called "English Ladies," although they are all from Germany. All the boys and girls in these schools are Santals—members of an aboriginal race who differ from the Hindus in features, religion and customs. The buildings are mud at Gokhla; church, fathers quarters, school house, children's quarters, cow sheds and all. They look as though they were made of brown cement, for they are smooth surfaced. This surface is mixture of cow-dung and mud that is peculiar to the Santals. It makes a very smooth rubbery surface. Perhaps a few words about the dress

of the Hindus and the Santals would not be uninteresting. Each person person dresses slightly different from his neighbor. The inroads of civilization is found in their dress. Moham-medans wear pajamas, exactly the same as we sleep in but perhaps not so loud. (Our word 'pajama' is from their language.) The Anglo-Indians wear European dress, but the rest of the people wear shirt, chadar, dhoti, and Pugri. The upper portion of the males body is usually uncovered but when it is covered he wears a shirt—with tails affluter. The dhoti is a plain piece of cloth about four feet wide and nine or ten feet long. This they wrap about their waist once or twice, bring the end from front to back between their legs and tuck it into the waist band at the back. The dhoti drops to approximately four inches above the ankles in front; behind, the calves of the legs are visible to the knee. The chudar is a blanket, usually of light weight, which they carry over the shoulders and in which they sleep at night. The natives sleep anywhere. We have seen them on the station platforms, hundreds of them, stretched out on the cold cement. A pugri is a turban.

Villages by the thousand, each a short distance from its neighbor, dot the land. In some places along the railroad track and along the Ganges, there are fifteen or twenty villages in a space of five miles. Now and then besides the houses of mud there may be one of brick or thatch-canoe tied together. There are no windmills in the houses. If perchance the house was built with one, the resident shutters or boards it up. The house is divided into two rooms. In one the members of the household do all their living; the other is left for the spirits of their dead ancestors. Generally the houses are devoid of any furniture whatsoever. A select few have a palang or bed made of a low bedstead strung with ropes of greas. When the priest pays a visit, if the family have one of these beds, they rush it out for him to sit on. The Santal women bring a lot (brass pot) of water and set it before the visitor and then dedok (bow down, touching the ground with the finger tips or the palm of the hand.) As a form of salute the men extend the right arm from the elbow and raise it to their shoulder, mean-while placing the left palm in the upper side of the crook of the elbow. In the house one finds dried fruit, beans, etc., suspended from the ceiling. Baskets of rice and dahl are there too, and also a small stove which is as large as a washtub. For fuel the Hindus use cow-dung and mud, mixed and baked in the sun. The Santals use wood for they live in the wilds on the Rajmahal hills.

When Father William and I visited the Sisters and Santal girls at St. Mary's in Ghokla, the Santals welcomed us in this fashion: The women set before us a brass pie pan and a lot of water. We asked Father Bohn what the purpose of the pan could be, for we had been presented with water before but the presence of the additional pan puzzled us. He explained that the women wanted to wash our feet after our long journey. We demurred for a long while but they chatteringly insisted, so we acquiesced. I removed my shoes and socks and so did Father William. A woman then put oil on her hands and massaged

my feet, rinsing them with water. After they had been dried with a towel I began replacing my socks and shoes, but had only dressed one foot when the woman grasped the other and held on for dear life. I asked what she wanted now—it was pay for the service. I should have known enough in the first place to pay for the respect shown, for it certainly rejuvenated my overheated feet. When I dropped a half penny into the water pot, she desisted, and I resumed my dressing in peace. Every one got a great "kick" out of the ceremony—and for those who do not wear shoes it is highly practical, for the dust is like flour and is three inches or more thick on all the roads.

At Godda in the Santal Paraganas I was celebrant at Midnight Mass, on Christmas Eve. Father Ernst is the Mission Master there. He has just completed a new house which is hardly big enough for three people. Father Scott was there also as preacher and deacon. There is only one room in which the three of us ate, lived and slept. Besides this room there is also a chapel and sacristy. We set up an altar on the front porch and had a tent top erected before it. There were no sides to the tent and the four hundred people who came in from the surrounding country settled down on straw and wrapped themselves against the chill of the night. Men, women children and babies were there. The latter cried when they were awakened at midnight. And you would too, if you had as few cloths as those tiny things had. A string around their middle was the wardrobe of the most. We had our Solemn Mass—the catechists sang the Mass of the Angels and at the Offertory they had Christmas hymns to the familiar tunes but with their own words. I might mention here that the Santals sing all their prayers; they don't recite the Paters, Aves, etc., but sing them with tunes all their own. They make quite a beautiful din during the mass, for they pray aloud every day.

