

"THE KRUYS KERK OF JAFFNAPATAM"

(The Church in the Dutch Fort, Jaffna, Ceylon.)

1967

275.493

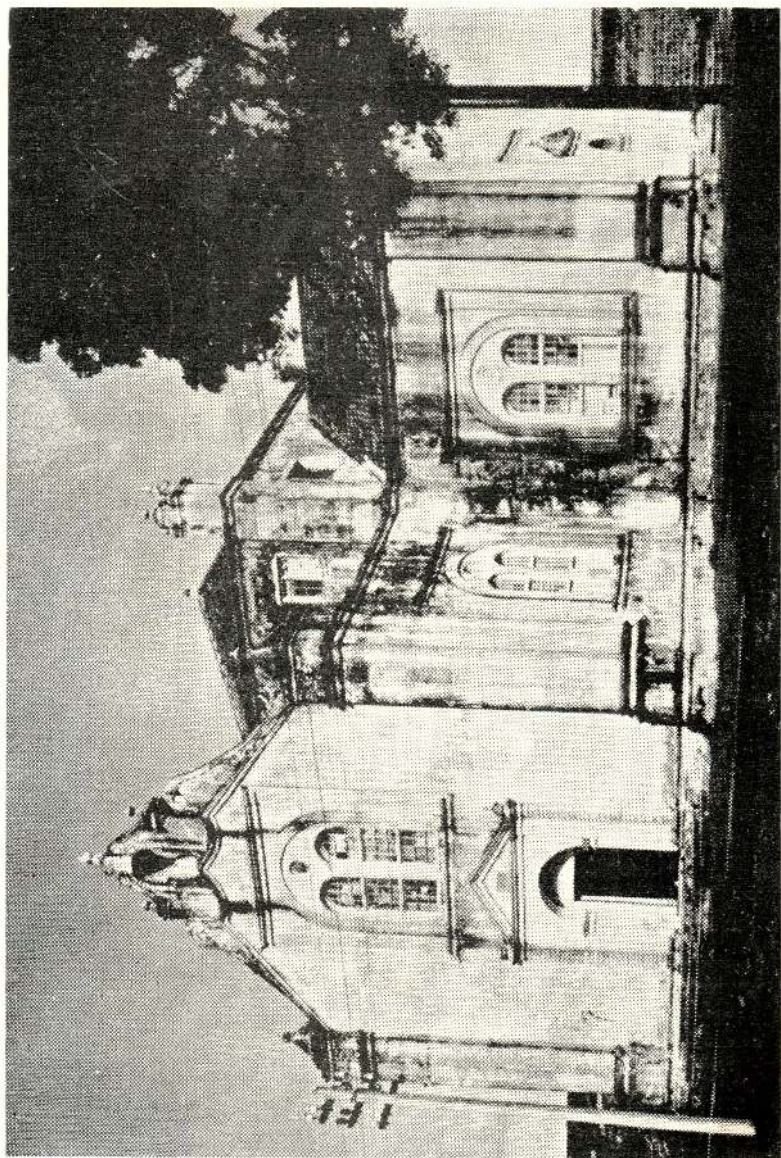


~~1476~~

K

११

(216)



THE "KRUYS KERK" OR THE CHURCH IN THE JAFFNA FORT

THE HOLLANDERS COME TO CEYLON

Vasco da Gama, the famous Portuguese explorer, opened the way from Europe to the East in 1498. From then on till the Dutch East India Company was formed in 1602, the Portuguese had undisputed supremacy on the Eastern waters. When the Dutch came out to the East, they thought it wise to leave alone the places where the Portuguese were well entrenched and go further East; and since the south western coasts of India were well fortified and manned by the Portuguese, they crossed the Bay of Bengal and began to set themselves up in the Eastern Archipelagos, beyond the Malay Peninsula.

By 1619 when the Dutch had established themselves in Jakarta (renamed Batavia) they felt themselves strong enough to turn their attention to India. In a few years they were able to take over quite a few places scattered over the mainland of India.

For any Colonial power that wanted to hold India the island of Ceylon was valuable as a base and stepping stone. Two other reasons besides this made the possession of Ceylon extremely valuable to the Dutch. Ceylon was the source of the Cinnamon trade, which at the time held a high premium in Europe. Also to the Dutch Ceylon would be a welcome half-way house to the Eastern Archipelagos.

The Dutch therefore were waiting for an opportunity to step into Ceylon. This opportunity was provided by the invitation extended by Rajasinghe II, King of Ceylon, who wanted the Dutch to come and help him to rid the Island of the Portuguese, who had occupied the maritime provinces.

The Dutch captured Batticaloa in 1638 and the next year Trincomalee to the north. They then slowly began making their way down the southern coast. In 1643 a ten years truce was declared between the Dutch and the Portuguese, because the Portuguese had broken with Spain, the hereditary enemy of Holland in Europe. Fighting was resumed in 1652 and Colombo was captured in 1656.

THE HOLLANDERS COME TO JAFFNA

The Portuguese had divided their possessions in Ceylon into three areas. The chief one was under the Governor stationed in Colombo; the areas of the South and the North were each under a Commandeur. The Northern area was called "Jaffnapatam" (a combination and corruption of two words, meaning "Jaffna Town"). The name was sometimes more correctly spelt "Jaffnapatnam." The people of this area belong to a different race and speak a different language from those inhabiting the greater part of the island. And whereas the Portuguese had established themselves in most of the maritime areas elsewhere soon after their arrival in 1505, Jaffna had remained under its own King till 1619.

