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The Life of the Venerable Francis Mary Paul Libermann, Founder of the Congregation of the Holy Heart the Holy Heart of Mary

Prosper Goepfert

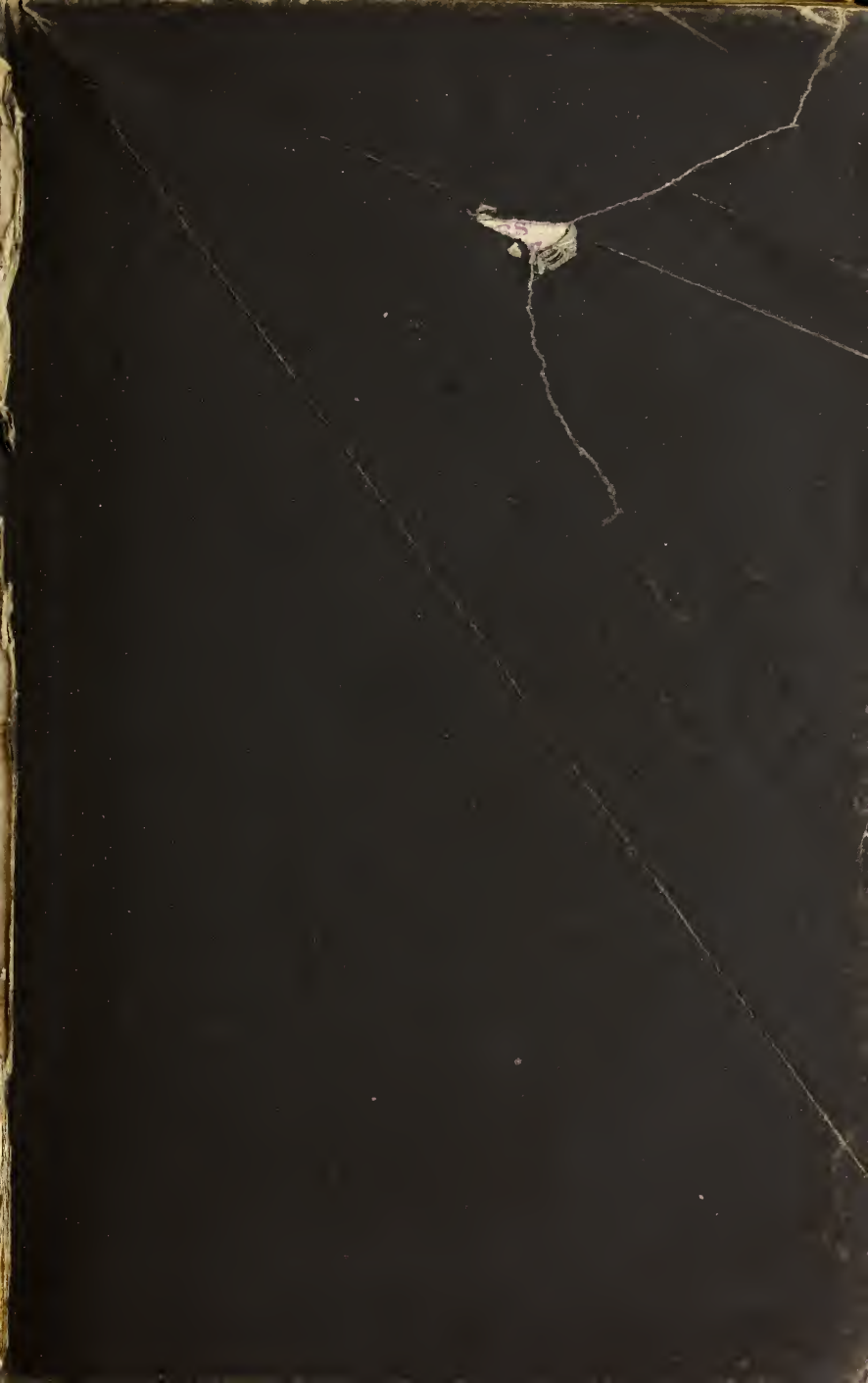
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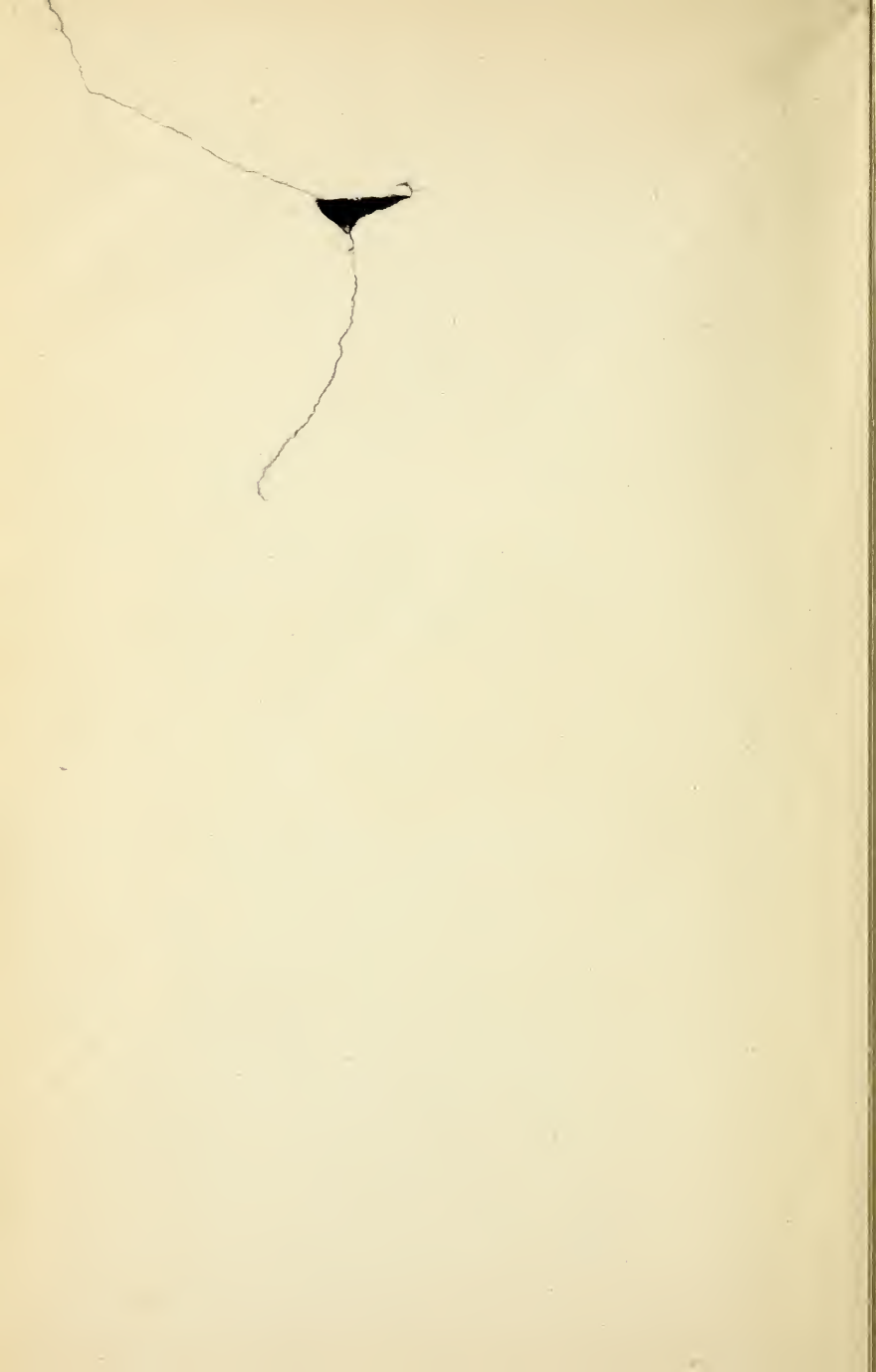
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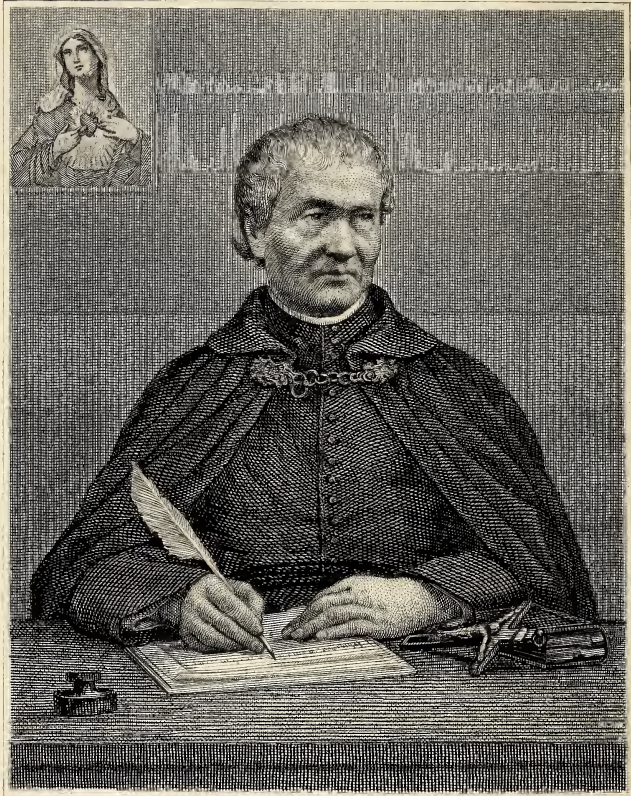
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HOLY GHOST FATHERS
1615 Manchester Lane. N.W.
WASHINGTON 11, D.C.



