

INTRODUCTION

Orazio Bettacchini, born in 1810 at Piosina in Northern Italy of a simple Catholic family, was sent to Ceylon in 1842 as the first European Missionary Apostolic by the Propaganda Fide. He was consecrated Bishop in 1846 and two years later was made Pro-Vicar of the Jaffna Vicariate. In 1849, he became the first Vicar Apostolic of Jaffna.

This work is not an in-depth study of the life and times of Bettacchini, but merely an introduction. Its aim is to focus attention on the pioneering activities of this great Italian Oratorian — a figure largely neglected by scholars of Ceylon Church history.

Our study is divided into four chapters. The first deals with the many problems the Catholic community in Ceylon faced in the early part of the British period; the second deals with Bettacchini's apostolate in Ceylon from 1842 till 1847; the third and the fourth chapters, based almost entirely on primary sources, deal with the many achievements and trials of Bettacchini, covering the periods from 1847 to 1854 and from 1854 to 1857 respectively.