Apart from the fact that the Dutch victory over the Portuguese could not have been complete till the northern part was reduced, Jaffna possessed an importance of its own for the Dutch. The distance between it and the nearest coastal town in India was only 32 miles. Both from a military and from a commercial point of view its possession would be a great convenience to them.

The expedition to capture Jaffna came out under the command of Ryklof Van Goens. The main force came by land and arrived before the capital city on the 9th March, 1658. Baldaeus tells us how a Thanksgiving Service was held in the

ex - Dominican Church, west of the city, on the 18th and how he preached from Psalm 20, verse 7. Since, according to Baldaeus, "The Fort was not to be taken by storm, owing to the unusual height of its walls, nor was it to be effected by mines owing to its rocky soil ... nor was it to be levelled with the thunderings of our cannon owing to the triple thick walls," it was realised that a prolonged siege was the only alternative. But even that could not be effective, unless a small island fort at the mouth of the inland sea that led to Jaffna, where the Portuguese still held out, was first reduced. The reduction of this small island Fort was accomplished in a few days by the simple process of bombarding its water supplies. Baldaeus preached his Thanksgiving sermon on Psalm 46: 8.

Undivided attention could now be given to the Jaffna Fort. Pressure was brought to bear on it by the adoption of another simple process, that of starving it out. Considerable numbers of the local population had also taken refuge in the Fort and all were shut in without exit and without the possibility of succour. Disease and starvation were working havoc. On the 21st of June the Portuguese troops surrendered. On the following day the articles of capitulation were signed and the keys handed over to Major Van der Laan. The Thanksgiving sermon was preached on Exodus 17: 15.

Within a few days of the conquest of Jaffna, the Dutch had to deal with a terrible conspiracy. While most of the Portuguese who surrendered had left for Goa, some had taken the oath of loyalty to the Dutch and taken service under them. Now that the Town had been taken, the greater part of the Dutch garrison had left on an expedition to Nagapatam in India. The plot was to enter the Church and massacre all the principal officers inside while Baldaeus was preaching. The plot was discovered and the matter dealt with with the

utmost thoroughness, that is, with the brutality of that time.

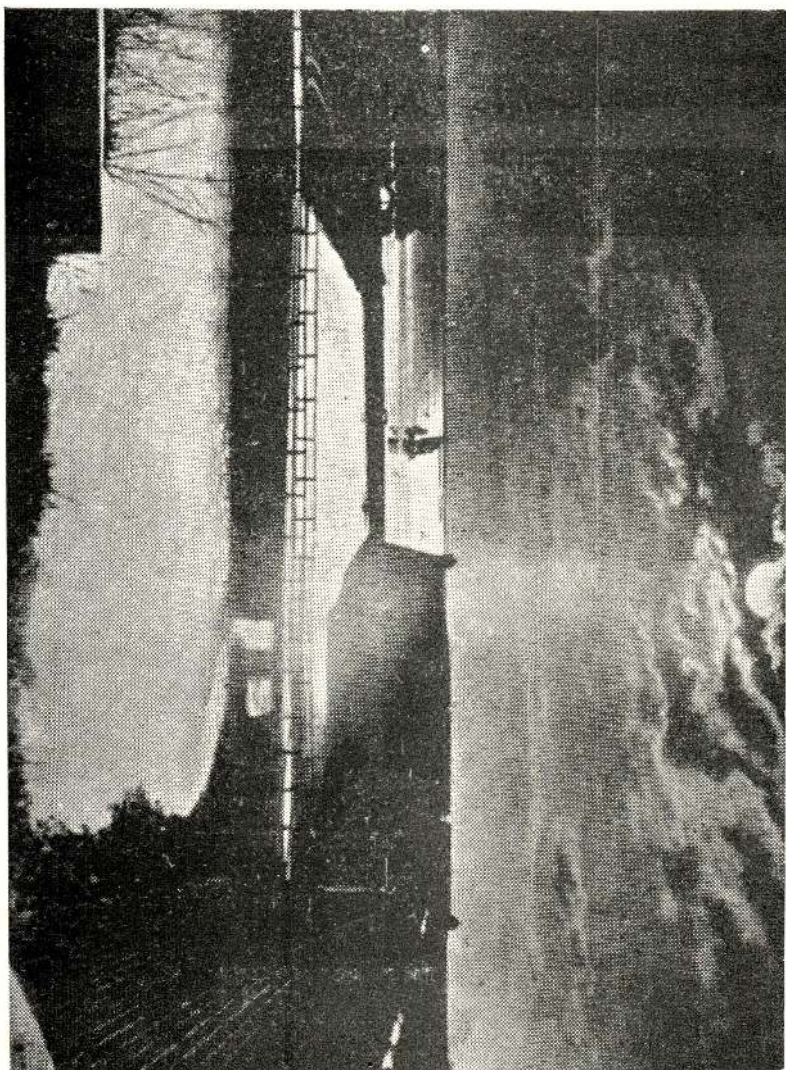
Very soon after settling down, the Dutch renamed all the islands around the mouth of the inland sea that leads to Jaffna with names from their own country; for Baldaeus who left Ceylon in 1665 uses the new names in his map of "*Regnum Jaffnapatnam cum insulis adjacentibus*." The following were the names given: Amsterdam, Leyden, Middleburg, Haarlem, Rotterdam and Delft. It is possible that Baldaeus himself was responsible for the last name, as he had been born in Delft, Netherlands. Most of these names are now forgotten. The name of "Leyden" still lingers; but that of "Delft" seems to have become permanent.