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LE VÉNÉRABLE
FRANÇOIS-MARIE-PAUL LIBERMANN

THE LIFE
OF THE VENERABLE
FRANCIS MARY PAUL LIBERMANN

FOUNDER OF THE CONGREGATION
Of the Holy Heart of Mary,
AND FIRST SUPERIOR-GENERAL OF THE SOCIETY OF THE HOLY
GHOST AND THE HOLY HEART OF MARY.

BY THE
REV. PROSPER GOEPFERT,
PRIEST OF THE SAME SOCIETY.

With a Preface by
HIS GRACE THE MOST REV. DR. CROKE,
ARCHBISHOP OF CASHEL AND EMLY.

SECOND EDITION.



DUBLIN:
M. H. GILL & SON, 50 UPPER SACKVILLE-ST.

1880.

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H. S. S. J.

TO
THE VERY REVEREND
IGNATIUS SCHWINDENHAMMER,
SUPERIOR-GENERAL
OF THE SOCIETY OF THE HOLY GHOST AND THE
HOLY HEART OF MARY,
A TRUE DISCIPLE OF OUR VENERABLE FOUNDER,
WITH WHOM HE WAS
ASSOCIATED DURING SEVERAL YEARS IN DIRECTING
THE INFANT INSTITUTE OF
THE HOLY HEART OF MARY,
AND WHOM HE SUCCEEDED IN THE POST OF SACRIFICE,
IN WHICH HE HAS DISPLAYED,
FOR EIGHT AND TWENTY YEARS, THE MOST
UNTIRING ZEAL IN PROMOTING THE INTERESTS OF THE
SOCIETY CONFIDED TO HIS CHARGE,

This Work

IS MOST REVERENTLY AND MOST AFFECTIONATELY
DEDICATED BY HIS
HUMBLY DEVOTED SON IN THE PRECIOUS BLOOD,
PROSPER ALPHONSUS GOEPFERT.

*Rockwell College, Cahir, Co. Tipperary.
Feast of the holy Apostles Philip and James,
1st May, 1880.*





PREFACE.



It must have occurred, I dare say, to most people, when reading the lives of distinguished men, or while reading, for that matter, any of the numerous and often very uninteresting biographies that issue almost daily from the press, that it seems to have been the author's aim, in nearly every instance, to represent the individual whose character he had undertaken to delineate as a rare specimen of what is great and good, and as free, to a very large extent, from the ordinary faults and even weaknesses of humanity.

And, perhaps, indeed, when there is question of those whose title to special fame and notice rests on a purely secular basis, provided always that the interests of truth have been otherwise substantially consulted for, there does not appear to be any very grave objection to this good-natured, if not wholly justifiable form of exaggeration. I venture to hold, however, that when one is dealing with the history of a canonized hero of the Church, or even with those saintly personages who, though not yet authoritatively pronounced

worthy of public veneration, are known to have attained to a high degree of holiness and presumably to have died in the odour of sanctity, great care should be taken not to give undue significance to their merits, or overlook their defects, in the least particular, and not to record as certain any peculiarly excellent or attractive feature in their characters, unless its existence can be fully sustained by a decent array of evidence.

The grounds of difference between the effects of exaggeration, as applied to worldly heroes and to the heroes of the Church respectively, appear to me to be pretty obvious. Suffice it, however, by way of explanation, to say that the latter are proposed to us as patterns whose many excellences we are invited to emulate; and that, if the biographer, wholly unmindful of their early trials and ceaseless contention with self, of their high resolves never to fall, and yet of their inevitable lapses, should tell only of the marvellous strength and endurance which they had displayed, and of the trophies borne away by them from the field of strife, the common run of mortals would be apt, it is feared, to think their lives more likely to be wondered at than imitated, and calculated to excite no other feelings in the multitude than those of despondency or disbelief. The great bulk of mankind, in short, are content with the merest mediocrity in everything; and heights, however attractive, whether in wealth, or fame, or holiness, are, as we know, but rarely attained at all, and

never, except by persons of uncommon earnestness and ambition. The heroic, unfortunately, is hardly ever aimed at now-a-days, or indeed honoured, save in idea, amongst men.

What I desire to convey is this. A saint, however advanced in holiness, is nothing more or less than a frail child of Adam whom God in His mercy had trained to sanctity while on earth, and enriched with a supply of uncommon graces. It is highly expedient, therefore, in order that he may serve as a guide to others, that accurate note should be taken, not only of every step, great or small, made by him in advance, but also of every slip and check that he had experienced, while travelling on the rugged road that leads from earth to heaven.

True, indeed, that it may not be always possible, in an individual case, to lay open to public view the gradual process by which a very high order of merit had been acquired, or to give a circumstantial insight into the minute details of what is known as the growth in holiness. But the biographers of saints should aim, I think, nevertheless, at pointing this out, when it is practicable to do so, and, as far as it is practicable, showing the progressive stages by which the mere man had passed into the saint, and how each one of us, aided by the grace of God, may, to a great extent, go and do in like manner.

Now, this is precisely what Father Goepfert has so successfully accomplished in the very interesting work just published by him on the life and

labours of the venerable Father Libermann, the saintly and well-known founder of the "Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary," and first Superior-General of the "Society of the Holy Ghost and the Immaculate Heart of Mary."

