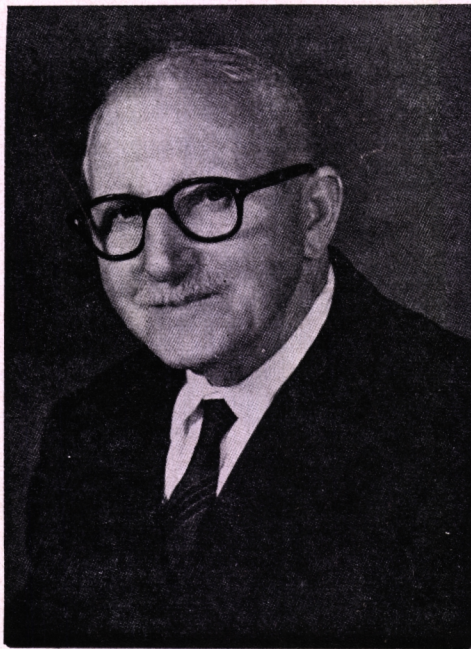


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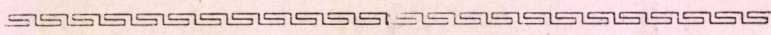


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**Bro. Gumersindo Cid Losada**

**s.d.b.**





BROTHER

## **Gumersindo Cid Losada,**

S. D. B.

With the death of Bro. Gumersindo Cid Losada on September 22, 1976 in Nazareth Hospital, the last of the First Pioneers is gone. The Salesian Congregation has lost one of its greatest men. Of him Mgr. S. Ferrando wrote, "Surely Bro. Cid is the new Marcello Rossi of Assam. In this Centenary Celebrations the memory of Bro. Cid must shine forth with the halo of sanctity and glory." No one who knew Bro. Cid is ever likely to forget him. His simplicity of life, his dedication to work, his deeply religious spirit, his fierce optimism, his profound attachment to youth, his warmth and cordiality to everyone ... these and other qualities marked him out as an extraordinary Salesian.

Bro. Gumersindo Cid Losada was born at Santa Marina de Aguas Santas (Orense, Spain) on December 7, 1893. He made his first profession in 1913 at the age of twenty. Of all his early days he never forgot the period he served in the army. He was proud to have been a soldier and maintained an excellent physique till the last illness that brought on his death. He loved to see boys marching and even in his old age would playfully take on the soldier's pace on a stroll. He would explode into a laugh when someone recalled to him the famous song, "Old soldiers never die, they just fade away." As years went by, steadily he grew more convinced of being able to keep himself in good health almost indefinitely. He would triumphantly point to the walking-stick which had been presented to him thirty years earlier, and which he never used. Those who meant to provide for his old age had succumbed to the weight of years, but he remained unshaken.



As a soldier young Cid served in Morocco and saw some stormy days. "Our Lady kept a loving hand over me," he says, "or else I would not have remained straight." He saw many of his very promising companions falling away, but he remained faithful. For him the call of the Master was imperious and irrevocable. He retained his religious values and returned to follow up his vocation as soon he was free from the army.

In 1921 he made his final commitment to God and became a perpetually professed member of our Congregation. He began working in the Salesian house in Cadiz, and "one fine day," as he says, the thought of going to the missions dawned upon him. At once he wrote to Don Albera, who was Rector Major at that time, and expressed his eagerness to go to the missions. The Salesians had just accepted the Mission of Assam and the Superiors were trying to form the first missionary team. A tentative list had been drawn up and presented to Fr. Louis Mathias, the one who was to be the leader of the group. He had found to his utter dismay that no Brothers had been named in the proposed list, and asked for the inclusion of the names of at least a few. The Superiors revised the list and among the new names added there was also the name of Bro. Cid. Thus Bro. Cid became one of the Founding Fathers of the later prosperous Assam Mission, a fact of which he was particularly proud to the very end.

Before leaving for the missions he desired to see his father whom he had not seen since he joined the aspirantate in 1905. He asked permission to go home but was refused. He never regretted the fact, for he feared, that if he had actually gone home he might have been moved by the tears of his dear ones and been dissuaded from proceeding with his bold venture. In those days one went to the missions with the intention and the certainty of not ever returning. The possibility of periodic holidays was not even remotely thought of. So he considered it a grace of God that he was not given permission to go home to bid farewell to his dear ones. "No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God."