These simple folk love color and music. The tent and the surrounding grounds were decorated with colored paper bunting, flags, Chinese lanterns, and gaudy flowers. After Mass they began to cook the rice and pigs provided by the father in charge. This is the custom in all mission stations: the Fathers give a "feed" for the parishioners. They danced all morning to music provided by violins which played a haunting tune, cymbals, and a peculiar instrument made from a tin can. This latter instrument is made from a gallon tin can one end of which is entirely removed. A string, held on the outside by a tiny stick about two inches long, passes through a hole in the center of the remaining end, through the can, and is held taut by the left hand. The can itself is held under the left arm, pressed against the body. A small piece of wood in the right hand is used for plucking the string. By tightening and loosening the string, three sounds are produced, which sound like—make one yourself and try it.

We Franciscans are trying to get organized. (And we are succeeding, I think.) Father Gabriel and I are going to Ranchi for a few months. Father William and Brother Ivan are located indefinitely at Ghokla. Father Eugene will stay here at Bhagalpur, where he will learn the language and the method

of managing a mission, and where Mr. Frank Zopetti will shortly begin work on our publication. The subscription price for one year is \$1.50. Subscriptions may be purchased from Father Bernard Cuskelley, Loretto, Pa. The Magazine will be distributed directly from here, so if you buy a subscription don't wonder why it is so long appearing. It takes thirty days for your name to get here and thirty more for the magazine to get to you. Once

they begin, you can count on them arriving regularly. I hope that each of you will find it possible to support this cause. It is for the preaching of Christ and Him Crucified—and He has promised a great reward. May God bless you, my friends, and may He answer the prayers that we and the Indian Catholics offer for you. Don't forget us.

Yours in Christ,  
Father Aquinas Lieb, T. O. R.

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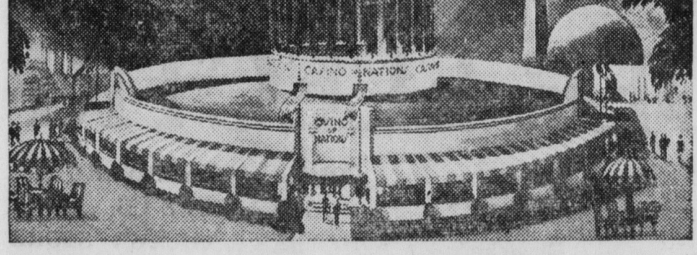
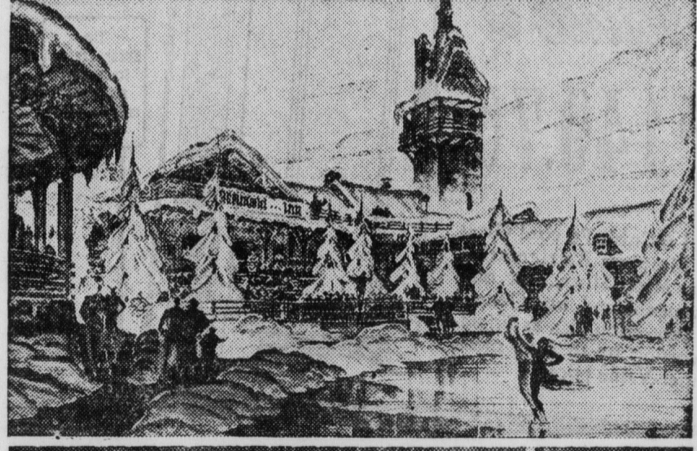
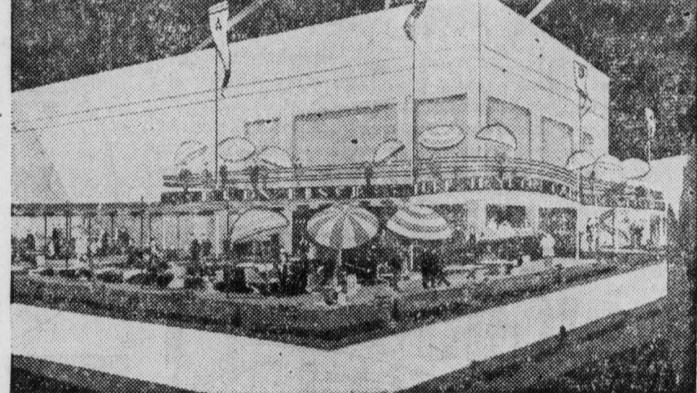
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### When You're Hungry at The Fair—



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