The subject of Father Goepfert's biography was an Alsatian by birth, and a Jew by extraction, his father having been head Rabbi of Saverne, and conspicuous amongst the brethren for his steady and intense hatred of everything connected with the Christian name. At the mature age of two-and-twenty, the young Libermann received the grace of conversion, and was baptized in Paris, on the eve of Christmas Day, 1826, in a chapel connected with the College of Saint-Stanislaus. Referring to that notable event, he says: "I cannot describe the marvellous change which took place in me at the moment the water of Baptism was poured upon my forehead. All my doubts and fears disappeared in an instant. The ecclesiastical costume, for which I still felt something of that extraordinary repugnance which is characteristic of the Jewish nation, no longer appeared to me under the same aspect. I saw myself, as it were, in the middle of an immense globe of fire. I no longer heard or felt anything of what was going on around me, and was led mechanically through all the ceremonies which follow Baptism." His eldest brother had already become a Christian; and in after years he had the singular happiness of seeing nearly all the other members of his

family similarly favoured, while one or two of his immediate relatives devoted themselves to the service of God in religion, or in the sacred ministry of the Church.

The history of his early trials and troubles as a child, of his fervour as a neophyte, of his saintly life as a seminarist, of his invaluable services as master of novices, and of his extraordinary struggles and final success, as founder of a Religious Society, or Congregation, is set forth in this volume with such charming simplicity of style, such minuteness and lucidity of detail, so frankly, so graphically, and so well, that we can almost picture to ourselves the venerable deceased as having lived and moved in our very midst, and believe that we had accompanied him, as one of his spiritual children, through all the varying stages of his marvellous career.

And, in point of fact, there does not appear to be any exaggeration whatever in saying that the career of the venerable Father Libermann was truly marvellous, and that it presents many features of exceptional interest, but seldom found in connexion with the lives of even the greatest saints.

Humanly speaking, it is no easy matter to effect the conversion of a Jew. The grace of God is, of course, omnipotent: but, what I mean to say is, that there are peculiar circumstances connected with the history and training of the Hebrew people which are the reverse of favourable to conversions

amongst them. They may be said, indeed, to have an inborn, or hereditary hatred of the religion, no less than of the name and followers of Jesus Christ. Jewish converts are, consequently, very rare, and when met with at all, are found for the most part to have belonged to the humbler and less prejudiced classes of their countrymen. Rarer still is it to see a Jewish convert promoted to a place amongst the Christian priesthood. But, in the case of M. Libermann, besides the difficulties just enumerated, a grave impediment had to be overcome before he could be admitted to Holy Orders. He was subject to epileptic fits. The symptoms of this fearful malady manifested themselves in the most unmistakable manner, about two years after his Baptism, and while he was yet an ecclesiastical student in the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice. "Epilepsy," says a distinguished medical writer, "is a sickness so extraordinary and so far beyond all comprehension as regards its causes and cure, that the ancients believed it to proceed from the anger of the gods."

For ten long and weary years M. Libermann was the victim of this most dreadful disease. It seized him for the first time on the very eve of the day on which he was to have been promoted to subdeaconship. Who can tell what he suffered during the agonizing period that intervened between his first and final attack? But "*Virtue was made perfect in infirmity.*" The Jew-born boy, the son of a fanatical Jewish Rabbi, the miserable

epileptic from whom his companions had to fly in dismay, the man apparently most to be pitied of all the sorely afflicted members of the human race, became, nevertheless, a priest of the living God, the founder of a Religious Society, and as he has been already declared *Venerable*, will in all likelihood, at no distant day, have his name inscribed on the catalogue of the canonized saints of the Church !

How all these things, and things quite as strange came to pass ; how this poor and humble priest conceived the idea of forming a new religious association for the conversion of the blacks ; how he made his way to Rome, the fountain-head of ecclesiastical life and administration ; how, and under what peculiar circumstances, he drew up, single-handed, a code of rules for the guidance of the future apostles of the negroes ; how he was rudely received by many, being looked upon by some of the authorities as a man of a disordered mind, and treated by them as though he were either a fool or a fanatic ; how, instead of being diverted from his lofty purpose by the difficulties that beset his path, he only redoubled his prayers, and placed the issue more confidently than ever in the hands of God ; how he finally succeeded in establishing the "Institute of the Holy Heart of Mary," which in time became incorporated with that of the "Holy Ghost : " all these are leading incidents in the life of Francis Mary Paul Libermann, which

his biographer puts on permanent record in this work.

It must not, however, be supposed that there is nothing of ecclesiastical or other interest to be found in the volume now before us, except what relates to the personal history of the venerable Father Libermann himself. It contains, moreover, a most exhaustive and edifying account of the several missions confided by the Holy See, at different times, to the "Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary," before and after its amalgamation with the "Society of the Holy Ghost," as well also as of the establishment and growth of the infant Society in France. Nothing can be more touching than this portion of the work, dealing, as it does, with the struggles of the devoted missionaries in Mauritius, Bourbon, Hayti, Australia, and especially on the Western and Eastern coasts of Africa.

But, leaving all these and a vast array of other equally edifying details to be discovered and dwelt on by the devout or curious reader, I should be very unfaithful, indeed, to my own feelings if, having spoken thus far, and yet so briefly, of the venerable Father Libermann, as founder of a religious congregation, and of its doings and development in other lands, I were to be wholly silent about those of his spiritual children who have settled in our own country, and whose services, in various ways, have been equally signal and undoubted.

The Fathers of the Holy Ghost have two estab-

lishments in Ireland: one in Blackrock, near Dublin, the other in Rockwell, near Cahir, Tipperary. I have no call to say anything of the Blackrock Fathers, nor shall I refer to them or to the noble collegiate institution over which they so fruitfully preside, further than to observe, that they and it have abundantly made their mark for good amongst us, and that, as an educational body, they have achieved conspicuous and well-merited success.

Referring, however, to that other branch of the Society which was introduced, fifteen years ago or thereabouts, into the Archdiocese of Cashel, and with whose good name and fortunes I happen to be personally mixed up, besides commending, as I do, in the most emphatic manner, the Reverend Fathers who compose it, for their zeal and cleverness as educators of youth, and for the thoroughness with which they discharge all the functions of that important office, I am bound, moreover, to declare that, since their establishment here, they have been ceaselessly doing good, assisting the parochial clergy, by whom they are beloved, in the discharge of their sublimest duties, preaching to the people, when invited to do so, giving spiritual retreats in our convents, and edifying us all both by word and example.

It must have been, therefore, and it really was, quite a labour of love to me to write this short preface to a work coming from the hands of one of the Rockwell Fathers, dealing, besides, with the life of a great servant of God, whose followers I so

much admire, and whose priestly spirit I should ambition to emulate. Every page of this biography passed through my hands; and as I take my leave of it now, not without regret, I may be allowed, perhaps, to make two remarks. First, I can safely assert that I scarcely ever read a book with greater pleasure, or with more sustained interest; and secondly, I venture to predict that no one possessing ordinary seriousness of character, and used even in a moderate way, to look into works of this kind, can read *ten* consecutive pages of "The Life of the Venerable Francis Mary Paul Libermann," by Father Goepfert, without being almost irresistibly led to read it through.

I have no doubt, therefore, as to its circulation or success; and I pray God to bless and prosper the devoted priest who composed it, as well as the useful and edifying community to which he belongs.

✠ T. W. CROKE,
Archbishop of Cashel.

*The Palace, Thurles,
Feast of the Ascension, 1880.*

LETTER OF THE VERY REVEREND
FATHER SCHWINDENHAMMER, SUPERIOR-GENERAL.



PARIS, MAY 16th, 1880.

Feast of Pentecost.