THE JAFFNA FORT

Baldaeus has given a plan of the Portuguese Fort as it stood in his time (1636 — 1665). It seems to have been a substantial structure. Baldaeus says that "it is a square surrounded by high walls ... it is larger than the Fort of Batavia". After some years, however, the Dutch decided to pull down this Fort and erect one of their own. Johann Wolfgang Heydt was a German, who took up work under the Dutch East India Company in 1733. He spent four years in Ceylon, after which he went to Batavia and in 1740 returned to Europe. In 1744 he issued a book with a section on Ceylon. In his book he speaks as follows of the Fort the Dutch had built in Jaffna: "The Fortress is certainly not one of the poorest; I will not say only on the island of Ceylon, but even in all the Indies; and this not only because of its strength but because of its correctness and beauty".

The Fort is of pentagon shape and has a wide moat round it. A somewhat narrow, winding path through ramparts on either side brings you to

THE BRIDGE TO THE FORT IN THE MOONLIGHT



a wide moat over which there was a "fine draw bridge" in the time of Heydt, but which is now spanned by a cement concrete bridge. Over the entrance is inscribed the date when the building of the new Fort had been commenced. viz: 1680 A. D. The big doors guarding the entrance were covered with pointed iron spikes, which would at one time have been a formidable source of discouragement to elephants, but have now mostly fallen off. The inside of the Fort is very spacious; around a large rectangular courtyard rounded off at the corners are many buildings including a church, the house of the Commandeur (now used by the Governor General, Judges of the Supreme Court and Cabinet Ministers, when any one of them is in Jaffna) and houses where some high Government officials still reside. At the centre of the courtyard there used to be a sun dial which has since been removed to the Jaffna Archaeological Museum.

The size of the Fort may be gauged from the fact that its original garrison force counted 350 men (of whom 287 were Dutch). As time went on the garrison seems to have been considerably reduced in number. But it may be seen that a Fort which could at any time have accommodated such a garrison along with other high officials must have been of suitable size.

Cannon were mounted all round on the ramparts and must have looked extremely menacing in those days. They remained in position till about 25 years ago, though looking rusty and outmoded. The cannon balls intended to be fired from them used to be piled neatly in the courtyard in the shape of little pyramids. Till 1906 the only occupation the authorities could think of for the prisoners in the adjoining jail was to make them carry these balls from one side of the courtyard during the first half of the day and build up pyramids on the other side and during the second half of the day to reverse

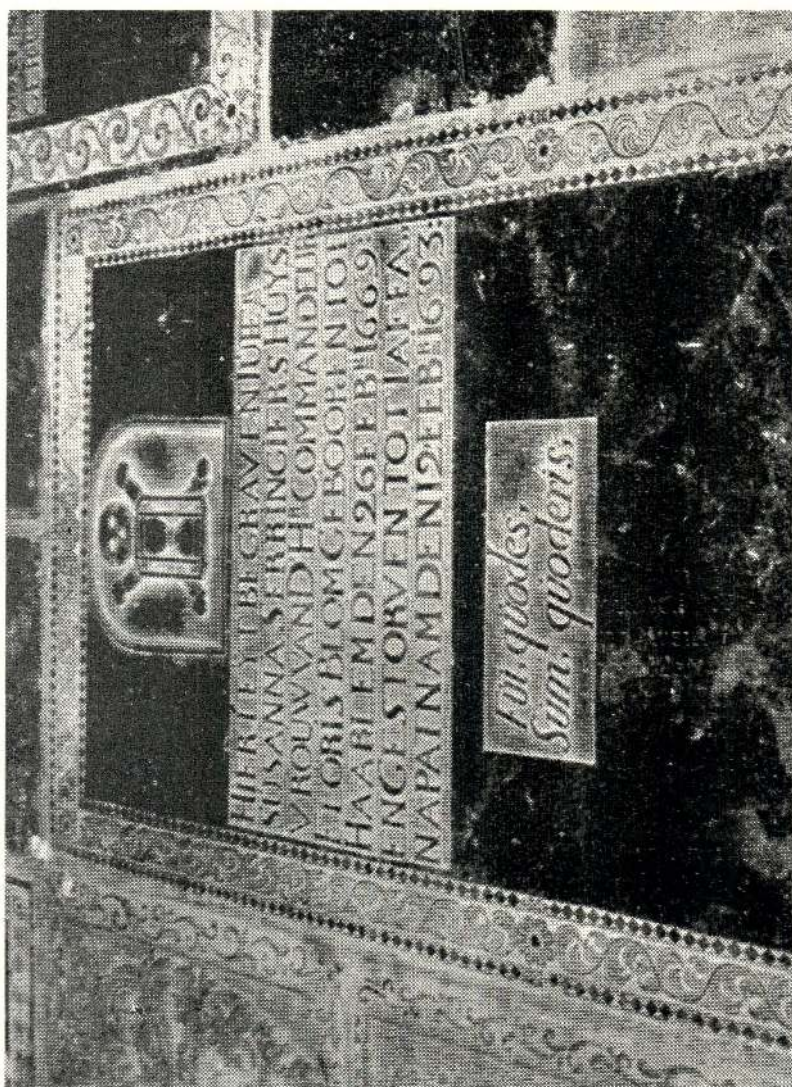
the process. This had gone on for years. During World War II all the cannon and the balls were melted down.

After the Fort was built, for many decades the Dutch were not engaged in any war in Ceylon; so the Fort did not have to withstand a siege. Even after the Fort had passed out of the hands of the Hollanders, it continued to be looked after carefully. Though not very carefully looked after now, it is still an impressive sight.