Eleven Salesians, six priests and five brothers, went on board Kaiser-i-Hind on December 23, 1921, and set sail for India. They had a beautiful Christmas. But by the time they reached



the Ionic Sea all of them were taken seasick except Bro. Cid. He ate a hearty meal and looked after the sick, a task he was to make his own for the rest of his life. After an uneventful journey our missionaries reached Shillong on January 13, 1922, the Octave of Epiphany and the name feast of Bro. Gumersind Cid. They were warmly received by the Jesuits, Frs. Lefevre and Van Lemberghe, and led to the church. As they knelt praying, the exuberant Bro. Calzi was heard to exclaim loud, "Don Mathias, Don Mathias, c'è qui Maria Ausiliatrice." Fr. Lefevre was quite a bit taken aback and not a little annoyed seeing that these young missionaries into whose hands the Assam Mission was passing lacked even that measure of seriousness as to keep silence in the church. It took a long time to convince him that the statue that stood on the left aisle was Don Bosco's Madonna and not the Queen of the Apostles. But the joy of the Salesians knew no bounds. Bro. Cid describes it thus in his memoirs: "That was really a living picture of children surrounding their most sweet mother. It is a pity no photographer was there to take a snap. I'm sure a beautiful picture would have come out indeed of that small group of apostles who later would propagate all over the country the devotion to the Queen of Heaven. Once again Don Bosco's dream came to our mind and it seemed She addressed us these words: 'Welcome, my dear children, propagate my devotion all over the country and I will be to you a loving Mother a consoler in your work for the salvation of souls.' And we answered in our hearts: 'Yes, Mother, as long as there will be a single Salesian standing in the field of labour, we shall propagate thy devotion... After the happy moment we met Our Lady Help of Christians, we forgot all our worries and anxieties.' That night gathered in the church once again "we prostrated ourselves at the feet of our dear sweet Madonnina and made to Her an act of Consecration of the Mission and all the work to be accomplished in future."

Next morning the young Salesians went round the house and saw the workshops which the German fathers had put up: the carpentry, the press and a small little room fitted out for shoe-making. Bro. Cid took possession of this last room and gave himself completely to that trade for which later he was well



known. A few days later he surprised Fr. Lefevre by presenting him with a pair of newly made boots. Over the years he trained a large number of boys in shoe-making who ever remained deeply attached to him. He was never ashamed of his trade. He considered it a matter of pride to see that everyone in the house had a good pair of shoes on. The boys who ruined their shoes during the day would find a new-looking pair at their bed-side in the morning. Even after the Department of Shoe-making was closed down in Don Bosco in 1962, Bro. Cid continued to work at his trade repairing the shoes of the Confreres and the aspirants. As the Rules tell us, "the work in the apostolate for us has a mystic value: it has a divine quality and is urgent." (Art. 42).

Bro. Cid could not see anything out of order and be at rest. His Salesian instincts would urge him to take over the situation and put a speedy remedy to it, whether it be the supervision of boys, care of things, or the completion of some work. He was working on a pair of shoes when he fell fatally ill. "When a Salesian dies working, the Congregation will have won a great triumph" (Don Bosco).

The first pioneers were fortunate in having a person like Mgr. Mathias to be their leader. His mind was constantly at work projecting new possibilities for the expansion of his missionary enterprises. On one occasion he let slip an expression like this: "I hope the day will come soon, when we'll have to extend this refectory to house forty Salesians." To this Fr. Van Lemberghe hastily replied with a sympathetic smile, "Don't worry, father, this ref will be big enough. You Salesians will never reach that number." Twelve years later when Fr. Van Lemberghe returned to Shillong to attend the consecration of Mgr. Mathias, he saw with his own eyes that the Salesians not only reached the Biblical number of forty but far exceeded it, and that the refectory was double the original size. Such ebullient spirit in their leader was truly contagious and all the Salesians were bubbling with enthusiasm for their missionary work. The spirit of optimism and confidence that Bro. Cid contracted those days was vibrantly alive in his heart to the last days of his life. He had an absolute trust in the working of Providence and a fierce



faith in God's guiding ways. The last thing on earth that anyone would expect to see was a depressed or dejected Bro. Cid. For him everything was destined to lead to ultimate success. Even failures only contributed to it.