MY DEAR FATHER GOEPFERT—I feel great pleasure in accepting the dedication of our Venerable Founder's Life, which you are about to bring before the English-speaking public. Appearing, as it does, under the kind auspices and personal supervision of the illustrious Archbishop of Cashel, a prelate whose virtues and learning are so well known throughout the Church, I have no doubt but your work will be crowned with success and do much good.

The life of a Jewish convert, who became a Catholic priest, the founder of a religious society, and a great servant of God, can hardly fail to be attractive, and afford edifying reading to every class of society.

May it enlist the sympathies of Catholic Ireland, and be instrumental in increasing the number of her zealous missionaries for the conversion of the abandoned souls!

Begging our venerable Founder to bless, as I do, both the work and its author, I remain, my dear Father,

Yours affectionately,

In the Immaculate Heart of Mary,

IGNATIUS SCHWINDENHAMMER,

Superior-General.

PROTESTATION.

IN obedience to the decrees of Urban VIII., of March 15th, 1625, and July 5th, 1634, we declare that when giving the title of Saint or Blessed to the venerable Libermann, or to any other persons of high virtue mentioned in this work, or when speaking of miraculous and extraordinary deeds and events, we only do so in accordance with the usage of ordinary language, without meaning in any way to anticipate the judgments of Holy Church.



L I F E

OF THE

VENERABLE FRANCIS MARY PAUL LIBERMANN.

Part I.

M. LIBERMANN, A JEW—HIS CONVERSION—FROM HIS
BIRTH TO HIS BAPTISM, 1804-1826.

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### CHAPTER I.

M. Libermann's Birth and early years at Saverne, 1804-1823.

**I**N the heart of Christian Europe, between the Vosges and the Rhine, there lies a valley, on which the hand of Providence has lavished the rarest gifts of nature and of grace. Few lands are favoured with a more fertile soil, or a more varied and healthful climate; in few lands too has Catholicity taken deeper root, or produced more consoling results. Situated as it is between France and Germany, which it separates or keeps united, the province of Alsace has been for centuries the battle-ground of these two rival nations. Uniting military ardour to the Christian spirit, its generous inhabitants have heroically and successfully resisted the emissaries of Protestantism, the plunderers of Gustavus Adolphus, and the assassins of the Great French Revolution. In the midst

of wars, vicissitudes, and political trials of all kinds, with a patriotism ennobled by supernatural motives, they fixed their hearts chiefly on their heavenly country, and constantly clung, above all, to the unchangeable faith of Jesus Christ.

At an early period of history, the great commercial activity of Alsace attracted the mercantile genius of the Israelites, who established flourishing settlements on both banks of the Rhine. . . . And well the children of Israel knew how to turn this position to their advantage. Their material prosperity, at the beginning of this century, had grown to such proportions that, in 1807, Napoleon I. thought it necessary to check its progress by an Imperial decree. In Alsace, as elsewhere—and this remark is applicable to every epoch of history—Jewish wealth increases amidst the calamities of Christendom. The humiliation of the Church, then so profound, inflated the pride of the synagogue, which always knows enough of Christ to distinguish where true Christianity resides. When the Church appears to be in disgrace, the Jew forgets his degradation; her reverses console him; he sees in them the accomplishment of his maledictions and the beginning of his triumph.

And, yet, the Jews of Alsace were destined ere long to give to the Church unhopèd-for consolations. From the dead trunk of Israel were to spring new branches which would blossom, fill the world with a delightful perfume, and bring forth most abundant fruit. The grace of God was to appear specially admirable in the family of Lazarus Libermann, the rabbin of Saverne.

Lazarus Libermann was universally esteemed among his co-religionists for his great talmudic learning, his patriarchal hospitality, and his extreme kindness to the poor. To be distinguished among the many eminent rabbins of Alsace, and to have attained, at a comparatively early age,

the honourable position which he held at Saverne, he must have been a man of no ordinary merit.

His fifth son, the subject of this biography, was born on the 12th of April, 1804, and, according to Jewish custom, received his name eight days after his birth, and was called Jacob.\* One of the greatest misfortunes of this child, predestined to be filled with so many graces, was to have become, at his entrance into life, the hapless captive of a rabbin, who pursued the observances of the synagogue with a zeal bordering on fanaticism. In addition to the original anathema weighing on every child of Adam, and to the weight of the innocent blood which so heavily presses upon the deicidal people in particular, he had to struggle against the tenderness of his relatives and the strong authority of a father and master, loving, learned, and passionate, as was the rabbin of Saverne.

His first years were anything but happy. Besides being exposed to the persecutions of his companions, who frequently made him the object of their railleries and ill-treatment, God permitted that various infirmities should, from his early childhood, weaken his naturally delicate constitution. To fill up the measure of his sufferings, his first master made him endure such inhuman and brutal treatment, that, despite Jacob's natural gentleness and forgiving disposition, it was never afterwards effaced from his memory. He related that this master went so far in his cruelty as to seize him by the feet and strike his head against the wall. This was sufficient to bring on serious infirmities, the traces of which he retained during the remainder of his life.

\* Lazarus Libermann had nine children, seven by his first marriage with Lia Suzanna Haller :—six sons—Samson, David, Henoch, Felkel, Jacob, Samuel, and a daughter called Esther. Sarah, of whom we shall speak later on, and a brother, still alive, were of a second marriage.

It would be a relief to think that so many tribulations were sweetened by the gentle support of a compassionate mother. But the Jewish woman takes only a secondary part in the education of her children, and is little more than their hired nurse, when the chief of the family is a rabbin. Add to this, that Lia Haller died in 1813, so that Jacob had known his mother only to experience one more affliction.

Nothing is omitted to imprint early on the heart of a Jewish child a great horror of the Christian name. This name alone, the sight of a Christian, of a church, of a crucifix, especially the meeting of a priest, and—what would find some respect even among pagans—a funeral procession, a new-born infant, provoke, it is said, the most frightful blasphemies and imprecations against the “*Goin.*”\* By none could that hereditary hatred have been more carefully transmitted than it was by Lazarus Libermann to his children.

Jacob, humble and timid, of a weak and sickly constitution, naturally received as a tablet of wax all the impressions which his father wished to stamp upon his soul. The following anecdotes of his childhood, which M. Libermann delighted to relate afterwards to his friends, will put in a clearer light what has just been said:

One day, the parish priest of Saverne, vested in surplice and stole, was returning from the cemetery, when on his way he met little Jacob. The vestments, the appearance of the cross, filled him with so great a terror, that he rushed in all haste into a shop hard by, concealed himself behind the counter, where, to the great amusement of all present, he waited until the priest had passed.

On another occasion, the same priest, coming from

\* A term of contempt by which the Jews designate the Christians.

a sick-call, encountered the rabbin and young Jacob in the narrow winding of a road which was lined on both sides by rather high walls. Frightened at the sight of the priestly dress, and not knowing what to do, the child hastily climbed over one of the walls and escaped through the fields.

These facts can be accounted for by the Jewish system of education. It is universally believed that the education of the young Israelites is chiefly based on the Old Testament. Such is not the case. The Bible is merely placed in the hands of a child as a text-book for reading. But the greatest attention is paid to the "*Talmud*," the doctrines of which penetrate the intellect and fashion the manners of the greatest number of the Israelites.

The Talmud, the work of the Pharisees of several centuries, is the total collection of the Jewish doctrine, the complete civil and religious code of the synagogue, the object of which is to explain the Mosaic Law in conformity with the spirit of oral tradition. It forms a collection of twelve volumes in folio. Mingled with traditions useful to explain the sacred Scriptures, the Talmud contains many absurdities, many false interpretations of the most elementary moral laws, many immoralities, and is especially calculated to instil a great hatred of Christ and the Christian name.