"THE KRUY'S KERK OF JAFFNAPATAM"

Throughout the district of Jaffna there are still remains of the large churches used by the local people in the Dutch period; for then most local people had to pretend to be Christians, as one could not have been a non-Christian without serious inconvenience. In some cases, new churches have now been built on the old sites and are used by the Christian congregations of the present time. Only the present Cathedral of the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India, at Vaddukoddai, a little more than seven miles from Jaffna Town, remains as it was in Dutch times, except for a partition put up by the Missionaries 150 years ago, separating about a third of the old church from the rest.

However, these churches outside the capital city were churches where the local Christians and not the Dutch worshipped. Services in them were conducted by the local schoolmasters, who more often than not, did not themselves hold the Christian faith. The Predikants (ordained ministers) from the Fort used to go out twice a year to these congregations to administer the sacrament, to marry couples (who might perhaps be already living as man and wife) and to baptize children (since without baptism the children were not entitled to inherit property).



A COMMANDEUR'S WIFE'S TOMBSTONE

However, says Dr. R. L. Brohier, an authority on the Dutch period in Ceylon, "The most characteristically Dutch buildings extant in Ceylon are the edifices which the merchants and officials in the principal coastal stations provided themselves with for purposes of worship. The churches were all built in the 18th century and preserve at least the main features and plan if not the details of mediaeval architecture".

The church within the walled Fort of Jaffna is the oldest which conforms to this type. The other three important Dutch churches came later; the one at Matara in the extreme south was put up thirty years later; work on the Wolvendaal Church in Colombo, where the Governor used to worship, was started in 1749 and completed in 1757, on the pattern of the Jaffna Church. The Church in Galle, also in the extreme south, was erected in 1754

The impressive Church which the Hollanders built in Jaffna for their worship stands in the south eastern section of the Fort, close to the Commander's house. It is in the form of a Greek Cross (with both beams of the cross being of equal length) and was known among the Hollanders of Ceylon as the "Kruys Kerk of Jaffnapatam". The main beam of the cross is from east to west, with the main entrance at the western end, facing the central courtyard.

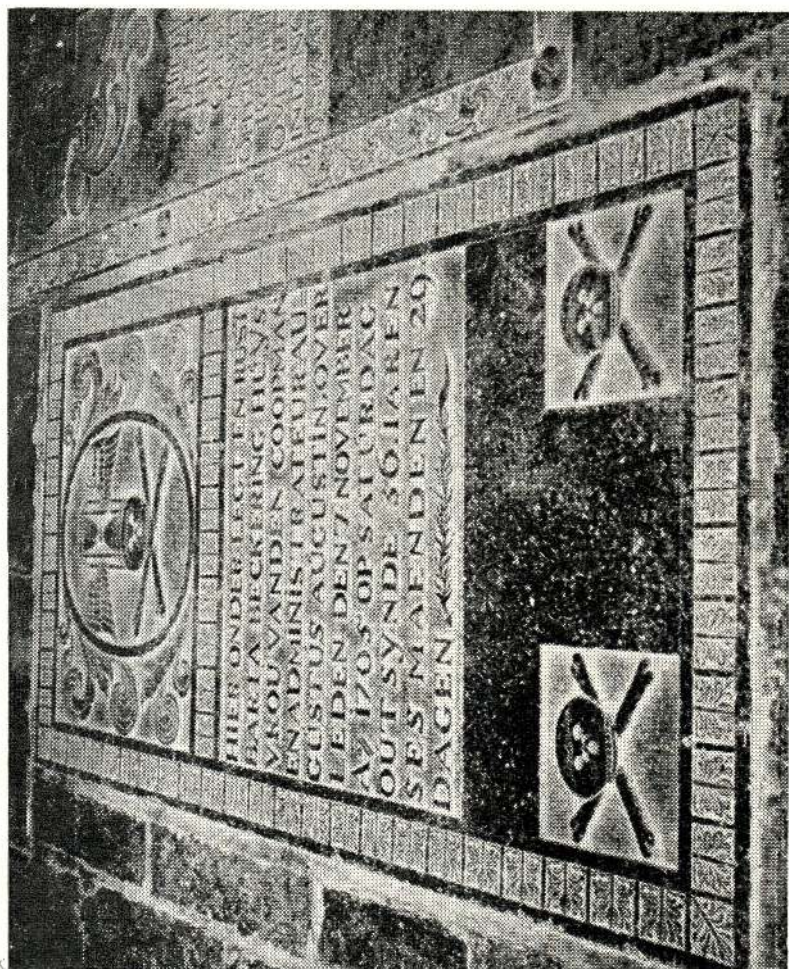
Over the main entrance are clearly inscribed the figures 1706; but inside the church are tombstones, let into the floor, dating back *inter alia* to 1666, 1672, 1673 and 1693. This has puzzled many people. Did an older church stand on this spot? Or were the "dust and ashes" of the Hollanders buried in the Portuguese Church of "Our Lady of Miracles" re-interred here, when this church was built?

For many good reasons we may safely conclude that this was the only church erected on the present site and that the dust and ashes of those buried elsewhere were re-interred here :

1. The Dutch had no objection to using the Roman Catholic churches erected by the Portuguese, since Baldaeus himself tells us how he used them for Protestant worship.
2. In all the villages of Jaffna where the Dutch set up their own form of worship, they merely touched up the old Portuguese churches and made them look Presbyterian.
3. It would have been senseless to pull down the old Portuguese church in the Fort, put up a new church on another site, then pull that also down and put up another in its place on the same site.
4. If such a senseless thing was done why was there no record of it at all?
5. It would have been far more sensible for the Dutch when they were rebuilding the Fort on a new pattern to have waited till it took shape and build the new church to suit the general pattern of the environment
6. It was customary for the Dutch when they had erected a new church to re-inter in it the dust and ashes of those buried in the old church which it was replacing.

