CHAPTER FIVE

FRANCIS LIBERMAN AND HIS CONGREGATION
OF THE HOLY HEART OF MARY

1. His Early Life

N. D. I, 4

Jacob, as he was called before his conversion, was born April 12, 1802, the son of Rabbi Libermann of Saverne, Alsace. Destined by his father to become a Rabbi also, he was introduced at an early age to the Hebrew Scriptures and to other sacred Jewish texts such as the Mishna and the Talmud. Even the German he learned to read had to be in Hebrew characters. Neither he nor his brothers were ever permitted to study anything else, for in the eyes of his ultra-conservative father, sacred Scripture and other books of Hebrew learning contained all that it was necessary to know. With an intelligence matched only by his docility, Jacob acquired a profound knowledge of Jewish lore and seemed to justify his father’s fondest dreams of a son who would become a great light in Israel.

N. D. I, 23 ff.

One can easily imagine the bitterness and grief of the old Rabbi when, after carefully training each of his nine children, he watched five of his sons turn away one by one from the Synagogue and become Catholics. The conversion of his beloved Jacob inflicted an especially deep wound. He had allowed this son to go to Metz for advanced rabbinical studies, but Jacob had used his time to become acquainted with European culture, studying French and Latin and avidly reading such contemporary best-sellers as Jean Jacques Rousseau’s Emile. Soon he had given up the faith of his fathers and proudly described himself as a free-thinker. Introduced to Christianity by the reading of the New Testament in Hebrew and struck by the inner peace and happiness that seemed to radiate from his eldest brother who was converted in 1825, he let himself be persuaded to examine the credentials of the Catholic

N. D. I, 60 ff.

1The year 1804, often given by biographers, is not exact. Jacob had eight brothers and sisters. Two of these, David (also called Christopher) and Nathanael (also called Alphons) migrated to the United States. Other immigrants from his immediate family were Lazarus Libman, the widower of Jacob’s sister Esther, and their children.

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Church during a quiet retreat in Paris. After an agonizing inner struggle, he finally capitulated to grace and was baptized on Christmas eve, 1826, taking the names of Francis, Mary, and Paul.

From the very first moment of his conversion, God granted extraordinary favors to this young man, whose moral life had remained unsullied even during the days of his agnosticism. Shortly after his conversion he was raised to the state of passive prayer, a supernatural privilege which lasted for about five years. Having manifested a desire to become a priest, he was admitted in 1827 to the seminary of St. Stanislas, and later that same year he transferred to St. Sulpice. Struck down by epilepsy shortly before he was scheduled to receive the subdiaconate, he was allowed to stay on in the Sulpician seminary of Issy because he exerted such an extraordinarily wholesome influence over his fellow students. In 1837, although only in minor orders, he was offered the position of Novice Master by the Eudist Fathers who were then slowly recovering from their suppression by the French Revolution. He remained in that difficult position directing priest-novices until 1839. It was then he became convinced that God wanted him to take charge of a project launched by some of his former associates at St. Sulpice in behalf of the neglected slaves in the French colonies.  

2. The Foundation of the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary

First Origins. The first idea of seriously undertaking the Christianization of slaves in the French colonies and other West Indian islands had come from two seminarists—Frederick Le Vavasseur (1811-1882), and Eugene Tisserant (1814-1846) Frederic had been born in Reunion, the son of one of the island's most prominent families. Received in St. Sulpice, he began to think about the sad state of neglect and ignorance in which the slaves on his father's estate and on neighboring plantations dragged out their existence. He foresaw terrible consequences to the impending emancipation unless the slaves were morally prepared for

2It is hoped that the reader will not find this sketch of Father Libermann's early life too brief. His story is sufficiently well known to justify the succinct character of its presentation here. Moreover, a penetrating study of his life and personality by Father Adrian L. van Kaam, C.S.Sp., will follow in the Spiritan Series of Duquesne Studies.
freedom. From time to time he spoke about his preoccupations with his fellow seminarian and friend, Francis Libermann.

At about the same time, Libermann was being consulted on similar matters by Eugene Tisserant, the son of a Haitian mother. Tisserant also traced the shocking conditions of Haiti's recently liberated slaves to a lack of Christian instruction and guidance.

Hardly acquainted with each other, the two young men went on the same day, February 2, 1839, to the shrine of Our Lady of Victories in Paris to recommend their intentions to Father Desgenettes, the Director of the Shrine and of its Archconfraternity. The pious priest introduced them to each other and enjoined them to pray for divine guidance. Shortly thereafter, a courageous director at the Sulpician seminary, Father Pinault, allowed them to plan the establishment of a community which would devote itself to the evangelization of abandoned slaves.

Consulted again by both separately, Libermann gave his blessing to the project, but advised them to go slowly. Frederic was all fire and had already chosen a name for the new society: the Congregation of the Holy Cross. He wanted all seminarians who were interested in the plan to go to Rennes, where, he assumed, they could easily make their novitiate under Francis Libermann, the expert spiritual director and Novice Master. This arrangement, however, was broached at a most inopportune moment. Just at that time Francis was experiencing great difficulties in his position and saw the day approaching when it would be morally impossible for him to continue his task, no matter how much the Eudist Fathers wanted him to stay.

Sensing this uncertainty, Mr. de la Brunière, a rich young man and former fellow seminarian, came to consult Francis about the venture and tried his best to persuade him to join them. Despite the fact that the idea intrigued him, Francis hesitated. The only thing that mattered for him was God's will, and at that moment he was groping for guidance. He preferred therefore to wait for a surer sign from heaven. On two successive occasions about a month later, God granted him an extraordinary insight into the future and a preview of his role in the new work. When the voice of his spiritual director added itself to these graces, all hesitation was gone. Ridiculous as it may sound, he, a poor uncured epileptic, permanently barred from ordination, lacking influence and wealth, assumed leadership of the project.
N. D. I, 670 ff.  *Voyage to Rome.* The first thing on the agenda, he felt, was to obtain from Rome a word of approval or permission. He started off for Marseilles, where de la Brunière was to join him, and stopped at Lyons to seek out the Superior of the Jesuits in order to get his reaction to the plan. Looking at the emaciated and poorly-clad ex-seminarian, whose facial contortions and poorly controlled voice marked him as the victim of some sort of neurosis, this worthy Superior listened for a short time in polite silence. The convert Jew was propounding fantastic plans. When he could no longer contain himself, he burst out laughing and without a word left the room. Others rebuffed Libermann in similar ways. Only Father Pinault, his Sulpician director, supported him. Because of this encouragement and the conviction that he was doing God's will, Francis was not much perturbed by what people said or did. Unless and until the Church itself turned him down, he would persevere in his efforts to the end.

Early in January 1840, he arrived in Rome with his companion, de la Brunière, who had covered the cost of the trip. The time was not very propitious for the presentation of such plans in the center of the Church. Just then Rome was suspicious of anything coming out of France. Planners were literally arriving in droves. As Cardinal Sala, the Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Religious, dryly told Dom Guéranger in 1837, "Not a day passes without some request coming in from beyond those mountains for the approval of rules and new congregations. In France there are only founders."

