

53

The Director's problem is solved. Before the end of the year 400 Mundas and Chakmas leave. No Chaplain goes along, but early May, the Ranchi Parish Priest, Fr. Van Esbeck, goes to have a look how they are faring. He finds them all together on a few islands in the No. 10, cutting trees, putting up barracks and leveling roads. They have done well without a priest: every morning and every evening they gather for a prayer meeting with plenty of singing. Their faith has been active. They also bring to him the catechism they have instructed, some for Baptism, others only for confession and communion. He tests them one by one. Some pass with flying colours, others need a little additional counseling. He has his hands full for a whole month, but by the time he sails all have received the sacraments. On his return he begins to make arrangements for another group.

On 16th July 1919, captain Oly with 800 men is back from France. But the last 400 will sail by the next boat without chaplain; they are announced for the end of the month of a touch of fever. Fr. Molhant feels it is his duty to meet at the harbour. On arrival at Calcutta he has to go to bed and dies of typhoid on 20th August 1919.

Meanwhile, on the expiry of their contract, the first group returns from Andamans. They are in high spirits and many of them volunteer for a second term. A batch of 327 sets out towards the end of the monsoon. Later again another group. It is becoming routine. Fr. Merckx who pays them a visit in December remarks on return: They earn good money and live in an exclusively Catholic atmosphere.

74 years have gone by. As Fr. Cornelius sets out to carry on the old tradition we are happy to wish him a hearty JOURNEY.

AVE