According to the teaching of the Talmud, "the possessions of the 'Goim' should be regarded as a desert and as the sand of the sea, of which the first possessor is the real proprietor." The Talmud expressly forbids the Jew to save a Christian from death, to restore to him his lost property, or to have pity on him. The rabbins have deduced the natural consequences of these premises, and have concluded that, when dealing with a Christian, the Jew is at liberty to make a mistake for his own advantage, and



that it is honest to deprive a Christian of any sum of money.

These pernicious doctrines formed a part of the instructions which the rabbin of Saverne inculcated on the minds of his children, who naturally received them as the purest expressions of truth, and would profit of every occasion to put their father's precepts into practice.

One day, Jacob was sent to the house of a neighbouring Christian woman, to change a piece of money. Imagining he was doing an excellent deed, he dexterously took away a penny from the infidel "GOIM." He returned quite proud of his feat, which gained for him the applause of his family, especially of his father, who saw in this youthful exploit an indication of a brilliant future.

During several years, Jacob realised these bright hopes by his docility, his application to his studies, and the lead which he easily took among his young companions. More than once, the most flattering distinctions at the public examinations—which brought together the Jewish aristocracy of the province—caused young Jacob to blush, whilst his heart throbbed with joy at the delight which he knew he thereby caused his father.

At the age of thirteen, he went through the usual formalities prescribed for the solemn and legal entrance into the synagogue. This act, one of the most important in the life of a Jew, is usually preceded by several months, often by an entire year, of privations, as if to make a trial of the rigorous ordinances of the Jewish laws and customs. On a fixed festival, or Sabbath-day, the youth is presented to the assembled synagogue; the leader of the choir proclaims his name, and calls on him to take part in the public reading of the Bible. He is thereby declared of age, becomes a man, takes his rank in the religious ceremonies, and is admitted, if required, to complete the

number of members necessary for constituting a legal assembly. He is thenceforth subject to all the prescriptions of the law.

Having been initiated from his infancy in the wording of the law, Jacob had now to commence the minute and intricate labours of philology and of talmudic exegesis, a study well suited to develop in the young Israelites a searching sagacity, which is to them of the greatest service, even in the most ordinary transactions of daily life. Samson and Jacob, without leaving the paternal roof, could pass through all the degrees of rabbinical teaching. Their mutual emulation was greatly increased by the competition of other students, who, at various periods, assembled at Saverne from the neighbouring localities. Lazarus Libermann, who was a competent judge, always considered his sons superior to all the others, and, in his estimation, Jacob's only rival was his eldest son Samson. More than thirty years afterwards, the latter still retained the reputation of having been one of the shrewdest Talmudists in Alsace. Both Samson and Jacob had fully mastered that complex collection of rules, opinions, and traditions, which, it is said, are so intimately connected that it is impossible thoroughly to understand one page of the Talmud without possessing an almost perfect knowledge of the whole. Hence sprung the ancient method, supplanted in our days by the innovations of the rationalists, of spending long years in the higher schools of the synagogue, in dissecting, with the minutest anatomy, two or three pages of the Talmud, or of the Mischna. Every word, nay, every syllable, was ardently discussed by the students under the vigilant eye of the master. Each one, harassed by the queries of his competitors, answered and asked questions. In those subtle conflicts, Jacob displayed a cleverness, vigour, and animation,

which would have surprised those who knew him in after years.

Samson Libermann, however, soon left his younger brother master of the field. Having attained the extreme limits of Talmudic studies, he began to feel disgusted at such a collection of sophisms, the emptiness and absurdity of which could not escape his clear-sighted mind. He accordingly abandoned his intended career and devoted himself to the study of medicine, in the practice of which he became, after some years, one of the leading men in the town and district of Strasburg.

The rabbin consoled himself for this desertion by more exclusively concentrating all his affections on his favourite son Jacob, who, as he thought, would one day follow his own profession, and perpetuate his name and his race. Either through natural inclination, or through simple deference, Jacob entered with the greatest ardour into all the views of his father regarding his future career. To become a learned and distinguished rabbin seemed to be the sole object of his desires, and in furtherance of such desires, Lazarus Libermann resolved to send him to the rabbinical school of Metz, with the intention of sending him afterwards to that of Paris.

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## CHAPTER II.

Conversion of Samson Libermann, 1818-1824.

**I**N this age of incredulity and perversity, a Christian heart is rejoiced by the spreading of truth and the triumph of divine grace among men. A conversion from the darkness of error to the light of Jesus Christ is always gladdening; but that gladness is increased, when we perceive, not an isolated event, but a movement of conversions, and when converts come forth from quarters which are usually overshadowed with infidelity and the unbroken silence of death, namely, from the barren fields of Judaism. Even as the wearied traveller through a wilderness is filled with joy at the sight of unexpected flowers which he meets within the desolate walls of some ancient ruin, so the heart of the fervent Christian thrills with delight, when, reading over the cheerless history of the obstinate Jewish race, he encounters here and there, amidst the scattered ruins of the ancient temple, a few of those admirable conversions in which he must admire the mysterious and adorable ways of Providence. Such feelings will, no doubt, penetrate the reader's soul, when he shall behold the wonders which Divine Mercy wrought among the scattered remnants of the Jewish people at the commencement of the present century.

The mysterious work of divine grace began in the generous soul of Samson, who was the first to counteract the prejudices of his early training. He had given up the study of the Talmud, with a desire of satisfying elsewhere his insatiable thirst for knowledge. Unhappily, he disclosed his religious perplexities to infidels, and sought for a

solution of his difficulties in impious writings. Voltaire, Rousseau, the deists and atheists, only threw his mind into still greater confusion; he went so far as to lose his faith completely, and to content himself with a vague sense of good and evil; and even about this he was but little concerned. There was in his heart a void which gradually became deeper and wider, whilst his aversion to the religion of his fathers increased from day to day. During the great festivities, he still frequented the synagogue and addressed his wandering prayers to that God of Israel in whom he no longer found support or consolation. His sadness became at times so great, that he could not refrain from shedding torrents of tears. Already his soul yearned after that food of truth, which alone was to relieve and calm his anxiety. More than once he was surprised to find himself reflecting on the dogmas of the Christian religion. He never forgot, how one day, whilst walking with a few friends, the sight of a cross erected on the roadside drew from him the following exclamation: "It is indeed a most wonderful idea, that of a God dying for men! Would that I could believe this!" . . . His medical studies could neither divert his mind nor dispel his interior troubles, and his anxieties were only increased by his marriage, as his young wife happened to be in the same state of religious [uncertainty as himself. She, too, found nothing but emptiness in the soulless worship and vain phantoms of Judaism. This was the result not of indifference, but of God's grace, which commenced to pierce the veil that, until then, had blinded their eyes: both earnestly sought after truth. Often they would converse on religion, without being able to console or enlighten one another. The same aspirations filled the souls of both: together they prayed, together they invoked the God of true light, and soon the first ray descended from the sun

of Divine Mercy, by the brightness of which they contemplated more closely the splendours of Christianity.