Looking for special support, Francis took into his confidence a former friend and fellow seminarian, Monsignor de Conny, then residing in Rome. The Monsignor listened and frowned. By what devious ways this little fellow was trying to get himself ordained despite his illness! Immediately he warned other ecclesiastics who might be approached by Francis, such as Father Vaures and the two influential French Jesuits, John de Rozaven and Philip de Villefort. Soon Libermann was depicted as a dangerous and irresponsible psychotic who had already succeeded in turning the heads of some seminarians and was now trying to fool the Pope himself. Together with Monsignor de Conny, Father de Villefort did his best to talk some sense into de la Brunière. Making use of confidential information received from Libermann in the course of spiritual direction (Francis had chosen him as director and confessor
during his stay in Rome) de-Villefort succeeded in persuading the young man to return to France and give up his dreams of founding a new society.\(^3\) Afterwards, Francis alluded to this painful experience when he wrote to a friend:

N. D. 2, 146

For two days I was sorely tempted against charity with respect to these persons and what they had done. Then I went to see my confessor [de Villefort] and told him everything that was going on in me. The effect was perfect, for I was entirely freed from my temptation.

Only one man was willing to help him in Rome—Dr. Drach, another convert Jew, famous for his learning, who was then librarian of the Propaganda. Years before, Dr. Drach had been influential in bringing Francis into the Church. Now the two went to an audience with Pope Gregory XVI, who put his hand in blessing on Libermann’s head. When Francis had withdrawn, the saintly old Pontiff asked Dr. Drach about his companion. At the end of the pathetic story, Gregory concluded the audience with these words: “Sarà un santo!” “He will be a saint.”

N. D. 2, 55

Encouragement by the Propaganda. On Dr. Drach’s advice Libermann presented the Propaganda with a memorandum describing his plan. He did not ask for formal recognition, but only whether in conscience he would be allowed to proceed. With complete objectivity, he added that he felt it would be possible to find recruits but that he himself suffered from the canonical impediment of epilepsy, which, however, was decreasing in violence. The answer was slow in coming. A visit he made to the Propaganda was quite discouraging. The Secretary coldly told him that he would have to be a priest before anything could be discussed, for “one does not treat about a future society of priests with a simple cleric.” It was not a formal refusal but it seemed to leave little hope.

There was, however, a definite purpose behind the somewhat chilly reply. The Propaganda always acts with the utmost prudence. It wanted time to investigate him. In the interim, there was no point in raising hopes which, considering the information locally

\[^3\]Libermann and de la Brunière always remained on friendly terms. De la Brunière joined the Foreign Mission of Paris, was sent to China and appointed Vicar Apostolic and Bishop of Tremita. He disappeared in 1846. Four years later it was learned that in July 1846 he had been murdered by marauding tribesmen.
obtainable, had little chance of being realized. After the arrival of
a highly favorable report from the Papal Nuncio at Paris, however,
the Propaganda debated the whole affair in council and, once the
Pope’s approval had been obtained, decided to do even more than
Libermann had asked. On June 6, 1840, it encouraged him and his
companions to persevere in their plan and expressed the hope that
his health would improve sufficiently to permit his ordination to
the priesthood. As usual, a formal approval would be forthcoming
only when the new society had demonstrated its vitality by several
years of successful operation. This was more than anyone had
dared to hope for.

With some difficulty the messenger from the Propaganda dis-
covered the whereabouts of the humble acolyte, who apparently
had not even left an address. He was found sharing an attic with
a flock of pigeons in the Vicolo del Pinacolo, one of Rome’s
numerous back alleys. When Libermann came to thank the Cardinal
Prefect of the Propaganda, His Eminence urged Francis not to
hesitate about being ordained, and Bishop Caladini, the Cardinal’s
secretary, made it clear that if he could not find a bishop willing
to ordain him, the Propaganda itself would assume the respon-
sibility.

While waiting for a decision on his ordination, Francis used his
time to compose a provisional rule for the new society, which he
dedicated to the Holy Heart of Mary. Later, in September 1840,
he began to write his spiritual commentary on the Gospel of St.
John. Toward the end of the year, when there was still no news
about his ordination, he set out on foot to make a pilgrimage to
the Holy House of Loretto. Once there, he longed to hide himself
in the numerous grottoes of the mountains to spend the rest of his
life with God and God alone, far from the hustle and bustle of man!
But at Loretto God favored him again with extraordinary graces

4 Although this alley was demolished in Mussolini’s removal of Roman
slums, the attic occupied by Father Libermann was rebuilt from the original
materials on one of the loggias of the French Seminary in Rome.

5 Shortly after, however, both Father de Villefort and Bishop Caladini
suddenly changed their mind about taking this step. Undoubtedly, they were
influenced by new unfavorable rumors about the convert Jew, who continued
to be plagued by defamation until his very death. A year later, Father
de Villefort regretted his attitude so much that he wrote Libermann a letter
beseeking him in the name of God and the Blessed Virgin to persevere in
his plans, and become ordained, because, as he now recognized, it was in
accord with God’s will.
and showed clearly that for him the divine will lay in an active life consecrated to the service of souls. Since God’s will was all that mattered for him, he hurried back to Rome shortly before Christmas, stopping only to make a brief visit to Assisi and become a member of the Third Order of St. Francis.

**Ordained a Priest.** Back in his attic, a letter from Strassburg was waiting for him. His brother, Dr. Samson Libermann, wrote that Bishop Raess, the Coadjutor of the Diocese of Strassburg, was willing to accept him in the seminary and prepare him for ordination. It was imperative that he come to Strassburg as soon as possible. Exactly one year after his arrival in the Eternal City, Francis left, travelling by coach to Alsace. In February 1841, after an interruption of ten years, he re-entered the seminary. Seven months later, on September 18, he was ordained a priest forever by Bishop Mioland of Amiens.

Profoundly moved by the supernatural happiness radiating from the man upon whom he had just imposed hands, the Bishop spoke about him later the same day to some Jesuits of St. Acheul who had come to a meeting in his palace with the Vicar Generals of the diocese. “Libermann!” they exclaimed. “Sorry to say so, Your Excellency, but your good nature has been imposed on. The man you have ordained cannot persevere anywhere. He causes trouble wherever he goes. You have made yourself responsible for something which you are going to regret.” Poor Francis surely was out of favor with the Society of Jesus, although he always had the greatest respect for it. Fortunately, one of his former directors at St. Sulpice, Father Mollevaut, happened to visit the Bishop late the same evening and was able to restore peace to the Prelate’s troubled mind by telling him the truth about Francis. He con-

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6 Although Libermann kept himself in the background during the short time he spent there, he made a profound impression on all he met. Several of the most distinguished early members of the congregation followed him from this seminary: Ignatius Schwinderhammer, his successor as Superior General; Aloysius Kobès, the future Bishop of the Two Guineas; Melchior Freyd, theologian and Superior of the French Seminary in Rome; John, Burg and John Bangratz, professors at the seminary of Strassburg. Bangratz, then a seminarian, was the one whose impersonation of a Rabbi on the day of Libermann’s arrival had injected a painful note into an otherwise happy day.

