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When Jacob Libermann, the fourth son of the Rabbi of Saverne, became Francis Mary Paul at his Baptism, there took place much more than a change of names. He was keenly aware of a profound change in himself, and it was soon evident to others that he had buried the old natural sinful man and risen as a child, as a son of God. And yet, as Jesus did not divest Himself of His divinity when He chose to clothe Himself with all things human, sin alone excepted, so did Libermann discard none of his natural human affections when he became a follower of Christ.

Francis remained the loving son, brother, uncle, friend, and quickly learned to Christianize every God-given human love, thereby making it more genuine, generous, extensive, unprejudiced, and profound.

He who once proclaimed that "true virtue consists in detachment from all things and from self, and in humble and peaceful surrender of ourselves into the hands of Jesus"—a virtue he constantly practiced—also believed in its counterpart, namely, a never-increasing attachment to relatives, friends and strangers, loved and embraced in and for God, in and for Jesus.

Only those who have adopted puritanical ideas of Christian, sacerdotal and religious life will be astonished when they read about Libermann’s constant visits to his relatives, his persistent interest in their affairs, his personal attention to every member of his family.

The letters to people in the world gathered in the present volume give the lie to those who say that Christianity and especially religious life dehumanize a man. True saints like Therese of Lisieux, genuine Christians like Venerable Francis Liberman clearly show that a close follower of the Son of Man lives a life that is more truly and nobly human.

These letters are perfectly human; they are human love letters. But they are, at the same time, love letters addressed to God, to Jesus, to the Mother of God.
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By that very fact these letters can give spiritual joy, comfort and inspiration to every reader be he lay or religious.

It may be useful for the better understanding of the letters to append a few biographical data concerning their author.

Jacob was born to Lazarus Libermann, Rabbi of Saverne, Alsace, on April 12, 1802.

From his earliest days Jacob was marked with the cross of suffering; there were infirmities due to his delicate constitution; companions pursued him with their railleries; and when he was nine years old he suffered the loss of his mother who had given him most loving support.

Destined to become a rabbi, the clever boy proficiently studied the Talmud but after a while became rationalistic in his views. A casual contact with the New Testament opened his eyes to the lovableness of the Son of Mary but he refused to accept miracles. The conversion of his older brother Doctor Samson Libermann greatly embittered him, but eventually he took a more peaceful view of Christianity. Grace was powerfully at work in him.

He went to Paris, met and was guided by the Jewish convert, Dr. Paul Drach, and at the Stanislas College, following a fervent prayer, was suddenly illumined with the light of faith, like Saul on the way to Damascus.

He was baptized on December 24, 1826, and immediately desired to become a priestly savior of souls. He studied in turn at Stanislas, Saint Sulpice and Issy. But the road to the priesthood became firmly closed to him by the dreadful disease of epilepsy. In the meantime, however, he exercised a powerful influence both inside and outside the walls of the seminary, being sought as a spiritual guide. In 1837 he, a simple seminarian, still barred from major orders, was chosen Master of novices of the Eudist Society.

Three years later, under the impulse of God’s grace, he abandoned the security of the Eudist’ Novitiate and under-
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took the founding of the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary. Against incredible odds, he reached the priesthood on September 21, 1841.

In 1848 Father Libermann’s congregation merged with that of the Holy Ghost and he became its eleventh Superior General. He died in Paris on February 2, 1852.

His cause of beatification was introduced in 1876, and the Sacred Congregation of Rites approved his writings on May 15, 1886. In 1891 the same Congregation approved the Process relative to “the reputation of holiness” of the Venerable Francis Libermann. On June 19, 1910, the Holy See issued the decree declaring that he had practiced the Christian virtues in an heroic fashion.

Universally recognized as one of the “greatest spiritual directors,” Father Libermann’s letters continue to be eagerly read by the numerous souls, both in the cloister and in the world, who are desirous of leading a life in which God is the center, the Alpha and the Omega of all their deeds.

It is our hope that this second volume of his letters in English translation will meet the same enthusiastic reception as the first.¹

A few of the letters chosen for this volume contain very little direct spiritual advice. They have been included to show how the Venerable Francis, with his intense spiritual life, did not lose sight of lesser concerns but raised them all to the level of God.

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