A Protestant family happened to dwell in the next house. It was there, that, for the first time, the New Testament fell into the hands of Dr. Libermann. God had chosen his hour. An interior voice whispered within his soul the memorable words which had once resounded in the ears of St. Augustine: *tolle, lege*, take up and read . . . That first reading, made in common, ravished and filled both with an equal enthusiasm. The Son of Mary, whom they had so long ignored, or only learned to know, that they might blaspheme Him, began to appear to them as the purest, the most beautiful, and the most amiable of the children of Abraham. Under that first indistinct impression of Christian feeling, they took a generous resolution, and promised, if Divine Providence would grant them a son, to present him, not to the synagogue, but to the Church of Jesus Christ. To fulfil their promise, Dr. Libermann was advised to apply to the celebrated Hofner, president of the Confession of Augsburg. "Happily for me," says Dr. Libermann, in a letter to His Eminence Cardinal Pitra, "M. Hofner was less a Christian than I was myself. I communicated my sentiments to him, and asked him what I was to do to procure baptism for the child, whose birth was expected. His reply was almost in the following terms: 'Dear sir, why are you in such a hurry to have your child baptised? Baptism is not so essential. I advise you not to think of it just now; later on you shall see what is best to be done.' After such cold encouragement, I who was all fire for Jesus Christ, of whose beauty I had then obtained but a faint glimpse, thenceforward felt only disgust for Protestantism." Those first perplexities were removed by the child being still-born.

This happened in the year 1820, at the period when the



Israelitic consistory of Strasburg undertook the foundation of primary Lancastrian schools. Having been appointed member and secretary of a committee established for that purpose, Samson Libermann devoted himself with great zeal to this work, presided as delegate of the committee at several installations of teachers, translated into German the catechism of the consistory—a work which has been printed for the use of schools, where it is still one of the elementary text-books. He did all in his power, by way of meetings of the committee, inspection of the schools, and distribution of books, to bring about the regeneration of the Jewish race.

Two members of the committee, M. Mayer, a young lawyer and M. Dreyfuss, a merchant, often met with Dr. Libermann, to debate this important question. Filled with sorrow at the sad dejection of the children of Israel, they discussed various plans for their regeneration, and finally came to the conclusion, that in Christianity alone could be found the remedy capable of restoring their race, and that any attempt at reform not tending to lead the Jews to the threshold of the Catholic Church, would only be an illusion and a failure.

With this conviction, they resolved to make an appeal to the clergy of France, and, to that effect, composed a substantial memoir, of which we cannot refrain from quoting the most interesting passages. The mere heading of the document causes surprise to any one, who is acquainted with the immense difference that exists between the Jew and the Christian :—

*“Letters of some Israelites to the Clergy of France. Reflections on the Conversion of the Jews, which they humbly and respectfully submit to the French Clergy.*

“All enlightened men have ever admired those pious and courageous ecclesiastics, who voluntarily renounce

their country with all its advantages, and sacrifice their fortune and health for the moral and religious conversion of the savage tribes, scattered over the broad surface of the earth. Happy the people that can boast of having given birth to such men, who, by means of their persuasive eloquence, gently pour into the hearts of their fellow-men the salutary balm of an enlightened religion, which raises man to his true dignity!

“It is admitted by all that, thanks to the discreet and religious zeal of those apostles of God, thousands of men, almost savages, are raised from their state of abasement, placed on a level with the most civilised Europeans, and rendered capable of receiving all the beneficial impressions of the most beautiful of all creeds—Christianity. Why should those holy men be denied the right of enlightening, with the principles of Christian faith, those whom the law commands them to consider as their compatriots, but whose religious practices are in direct opposition to the social spirit of civilised nations? . . . For several years the question of the social relations of the Jews with the Christians, amongst whom they are dispersed, has been the subject of great discussions in various European countries. Governments and nations have everywhere regarded their abjection as the effect of the persecutions which they have suffered during many centuries. It is in consequence of this opinion that many countries have granted them rights which before they had never enjoyed, especially France, where they owe to the philanthropy of the martyr-king, and to the spirit of justice of his august successor, the happiness of possessing the same privileges as other Frenchmen.”

After some words in praise of the Jews, the writer of the memoir courageously enters into his subject, in a spirit more becoming a Christian than an Israelite:—

“Since the Saviour of mankind deigned to be born, to live and die among the Jews, why should those who are called to teach his heavenly doctrine find it below their dignity to include that unfortunate people in their pious and generous labours? Why should their compatriots, their fellow-men, be less entitled to the blessings arising from their beneficent enterprises than the savages on the banks of the Mississippi? Oh! you holy ministers of a God of peace and mercy, you who, in the ardour of your zeal, cross the vast ocean, in the hope of bringing back some strayed souls to the path of salvation; you who find your only happiness in the performance of meritorious works, deign to cast a look of compassion on our brethren! Pity their blindness and obstinacy, remove from their eyes the bandage which covers them, restore them to society, and you will have the twofold satisfaction of having regenerated corrupted hearts, and of having given to the State useful citizens.”

After so touching a preamble, the writer of the memoir refutes whatever objections might be brought against his propositions. He then gives most humiliating details of the practical morality of the Jews, and, after drawing a very sad picture of what takes place in the synagogues, he thus continues:—

“On leaving the synagogue, instead of that interior content which one always feels after some moments of religious recollection, our hearts are filled with bitter sadness, in consequence of the awful disorder which we have witnessed in that place of worship. Far from finding the image of a temple of the Divinity, we can only see therein the almost exact copy of a Turkish mosque . . .”

The document goes on to represent the rabbinical religion as anti-social, and asserts, that it would be a very great service rendered to the world, and chiefly to the

Israelites, to divest the Jewish religion of the talmudic extravagances by which it is overwhelmed. The writer proceeds to say, that an attempt to instruct and convert the Jews by persuasion would by no means be a violation of their civil and political rights as citizens. He admits that the enterprise would be a difficult one, but he also holds out great hopes of success, if the means which he proposes were adopted.

The memoir divides the Jews into two categories: the fervent, or sincere Jews, and the tepid, or wavering. Those of the first class are plunged in the grossest ignorance, and entertain most perverse notions regarding the Christian religion. To those, religion ought to be shown in its true light, and their prejudices would soon vanish.

We shall give in its entirety what the memoir says concerning the second class. This passage may be looked upon as the beginning of a movement which has since caused much consolation to the Church:—

“Let us cast a glance on that interesting category of Jews who have now long struggled with more or less success against the spirit of darkness. The number of Israelites who abhor the doctrines of the Talmud, the principal obstacle to the propagation of Christianity among them, is happily greater than is generally believed. In several countries, particularly in Germany, the anti-talmudic Israelites have separated from the Pharisaical Jews, and follow the precepts of Moses in their primitive purity. If in France and other countries the enlightened class of Israelites have not yet publicly abjured the Talmud, and, if those among them, whom reflection has led to believe the truth of the Catholic religion, have not yet entered into the bosom of the Church, the cause must be ascribed to a want of union and to other purely human fears and obstacles.

“Very few difficulties will therefore be experienced, in order to gain over to the religion of Jesus Christ all those whose souls are not enslaved by rabbinical opinions. To strengthen the faith of some, to remove the obstacles which retard others, and to level for all the path which leads to the sanctuary, such would be the only requisites to secure almost certain success.