7 Cf. his kindly judgment of the Jesuits in *N. D.* 1,468. In later years, when they became better acquainted with him, the Jesuits of France learned to esteem the holiness and diplomacy of the Venerable Francis Libermann.
N. D. 2, 424  Exercised through a bed, secular soberly opening its lines. Le St. Thomas more immediately an incident arose. The Jesuit Superior, Father Sellier, feared that the newcomers would soon take over all ministry in the surroundings. He was much annoyed to see them settle in the neighborhood and went to warn the Bishop that he had admitted a troop of schemers into his diocese. However, when he noticed that Francis and his companions did not try to supplant the Jesuits, he changed his mind and told the Bishop that these men were true saints whose prayers did a lot of good for the diocese. Through it all, Francis was indifferent to what people, even good and holy people, said about him. He quietly went about his tasks directing the nascent foundation.

N. D. 3, 366 ff.  Two novices had arrived with him—Father Le Vasseur and Mr. Marcellin Collin, still a seminarian. Others were momentarily delayed, but followed soon. A house had graciously been put at their disposal by the diocese—thanks to Father de Brandt, the Bishop's secretary. The kind Sisters of a nearby convent had furnished it soberly but sufficiently. Materially speaking, the new community was better off than many others at their first beginnings. Trouble, however, arose from an unexpected angle. Both Le Vasseur and Tisserant, who arrived later, felt that they ought to have more to say over the young congregation and its rules. Le Vasseur was especially vehement in trying to make his own extravagant ideas prevail. He developed such an antagonism that, no matter what Libermann said or did about anything at all, he at once took the opposite stand. It was an attitude which some of his biographers have been able to explain only as the result of a diabolical temptation.

8Father de Brandt was a former novice of the Eudists, who had caused untold troubles to Father Libermann during his period as Novice Master in Rennes. De Brandt finally left and became a secular priest. Throughout his life he remained very devoted to the Venerable and to his work. On at least two occasions he exercised considerable influence on its early orientation.

9To give a few examples: he wanted to allow only one meal a day, no beds, no private rooms, and only one common room to serve all purposes.
At length, things got so bad that Father Libermann thought it
best to give him a chance to acquire some experience and maturity
of judgment. Accordingly, four months after his arrival, Father
Le Vavasseur made his consecration to the apostolate and left
for the island of Reunion in the Indian Ocean. The same solution
was found for Father Tisserant. Three months after entering the
novitiate he was on his way to Martinique, where he awaited his
chance to enter strife-torn Haiti. These two departures had been
preceded by that of Father James Laval, who, without benefit of a
novitiate, set sail for Mauritius in June, 1841. 10 Scarcey a year
after the opening of its first house, therefore, some of the most
prominent members of the Congregation of the Holy Heart of
Mary had already gone out to labor in abandoned regions of the
Lord's vineyard.

3. The Resumption of the African Missions

Africa in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century. As late as
the middle of the nineteenth century most of Africa was still terra
incognita, a land of mystery. Contemporary maps sketched out its
coastline and its trading posts, leaving the rest blank or filling it
with fanciful pictures of dangerous animals. From the standpoint
of religion, the situation was hardly any better. The island dioceses
of Cape Verde (1532) and San Tomé (1534) exercised jurisdic-
tion over the mainland from Cape Palmas to the Cape of Good
Hope.

Back in 1490, Portuguese missionaries had arrived in the
Congo, and the Jesuits began to work there in 1548. They were
daily attended by Capuchin priests and other missionaries. Success
quickly attended their efforts, and soon the whole royal court of
the Congo was baptized. In 1596 Pope Clement VIII established
a special diocese in Angola and the Congo. As early as 1512, and
again in 1608, the native kings sent an embassy to the Pope to
acknowledge their submission to his authority. By the middle of

10 The ease with which Father Libermann dispensed in whole or in part
from the novitiate must not be seen in the light of modern canonical
requirements, which date only from 1894. Strange as it may sound, in Libe-
mann's time Rome regarded the novitiate as something proper to the old
religious orders and did not favor it for mere congregations. Thus it was
rather common practice to shorten it if need arose or even to allow priests
to make it privately as best as they could.
the seventeenth century there was a large number of Christians, although for the most of them it was merely a question of Christian baptism and not of Christian life.

In the northern part of West Africa, Mass had been offered as early as 1482 in the Gold Coast region. In fact, the church developed to a point where natives of this area had been sent to Lisbon to study for the priesthood. In 1495 they returned to their country and began to preach in the territory around the Gulf of Guinea.

In 1572 Portuguese Augustinians undertook missionary work there, but a few years later the natives plundered their mission stations and their efforts came to nought. The Capuchins took over in 1637. Despite a frightful mortality rate, they established flourishing missions in Guinea, but their work came to an end about twenty-five years later when the Dutch captured this territory.

The Dominicans tried again in 1687, but failed and withdrew in 1703 or 1704. The seventeenth century saw other Capuchin missions established in Sierre Leone, but these too were of brief duration. With Pombal's suppression of religious orders in Portugal, all Portuguese missions slowly disappeared for lack of personnel. A few lazy and ignorant native priests were all that was left of the once-flourishing mission of Angola, which at an earlier date had even boasted a native African bishop.\(^\text{11}\)

The only other ecclesiastical jurisdiction in Negro Africa was the prefecture of Senegal, entrusted since 1779 to the Holy Ghost Fathers.\(^\text{12}\) However, the activity of its few priests was largely limited to the town of St. Louis and the little island of Goreé. It was not that the priests sent there by the Congregation were disinterested in the natives and preferred to lead an easy life in more

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\(^{11}\) Prince Henry, the twenty-four-year-old son of the native king, named by Pope Leo X, May 8, 1518.

\(^{12}\) We prescind here from the Vincentian missions in Ethiopia (1839) and Egypt (1844) and the Vicariate of Cape of Good Hope (1837), which occupy a special position. The 1844 statistics show a total of fifteen priests for Ethiopia, Cape of Good Hope and Mauritius.
civilized surroundings. Rather, they were contractually bound to serve as chaplains to the French military forces, and therefore could not move far from their assigned residences. Moreover, their tour of duty generally did not last long enough to enable them to learn a native language. Lastly, utter ignorance of tropical medicine and hygiene would have made any effort to penetrate inland almost equivalent to an attempt at suicide.

True, the Superior General of the Spiritans, Father Fourdinier, was thinking about the evangelization of all Africa at a time when the Venerable Francis Libermann was still Novice Master for the Eudists. With the cooperation of Mother Javouhey he brought three African students to his seminary, and then wrote to the Propaganda in 1839:

If these Africans reach the priesthood, as I hope they will, they can be used in an attempt to bring the Faith to the interior of Africa by travelling up the Senegal river to lands which white people can hardly enter because of the heat. Whatever comes of it, it is always a great advantage to have learned from experience that, just like white people, negroes can acquire a knowledge of theology and reach the priesthood. If these experiences could only be multiplied, they would perhaps serve as the means by which the Faith can be made to penetrate into regions of Africa that are totally abandoned.

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13The type of conditions under which they lived and worked may be seen from a complaint of Father Giudicelli, a Prefect Apostolic of Senegal:

My house consists of one room, which is a vestibule to the one in which I say Mass... I have a mattress and a hospital blanket. My trunk serves as the only seat. For more than eight months I have been unable to learn whether anyone in Senegal is supposed to pay my salary. A very dirty and unsuitable room does service as my church, a wretched bar table, which the poorest worker would not even tolerate in his kitchen, acts as my altar; a broomstick supports my crucifix.

The only effect of this complaint was a threat to have him thrown into jail for insubordination.