The first Obedience that Bro. Cid received was to St. Anthony's (later renamed Don Bosco's, the High School retaining the original name). He took up his work in earnest. Amidst his manifold activities he applied himself to the study of English and Khasi with great seriousness. After the initial difficulties, he performed well in these tongues. He grew to love the study of languages, for he remembered Don Bosco's dictum: "Every language learned removes a barrier between us and millions of our brethren of other nationalities and enables us to do good to a great many of them." Later when he was working in Saharanpur (U.P.) he learned to read, write and speak Urdu and Hindustani. During his last years he began the study of Lushai (Mizo) because he felt the need of saying a good word to the Mizo boys in the house.

On February 11, 1922 Frs. Hauber and Deponti set out on their 75 Km. trek to Raliang. The other Salesians accompanied them upto Happy Valley where they sang a hymn to Our Lady, embraced the departing missionaries and sent them on. In those days there were no roads in that direction and all the travelling had to be done on foot, and sometimes on a mule with obvious consequences. But our heroes made nothing of long strenuous journeys that would appear a terror nowadays. When Fr. Deponti fell seriously sick and medicine had to be urgently taken to him at Raliang, Bro. Calzi volunteered, got lost on the way, was compelled to sleep in the paddy fields, but reached in time next morning to administer the medicine. Bro. Cid was among the strongest in the group. He recalls going on many occasions by bike to Cherrapunjee, walking down to Laitkynsew and returning the same way next day. This journey would mean no less than 80 miles. But such distances held out no terror for an indefatigable missionary like Bro. Cid. He would easily venture on a bike-trip to Gauhati and back only to give a helping hand on the occasion of a feast.



During the holidays the confreres and boys of Don Bosco would hike it to Laitkynsew from where they would visit all the surrounding villages. This meant a great deal of walking to which they soon got used. Much good was done during such tours, and Bro. Cid never missed any of them. Eating what one can get, sleeping rough, climbing endlessly — the schedule was heavy. Games and sports, lotteries and lucky-dips, processions and prayer-meetings — all the hills were astir when the brothers arrived. Now they might be at Umpling, now at Mawpdang, or Mawsmmai, Nongbah, Sadew, Tynrong, Umniuh, Raliang or Lamin — and all the people heard the mighty works of God. Years later Bro. Cid still kept true to his early habits and visited the outlying villages where he was well known and greatly esteemed. He was always ready with a bit of medicine, a little gift, a good advice, and his kindly figure grew familiar to the villagers who learned to love him. For years he visited Mawlynrei on Sundays to conduct the Jingiaseng with moving missionary zeal. He would make it both ways on foot and never grew weary of it until his very last years. Even so, he would try it again on foot once in a while and return home in triumph evidently proud of his performance. His untiring zeal never grew old.

A year after the arrival of the Salesians, the Jesuits withdrew from the Assam Mission, and Fr. Mathias was appointed Prefect Apostolic. There was great rejoicing among the Salesians and they wanted to solemnise the occasion with a Pontifical High Mass. The trouble was that most of the Pontifical vestments were missing. Fr. Bars and Bro. Santana skilfully adapted existing vestments to give them a new look. A mitre was made with cardboard and silk, and everything else as well took on a comely shape. Thus the first Pontifical Mass went off to everyone's satisfaction and joy.

For all their successes, the pioneers had much to suffer. Food failed not only in quality but sometimes even in quantity. The living quarters lacked every desirable convenience. Bro. Cid describes the situation in the following words: "As for the house, all we possessed were a few cottages scattered all over the premises, and they were no better than rat-holes. One of



the cottages was situated where Don Bosco's statue is standing at present. It looked more like a cow-shed than a human dwelling. One part of it was used as the infirmary, and the other part as a common sleeping room for confreres; for, a private room that many of us enjoy today, was not possible at that time. That sort of a house was so old and decayed and full of rats, so dangerous to sleep in, that one could expect anything as one's nose missing during night rest. Once I remember Bro. Roncoroni awaking with a shout and with a bleeding nose because he had been bitten by a rat during sleep. Things like toilet soap and tooth-paste would be carried away by these troublesome animals. Under the floor there was space enough, too, for cats which kept us awake with their night concerts. Jackals also came from St. Edmund's College hill, at the foot of which there was plenty of undergrowth, where they hid during the day time, making their presence felt at night with their loud chorus, searching for anything they could get, for their hungry stomachs. Other unwanted insects such as fleas gave plenty of annoyance at night. Such were the conditions of our dwelling. But we remembered that we had chosen a missionary life in this far away land, being aware that all these troubles were to be expected including mosquitoes."