There is no doubt, therefore, that till the new church was put up the Dutch continued to worship in the old Portuguese church which was on a different site and that this is the only church that has stood on the present site.

The present church was built when the Honourable Adan Van der Duyn was Commandeur



ANOTHER TOMBSTONE

of Jaffnapatam. The architect and builder was Martinus Leusakam, who is described in an old family record as Bass Landmeter, who was in the Company's service in Jaffnapatam; he had the rank of an Oonderkoopman. His name appears in many Dutch maps of the period. The resident Clergyman was the Reverend Philppus de Vriest; and the following formed the Consistory: Arnout Mom Alexander Ravens, Jan Lodewyk Stomphius, Marten Anthonisz, Jan Marten Verdonk and Louis Verwyk.

Dr. Brohier says of the church: "The quaint ensemble of gables, central tower, belfry and many-paned heavily mullioned windows is nowhere displayed to better advantage than in this building". We give below some of the comments on it by the Honourable J. P. Lewis in the "Architectural Review" of 1907: "The Dutch Church at Jaffna is very interesting as showing how effective a building can be made with simple material and little attempt at ornament; and the plan of it which is that of a Greek Cross with a wide central area is especially suited for a modern Town church where the object is that as large a portion as possible of the congregation should be within sight and hearing of the pulpit and altar. It is capable of seating 600 people. The interior owing to its loftiness and thickness of its walls is very cool and airy and is well lighted by the deeply recessed windows of the nave, transepts and chancel as well as by the four small windows of the lantern ... it is very church-like and reflects credit on its Calvinistic builders".

Lewis adds: "They (the Hollanders) were as regards their ecclesiastical architecture, permeated with the mediaeval spirit ... The Gothic or mediaeval tradition seems to have survived until late among the Dutch ... The walls are from four to five feet thick, built of rubble and coral stone, of which the Fort is constructed with a covering of cement. The floor is paved with rectangular stones

something under two feet square which the Dutch seem to have used for this purpose in all their larger buildings. The pillars, arches and pediments of the doorways are in the thin yellow bricks that the Dutch also happened to have imported".

The church took over the two bells that had belonged to the Portuguese church, each bearing the inscription :

N. S. DOS MILAGRES DE JAFFNAPATAO 1648.

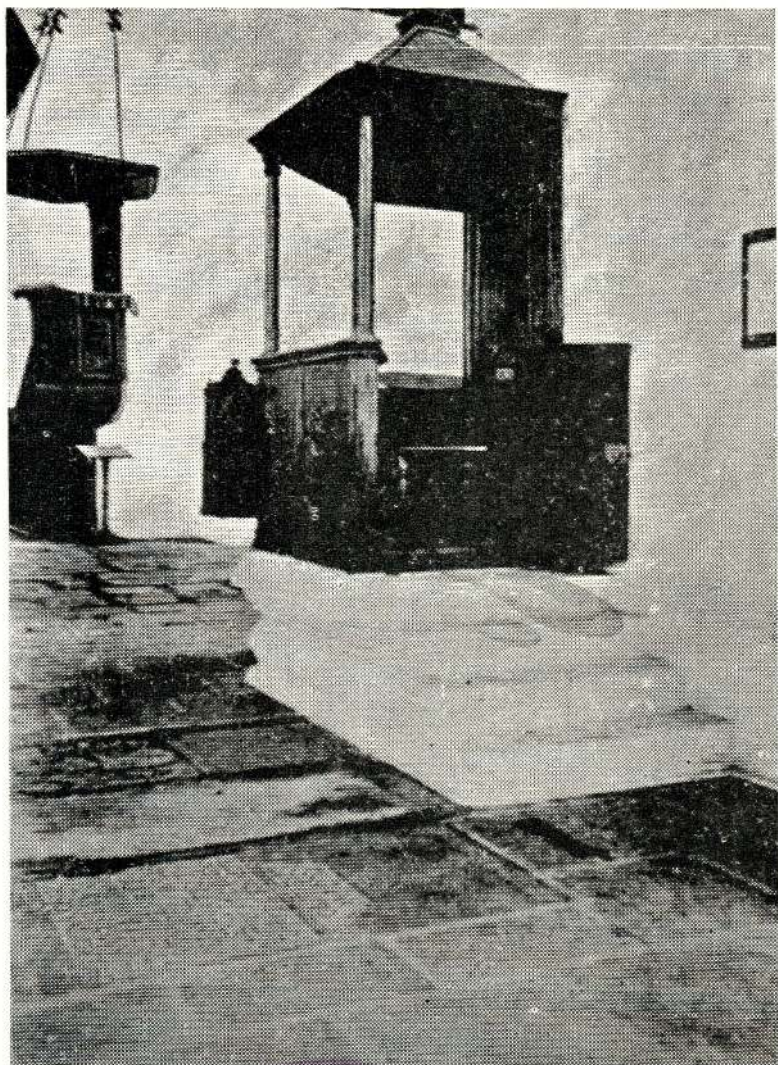
(Nossa Senhora dos Milagres = Our Lady of Miracles). The bigger one was hung on a belfry on the bastion, to summon the Burghers in town to worship and the smaller one was hung in the "lantern" of the Church to summon the officials and members of the garrison in the Fort.