14Blessed Ann Mary Javouhey (1779-1851) founded the Congregation of St. Joseph of Cluny (1807). Originally destined only for educational works, the Sisters began to undertake colonial hospitals in 1817. From 1819 on they were established in Senegal. Mother Javouhey was a particularly strong woman. King Louis Philip called her a “great man.” Her Congregation has always been closely associated with the Holy Ghost Fathers.

15All three reached the priesthood. In 1842 and 1843 they returned to Senegal. In France, where they had been under close supervision and
However, Fourdinier was kept so busy with the muddled affairs of the colonies that he could do nothing further in this direction.

N. D. 5, 13 ff. *American Efforts.* The first successful effort to resume Catholic missionary activity in Africa had its origin in the United States. After the War of Independence, England had settled a number of liberated slaves in Sierra Leone, and American philanthropists now planned to open a similar refuge in the territory that has since come to be known as Liberia. Feeling responsible before God for these former slaves, the missionary-minded American Bishop John England, of Charleston, addressed a memorandum to the Propaganda in 1833 urging that priests be sent to them. The Propaganda referred the matter to the Second Council of Baltimore, which was being held that same year. There it was decided to appeal to the Jesuits, who, the Propaganda thought, would be willing to undertake this mission. However, the Society of Jesus declined and its example was followed by the Dominicans and several other religious orders that were approached for the purpose. Finally the Propaganda had to leave the matter in the hands of Bishop England and his episcopal colleagues of New York and Philadelphia. An appeal for secular priests produced only two volunteers—Father Edward Barron, Vicar General of Philadelphia, and Father John Kelly,¹⁶ the brother of a prominent New York banker. Joined by a layman, Denis Pindar, they sailed from New York for Liberia on December 21, 1841.

N. D. 5, 14 ff. Arriving at Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, they found only a few Catholics among its five thousand immigrants from the States. An inspection of another settlement of five hundred at Cape Palmas revealed only eighteen Catholics. The priests therefore decided to turn their attention to a nearby native village of about three thou-

guidance, they had made an excellent impression. In Senegal, where Ecclesiastical Superiors had little effective control and were changed quite frequently, they did less well. Around 1851 all three were recalled to France. One of them, Father Boilat, remained in France and became pastor of Nantouillet. He enjoyed the esteem of all his parishioners and wrote several books. In 1901 he died at the age of eighty-eight. The second, Father Fridoil, returned to Senegal and did good work under the firm direction of Father Guyard. He died in shipwreck on the way back to France. The third, Father Moussa, was a failure. Left alone in Gorée, he slowly returned to the life of a savage. After his recall to France, he went to Haiti, which at that time was the last refuge of troublesome priests.

¹⁶Father Barron was born in Ireland, the son of a rich family. His eldest brother was a baronet and member of the British Parliament.
sand souls. The reception was very cordial, to the great surprise of the American immigrant Negroes, who shortly before had witnessed the same village badly treating a delegation of Protestant pastors. As they learned later, the reason for this change of heart lay in the fact that the new missionaries were celibates and were not interested in trading. Soon requests for priests arrived from other villages and it seemed that there might be some reason to hope for success.

After observing local conditions and possibilities for about three months, Father Barron went to Rome to report to the Propaganda.

N. D. 5, 82 ff. As a result, on September 28, 1842, Rome created the immense Vicariate of the Two Guineas and Sierra Leone. Father Barron was consecrated bishop and placed in charge of the vast new mission that stretched between Senegal and the Orange River in South Africa—a distance of five thousand miles—and extended without limits into the interior.17

A. C. H. S. 43, 65 ff. Libermann and the New Mission. The first task of the new bishop was to find personnel for his Vicariate, the scope of which went far beyond anything intended by the Council of Baltimore.

Pr. Exp. 8 Before his departure from New York, he had been told by Bishop

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17 It is not our intention to solve here the problem of the exact southern boundary of the Vicariate of the Two Guineas. We are concerned solely with the mission as it de facto appears in the history of Africa. The official document of the Holy See speaks of "Upper and Lower Guinea [Congo] and the whole region which is called Sierra Leone." Bishop Barron interpreted these vague indications to mean the entire territory between the Senegal River to the North and the Orange River to the South, except for the few isolated towns over which the Senegal Prefecture and the old Portuguese dioceses effectively exercised jurisdiction. Because he was not a prelate who wanted to usurp as much territory as possible (he asked the Holy Sea to relieve him of Sierra Leone), his interpretation must have been based on an oral explanation furnished by the Propaganda, for in 1845 that Congregation replied to Libermann's inquiry about the exact boundaries by referring him to Bishop Barron for information. The next year Libermann wrote that the Bishop's successor had power over the same regions—"the interior as well as the coast; moreover, we are authorized to exercise our ministry in all surrounding countries where no jurisdiction has yet been established." As late as 1864, Cardinal Barnabo, then Prefect of the Propaganda, declared that the Vicariate still extended to all areas "not comprised within the limits of other missions," i.e. those of the Senegal Prefecture, the Diocese of Angola and the newly created missions of Sierra Leone and Dahomey. On the basis of this declaration Libermann's successor in the generalate considered himself responsible for all this territory as far south as the Orange River and in 1878 sent Father Duparquet to organize missions in Cimbebasia, i.e. Southern Angola and South West Africa.
Rosati\textsuperscript{18} of St. Louis, Missouri, that a new congregation had just been started by a convert Jew at Amiens. It was suggested that he might seek help there. The Propaganda, however, had dissuaded him from doing so, observing that the new society was still too weak to render any effective assistance. Accordingly, Bishop Barron tried elsewhere. All his efforts met with failure, even though the Capuchins did promise to send a few Spaniards whom persecution had exiled from their homeland.\textsuperscript{19}

Distressed by this failure, the Bishop went to say Mass at the Shrine of Our Lady of Victories in Paris and told its director, Father Desgenettes, how he was burdened with an immense and promising mission, but had no personnel with which to staff it.

\textsuperscript{18}Bishop Rosati knew Father Libermann, whom he had met personally in Paris.

\textsuperscript{19}Bishop Barron was anxious to obtain some Capuchin Priests in an effort to revive the ancient Capuchin missions of the Congo.
Shortly before, Father Libermann had called on the same good priest to discuss his difficulties. His novitiate was full of young priests eager to go off and work in the Lord’s vineyard, but all of a sudden political circumstances had closed Haiti, Reunion, and Mauritius,—all fields to which his first missionaries had gone. “I do not know where to send them,” said Libermann.

The kind old man did not immediately remember Libermann’s problem when Bishop Barron came to see him, but it struck him quite suddenly the next day during his Mass at the Shrine. He could hardly wait till the Bishop had finished his, before telling him about Father Libermann’s predicament. Soon the two made each other’s acquaintance and Libermann gladdened the prelate’s heart with an immediate offer of five missionaries for his Vicariate. Later, he added two others when the promised Spanish Capuchins failed to materialize. Instructed by the Bishop to prepare everything needed for the expedition, Father Libermann assembled no less than twenty-four tons of luggage, to the great surprise and profound disgust of the departing missionaries, whose apostolic dreams left room for only a crucifix and a breviary.

