

## Missionary in India

After ordination, Ozro French continued his theological studies, labored at East Indian dialects, and supplied several pulpits. In the meantime, however, he planned to wed Jane Hotchkiss, of Harpersfield, New York. Their courtship terminated on March 11, 1839, when, on Monday afternoon, they were married. "The ceremony was performed by Rev. S. Williston in a very solemn and impressive manner," wrote George W. Reynolds, a mutual friend, "and instead of the levity generally manifest on such occasions, here was seen the falling tear and heard the heartfelt sigh."

On March 28th, the young couple "knelt for the last time around that sacred family Altar," and Mr. French led in prayer. Tearful farewells over, they took the stage to Prattsville and from there traveled to Salem by way of Boston. The brig *Waverly*, with New England lines and a Yankee master, was waiting, as were five other missionaries all bound to work "amid the darkness & degradation of heathenism."

Friends gathered at the wharf for prayers and a psalm. Then began the long voyage. The missionaries organized themselves into a Bible



class to study the words of the Apostles. On May 15th, an American whaler passed, stopping long enough, however, to take a packet of mail to the States. Two days later the *Waverly* was becalmed off the coast of Brazil. On June 8th, French celebrated the thirty-second anniversary of his birthday. "Soon my earthly course will be finished and yet I have scarcely begun to live." Land was first sighted on June 24th when French noted in his diary the coast of Madagascar.

Finally, after a "prosperous passage" of ninety-two days the sailing brig docked at Zanzibar. The date was July 2nd. French, together with the ship's captain, went ashore to call upon the American consul. They also visited a prince who received the party with "apparent cordiality" and served his guests with "a cup of coffee, then with a glass of sherbet and afterwards with a cocoanut."

On August 10th, the brig dropped anchor at Bombay. There was the field of which French had dreamed since a student at Williams College. And there he was to spend ten years of his life.

His first pastorate was at Ahmednugger, a desolate location less than 100 miles inland from Bombay. The new pastor found his task difficult, and the heathen singularly unconcerned with salvation. He remained about a year and a half when he moved to Siroor. There he labored most dili-



gently, traveling to isolated villages, distributing tracts, and preaching the Gospel. At Nighoos, Bohera, and other villages he established schools for natives. Sometimes, as at Adulgon, his audiences numbered 100 persons, but few natives showed a disposition to forsake their own gods. "O! the abominations of idolatry! When will the gospel, in its enlightening, purifying, saving influence be felt in this dark, ruined land!"

Mrs. French labored with the native women, receiving daily congregations and explaining the care of children and treatment of the sick. Sometimes she accompanied her husband on his exhausting trips into the back-country where natives bathed in the blood of the lamb and made sacrifices to grotesque gods. She helped also with transcribing hymns into a musical form which her husband had invented for native use. Local dialects were utilized as much as possible.

But the exhausting climate, the long treks, the death of three infants, Jane, Joseph, and Willie, and the unhappiness over his failure to achieve greater success undermined French's health. His eyes grew weak and inflamed, and he suffered from other disorders. For almost a year he gave up the bulk of his duties in order to care for his physical self. Finally, he surrendered to pain and prepared to return to America.



It was not easy for Ozro French to leave his chosen field. Weeks were spent in packing a few precious books and household belongings and saying goodbye to friends.

On December 14, 1848, Mr. and Mrs. French, together with their four-year-old daughter, Lydia, and their infant son, Russel, started on the ten-day trip to Bombay. There they rested until January 17, 1849, when, at one o'clock in the afternoon, they sailed on an English vessel for London. They never saw India again.

Their sailing vessel made from 130 to 240 miles per day, and put into port after a voyage of four months and a day. Both Mrs. French and Lydia were unable to walk and had to be carried from the ship. Their feet had been infected with a peculiar worm common to vessels of the 1840's. While in London, French attended the anniversary meeting of the National Temperance Society in Exeter Hall, visited Westminster Abbey, and heard "several excellent" sermons.

The party left London for Liverpool on June 6th, and six days later sailed for New York on the *Montisuma*. Their passage cost £44. There were only three other cabin passengers, while 340 persons crowded steerage quarters. The trip was without incident with the exception of two events. Little Russel spilled a bowl of soup upon his foot,



burning it badly. And on July 1st, an old man died with symptoms resembling cholera.

When Long Island was sighted on July 17th and a pilot came aboard, passengers learned that the disease was rampant in New York. Russel was ill when the Frenches arrived in the city on July 19th. He seemed to respond to treatment, however, and his parents hurried him to Catskill where they prayed the dreaded cholera would not follow. The child grew worse rapidly. He died of cholera on July 25th, and was buried at Catskill. "It was a severe trial to be called to follow this our *fourth* child to an early grave".

After the funeral, the parents and Lydia left for Mrs. French's home in Harpersfield, where they arrived on July 26th, six months and two days after leaving Bombay.

French spent the remainder of the year resting, making short trips, and attempting to regain his health. It is said that he traveled for some months in 1850-51 as an agent for home missions in Kentucky and Tennessee, but his careful diaries make no reference to this task, if, indeed, he ever performed it. A sixth child, Elizabeth, was born at Harpersfield on April 17, 1850.

PHILIP D. JORDAN  
I. H. PIERCE