As you enter by the main entrance (the old massive gates seem now to have been replaced) if you happen to look down on the stone slab below your feet, you are greeted with the startling inscription in Dutch which reads :

HOW LONG
IS
ETERNITY

A sketch of the interior as it was found in 1733 is to be seen in Heydt's book. The fidelity of Heydt's drawing is borne out by the water colour drawing made by the Dutchman, C. Steiger and preserved in Rijke Museum in Amsterdam, showing what it was in 1760.

As you go in you will notice that there are many tombstones built into the floor. The 18th century ones are usually massive, being 8 feet by 4 feet; the 17th century ones are usually smaller. Since such stones often mark the graves of the Commandeurs or their wives or other great personages,



THE COMMANDEUR'S PEW

1212
10000

the inscriptions would be suitable. These tombstones are fine memorials from every point of view : this is not to be wondered at, since they were the handiwork of experts in Amsterdam. In this brochure some of the inscriptions on the tombstones will be reproduced by means of photographs.

As you look along the nave towards the chancel, on the left hand side, in the corner where the wall of the northern transept meets the wall of the chancel, stands the pulpit. It is of the "Chalice" pattern; and over it was a sounding-board suspended from the wall by a twisted iron rod. In the opposite corner is the Commandeur's pew, which used to have a canopy over it, held up by wooden pillars. All along the walls were wooden stalls of "typical Dutch outline". The ones along the southern transept, near the Commandeur's pew, seem to have been reserved for "qualified persons and servants of the Company". (It is expected that the damage which has overtaken most of the wooden equipment at the time of writing will soon be set right.)

The Commandeur seated in his pew dominated the congregation and was the chief auditor. Whether all Commandeurs took advantage of the situation or not we do not know; but evidently one did. His orders were that the Predikant should not come with a prepared sermon, but should preach on the text which he himself would put before him when the time came. One Sunday, as the time came for the sermon, the Commandeur sent up a blank slip of paper. The Predikant was equal to the occasion and without the slightest embarrassment announced his text as follows: "The earth was void and without form" (Genesis 1:2) and proceeded to preach a mighty sermon.

In the northern transept is an organ gallery. In Heydt's time (1733) this seems to have stood on

stone pillars on a different site; it was later shifted to the present site and set upon a wooden platform. The gallery is of wood on which is a carved panel showing King David, very bald, playing on a harp and glancing at a book of Psalms, resting on an 18th century reading desk. The letters in the book of Psalms are in Greek.

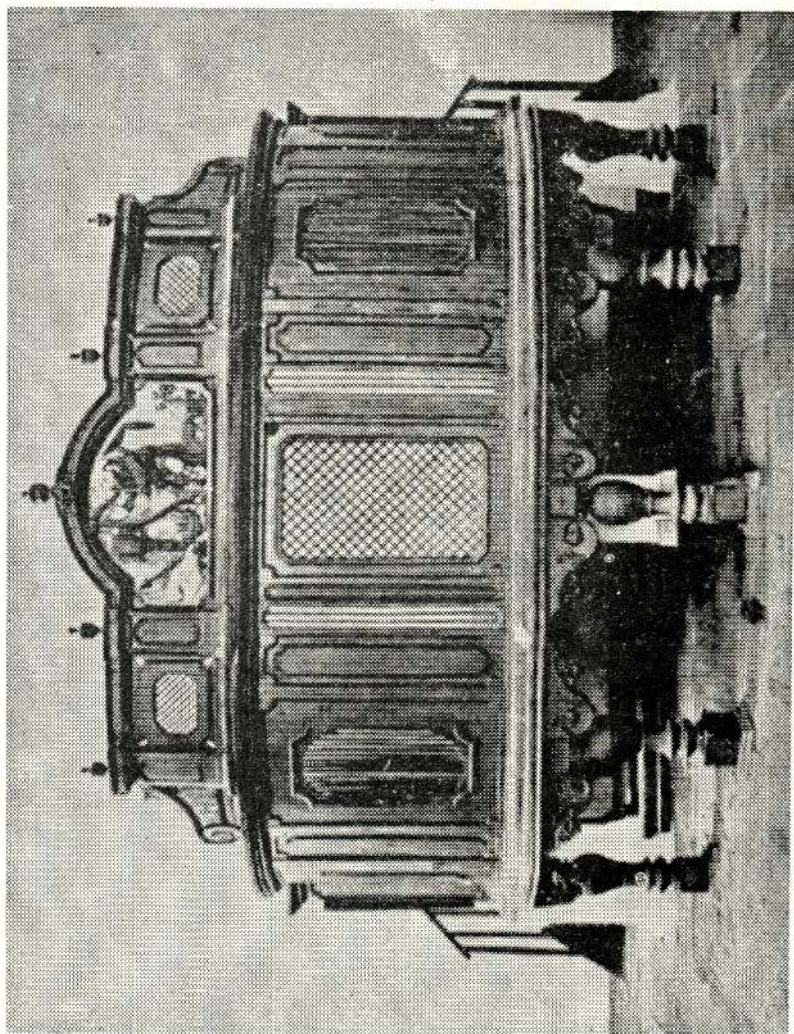
On the western wall of the southern transept is a wooden hatchment to the memory of Baron de Reder, a German nobleman, who had been in the service of the Company. The Latin inscription on the hatchment runs as follows:

FRIEDRICK WILHELM LIBER BARON DE REDER
NAT. GOLDBERAGE IN SILESIA D. XXV MAII MDCCVI
MORT JAFFNAPATAM D. XXVI MART. MDCCLXIX

His coat of arms surmounted by the figure of Time is flanked on one side by that of a lady in classical costume and on the other by a suit of arms. There were some heraldic emblems on the other walls too; but they were all removed to the Government archives during the World War II and have not come back.

