

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF CALCUTTA: THE DATA OF WHICH IS DRAWN FROM VARIOUS AUTHENTIC SOURCES, EM- BRACING THE FIRST SETTLEMENT OF THE ENGLISH, TOGETHER WITH ITS PRESENT DESCRIPTION.

BY ELDER N. V. JONES.

Calcutta is situated about one hundred miles from the sea, on the eastern bank of the western branch of the Ganges; called by Europeans the Hoogly or Calcutta river; by the natives, Bhag-eruttee and the true Ganges, and considered by them as a holy stream.

Fort William, its citadel, stands in latitude 22° 23' N., longitude 88° 22' E. Calcutta may be said to have been founded by Job Charnock, and is built on a dead level with a rich fecundated soil. Since 1717 the jungle (forest) has been cleared away to a certain distance, and the streets properly constructed and drained, and the ponds filled up, by which a vast surface of stagnant water has been removed, especially in that portion that can properly be called new Calcutta. The old has been but little changed, but the air of the city is still much affected by the near proximity of the sunderbunds (salt lakes).

At high water the river is here a full mile in breadth, but during the ebb tide the shore exposes a long range of muddy banks, which are daily increasing in size by the deposits of mud from the feculent, turbid waters of the river.

On approaching Calcutta from the sea, the stranger is much struck with the magnificence of its appearance; the elegant villas on each side of the river, the government and company's botanical gardens, the spires and minarets of the numerous churches and temples and the strong and regular citadel of Fort William make that impression upon the mind of the stranger that is seldom if ever eradicated, especially if he has come from a long sea voyage.

In 1771 it exhibited a very different appearance, the place where the present town now stands was then a village appertaining to the district of Nuddia, the houses of which were scattered in clusters of ten or twelve each, and the inhabitants chiefly husbandmen. A forest then existed to the South of Chand Paul Ghaut, which was afterwards removed by degrees.

Between Kidderpore and the forest were two villages whose inhabitants were invited to settle in Calcutta by the ancient family of the Sehs, who were at that time merchants of great note, and very instrumental in bringing Calcutta into the present form of a town. Fort William and the Esplanade are the sites where the forest and the villages before mentioned stood.

In 1717 there were straggling villages consisting of small houses surrounded by puddles of water, where now stand the elegant houses of Chowringhee; and in 1742 a ditch was dug round considerable portion of Calcutta to prevent the incursions of the Maharrattas and is still known by the name of the Maharratta ditch.

It appears from Orme's history of the wars of Bengal that at the time of its capture by Sera-fand Dowlah in 1756 there were about seventy houses in the town belonging to the English. The Esplanade and the site of Fort William was all a jungle at the time; though it was evident that the first English settlement was long anterior to this date. It has without doubt been a commercial depot much longer than any of the records of the place now show.

The old cemetery of Calcutta bears inscriptions of English merchants and seamen as far back as the thirteenth century. The modern town of Calcutta extends along the East bank of the river far over six miles, but the breadth varies much at different places. The Esplanade between the town and Fort William leaves a grand opening, along the borders of which is placed the government house erected by the Marquis of Wellesley. Continued on a line with this edifice is a range of magnificent houses beautifully ornamented with spacious verandas at every floor and terraced roofs.

The conventional divisions of the city, which are but two, are tolerably well defined and may be described as follows: a line drawn from the New Mint on the river banks due east to the Burrah Bazar and from there to where Cossitollah St. crosses Loll Bazar street and from there due east to the Boitokonnoh on Upper Circular road, and from Hastings bridge on Tolly's Mullah in a north-easterly direction to the Lower Circular road will inclose the whole of the space occupied by the christian community. While a similar process of demarcation commencing at the New Mint and running as above mentioned including all of the streets northward as far as Chitpore bridge, and the boundary of the Maharratta ditch will comprehend the greater portion of the city which is occupied by the natives.

The natives however are not exclusively confined to this portion of the city; the European division is thickly settled with them, a great portion of which are Mussulmen and the lower order of Hindoos, while but very few of the Europeans have their abode in the native portion of the city.

In the native division of the city with but very few exceptions, the streets are like those of most oriental cities, exceedingly narrow and the houses lofty with loop holes or windows made to close with shutters, and are invariably built with the backs to the street and in the form of a hollow square, and it is strictly against their caste to allow a European to even come into that part of the house occupied by their families; and they are so tenacious in respect to this that the Europeans have never been able to correctly get the census of the city. There are whole squares of buildings in the heart of the native portion of the city that a white man never saw the inside of. The lower rooms are seldom inhabited, being principally used for shops and store rooms.