But there was plenty of joy in the house with sports and games, song and music, competitions and stage-acting, practical jokes and loud laughter. One day it was Fr. Mora ending his Good Night talk with "Bam Suk", another day it was the thief-hunt of Bro. Casagrande, a third day it was some unforgettable adventure of Bro. Calzi — there was never an end of it. Fr. Mora and Bro. Ravalico organised some very exciting matches. It was quite a sight to see them returning from the field discussing heatedly the merits of their respective players. Even when the house team lost a match, they always played a better game anyway.

Staging dramas was another activity fully in keeping with Don Bosco's traditions. Most plays were Khasi translations of Italian and Spanish originals. As there was no much time for such translation work during the day, the brothers went into action at night. Lost behind a pile of papers, dictionary and books,



Bro. Cid and Bro. Alessi would sit up working till 3 o'clock in the morning in the flickering light of a kerosene lamp. About these days Bro. Cid writes: "With the help of a dictionary, books and papers of all kind around us, and a kerosene lamp to give us light, we sat on a school bench and applied our brains to those plays. Bro. Mlekus, good already in Khasi, was studying Synteng. Bro. Alessi was typing and I was translating. It was a sight worth recording: the poor light, uncomfortable room and poor knowledge of the Khasi language. But plenty of good will was there. The theatre was indeed a powerful means to attract people in the villages on occasions of jingiasengs." One of the most successful performances was that of "Marco Pescatore" (Refugium Peccatorum) prepared by the brothers of Our Lady's House, in which Bro. Foglia took the part of Mark and Bro. Pianazzi that of the devil.

In 1927 Don Bosco band came into being with Bro. Igino Ricaldone as the first band master. From that time on Don Bosco band was present without fail on every important church event whether in Shillong or in the villages. Bro. Cid played the big bass and Bro. Frasson the drum.

A certain Fr. Fergnani who was working on a booklet on St. Stephen made the mistake of saying in the refectory one day that the devil was after him since he was engaged in this good work. From that time onwards he was given no peace. Bro. Calzi was up to all kinds of tricks the whole night in order to convince Fr. Fergnani that the devil was really after him. But the thief-hunt of Bro. Casagrande broke all records. One night he was keeping watch with revolver in hand waiting for the thieves to put in an appearance, when a few jackals came by to lift the bones that were scattered near the kitchen. Hearing the noise he rang the bell and sounded all alarms. The whole community was down in a minute sticks in hand. Bro. Cid was always the first for such expeditions, but knowing Bro. Casagrande and being afraid of being fired at, he appeared from the back. Meanwhile Bro. Casagrande seeing a figure at a distance released three shots from his revolver. All dashed forward and found that it was only the stump of a dead tree that received the bullets.



One day Mgr. Mathias presented Don Bosco School with a Tibetan mule to ease the problem of transport. True to its nature, Keka, as it was immediately christened, was hard of persuasion. Of all the confreres in the house Bro. Cid was the most skilful in handling the stubborn animal. Keka made history on the day that the new playground was being inaugurated. Confreres and boys had been working a long time on enlarging the grounds and all desired a solemn inauguration. Sports were organised for the day of opening. One of the interesting features of the day was the Tyre Race in which also the confreres took part. Fr. Costa and Bro. Gota had been practicing in secret for several days and were sure of winning the race. But as bad luck would have it, they stumbled and fell one on top of the other, Fr. Costa landing inside. But the peak event of the day was to be the Prize Distribution, and Bro. Cid was to bring in the prize in solemn dignity on Keka's back. He was to ride in sitting backwards and holding the box of prizes firmly in hand. All went well until the brass band went into action and the original instincts of the animal were roused. Up went the rider and all the treasures he held, and Keka left the scene of action. With a lot of difficulties and much persuasion the same trip was attempted again, this time everything less music, and the day concluded in glory.

In 1930 a good number of boys, having eaten wild fruits on a picnic, were taken seriously sick with typhoid. The situation grew so serious that the community was split in two in order to facilitate the care of the sick, one group of confreres moving to Cherrapunjee with a group of boys. Day and night the confreres waited on the sick with the assistance also of sisters. During those days Bro. Cid did a mighty work going to Cherrapunjee on bike to give news and returning the same day to take his turn of night watching. In spite of the supreme effort on the part of the Don Bosco Community and the confreres of Our Lady's House, four of the boys were carried off by the ailment and the others were saved with great difficulty. It must, however, be added that Bro. Cid was not the infirmarian at this time, and under his stewardship no one ever died.