In the chancel, that is, the top of the Cross, the British put up a small wooden platform 8 feet in width, and in front of it, altar railings, to suit the Anglican form of worship. The wooden platform and the railings still remain. In Dutch times there would have been stalls along the chancel walls too.

Members of the Garrison and officials of the Company did not constitute the entire congregation of the Church. The Dutch were anxious to secure a good human base for their occupation and made every effort to set up Dutch colonies in the land. They, therefore, held out glowing prospects to those at home of the riches and fertility of the land; and



THE ORGAN GALLERY

to prevent the colonists from acting on second thoughts, they laid it down that once they had come they could return to the Netherlands only after 15 years ; by which time it was hoped they would have got used to their new home. Anyone who wanted to go earlier would have had to do it at his own expense. But recruitment either for the Army or for the colonisation scheme does not seem to have been confined to the inhabitants of the Netherlands ; for there are now French, German and Italian names among the descendants of those who came in those days (Toussaint, Koch, Schneider, Sansoni, etc.) However, once they had come, everyone was considered a "Dutch Burgher".

Evidently as time went on, the strength of the Dutch military force guarding the Fort (which we found earlier had been 287) had been greatly reduced, for the usual strength of the Dutch congregation in Jaffna during the early part of the 18th century fell short of 200 ; during the latter part it was around 250 (Royal Asiatic Journal, 1847 - 1848). And of this quite a few must have been civilians. Evidence of this may be found in the fact that the Main Street of Jaffna Town is still called in Tamil the "Street of the Burghers"; and the houses along it were obviously built by the Dutch. In fact, it has been observed that no Town in Ceylon bears such obvious marks of Dutch occupation as Jaffna.

Heydt gives his impression of a service in the Fort Church when he visited Jaffna (1733) as follows :

" The women are accustomed to sit on chairs, which they at all times have carried behind them by slaves, and when church is over, they are taken home again. Each takes care, not only to have a fine seat, but that it be provided with a stately cushion..... So long as the service continues sentries are set

on all European churches, in part to protect from possible revolt, in part to prevent that any rough sailor or soldier should take it into his head to enter the church, and so disturb the worshippers in their devotion ”.

Judging from what happened when first the Dutch had come and taken over the Fort, one might say this precaution was entirely justified.

LATER

The Dutch regime in Ceylon came to an end in the last decade of the 18th century. In 1794 the French Revolutionary Army entered the Netherlands; the Stadtholder (the hereditary head of the country) had taken refuge in England; a new Republic was set up which was forced into an alliance with the invaders. The Stadtholder in his letter dated Kew (England) 7th February, 1795, requested Van Anglebeck, the Governor of Ceylon, to admit the British Forces, who were coming to protect the settlement from the French. Lord Hobart, the British Governor of Madras, gave an assurance on behalf of the British Government, that the Island would be restored to the Dutch at the end of the War. Some time later, however, Batavia sent word that according to the treaty between the Netherlands Government and France, the British were to be resisted.

A long period of undisturbed peace had made the Dutch in Ceylon ill prepared for war; they had learned to lead a luxurious life, according to Captain Robert Percival, beginning the day with gin and tobacco and ending it with tobacco and gin. The historian, Sir Paul Pieris, comments acidly on the deterioration that had come over “the indomitable courage which once defied the might of Philip of Spain ”.

Taken altogether by surprise, unprepared for a war and ill-disposed to recover the qualities needed for waging one, and beset by contradictory instructions from the authorities, Dutch resistance was feeble and half-hearted. One by one the coastal towns in Ceylon surrendered to the British, after varying degrees of resistance; Jaffna fell in September, 1795 and Colombo a few months later.

The treaty of Amiens signed in 1802, for the time being brought to an end the hostilities between the contending powers in Europe; and there was to be a general reversion to the *status quo ante bellum*. Britain, therefore, returned to France and her allies all the possessions she had taken from them; but owing to the continued dominance of Napoleon, and perhaps for other reasons, she thought it wise to keep back Ceylon.

The "Kruys Kerk" was hereafter used by the British Garrison and the high officials stationed within the Fort as their place of worship. There are some tablets on the walls and a few tombstones belonging to the early British period. From 1872 the British began using a church of their own, which they had put up a mile away from the Fort, in the heart of the city. The Fort Church now lost its congregation, and with it the loving devotion that a congregation bestows on its place of worship. It had become a relic.