The business portion of the city is comprised between Chand Paul Ghaut and the New Mint on

the river bank and from the former to the head of Cossitollah street, at its junction with Durumtollah and Chowringhee road, and from the New Mint in an eastern direction to the Burrah Bazar and a line drawn from that to the head of Cossitollah will complete the definition.

The western division of the city is by far the finest portion; it is chiefly the residence of the officials, rich merchants and functionaries of Calcutta, and if there is any propriety in the term "city of Palaces" it will apply to this portion. The stranger on viewing the Esplanade and Chowringhee road from the citadel of Fort William about sundown would say that the title was not altogether inappropriate.

Some of the streets in this division are of great dimensions, as the Chowringhee road for instance, which is nearly two miles in length, average width not less than 80 feet. This however is only built on the eastern side facing the plain or midan, which is from three fourths of a mile to one and a quarter miles in width, and separating it from the river. The houses are mostly of gigantic proportions, averaging from forty to sixty feet in height with spacious verandahs and colonnades which overlook the midan, Fort William and the shipping lying in the river.

On the western side of the road are several large tanks which supply that part of the town with water. The midan is enclosed with a brick fence, the upper portion is panelled and the interstices filled with rounded tile resembling turned posts of wood. The whole is refitted every year, which gives it a clean and neat appearance.

The Durumtollah is somewhat less in extent, there are however many fine buildings on the line of this street, which have an elegant outward appearance. The interstices on both sides of the street are filled up with native hovels which are rude structures built of mud and bamboo. Some are enclosed with mats. They are chiefly covered with tile. Their near vicinity to the abodes of the Europeans, places before the mind ever and anon the contrast between a palace and a shanty.

Chandney Choke (or thieving bazar) is situated on this street. You will invariably find the streets full of peddlers and retailers of all descriptions, who seriously encroach upon the public thoroughfare. They are not confined to this street alone, but are so found generally throughout the city, which renders a walk in the streets anything but agreeable.

Wellesley is a street of considerable dimensions. It is lined almost continuously with native huts, which present a most unsightly appearance. They are constructed chiefly of mats made from a sort of large cane grass which are tied to the frame work of the buildings, which are of bamboo set in the ground, the roofs are mostly made of tile, some are thatched with grass, and are generally from five to eight feet from the ground.

The Kalassee or native seaman's quarters are situated in the most central portion of this street, near where it intersects with Jaun Bazar street and is inhabited by a debauched and otherwise totally demoralized mass; it is a resort generally for those that are out of employment, or who live by the wages of prostitution. The most part of the street in this vicinity is a nuisance; this and Jaun Bazar street and the adjacent lanes and alleys support not less than 10,000 female prostitutes.

The Upper and Lower Circular Roads, which nearly encompass the city on its eastern or landward side, are long and are of very fine proportions, and called so from the limits they prescribe as their name indicates. They form the eastern boundary of the city and run parallel with the Maharratta Ditch.

The roads are sparsely settled by Europeans, and by far the greatest number of these are on the Calcutta side, while the back ground of the other is filled with jungle and native huts, which is a great drawback to its appearance, and gives a desolate aspect to the entire roads.

Like most of the other streets, this also is crowded with natives, and their being no such thing in all Calcutta as a side walk, there is of course but little safety to the pedestrian; the fear of being run over by the numerous horses and carriages keeps him constantly on the alert.

There are also some very fine streets in the Chowringhee quarter; they are generally short but of good proportions, of which I might name Russel, Park, Middleton, Canac and Lowdon. Old Court House street is of the most magnificent proportions; it is not less than 90 feet in width and something near one mile and a half in length, commencing at Toll Bazaar, on the north-east corner of Tank Square, and running west by the Governor General's palace, crossing the Esplanade and the midan. On this street are situated some of the first business houses in Calcutta.

Calcutta Proper has about 135 miles of streets and contains a population of one million of inhabitants. The principal square is called Tank Square, situated north of Old Court House street and west of Loll Bazaar, in the heart of the business portion of the city, containing an area of about 500 yards square, in the center of which is an extensive tank, surrounded by a handsome iron railing, and having a gradation of steps, to the bottom of which is 60 feet. The remainder of the square is beautifully laid off into grass plots and beds for shrubs and flowers, and is often resorted to by the middle and lower classes for an evening promenade.

There are also in the eastern portion of the city Wellington and Wellesley squares, situated on streets bearing the same name, each of which contains a tank. In point of locality they are inferior to Tank square. Both are enclosed by an iron railing and supply that part of the city with water.

Calcutta has no walls or other outward appearance of a fortified town, for the circumvallation called the Maharratta ditch merits no such rank, though it was constructed ostensibly for that purpose, and if at the time it made any defensive appearance it has long since lost it.