The great fire of 1936 was one of the greatest tragedies in the history of the Assam Mission. It took place on April 10, on Good Friday when the Christians were on their way in procession to the Calvary to take part in the Way of the Cross. The fire broke out in Our Lady's House and a strong breeze made it spread rapidly. By the time people arrived there was nothing that could be done to check the fire. Very little could be saved. Bro. Cid and Bro. Frasson pushed to safety a valuable piano that was in the verandah. The church, the Bishop's House, the house of studies — everything burnt down in a matter of a few minutes. Bishop Ferrando, his staff and the clerics of Our Lady's House took refuge in Don Bosco. Later the clerics moved on to Woodcot, then to Bandel and finally to Mawlai. The Christian community in Shillong went through the Good Friday experience that year. In the sermon that Fr. Vendrame preached during the Way of the Cross, he called on the people to have confidence in Divine Providence and assured them that a new church would rise on the ruins of the old one, more spacious and more beautiful, which, of course, did actually take place.

In 1937 Bro. Cid was transferred to Saharanpur. He found the place extremely hot, having been used to the mild climate of Shillong. But as a good missionary he learned to adapt himself to the new situation. Soon after his arrival he plunged himself into work and began digging a swimming pool doing much of the work himself with a wheelbarrow. Once this work was completed Bro. Cid got busy setting up a shoe-maker's shop. A room that had served earlier as a stable for horses was adapted to suit the purpose. Soon enough he had thirteen boys to learn his trade. Since there was no one else to help him, he had to work late into the night to complete what the boys had begun. Next, he started a poultry which proved a great help to the house. Meanwhile he had given himself seriously to the study of Urdu. As in Shillong, so in Saharanpur, Bro. Cid won the hearts of all and did an enormous amount of good among the boys.

In 1944 he returned to Don Bosco Shillong once again where he worked to the end of his life. He went back to his old workshop and took up his usual tasks with his characteristic



drive and enthusiasm. Besides directing his workshop often he supervised the kitchen and for many years looked after the sick in the house. The only thing he never learned was the art of taking rest. In later years when his workshop was closed down, he took up a whole lot of other activities. He would repair spoiled gadgets, attend to general cleanliness, prune plants in the garden, make wine, bacon and sausages. This he would do not only in the house, but readily give a helping hand to any other house according to possibility. With his characteristic cheerfulness, optimism and spirit of service he was welcome everywhere. But of all his works, he loved best to serve the sick. For him it was a service, an apostolate and a joy. This type of work never seemed to tire him. Even in his old age he was capable of losing hours of sleep at the bed side of a boy. When situation demanded it he would walk to the hospital and back any number of times a day. Then he might have to go to the town to buy medicines, and then back home he would attend to the sick: take their temperature, supervise their food, their medicines, and their cleanliness. Not only the boys of the school but also all the children of the neighbourhood knew where they could go when they were sick. There was something of the healing touch of Jesus about Bro. Cid and every cure he effected was a triumph of goodness.

There was one evident consequence to his love for the young. He never grew old. He was never upset with changes and novelties and accepted anything in which he saw a positive value. He quickly adapted himself to new ways and never showed surprise at the changing tastes of the boys unless they were evidently wrong. He cheerfully welcomed innovations in liturgy, changes in the Rules and alterations in the traditional ways of doing things. While he had an excellent memory and remembered both with joy and precision events of the early days, he bravely looked forward to the future and spoke with enthusiasm of things to come. He had the adventurous spirit of a young man.

An unmistakable characteristic of Bro. Cid was an unfailing optimism and an unfading cheerfulness. He had a great sense of humour. He would enjoy a joke and laugh heartily. He had the ability to see the comical, the cheerful and the bright side