Though the British were not using the Fort Church any longer, they wanted to liquidate any claim that the Dutch might still have on it; and so in 1892 they paid a sum of Rupees 6,000 for it (present exchange : 1 Rupee and 30 cents = 1 Dutch Guilder; though at that time the exchange would have been more favourable to the rupee) to the Wolvendaal Consistory, Colombo. In addition a sum of Rupees 75 was paid for the furniture. And since the bells would no longer summon any-

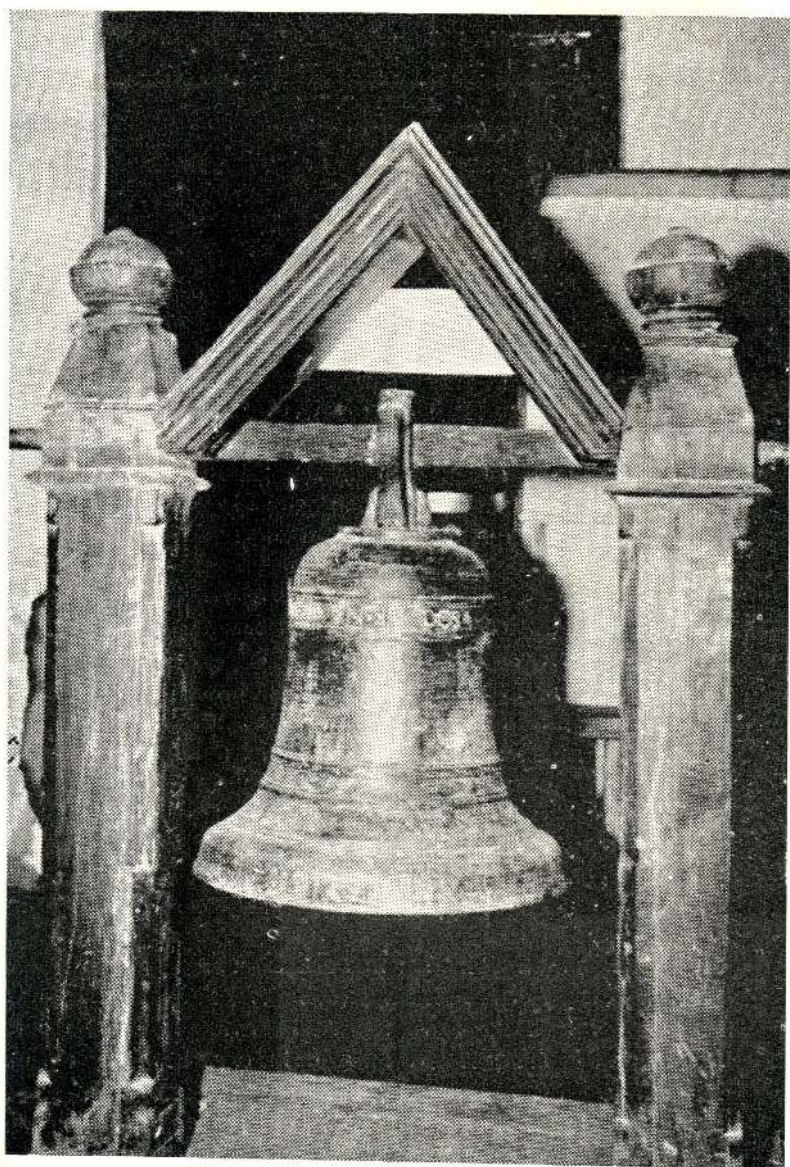
one to worship, the bigger one was given to the Wolvendaal Consistory itself, which later sold it to the Church of St. Michael and All Angels, Colombo (for Rupees 200); and the smaller was taken down and placed in the vestry.

A relic may not command loving devotion; but as long as its significance strikes a sympathetic chord in the heart of its owner, it will command interest and care. It was natural that all through the British period such interest and care should have been available for the "Kruys Kerk". About the turn of the century the Archaeological Department set up by the Government took over the building as a "Protected Monument"; and attention to it was never lacking. Till about thirty years ago every writer on the building hardly failed to express surprise (and satisfaction) at its extremely good state of preservation. The present writer well remembers the thrill he experienced every time he went into this church. Everything was as it would have been in the time of the Dutch; it almost looked as if one had gone back in time into the 18th century.

For many years during this century the three Protestant denominations in Jaffna used to hold an annual three-day Rally in the Fort Church, called the "Convention", usually round the latter part of August or the early part of September. The Hon. J. P. Lewis, writing in 1907, says, "With the permission of the Government, services are occasionally held in it; and it is to be hoped that owing to the care with which it is now kept it may long be available, and so continue in some measure to fulfil its original purpose".

THE PRESENT

If the care bestowed upon a relic depends on its striking a sympathetic chord in the heart of the



THE PORTUGUESE BELL WHICH THE DUTCH TOOK OVER

owner, it could not be expected that after Ceylon had gained its independence the Kruys Kerk would continue to get the same care as it did under the British. It was natural that the era it represented should be looked upon not as integral to the real history of Ceylon, but as an unfortunate interference with that history.

In the meantime a general decay was gripping the church. The windows were falling to pieces and were patched up by odds and ends. The canopy over the Commandeur's pew had disappeared. The sounding board over the Chalice Pulpit had dropped down and was propped up against one of the walls. The pulpit itself was tottering and was supported by a smaller one, donated by the Methodist Church at the turn of this century. It was grievous to see the state to which the once glorious church of the Hollanders was being reduced and the general air of desolation which prevailed.

The Archaeological Department itself began to realise that unless somebody interested in the building took charge of it the situation could not be remedied. So it offered it to the Jaffna Christian Union on a 50 years lease.

The Jaffna Christian Union is not a statutory body. It is a loosely-knit organisation which represents the three major Protestant denominations in Jaffna. But it felt that unless it undertook the responsibility nothing would be done.

Whatever major repairs are done on the building would be done with funds provided by the churches of Holland. The Protestant Churches of Jaffna would be responsible for the expenses of routine upkeep. The Bishop of the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India is the lessee.

We trust that you will go away duly impressed with your visit to the church, which in the days when the Hollanders ruled Ceylon was a source of pride to them and must have been the scene of much Christian devotion for two - hundred years.

Office - bearers,

Jaffna Christian Union.

1967.