“All those propositions may be resolved into one single measure, namely, the formation of a society for the propagation of Christianity among the Jews. That society, which would be naturally placed under the direction of the French clergy, would gradually include all Israelites, influential either by their learning or by their social position. The first labours of the society would tend to overthrow the authority of the Talmud, by the publications which it would issue, and by the influence which it would endeavour to exercise over public instruction and elections to the rabbinical chairs. With a little protection, it would be easy to place at the head of worship and instruction persons educated by the society in the principles of the true faith, and consequently disposed to second all its efforts. The clergy would come to an understanding with the leaders of the association, with regard to the choice of the priests who should direct each separate society, and expound to its members the principles of the Christian religion. The conferences of the director would be preserved in a register, which each member might consult. Members of the society, skilled in Jewish theology, would also, with the approbation of the directors, hold comparative conferences, with a view to bringing into a clearer light the sanctity of the Catholic religion. The members of the society would engage to protect each other against the annoyances which they might have to suffer from the sectaries of their former religion; they would, moreover,

engage to provide for those who, in consequence of their change of religion, should have lost their means of subsistence. Only men of irreproachable character should be admitted; a society-fund should be formed by subscription, to meet the expenses incurred by printing, travelling-agents, and other unforeseen necessities. The society being destined to exercise a great moral influence over the Jews, the strictest secrecy should be kept with regard to its operations; neither should the names of its members be divulged. The propagation of Christianity among the Jews being its sole object, each member should endeavour to diffuse the principles of the society, in order to bring, day after day, new souls to the Church.

“The means which we have just now sketched will, we feel persuaded, be followed by very excellent results, if our plan be adopted by the men of influence to whom it is submitted; and if they resolve on taking the matter into serious consideration we shall be glad to accept their invitation to a conference, in order to give to the project all the development necessary, and we shall ever congratulate ourselves for having conceived the idea of so great and so meritorious a work.”

The formation of this society was the chief object of the memoir, and the authors dwell upon it with marked complacency. Such an attempt at compromise between things ever irreconcilable was assuredly fraught with great illusions; but the sincerity of their intentions could not remain unrewarded.

The see of Strasburg being vacant, the memoir was presented to Mgr. Jauffret, Bishop of Metz; but this prelate died suddenly at Paris, before having had time to patronise so extraordinary an undertaking. The capitulary administration of Metz, having found the document



among the papers of the deceased prelate, transmitted it to Mgr. Tharin, who had just taken possession of the see of Strasburg. The new bishop sent at once for Messrs. Mayer and Libermann, whose signatures were appended to the memoir. He held several conferences with them, and commissioned one of the vicars-general, the learned and venerable Abbé Liebermann, to make a more minute examination of the whole affair.

This fortuitous homonymy, the sweet and persuasive charity, the science and experience of the illustrious Vicar, seconded so well the work of God, that, on the 15th of March, 1824, Dr. Libermann and his wife had the happiness of being received into the Catholic Church. They were followed soon afterwards by several members of the Israelitic committee, and first of all by Messrs. Mayer and Dreyfuss.

New chiefs were elected to fill up the gaps in the committee, now threatened with dissolution. But these also, (MM. Goshler, Theodore Ratisbonne, and Jules Lewel), walking in the footsteps of their predecessors, entered the camp of Catholicity. The Church's gates once thrown open, there pressed into it the principal disciples of M. Bautain, to whom must be attributed, in a great measure, the honour of those conquests. A third phalanx soon proceeded from the same committee, having as its leader a second Ratisbonne, who, as is universally known, was subdued by the astounding miracle of St. Andrea *delle Fratte*, and who, in memory of this victory, took the name of Mary.\* If to those numerous conversions we add those of

\* Towards the close of the autumn of 1841, the younger Ratisbonne set out from Strasburg, his native city, for Italy and the East, in quest of health and pleasure. Fifteen years before, while he was yet a child, Theodore Ratisbonne, his brother, had embraced the Christian religion and

M. Drach, Father Hermann, the two brothers Lehmann, and the one we are about to relate, we witness a movement

become a Catholic priest. The traveller had solemnly declared that "he was a Jew born, and a Jew he would die." But the same grace which had laid Paul prostrate at the gates of Damascus awaited him, too, and it was at Rome that his hatred for the Christian name was to be miraculously changed into the most ardent love of a true disciple of Jesus Christ. He visited the capital of the Christian world with the lively curiosity of a tourist, and was about to proceed to Naples, when, contrary to his wishes, he met with an excellent Catholic, Baron de Bussières. The latter, full of zeal, succeeded at their first meeting to suspend a medal of the Blessed Virgin around the neck of the young Israelite, and to make him accept a copy of the prayer of St. Bernard: *Memorare, o piissima Virgo. . . .* M. Ratisbonne received these objects, not because he had the slightest belief in their efficacy, but merely to rid himself of his friend's importunity. A few days after, —it was on the 20th of January,—M. de Bussières accidentally met M. Ratisbonne near the church of St. Andrea delle Fratte. Both entered the church together. M. de Bussières, having occasion to speak for a few minutes to a priest, left his friend walking through the sacred edifice. What was his agreeable surprise, when, on returning he found the young Jew on bended knees in front of the chapel of St. Michael the Archangel. . . . "Lead me where you please," exclaimed Ratisbonne, "after what I have seen I obey. . . . Oh, what bliss is mine! how good is the Lord! what fulness of grace and of happiness! how pitiable the lot of those who know not the truth! I have seen her! I have seen her!" and he burst into tears. The following is his own statement of what had taken place:—"I had been but a few moments in the church, when I was suddenly seized with an unutterable agitation of mind. I raised my eyes; the building had disappeared from before me; one single chapel had, so to speak, gathered and concentrated all the light; and in the midst of this radiance I saw, standing on the altar, lofty, clothed with splendour, full of majesty and of sweetness, the Virgin Mary, just as she is represented on my medal. An irresistible force drew me towards her: the Virgin made me a sign with her hand that I should kneel down; and then she seemed to say: 'That will do.'

of grace among the children of Israel, such as the world has not seen since the first ages of the Church.

She spoke not a word, but I understood all." On rising from his ecstasy, M. Ratisbonne had received intuitively the knowledge of the Christian faith. On the 31st of January, 1842, he was baptised, confirmed, nourished with the bread of angels, and a few years after, Marie Alphonse Ratisbonne was, like his brother Theodore, a priest of the Church of Jesus Christ.

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## CHAPTER III.

M. Libermann a Student at Metz, 1823-1826.

**J**ACOB had attained his 19th year when he was sent to Metz to pursue those studies of which, under his father's direction, he had laid the deep and solid foundations at Saverne. On his arrival in that city, he naturally expected to meet with that hospitality which the Jews, with laudable generosity, always extend to their co-religionists, and he had greater reason for expecting such, as at Metz there was still preserved the custom which for centuries had existed in the ancient university cities of France. A Jewish student was always certain to find, among those of his race, a second family which would supply him with food, fire, and lodging, assist him by friendly advice, and, by exercising over him a vigilant patronage, render less perilous the transition from his parents' home to the many dangers of a city. That hospitality was often divided among several houses, each family receiving the student for a day, and bestowing on him the same cordiality and the same watchful kindness. But the young Jew of Alsace was totally disappointed in his expectations, and only met with the rudest harshness. His father had given him letters of recommendation to two professors of the Israelitic school, one of whom had been his pupil, and the other his friend. The first who, when a student, was treated by the rabbin of Saverne as a member of his own family, received him with such cold haughtiness that Jacob was wounded to the very heart and determined never to visit him again. The other, an

old man, less disdainful, at first took some interest in him, and for a time treated him with a certain degree of kindness; but, on perceiving that his *protégé* secretly studied French, and even Latin, and kept up such relations as might favour those furtive studies, he immediately changed his manner of acting.

Jacob was the more afflicted by this treatment, as it bore a strange contrast to the generosity of his father, whose door was always open to the shelterless poor, in whose house a room was always ready to receive the stranger, and whose memory and proverbial hospitality are even yet blessed in the neighbourhood of Saverne.