Departure of the Expedition. After considerable delays, the party finally set sail from Bordeaux on the vessel Deux Clémentines. All were fervent and courageous priests who fully realized that they might be in for a very trying time. The same cannot be said of three laymen who at the last minute were added to the expedition because the Bishop wanted some Brothers. To the great concern of Father Libermann, they had been picked up at a foundling home and were being taken along without preparation of any kind. Father Bessieux called them Brothers, although only one—and

20 The Superior General of the Capuchins had selected five of his subjects, one of whom was officially appointed Prefect Apostolic of the Two Guineas. These five travelled as far as Marseilles. At that point, two of them refused to continue their journey, alleging that they had requested permission to stay at home. When no replacements came, the other three gave up and returned to Italy.

21 If the amount of luggage seems large, it should be kept in mind that literally nothing would be available locally. Everything, except some few provisions, had to be imported.

22 The names of these pioneers are: John Bessieux, the future successor of Bishop Barron; Louis Roussel and Francis Bouchet, destined for Guinea; Leopold de Regnier, a former lawyer; Paul Laval, the convert son of a Protestant pastor (this last had succeeded Libermann as novice master for the Eudists and now joined his missionaries); Louis Maurice and Louis Audebert, destined for Senegal.
of them, Gregory Sey, was destined ever to become a Brother. None of the party had any experience of the country in which they were going to work. Bishop Barron himself had spent only a few months there, and he was planning to follow the expedition at a later date. The priests had read whatever they could about the territory and Father Libermann himself had gone to great lengths of research in gathering information. Really useful data, however, seemed unavailable.

After an uneventful passage, they arrived at Gorée, off Senegal, where they were received by Father Arsenius Fridoil, a native priest who had been ordained at the Holy Ghost seminary of Paris and was now pastor of the local church. When one of the priests contracted fever after visiting the mainland, Father Bessieux insisted that all stay in their crowded and stifling cabin aboard the two hundred and fifty ton sailing vessel, even though the ship was to remain two weeks at Gorée. Dressed as they were in heavy black cassocks, this confinement must have been sheer torture. The same may be said of the month-long voyage through tropical seas to the port of Cape Palmas, where they arrived weak and emaciated on November 29, 1842. Father Kelly, the priest who had been left behind by Bishop Barron, received the newcomers with open arms. Conversation, however, at first proved difficult. The Frenchmen knew almost no English, and Father Kelly did not understand French. Recourse to Latin appeared hopeless, for Latin with an American accent differs considerably from its French version. They had to resort to gestures, at least till Father Kelly attuned his ear to the heavily accented and broken English spoken by Father de Regnier.

*Inauguration of the Mission.* On the feast of St. Francis Xavier, Sunday, December 3, the new missionaries inaugurated their ministry. With a number of hastily recruited boys dressed in soutanes and surplices, a solemn procession, preceded by a crucifix, slowly wended its way to a native village, while the priests sang the *Exsurgat Deus* and the *Magnificat.* Great was the enthusiasm among the natives at this colorful and unusual spectacle. However, they tired quickly when Father Bessieux opened a big bible and began to preach a sermon in Latin, translated into English by Father Kelly, and then into the native Grebo language by an interpreter. We may smile at this naive procedure, but this first
effort contained two elements then almost neglected in missionary work: 1) the priests presented themselves purely as men of God and not as representatives of any European government and 2) they tried to approach the natives through the medium of their own language. With all their energy they devoted themselves during the following days to the study of Grebo. Moreover, they were eager to adapt themselves to the natives as much as possible—perhaps too much. They refused to wear a helmet in the sun and adopted what they supposed to be an African diet: boiled rice, yams, and a little piece of meat or fish once a day. All around them were stacked the abundant and strengthening provisions Father Libermann had shipped out for them, but these remained untouched.

Disasters. The results of this folly and the penalties of inexperience soon became evident. Fever began to strike ten days after that famous first sermon. Within two weeks seven of the eleven were ill. On December 30, Father de Regnier died after writing with a feverish hand: "I am happy to have left everything for Our Lord. If I had the choice, I would do it again, a thousand times over." Three days later Denis Pindar suffered a sunstroke and expired almost immediately. Brokenhearted, without news of his bishop, and unable to converse with anyone, Father Kelly could not resist the lure of a passing American vessel and suddenly embarked on January 18, leaving Father Bessieux to disentangle his confused business affairs. Five days later a third victim, Father Roussel, had to be carried to his grave. Only then did the fever begin to diminish.

Slowly the survivors went back to their study of the Grebo language. March brought the long-awaited arrival of Bishop Barron and two new helpers. Mr. James Keily, a seminarian, and John Egan, a layman. The Bishop had heard the bad news from Father Kelly when their paths crossed in Sierra Leone and now he proposed a new change of plans—to abandon Cape Palmas and to establish three new bases at Assinia, Bassam and Gabon. Though loath to leave the graves of their confreres and everything they had built up at the cost of so much sacrifice, the missionaries readily obeyed. Only Father Bessieux and one of the "Brothers"

23 Father Kelly died in 1866 in Jersey City where he ended his days as a resident pastor.
The Spiritans

Pr. Exp. 33 ff.
N. D. 5, 230 ff.

stayed behind to guard the possessions which could not be shipped at once. The others sailed away with the Bishop on the Eglantine. Four weeks later their ship arrived at Bassam. Bad news awaited them there. An epidemic had broken out and a landing was far too risky. In short order, messages began to arrive from Assinia and Gabon bringing word that neither place was ready to receive them. In the face of this impasse, they took counsel and decided to land the whole party at Assinia in spite of the discouraging reports. From there they planned to send some men overland to Bassam. As they were landing at Assinia, the ill-tempered crew out-did their captain in showing the missionaries every possible discourtesy, and nearly all their supplies were dropped into the sea during the process of debarkation. While some of the men sought temporary shelter in a military post, Father Audebert, Father Laval and “Brother” Gregory set out for Bassam through swamps and forests, without supplies, money, or even spare clothing. The scant luggage they had managed to retrieve was supposed to follow, but it fell into the hands of thieving tribesmen and only a small part of it was rescued by a military expedition.

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The First Expeditions in the Vicariate of the Ebo Salmas
- - Bishop Barron
- Fr. Desfosses and Companions
+ Death of Missionaries

500 miles
1,000 km
Pr. Exp. 37 ff. Soon it became apparent that both Assinia and Bassam offered no possibilities for successful missionary labors. Bishop Barron therefore decided to fall back on Senegal and gradually to transfer all his personnel there. He set out from Assinia with Father Bouchet, but that unfortunate companion died of a stroke soon after they boarded the *Eglantine*. The captain refused the customary honors of burial at sea with a cannon ball or a bag of sand. He refused even to allow any prayers to be said. Instead, he simply had the body dumped overboard, telling the Bishop: “Just watch and see what a lovely foot-bath that fellow is going to take.”

Stopping over at Bassam, Bishop Barron found the whole community sick with fever and dysentery and deprived of the most elementary necessities. In spite of everything, they were valiantly trying to make contact with the natives. Withdrawal to Assinia seemed inevitable, but because only one additional man could find even a temporary shelter there, Father Laval alone went back with the Bishop. At Assinia, death claimed one more victim, Mr. Keily, before a doctor finally arrived from Senegal. He immediately ordered the evacuation of all the sick to Gorée but Father Laval was too far gone even to be taken aboard. He died soon afterwards. Only Father Maurice, John Egan, and “Brother” Andrew were able to go. All three later returned from there to Europe, where Egan died shortly after, and the other two definitely abandoned every thought of further work in the African mission.