The whole city is supplied with drinking water from its numerous tanks; the tanks are supplied from the periodical rains called 'burrah bahsat,'

or more properly the south west monsoons, which commence about the 15th of June and end about the first of October. During the dry season they are supplied from the river by means of steam hydraulic works which raise it from the river to a large reservoir, from which it is conveyed by means of aqueducts to almost all parts of the city, where it is used for watering the streets and replenishing the tanks.

Calcutta has extensive, irregular and thickly peopled environs, but the Europeans thereabouts are few and far between. Of the suburban localities there are but two worthy of note. In-tolly, east of the Circular road and at the termination of Durumtollah street, is chiefly inhabited by the middle and lower classes. Garden Reach, about four miles south of the town, is by far the most important and has a magnificent appearance. Some of the buildings are on a large scale of grandeur and elegance, and are laid off in miniature representation of beautiful parks. The east and north are continuously lined with native villages and huts.

The population of Calcutta is much larger during the day than at night. The natives cross the river by thousands going to and from their labor.

Fort William commands the circumjacent country, and in an emergency could contain the entire Christian population. It stands on the east bank of the river about one quarter of a mile below the town, and is superior in strength and regularity to any fortress in India. It is of nearly an octagonal form, five of the sides being part of a regular heptagon, while the forms of the other three are according to local circumstances. The five regular sides are towards the land. The bastions here have retired flanks and orillons, also an inverse double flank at the height of the beam. This double flank is an excellent defence and would altogether preclude the passage of the ditch, as from its form it cannot be enfiladed.

The berm opposite to the curtain serves as a road to it and contributes to the defence of the ditch. The ditch is dry with a lunette in the middle. The water of the ditches are received by means of two sluices that are commanded by the fort on the river bank.

The covered way or entrance is excellent; every curtain is covered by a large ravin, the faces of which mount thirteen pieces of heavy artillery, thus giving to the defence of these ravins a fire of twenty-six guns.

The demi bastions which terminate the five regular fronts, on each side are covered by counter-guards, of which the faces, like the ravins, are pierced with thirteen embrasures. The counter-guards are supported by two redoubts each.

The whole defences are faced and palisaded with care, and kept in admirable condition, and capable of making a vigorous defence against any force.

This citadel was commenced by Lord Clive, and bears date 1770. It mounts 619 guns and has 250 bastions, 89 flank bastions, 197 counter-guards and ravins, 122 lunettes and batteries on the Fausse Braye.

From first to last the works have cost £2,000,000 sterling and is capable of containing 15,000 men. Its laboratory and arsenal forms a great repository for the munition and ordnance of the north western provinces of India.

Calcutta is much subject to severe gales which generally occur about the close of the south west and setting in of the north east monsoons. During the years 1840-43 there were 85,000 perished in Calcutta and the adjacent country; the losses sustained by the shipping was almost beyond calculation. The crowds which exist in multitudes in and about the city were destroyed by the violence of the wind in such vast numbers that the city authorities were several days in casting them out of the city.

The climate is very insalubrious both to natives and foreigners, and the heat very oppressive, especially during the months of March, April and May. The mean temperature of the thermometer from December the 1st, 1853, to the last of November, 1854, was 76 85-100ths.

Religiously Calcutta is a medley, complex and heterogeneous in the extreme, consisting of Christians, Mahomedans, Hindoos, Parsees (fire worshippers), Buddhists, and worshippers of the sun, bulls, cows and trees. It has 4 Catholic churches, 10 Dissenters, 2 Greek and 1 Jewish synagogue, with Mahomedan mosques and Hindoo temples beyond number.

Calcutta has but a few places of resort; the chief is the Strand, where can be seen nightly the majority of the wealthy portion of its inhabitants taking their evening's drive.

The town hall is the only public building in the place and this is only accessible to the higher classes. Such a thing as a mechanics' hall or a public lecturing hall of any description is not known there.

Calcutta has tried for several years past to support a theatre, but have never been able only for a short period at a time. Metcalf hall is the only public reading room in the city, and that stands alone to the credit of him whose name it bears. Lord Metcalf at his decease gave the money for its erection. It is situated on the corner of Hare street and the Strand. It contains a full library of books and is a magnificent building. The museum, situated on Park street, has a pleasing collection of oriental curiosities and is well worthy of the attention of travelers.

On the river bank are a number of monumental ghauts and in various portions of the city; there are erected columns and bronze statues, some of which are of colossal dimensions. The most important is the Ochterlong monument. It is a column, the pedestal of which is of cut stone and built with a square base, the shaft is round and fluted to the balconies, which are two, and enclosed with an iron balustrade. The capitol is of one solid stone cut in meridional sections. The entire column is about 150 feet high with a spiral staircase running to the observatories. It is chiefly built of brick and of massive proportions. It stands upon the midan near the Governor-General's palace and the Esplanade, and can be seen from almost all points of the city.

