

Notre Dame College

—a perspective

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Notre Dame College — the name presents a vision of an expanse of tree-shaded fields and pleasant looking buildings, serene with the cloistered calm of its students.

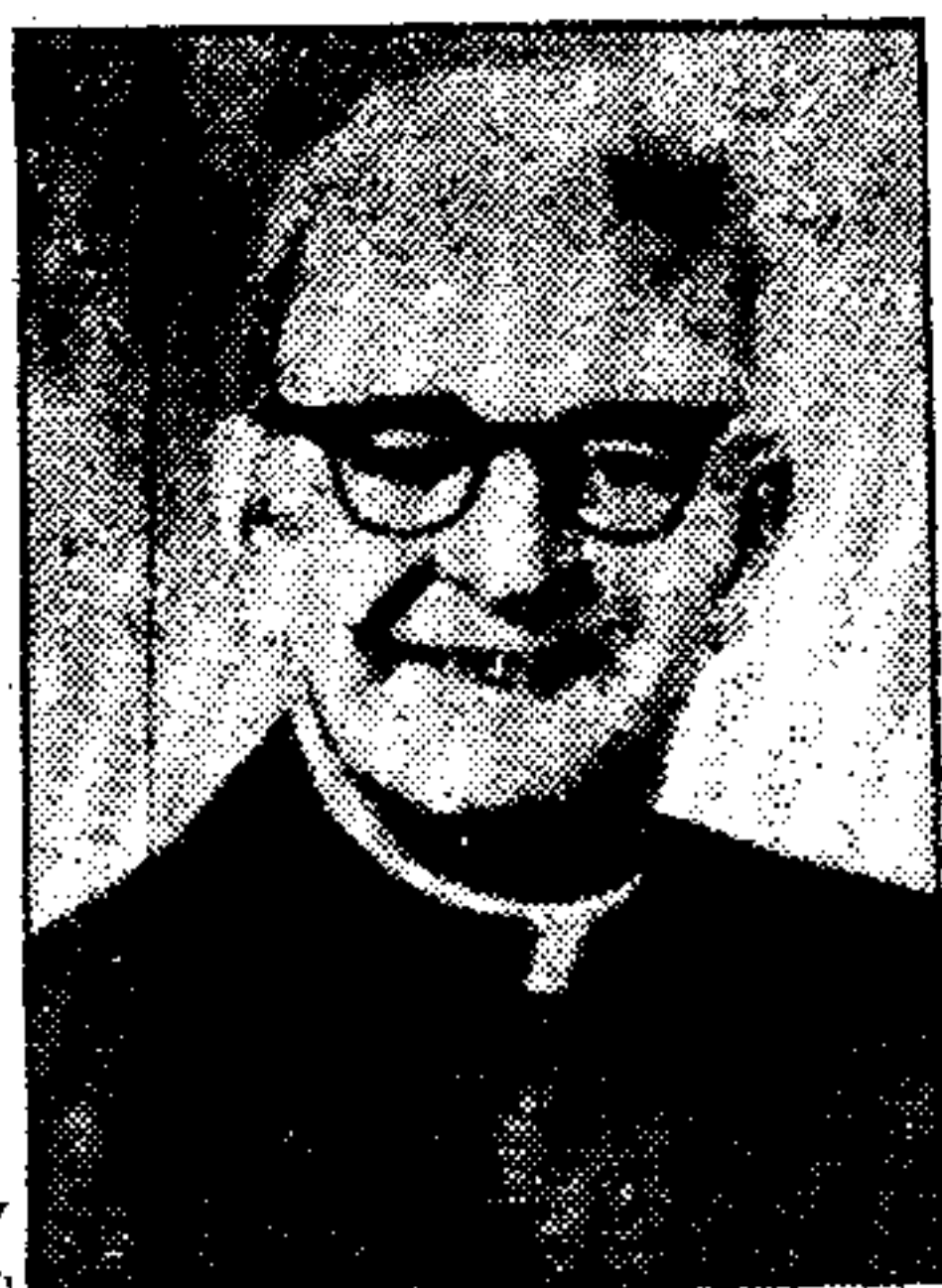
Ever since its inception, it had tried to wade, with its own distinct spirit, value and ideals through the quagmire of Secondary Education that we know of today. Among the many leading colleges in the country, Notre Dame College has established itself in its own right as a college that emphasises not on the certificates that imply knowledge, but on the actual knowledge itself.