Pr. Exp. 41 Meanwhile in Bassam, death had put an end to the sufferings of Father Audebert. There had been no one to give him the last sacraments, for his sole companion was the sick “Brother” Gregory, to whom he had administered Extreme Unction just a short time before. Until rescue came, the poor Brother was destined to spend six months alone in a wretched hut without adequate care or food.

Pr. Exp. 42 ff. *Departure of Bishop Barron.* Discouraged by all these disasters, Bishop Barron gave up and sailed on a passing vessel to Senegal. From there he made his way to Rome to report to the Propa-

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24 For this and other atrocities the Captain was to face a court martial on the complaint of his fellow officers. Realizing that he would be stripped of his command, he blew out his brains.

25 Father Maurice left the Congregation and in 1846 came to the States as a Jesuit novice. Later he left the Jesuits and became pastor of St. Ambrose Church in Greece, near Buffalo, where he died in 1895.
ganda and resign. Three men were left behind: Father Bessieux, his companion at Cape Palmas, and "Brother" Gregory. Before his departure, the Bishop asked the French authorities to transport these men to Gabon if they were still alive. Picked up by the Zèbre, the three invalids finally arrived in Gabon on September 28, 1844. The French navy, which had just established a base there, received them most cordially.

Father Bessieux's lay companion had to be shipped back to Europe immediately. Probably struck by the sun, he was completely insane and a merciful death overtook him while the ship was still at sea. The other two stayed in Africa. Through the care of a doctor and the generosity of the French commander, they slowly recovered from their ordeals. Father Bessieux courageously applied himself to the study of the local Pongue language, preparing feverishly for his future missionary work. To the amazement of the French officers, there was no thought in his or his companion's mind of giving up and returning to France. Missionaries they were and missionaries they would always remain.

Ever since their first departure for Africa, the one great cross that weighed them down was the complete absence of news from Father Libermann, although Bessieux had written nine times. The poor man blamed himself for the situation, thinking that his faults and mistakes had rendered him odious to everyone. At times it even crossed his mind that the new society might have been disbanded, leaving the two of them alone and forgotten in the confusion. At last, one year after their arrival in Gabon, a pack of letters came from Gorée, sent by Father Briot. In forward-

Although Bishop Barron erroneously thought that Father Libermann ultimately was to blame for the disaster of the expedition, there were no recriminations on either side. Both men had suffered intensely under their common disaster, but they continued to hold each other in high esteem. Bishop Barron returned to the United States in 1845 and turned down several offers of an episcopal see, preferring to do more humble work. While caring for yellow fever victims in Savannah, Georgia, he himself contracted the disease. A hurricane blew the roof off the house in which he was dying. He was buried in the local cemetery. In the Cathedral of Waterford, Ireland, a monument was erected in his honor, bearing the inaccurate statement that he and one other were the sole survivors of the twenty-one man expedition to Africa.

The Notes et Documents show not the slightest evidence in support of G. Beslier's fantastic story that Father Bessieux "had been captured by the Methodists who for two years tortured him with the evident intention of getting rid of him, but [that] he had managed to survive this long ordeal and to take refuge near the estuary of the Gabon River."
ing the letters, Father Briot announced his impending departure for Gabon to reinforce the community. With tears in their eyes the two men hungrily read the news and then went over to chant a Magnificat in their humble chapel.

N. D. 6, 351 The News Reaches Libermann. The Venerable himself, on the other hand, had received no news of his priests, although he himself had written every time a ship sailed for Africa. Rumors took the place of definite information: the priests had been shipwrecked, burned at the stake, or killed by the natives. His enemies took advantage of the situation to spread further distrust of a madman who appeared to be sacrificing young lives for his personal glory. Finally, a full account of the disaster reached la Neuville by way of a letter from Bishop Barron on October 8, 1844. Calling his spiritual children together, the Venerable announced the bitter news in a saddened but calm voice.

N. D. 5, 64 ff. The reaction was just the opposite of what, humanly speaking, he might have expected—one by one all came forward begging to be sent out to the Two Guineas. His volunteers were so insistent that he had to issue a formal order forbidding them even to broach the subject. While Libermann had no intention to abandon Dark Africa, which the Propaganda officially entrusted to his Congregation shortly after (January 1845), he had no desire to send his priests away to die like flies in the tropics. Before long he too began to formulate a plan for saving Africa by means of a native clergy. Thus he unwittingly took over the idea proposed by Father Fourdinier and mentioned above. We will speak of this plan later when we discuss the missionary ideas of the Venerable Francis Libermann.

N. D. 6, 391 ff. Reinforcements Sent. As has been mentioned, Father Briot was sent to the rescue of the two lonely men making a last stand in Gabon. In virtue of faculties granted him by the Propaganda, Father Libermann had appointed Father Eugene Tisserant Prefect Apostolic of Guinea. However, the new Prefect was detained by illness and Father Briot, together with Father Arragon and Brother Peter, had gone on before him. All these men had been forced to withdraw from Haiti because of political difficulties on that much-disturbed island. They now received definite and prudent orders to stay at Goree and become acclimatized before un-
dertaking any long trips. Libermann issued these orders despite the fact that Father Leguay, then Superior General of the Holy Ghost Fathers, had bluntly refused to recommend the new-comers to his priests there. Leguay feared these upstarts, on whom "he had declared war, with no holds barred." He went so far as to send instructions to this effect to Father Boilat, a native Vice-Prefect of Senegal who was then stationed at Goreé. However, once Father Libermann's men had arrived in port, personal contact gradually smoothed away most of the difficulties with the local clergy.

Canonically speaking, the situation was dangerously complicated. The old Spiritan Prefecture extended over "Senegal and all its dependencies," while the Guinea mission included all non-occupied territories on the West Coast. Obviously, the vagueness of the terms "dependencies" and "non-occupied" could easily lead to conflict. The biggest source of surprise and indignation on the part of the old-timers, however, proved to be the fact that Father Arragon began immediately to study the local languages, Wolof and Arabic, for the avowed purpose of preaching the Gospel to the Negroes in their own tongue. Not even the native priests were willing to condescend that far. They preferred to have their French sermons only half understood or not at all. Meanwhile, Father Briot and his confrere left Arragon to his language studies and went off in search of a permanent base on the mainland.

Father Tisserant, the Prefect Apostolic, sailed on a steamer in November 1845. Caught in a violent storm off the coast of Africa, the vessel was wrecked and the new Prefect was one of those who failed to survive. He was replaced by Father Jerome Gravière who sailed shortly after with two companions, and was later followed by four others. This contingent was sent to build up the base of action at Dakar, the place selected by Father Arragon as most suitable. Within a year after Father Briot's arrival at Goreé, it was at last possible to send reinforcements to the two lonely men holding the vanguard in Gabon, about twelve hundred miles southeast of Dakar.

28 Half of the first expedition should have done the same, but they had misunderstood Libermann's orders. Goreé, off the coast of Senegal, was an old Spiritan mission established in the eighteenth century. It had, in addition to a church, schools staffed by Brothers and Sisters, a decent hospital and competent doctors.