of events and situations even under trying circumstances. In his memoirs he recalls a number of humorous stories with excellent taste. He tells us, for example, how during his first journey to Italy he put the entire police force of Marseilles on the move by his helpless and excited enquiries for the Salesian House. He remembers how in a mass said for Pope Benedict XV in Shillong Bro. Calzi served as the thurifer and handled the thurible in the farmer's fashion and how Fr. Lefevre's beard had a narrow escape. During his last sickness as he lay helpless in the hospital he called one to his side and whispered with a mischievous smile on his face, "If I ever get out this, I shall give you a Spanish dance, the like of which you have never seen." And when he was asked how his left hand was, which was practically paralysed, he said, "Like a piece of wood, but it won't serve any purpose in Don Bosco Carpentry." His sense of humour was closely linked to a human touch about everything, which made him kind, sympathetic, understanding, tolerant of exaggerations and oddities in persons, attentive and helpful. While he was very austere with himself with regard to poverty and work and the use of things, he had a generous heart when he was dealing with others. Undoubtedly this quality in Bro. Cid sprang from an original goodness of heart that gave him an unflinching faith in the essential goodness of man. So it happened that it was impossible to hear him criticizing persons, situations, arrangements or events. For him everyone was good and everything ultimately worked out for the good.

No one will ever remember having heard a harsh word from Bro. Cid. But he was lavish in praise and appreciative of any good done. He had a special affection for younger confreres and was willing to do anything for them. He kept up correspondence with many of them even at the cost of great sacrifice. As a matter of fact, he had very wide interests, and followed the progress of missionary work in the Province and the rest of the country.

Bro. Cid was an unfailing member at every community event. He saw a special value in things done together. "To live and work together is for us Salesians a fundamental need" (Art. 50). If he needed to be absent or had to go out on some duty he



would always seek due permission. For him it seemed a veritable joy to discuss before taking up activities outside the house and to report after. It came natural to him to consult before making purchases, giving and receiving gifts and doing anything of any importance. But what was marvellous about Bro. Cid was that in his case these things were spontaneous, there was no legal mentality, no show of virtue, no exaggerations. His actions were prompted by certain basic convictions he had about the happy harmony of relationship that should exist in our life together.

But what was most admirable of all in Bro. Cid's life was his deep awareness of God and of the loving designs of His Providence. Prayer was the daily nourishment that made of him all that he was. And he was never tired of it. There was nothing artificial or strained about his piety ; it was virile, simple and confident. At the early stages of his sickness he was certain that he would get over it and was eager to return home and get back to his duties. But as days wore on and his health deteriorated and his feeble frame helplessly fought back the oncoming forces of death, he grew resigned to God's will. "All that matters is His will" he would say. And pointing to the Crucific and his face flushed with deep feeling he would add, "I know He wants me to be with Him." Day after day he clung to his Rosary and prayed. He prayed for everyone. He said he couldn't do anything more for the boys and he was sorry. As the beads moved on his great grief was that he was unable to concentrate on prayer. "But then, He understands" he would say, "He will see to it." After certain bad nights if he was asked how he was keeping he would mildly refer to his pains, and then showing his Rosary he would quickly add, "But this settles everything."

All the while he was following everything that was happening in the house. He would enquire about everything and everyone, especially anyone who was sick. He would be deeply distressed if anyone's health was not improving. On the Feast of the Assumption some of the boys in the House received baptism. He wanted to meet them by all means. And when they came, he embraced them one by one and addressed them all a kind word. Then came the celebrations of the Mission Centenary



and the Provincial Rally of the Past Pupils. He would have loved to take part in these events, but his condition was steadily growing worse. His only worry was that he might spoil the feast if the Lord would call him away during the celebrations.

He had already been anointed twice during his sickness. On September 21 at about 9 o'clock in the evening the confreres of Don Bosco, Archbishop's House and Christ King College gathered around his bed in Nazareth Hospital and he was anointed for the last time. It was clear to all that he was hastening to his end. Next day September 22, at 9.45 A.M. he returned to the Lord. Though everyone had expected this for a long time, his actual departure cast a profound gloom over the house. The boys were inconsolable. The very mention of his name had a magic about it that was hard to describe. Bro. Cid is gone, but his memories shall live on in the minds and hearts of so many of his confreres and boys that he shall for generations to come be like "a city set on hill that cannot be hid."

May the Lord give to our Congregation men of such giant stature as Bro. Cid. Pray also for this house that has suffered the loss of such an irreplaceable person.

*Yours in C.J.*

FR. THOMAS MENAMPARAMPIL

Don Bosco Technical School,  
Shillong (Meghalaya)  
India.

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Rev. Bro. **GUMERSINDO CID LOSADA, S.D.B.**

**Born :** 7-12-1893 (Orense, Spain)

**Professed :** 4-9-1913

**Died :** 22-9-1976 (Shillong, India)



