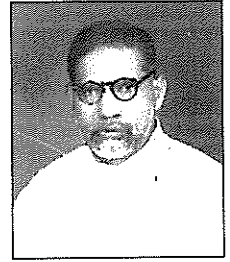


REV. DR. H. S. DAVID

The Linguist At St. Patrick's

By A. Dominic



Rev. Fr. H S David was born on the 28th of June 1907 at Thumpalai, Vadamarachi in the Jaffna peninsula, Sri Lanka. His parents were Mr A David and Elizabeth David from Thumpalai. He and his sister Clara were the children by the first marriage of Mr A David. Fr. David was saddened by the death of his sister Clara early in life.

Mr A David was language teacher at St. Patrick's College, Jaffna for 36 years. His son had his secondary education at St. Patrick's. After finishing his secondary education, the young David entered the University College in Colombo to read history. At the end of the course, he obtained a first class honours and won the gold medal awarded to the best student. The brilliant young David could have easily entered the prestigious Ceylon Civil Service at that time but he decided to become a priest to devote his lifetime to the Church. After his ordination as a priest, he joined his Alma Mater as a teacher.

In 1947 he went to India and attended Universities there to learn Pali, Sanskrit and Telegu languages. He did research work in these languages and obtained a degree before returning to St. Patrick's. In 1951 he toured the European countries and obtained his PhD. from the University of London in 1953 before returning to St. Patrick's. While teaching at St. Patrick's, he began his research work into the origin of the Tamil language and its link with other languages. This work was in continuation of the work done by Nallur Swami Gnanaprasar. Fr. David published six volumes of the Lexicon.

Fr. David was a man of simple living and high thinking. Besides spending most of his time in teaching and research work, he found the time to look into the welfare of his pupils especially the poor students. He followed the performance of these students and met their parents in their homes to encourage them in their studies. He had a photographic memory. He remembered all that he read and the pupils he taught even after they had left school.

Fr. David was always active and young for his age. He was an ardent tennis player. At 4.30 pm he would leave his room accompanied by some of his pupils on his way to the Sports Club to play tennis. On his way to and from the Club, he would be teaching the small boys English and Tamil grammar. Sometimes, on his return to the College down Bankshall Street, he would be reciting the Rosary with the students.

He died during the night of the 31st of May 1980 - the night the Public Library in Jaffna was set on fire by the Sri Lankan Security Forces. He could not bear the destruction of the library that was dear to his heart. A short time before he died he entrusted his personal library to his nephew Mr Philipneri, a senior lecturer at the Palali Teachers' Training College. Before Mr Philipneri left for Guayana in 1985 he handed his uncle's PhD thesis and some of the books to the Jaffna Catholic Library. He also left some of Fr. David's books with Mr. Ulaganathan, the Grama Sevaka at Palali. These books were destroyed in 1987 when the Sri Lankan Security Forces set fire to Mr Ulaganathan's house.

We pray that this great linguist, both student and teacher at St. Patrick's 'Rest in Peace'.