29 When his conduct became known, Father Leguay had to swallow a severe reprimand from the Papal Nuncio.
N. D. 8, 186 ff.  *Bishop Truffet Appointed.* Meanwhile, Father Libermann had gone to Rome to discuss the affairs of the African Missions with the Propaganda. In a long memorandum he pressed for the appointment of a Vicar Apostolic who would reside in Dakar and canonical erection in the foreseeable future of other Vicariates in Sierra Leone, the Ashanti kingdom (near the Gold Coast), Dahomey, and Gabon. The Propaganda concurred with his views and on his recommendation they named Father Stephen Truffet Vicar Apostolic of the Two Guineas. The new bishop was still an unsuspecting novice when informed of his impending episcopal consecration. Albeit a novice, he had had twelve years' experience as a priest, teacher and author. In April, 1846, therefore, he sailed for Dakar, accompanied by seven members of the Congregation. The African missions, which only a year before had seemed to be doomed to failure now appeared well on their way to success.

Br. 216 ff.  *Libermann's Congregation Expands.* Father Libermann found it possible to provide the personnel necessary for this vast enterprise because, despite all efforts to defame and oppose him, and despite the disasters reported from Africa, his novitiate abounded
in recruits who had been attracted by the holiness of its founder. Although he had enlarged the house at La Neuville twice already, it was still too small for all who came to join him. They decided, therefore, to take over a former orphanage in Noyon, a suburb of Amiens, and in addition, to buy the medieval abbey of Gard, which the Trappists had abandoned when a new railroad line cut its acreage in two. In 1846, then, Noyon became the site of the novitiate and the abbey began to serve as the senior scholasticate of the Congregation. A convent bought the house at La Neuville which was the birthplace of Libermann’s society, and the money realized from this sale was used to pay for the abbey.

At the outset, Father Libermann had thought only of a congregation of priests. However, he soon realized that too much time would be taken up with material cares if his priests had to do everything themselves. He first tried to work with simple laymen whom everyone charitably addressed as “Brother,” even though they had no intention of becoming religious Brothers. The most famous of these was one called Brother “Sadsack,” whose constant comment on everything was: “C’est triste.” (“It is sad.”) Three such “Brothers,” as we have already seen, had accompanied the first missionaries to Africa but it soon became clear that this arrangement was most unsatisfactory. Accordingly, in consultation with his confreres (especially Father Le Vavasseur), the Venerable decided to admit a second category of members into the Congregation, viz., pious laymen who had no intention of becoming priests but who wanted to consecrate their lives to God by the vows of religion and aid the priests in their apostolic work. The first of these entered the novitiate in 1843. Father Libermann foresaw that these men would be of inestimable assistance to his priests through their work in construction, maintenance, care of the sick, and the technical instruction of apprentices. For this reason, he expressed a strong desire to attract to this second category “carpenters, woodworkers, ironworkers, weavers, . . . mechanics, architects, and above all physicians, who would be the most useful of all.” The year before his death he saw to it that a special rule for the Brothers was printed and distributed among them.

The African Mission Again on the Brink of Disaster. Bishop Truffet was received most enthusiastically at Dakar, not only by his confreres, but by the natives as well. The enthusiasm of his
African friends was not entirely disinterested for they were plotting a war against a neighboring tribe and the Bishop’s support would be immensely helpful. Since their enemies had just imprisoned two missionaries, they felt confident that a plausible case could be built up. However, the Bishop wisely declined to enter into local village politics, especially when the two prisoners returned unharmed after a few weeks’ absence and expressed surprise at all the commotion in their behalf.

To prevent any repetition of such incidents, the prelate forbade his priests to take any trips away from the compound unless he was with them. It was an effective measure to stop all trouble, but it also stopped all missionary work. The small school had just opened, and its seven pupils could not keep everybody busy. The priests began to fret about their inactivity. When their frustration reached dangerous proportions, Bishop Truffet organized the community on the lines of the novitiate he had just left. Action was replaced by meditation; he himself gave them three conferences a week; no letters were to be written about the mission to anyone but himself; and, because the community was in Africa, everyone had to speak the local Wolof language, although only Father Arragon possessed a fairly adequate knowledge of it. Worst of all, he ordered the immediate adoption of the native diet: canary seed, rice and fish—no wine, no bread, no meat, save on Sundays and Thursdays. As Father Warlop later remarked, it was not long before the younger priests were literally shaking with hunger and secretly devoured anything edible they could lay their hands on.

The inevitable happened: within six months everybody was ill, including the Bishop himself. He refused to let a doctor come from nearby Gorée. Only supernatural means were to be used. He prescribed his own remedy: a diet of sugar water. When he finally consented to treatment, it was too late. Less than seven months after his arrival in Africa, he died, the victim of his own imprudence. The others responded to treatment and medical care at the hospital of Gorée and then returned to the simple but sane diet adopted before Bishop Truffet’s arrival.

Administratively also, the attitudes assumed by Bishop Truffet and Father Arragon brought the mission to the brink of disaster. In 1843, with the full approval of the Propaganda and Bishop Barron, Father Libermann had concluded an agreement with the French Government in virtue of which his missionaries were to
notify the naval authorities whenever they went off on exploratory trips. They were to report on the local population in the area visited, but otherwise they retained full freedom of apostolic activity. In return, the Navy provided free transportation, hospital care, rations, and an annual subsidy—in all about $25,000 worth. For a new mission without resources of any kind in an unknown and sometimes hostile territory, this agreement was highly advantageous. Nonetheless, Bishop Truffet wanted to break entirely with the Government because he had an exaggerated fear of civil interference in the missionary work which he himself had so radically restricted.

During his few weeks as Acting Superior after the death of the Bishop, Father Arragon decided to make a complete break. In a blunt and insulting letter he told the Navy that as free and independent citizens of Savoy the Fathers did not want any French help. As an immediate result of this folly, the French government took him literally and cut off all support from the Mission. Fortunately, Father Libermann’s diplomacy succeeded in restoring the good will of the government at home, while Father Bessieux, who was highly respected by the French naval authorities in Gorée, rushed over from Gabon to appease their anger. In the end, Father Arragon had to swallow his words and pledge observance of the covenant. Had Libermann and Bessieux failed, the whole African enterprise might have been ruined for, unlike Bishop Barron who could use his personal fortune, Liberman and his missionaries had no funds with which to support the mission.

Bishop Bessieux and Bishop Kobès. With the appointment, in 1848, of Father Bessieux as Vicar Apostolic of the Two Guineas and of Father Aloysius Kobès as his coadjutor, one could say that the African missions were at last in good hands. Too good, perhaps, for Bishop Kobès especially was so full of Africa that he could see no sense in using any member of the Congregation elsewhere. This question of manpower soon became very acute. Father Libermann had other projects in mind and, in further com-

30Several of the Fathers in Dakar had come from Savoy, a country which at that time was not yet part of France and was proud of its independence.
31Father Bessieux had always been the logical man to take charge of the mission. His extreme reluctance to accept any post of authority had caused Father Libermann to present Father Truffet’s name to the Propaganda in 1847. This time the Venerable overrode Bessieux’ objections.
plication of the problem, it was just at this time that the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary was disbanded and its members entered the Society of the Holy Ghost, thereby assuming responsibility for the old French colonies as well. We will return to this point later when we discuss the acceptance of works in Europe and treat of the history of the Congregation under Libermann's successors.

