



Mr E.H. Noel – 1904 (Edition 1)

In October 1904 Mr Edwyn H. Noel was commended by Rongotea assembly and went out to India. At Cochin he joined Mr and Mrs Volbrecht Nagel, missionaries who had come out of a society in North Malabar, and with them he learned the Malayalam language. Malabar, Cochin and Travancore which together later comprised the State of Kerala, were some of the more densely populated areas of India. The population had been strongly influenced by the teaching of the Syrian Church dating back to the legendary preaching of the apostle Thomas. During the time he was engaged in language study in 1905/6 Mr Noel visited Kunnankulam, Parur, Puthupally in Travancore and Cochin, all having indigenous assemblies. In order to be amongst people who were not speaking English he left the Nagels who had bought a property at Trichur for an orphanage and moved south to Kumbanadu in 1908.

There he entered into the labours of Tamil David the Indian evangelist and brethren Nagel and Handley Bird who had moved through that area preaching particularly to the dissidents in the Syrian Church. There were many assemblies who needed teaching and there were many non-Syrian Hindus who needed to hear the gospel and from that latter section he saw a great turning to God. Right from the outset the poorer people with no identity, education or privileges became the burden of his heart and he spent himself for them, sacrificing much to meet their needs.

On May 29th 1909 he married Miss Julia Shirliff who had gone out from Nelson and she was a true helpmeet in the work amongst those people. They lived close to them, walked hundreds of miles amongst them, chatting in their poor homes, settling their disputes and preaching the gospel in their villages. Mr Noel started a Bible School for Indian evangelists that year and his wife commenced medical work. A great deal of the time he spent out with his Indian brethren tramping over the hills, often in very rough conditions, there being no proper path. Day schools were commenced in many areas so that children would never, like their parents be unable to read the Scriptures.

By 1918 there were estimated to be up to 2,000 believers in fellowship and some 30 assemblies had been commenced amongst the Hindus as well as many established amongst the Syrians and there were approximately 50 India evangelists shepherding and reaching out to the lost. At that time a Bible Depot was commenced which in its first two years distributed over 12,000 Bibles, Testaments and gospels. There were also over 2,500 girls and boys in schools. By the end of that decade three-day conferences were well and truly established with thousands attending meetings at least three times a day. Those special meetings were held in different centres around the district such as Adoor, Pathanapuram, Pulaya etc.

In 1921 Mr Black joined the work from New Zealand and vigorous visitation went on. Often-times in those years there was opposition to the preaching and antagonists beat drums and threw pig entrails over them. One evangelist was kicked and trampled on and Bibles were stolen and burned. However throughout the 1920's the work prospered in South India. Most years saw well over 100 baptised. Conventions held in thatch pandals, a shelter under which up to 5,000 people listened to messages. Hundreds of thousands of tracts were distributed

and the schools grew apace. In places where there had been opposition assemblies of over 100 were meeting. Special Bible studies were conducted for evangelists and teachers and day-school teachers spent their holidays in teams visiting hundreds of villages.

The work continued to expand throughout the 1930's with day-school attendances increasing to over 3,000 with many Christian teachers. Three schools near Kumbanadu had rolls of 800, 450 and 300 pupils and all with Christian teachers. By 1936 there were 110 assemblies in the area and they had never had more freedom.

Naturally a work like that was not without its theological problems and with so few missionaries most of the teaching was conducted by Indian believers. In 1936, too, the Noels took over the printing press from Mr Alex Soutter and it was shifted to Kumbanadu. There were just two small machines with a staff of four printers and three apprentices but they were able to produce hundreds of thousands of tracts. In one month alone in 1938 they printed 75,000 tracts. At a baptism in a public place Mr Noel was pelted with mud during the service but this did not deter their efforts.

The last years of Mr Noel's life were spent in the midst of that on-going indigenous work. 5,000 children were hearing the Scriptures daily. The medical work was ministering to the needs of thousands of people and local evangelists were reaching out to plant new assemblies. Mr Noel died at Kumbanadu, the scene of most of his labours, on September 30th 1943 at the age of 65 and 4,000 people attended his funeral.

Mrs Noel continued with a vital interest in the activities particularly of the printing and medical work which she supervised. The Indian brethren were arranging conferences and inviting speakers and many other New Zealanders such as brethren Payne, Goold, Chote, Fountain, Junck etc. were invited to speak. In 1956 Mrs Noel retired to New Zealand living at Nelson till 1962 when she moved to Maranatha Home at Mosgiel. She died on July 2nd 1966 after a full life of service for her Lord.

[Source p. 160 has photo with caption: 'Miss B. Shirtliff, Malaya, Mr E.H. Noel, Miss C. Newport, Mr J. McIver, Miss E. Starck', also entry for Mr E.H. Noel has uncaptioned photos of Mr and Mrs Noel. Page 171 has photo captioned: 'Missionary group in 1924. Back: Mr Irvine, Miss Mai, Mr Brewerton. Centre: Miss Sundgren, Mrs Noel, Mrs Black, Mr Noel, Miss Mosley, Mr Revell, Miss Treweek, Miss Townley, Miss Starck, Mr Buchanan. Seated: Mr and Mrs Thomson, Mr Black, Mrs Irvine, Mrs Revell, Miss Dyason, Mrs A. Redwood. Note: Mr Brewerton was visiting India from Malaya.']