Calcutta is seriously deficient in building materials. The soil and water from which the brick are made is strongly impregnated with saltpetre; the burning of the brick does not effectually remove it, and the buildings are in a constant state of deterioration and have to be repaired every two or three years.

There are no municipal regulations, properly speaking, in Calcutta. Its chief officers are commissioned justices.

There is a disgusting farce conducted under the name of police court, the order of which strongly resembles the military, and like everything else in India has its "service." There are about 2,500 police who are stationed day and night throughout the city. They are natives from the upper provinces hired for the moderate sum of eight English shillings per month. The officers of police are Europeans and East Indians.

The government of Calcutta, as in all other portions of India, is by consent. Including European extraction, Calcutta has not over 4000 within its limits.

The authorities, in their "great clemency" towards the natives, have in a great measure done away with the manners and customs of Christian nations. They have succumbed to the prestige of the Bengalie, and actually foster by law many relics of barbarism that degrade the orientalists in the eyes of those who esteem themselves the more enlightened portion of mankind.

One of the onerous duties of the river police are to traverse the river at sunrise each successive morning and sink the bodies of the dead Hindoos as they come floating down the river, which they do by means of bags filled with sand thrown across them.

A short distance above the New Mint on the river bank, at the place where the natives burn their dead, can be seen at all times of the day and night one of the most revolting spectacles that the eyes of man ever beheld. It reduces to reality all that we have ever heard of the sinner in Hades. Frequently before spirit has left its earthly tenement, the devotee is heard to exclaim "Hurree boll! hurree boll!" which is "Hurrah! hurrah!"—when his nearest relative will put the fire to his mouth, and if this should not effect the transit of the spirit sufficiently quick, he is conducted to the margin of the river where he is strangled with *holy mud*, which is put into his mouth by his oldest son or some near relative.

This accomplished, he is hurried upon the pile and suddenly wrapped in living flames midst the vociferous shouts of the brahmin (priests). Those that are not able to purchase wood are simply scorched, and some not even that, when they are consigned to the consecrated Ganges—the sepulchre of the nation. Any day can be seen twenty dead and as many live ones waiting their time to pass the fiery ordeal.

One view more and I am done. I will extract from the 'Indian Gazette':—

"We are led to understand that the sickness among the natives has somewhat abated. Dead bodies in rather considerable numbers may still be seen afloat, and even in Tolly's pullah we have seen several. Indeed, one remained two days near Allipore bridge and would, we suppose, have remained there until this hour had it not been carried away by the rising of the water. It is quite horrible, close to a city like Calcutta, to see human creatures floating about, or lying at length on the banks, a prey to dogs or carrion birds. The sight is degrading and brutalizing. It is no less so to see the dooms carrying the dead in a state the next to nudity, slung upon bamboos, and thus casting them into the river, making a nuisance of the stream. It would be a most desirable thing if such a scandalous mode of depositing of the dead could be obviated, for scandalous such spectacles certainly are to the eyes of Christians in a city subject to Christian laws and government."

## NOTICE.

The members of the Priests' Quorum in G. S. L. City will meet in the 14th Ward School house the 1st Sunday in every month at 4 o'clock, by order of the President of said Quorum. LEWIS WIGHT, President.

## ANNOUNCEMENT

In this city, June 1, by Elder F. D. Richards, Mr. ANDREW KILBOYLE and Miss SARAH ELLEN WELSH, late of Nova Scotia.

We wish you all the joy that comes From virtuous lives, to peaceful homes.

## ANNOUNCEMENT

In E. T. City, May 8, RICHARD SALISBURY, aged 65 years.

He was born in Packington, Eng.; was baptised and became a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints April 3, 1844; emigrated with his family to the Valley of the Great Salt Lake in 1853; was ordained a High Priest the ensuing winter. His delight was in the principles and privileges of the everlasting gospel; was beloved by all his acquaintances.—[Communicated.]

In Provo city, May 22, 1857, of croup, SARAH JANE, daughter of Miles and Sarah Weaver, aged 4 years, 6 months and 14 days.

## NEW ADVERTISEMENTS.

### WANTED.

A CABINET MAKER.—Apply to Mr. WM. EDDINGTON, Deseret Store, G. S. L. City. 13-2

### JOBBERS TAKE NOTICE.

ON SATURDAY the 13th of June, we will let to the lowest responsible bidder, certain JOBS of work on the public highways, in South Cottonwood Ward. The select men will be found at the fort in said Ward at ten o'clock on that day. REUBEN MILLER, JACOB WEILER, Select Men. 13-2

### LOST.

ON the 29th of April, near Spanish Fork, a dark blue OVERCOAT, home manufacture. The finder will please report to Bishop Bigler, at Nephi. 13-1