4. The Australian Venture

In July 1843, Father Libermann was visited at La Neuville by Bishop John Brady, an Irishman who had studied at Holy Ghost Seminary and had later gone out to Australia. After exploring the regions around Perth, he had been consecrated bishop of the territory and was now charged with the task of establishing missions there. He was looking for personnel to staff one of the two Vicariates which he intended to open for the two million inhabitants he mistakenly supposed to be there. It appeared to Father Libermann as if he had come in answer to unspoken prayers. At the moment, all French colonies were closed to his missionaries by the opposition of Fourdinier, the political turmoil in Haiti precluded any pastoral activity, the plans for Madagascar might have to be abandoned, and the first mission of the Two Guineas in Africa had just suffered appalling disasters. Somewhat hastily he agreed to supply personnel for one of the Vicariates to be founded near Perth. "Don't worry about a thing," the Bishop said, "I will supply everything necessary. Just send all the men you can spare to London."

The next month, Father Francis Thévaux, the newly appointed Superior of the mission, departed with two Fathers and two Brothers for London. It was going to be a great expedition. Bishop Brady had assembled seven priests, two Brothers, six Sisters, three seminarians, and eight lay catechists to accompany him to Perth. Innocently trusting the Bishop's promise regarding ample supplies, the poor Fathers had not even taken any spare clothing with them. Nothing, however, was forthcoming. On reaching the Cape of Good Hope they had to cut up bed sheets to serve as substitutes for their bedraggled shirts. When fever broke out, there was not even a medicine chest on board. As they approached Freemantle, in southwestern Australia, Father Maurice
Bouchet had to be carried off the ship and given Extreme Unction. He died soon afterwards.

At Perth new trials awaited them. Instead of a large town, Perth proved to be a miserable settlement consisting of a few bungalows. The white settlers were nearly all Protestant and the innumerable native population existed only in the imagination of Bishop Brady. The newcomers found a Dutch priest, Father Joosten, already working there and, after some discussion, Father Thévaux and his confreres were assigned to the future Vicariate of Albany in King George Sound, two hundred and fifty miles away through tangled forest. With his blessings and but little else, the Bishop sent them on their way in company with one of the Irish priests, Father Powell. When they opened a letter of instructions from the Bishop, they discovered that the agreement he had made with Father Libermann was broken: their jurisdiction was limited to the natives and they were to remain dependent on Father Joosten, who had been appointed Vicar General by the Bishop. Moreover, Father Powell claimed that he was their superior, for the Bishop had told him that he was to be the Vicar Apostolic of Albany. In spite of all this, they decided to go on.

Searching for the 50,000 natives who, according to the Bishop’s estimate, lived around Albany, they travelled through a region of a hundred miles and found less than a score. Yet the Bishop persisted in his illusions of large populations. Soon he began to reproach the Fathers for their lack of zeal and ordered them to disperse and start two or three communities in the interior. Obediently they set out in the midst of the rainy season, sick with fever, without adequate supplies, fruitlessly searching everywhere for native settlements. Father Powell, the Irish secular priest, had enough of it. Giving up the prospective Vicariate and his episcopal dreams, he left, never to return. The seminarian as well as one of the two Brothers had to be sent away. Appeals to Bishop Brady for help and at least some limited food supplies were answered with new orders to go farther into the interior and set up stations in the forest. Moved by pity at the sight of their extreme need, the captain of a passing sailing vessel gave them some food and a small loan of money. Then the emaciated priests and the Brother once more trekked three days deeper into the woods and began to build a house which they called Santa Maria. Food being unavailable locally, they had to rely on the
produce of a little garden they had started at their first place of residence, marching three days every time they wanted to reach it. Soon they were reduced to eating chopped grass and frogs.

Meanwhile, at Perth, Bishop Brady continued making all kinds of fantastic plans—including the opening of a college for his non-existent population. Not having the slightest notion of financial matters, he was over his head in debt. When it finally came to his rescue, the Propaganda specified that three thousand gold francs of its subsidy were to be given to Father Thévaux and his companions. "Give us at least half of that sum," the distraught priest pleaded in vain, when the payment of his share was slow in coming. But even this plaintive request fell on deaf ears.

Early in 1847 a reply finally came from the Bishop. His Excellency was most indignant over a letter Father Thévaux had written to an Italian layman who had been assigned to the future college of Perth. In it a slight allusion had been made to the Bishop’s impending bankruptcy and the prelate demanded an apology under pain of suspension. Father Thévaux marched all the way to Perth to explain the situation, but to no avail. "As a punishment," the Bishop said, "I am taking away from you the mission of King George Sound. The Passionists will soon arrive to take it over. You and your confreres are henceforth confined to Perth." Since this restriction was definitely against the agreement with Father Libermann, Father Thévaux refused to accept the Bishop’s decision and asked money to leave Australia for Reunion or Mauritius. "That you can have" was the reply, "Here are fifteen pounds, and in addition you are hereby suspended for disobedience, false testimony, and offensive language to your Superior."

With a heavy heart, the poor priest wearily tramped two hundred fifty miles back through the woods—to convey the bad news to Father Thiersé, his sick companion. There was nothing for it but to make their annual retreat and watch for a boat. Meanwhile, the Bishop sent a message appointing Father Thiersé Superior and giving him faculties to absolve his confrere from the suspension. Father Thiersé, however, thought that he could not accept this appointment because it had not come through his religious Superiors. Thus he did not see how he could make use of the faculty to absolve Father Thévaux from the suspension. As he
discussed it with the victim of the Bishop’s wrath, they came upon an ingenious solution. Father Thiersé had faculties to receive members into the Third Order of St. Francis and vaguely remembered something to the effect that entrance into this Order automatically lifted ecclesiastical penalties. Accordingly, he absolved his conferee by making him a member of the Third Order, thus enabling Father Thévaux to start saying Mass again two months after he had incurred the Bishop’s displeasure. Since these two men could not avail themselves of canonical consultation and had no reference books whatsoever, one may excuse them for an action which made Father Thévaux irregular. The affair was closed only in 1848 when Father Libermann obtained an absolution from the Propaganda.

It was July 1847 before they had an opportunity to sail for Mauritius. For forty-eight days the ship kept trying to leave this inhospitable shore, but every time it put off, heavy seas drove it back. Father Thiersé was so sick that he had to be landed again. He had hardly reached the land in company with the Brother when the wind changed and the vessel sailed off to Mauritius with Father Thévaux aboard. The two unfortunates who were left behind spent another year of misery in the forest until at last a ship came along and took them to join their community in Mauritius.

As for Bishop Brady, Rome grew increasingly disturbed over reports of his maladministration and soon demanded his resignation. The Bishop retired to his native diocese of Kilmore and a sad chapter of missionary history thus came to a close.

In the foregoing pages we have been forced to reveal Bishop Brady’s administrative ineptness, but it would be wrong to leave the reader under the impression that nothing good can be said about him. Before his appointment to Australia, he had spent twelve laborious years as a missionary in Mauritius. He sold his personal property to help the mission, lived in a miserable hovel, subsisted on the coarsest kinds of food and gave every evidence that personal comfort meant nothing for him when the Church’s welfare was at stake.