This has not only resulted in many students who had succeeded in securing the top places in the SSC examinations but in many more maybe without top places, in learning to do their jobs happily in their later life. Those who really want to learn, get a chance to do so at Notre Dame.

For the students who join Notre Dame, according to Fr. Joseph S. Peixotto, the present and present-everywhere principal of the college, "Those two or more years (at Notre Dame) are still a period



St. Gregory's College.



Rev. Fr John J. Harrington, CSC.

of great activity, of classes, quizzes, labs, exams, extra-curricular activities — all part of their growth in knowledge, character and social awareness under the direction of a dedicated staff".

And despite being run by Christian fathers, the colleges are totally secular, where students and staff have developed a unique sense of camaraderie and rapport.

In this respect and in many other ways, Notre Dame college is a college with a difference. In a developing country, formal education devoid of any semblance to the future life the students are going to lead, cannot be the end in itself. This is more obvious in a developing country like Bangladesh.

In this context, Notre Dame has attempted to, in its own special way teach and mould the students in the way that is ideal. Anwar Hossain, Editor of the Daily Ittefaq and an alumnus of Notre Dame, has written about this very Notre Dame tradition "During our

time here, a student at Notre Dame was not only prepared for his exams. There was no lack of the teachers' individual care in making sure that he understood and absorbed what was being taught".

Notre Dame is a relatively young institution. It opened its doors in November 1949 at the premises of St. Gregory's school at Luxmi Bazar, in old Dhaka. Five years after its inception, it was known as St. Gregory College. The first principal was Fr. John J. Harrington. The student body then consisted of 20 students in rather cramped circumstances.

In 1950, the college was shifted to a large new building, some three hundred metres from the old premises.

The first Dhaka University result, in the Arts section, was not too disappointing, considering the difficulties faced in the early days, with five out of eight students getting first divisions.

As the number of students grew the inadequacy of its quarters compelled the college to procure its own property. A four-acre site was finally chosen in the Motijheel area of Dhaka where now stands the present college campus. The corner stone was laid in 1954 and the shift took place the following year.

With the inauguration of the new building by Cardinal Valerian Gracias of Bombay — the only cardinal at that time around this part of the world a new name came into being. The college became 'Notre Dame' after Notre Dame University in the USA, The Alma Mater of all the fathers on the staff.

The college continued to grow and expand in the succeeding years and had acquired a reputation as one of the leading educational institutions of the then East Pakistan. Many consider that No-

Dame was at its academic peak in 1965 with eight straight preceding years of first places in the I.Sc. examinations.

During the war of independence, the college practically ceased to function with most students being involved in the struggle. Following the disruptions caused by the nine months of liberation struggle Notre Dame was a somewhat different institution in 1972. The number of the fathers on the staff was reduced due to the opening of a new mission in Uganda and the government uniformly putting tuition fees at all colleges at Taka ten. This put the college in a financial quandary causing a drastic increase in enrolment.

There was consequently a fall in individual attention and the rapport between the staff and students too.

Nevertheless, it might have been a blessing in disguise as Fr. Richard W. Timm, the sixth principal, and one of the world's leading authorities on nematodes, has said "We can now fulfil one of our aims, which is to have a large percentage of students from the rural areas and poorer classes".

In Fr. Timm's words, Notre Dame wants "to fulfil an aim of social justice as well as an aim of educating the elite" because Notre Dame does not "want to perpetuate a system where the poor lose out".

To about 1,800 students now Notre Dame gives Humanities, science, commerce and Bachelor arts courses students who have their own camera, science and other clubs in the college, also give free education to poor children from the campus and take part in various social work programmes.

Notre Dame thus has spread beyond the confines of the institutional walls.