The studies to which Jacob applied himself had embittered the minds of his masters against him. The rabbins, to whom at that time, as well as now, the religious care of youth was entrusted, through fanaticism held in such horror every language but Hebrew, that, according to M. Libermann, his father knew neither how to write in German nor in French. This is sufficient to explain the conduct of the professor towards his pupil.

Young Jacob, already in great affliction of spirit by disappointments and ill-treatment, was plunged in still greater trouble by the news of his eldest brother's conversion, which became the turning-point of his own future career. The conversion of Samson caused the rabbin of Saverne the liveliest feelings of sorrow. His entire family put on mourning, as is customary at funerals; but it irritated especially the young student of Metz, whom, at least for a time, it plunged still deeper into the errors of Judaism. The latter, however, promised himself an ultimate triumph over what he called the apostasy of his brother, and he came expressly to Strasburg with the purpose of enlight-

ening his dear Samson again, and of refuting all his arguments in private discussions. But, even on those occasions, he exhibited a spirit so calm, so courteous, so charitable, that at the conclusion of one of those well-contested controversies, his sister-in-law, who herself took an active part in them, addressed to him the following words, which have since become prophetic:—“*You shall one day be not only a Christian, like ourselves, but a priest and an apostle.*”

After his return to Metz, Jacob became more and more disturbed by the striking ignorance even of his most learned masters. The deficiencies of their doctrine appeared to him as so many abysses, at the bottom of which he perceived nothing but uncertainty. He who, until then, had believed with such candid docility, he who seemed to breathe only through the faith of his fathers, now felt that faith almost dying away, and commenced to experience a secret contempt for all that he had hitherto believed and esteemed.

He, however, still remained a faithful, nay, even a scrupulous observer of all the prescriptions of the Jewish law, and stood forth on all occasions as a zealous upholder of the Talmudic traditions, as may be seen from the following amusing incident which must have taken place shortly after his brother's conversion.

The better to understand his conduct on this occasion, we must bear in mind, that there is a prescription in the Talmud which commands a conscientious Israelite never to take his meals with his head uncovered. “In looking back,” says a witness, “to the first years of my conversion, there recurs to my memory a little incident in the life of your Venerable Father, which proves how great and energetic were his faith and piety. His brother Samson was physician of the district of Geispolsheim, near Strasburg.



and lived in the little borough of Illkirch-Graffenstadt, where he filled the office of mayor. Jacob, who was at that time about eighteen years old, came, now and then, to spend a few days in the doctor's family. On one occasion, the mayor invited a few of his friends to dinner. I was of the number. When taking our seats after the *Benedicite*, I remarked that the young man alone remained covered. Being seated opposite, I said to him: "Young man, you see that we have all put aside our hats, kindly do the same with your nice cap, or you shall be taxed with impoliteness."—"Monsieur l'Avocat," he replied, with vivacity, despite his habitual mildness, "you follow the prescriptions of your religion, allow me, if you please, to follow those of mine;" and he alone remained obstinately covered, to the manifest amusement of all the guests. Such an immolation of human respect required greater courage than that usually met with in youths of his age.

Doctor Libermann, ever anxious for the conversion of his relatives, did not for a moment lose sight of them. With the heart of an apostle, he extended his zealous efforts day after day, and by bringing about the conversion of two of his brothers, Felkel and Samuel, he prepared the way for that of his favourite brother Jacob. The latter, it is true, was filled with grief on account of these conversions, yet he never ceased to entertain for his Catholic brothers that sincere attachment which, from his tenderest infancy, had been the delight of his soul. He even kept up an active correspondence with Samson, who attentively watched the increasing workings of divine grace in his brother's soul. Jacob's mind gradually became perplexed and confused, until, at last, he found himself in a state of utter uncertainty and unbelief.

In a letter written from Metz, in January, 1826, he lays

before his brother all his doubts regarding the religion of his fathers, and the interpretation of the Holy Bible. He boldly asserts that he has based his religious belief on the sole foundation of his private judgment, and he puts forward many rash propositions and objections, which have been refuted a thousand times, as well by the ancient as by the modern apologists.

This letter shows into what depths even the most candid soul may be plunged by religious uncertainty, and proves once more that the most sincere intelligence, when searching, without a guide, the hidden sense of the sacred Scriptures, will almost inevitably fall into scepticism and impiety; and this will happen, even though that intelligence were exempt from the troubles of the passions. The human mind, to understand the Word of God, must needs be assisted by an infallible authority, which is entrusted with the divine mission of transmitting and explaining the sacred oracles of which it is the depository. Deprived of the firm anchor of the true faith, Jacob Libermann wandered on the paths of infidelity, like a vessel tossed, without pilot or compass, on the waves of a tempestuous sea.

Doctor Libermann understood Jacob's state of mind all the better, as he himself had passed through the same ordeal. He earnestly hoped, that the dawn of Christian truth would soon dispel the night of spiritual darkness in which his cherished brother had been so long enveloped. Such hopeful expectations could justly be derived from the student's ready and daily relations with Catholics, and from his assiduity in learning the Latin and Greek languages, as we may perceive from the concluding passage of his letter:—"I am going on well at my studies; I began Latin fifteen months ago, and I have already made fair progress in that language. For the last two months, I

am reading Cæsar and Virgil. In Greek, I am now only as far as the verbs, having commenced it but a short time since. Unhappily, an unforeseen accident has suddenly interrupted those studies; my master left last week for Luneville, where he has obtained an appointment at the college. I do not, however, lose courage; I shall continue my work with greater perseverance than before. If the road be a little longer and fraught with many difficulties, and, if I must follow it alone, I shall take application as my guide, and with its assistance, I hope to be still able to reach the end of my journey.\*

“I have hitherto neglected Hebrew. My constant apprehension is to be removed from Metz, as I have much to fear from my father, who has repeatedly told me that he would not leave me here long. This is why I am most anxious to learn Latin and Greek while I am here. I shall still have time to study Hebrew and Chaldaic, if, in a year or two, I shall be compelled to remain for some time at Saverne. However, when I think myself sufficiently advanced in Latin and Greek, I will begin again the study of those two Oriental languages.”

From his earliest years, Jacob Libermann had fulfilled the observances of the Jewish law, with all the sincerity of a simple heart, and with all the freshness of a candid mind. Up to his twentieth year he had lived without guile, as a true Israelite, no doubt trod the path of natural justice, had thereby in some way pleased his God, and merited the treasures of Divine Mercy. From that moment, God began to prepare the young student for the great mission for which He had destined Him, by detaching him from all creatures, through a series of trials,

\* It appears that he received the first lessons in Latin from an ecclesiastic whom he accidentally met in the library of Metz.

disappointments, and interior conflicts. Jacob was, as it were, lost on a boundless sea of doubts, between the synagogue and the Church of Christ. The former still sheltered his affectionate father and many relatives, the latter had recently opened its gates to his three brothers, who were indeed dead to his religious convictions, but living more than ever in his wounded affections. His heart was more and more divided between the Jewish religion, which he had known and loved from his infancy, and the Christian religion, which he had hitherto ignored and hated. All human support completely failed him; darkness and tempests increased within and around him. At every step he feared, like the Galilean fisherman, that he might sink and perish; and there was no Redeemer by his side to lend him a helping hand.

Solomon's temple, the magnificence of which had charmed the years of his boyhood, faded away in the distance—a symbol of emptiness, a monument of the past, and, as yet, he did not perceive the beauty of the edifice which appeared on the opposite shore; the shadow and the reality were alike to him. But, though his mind was in complete obscurity, he felt within his heart an inexpressible yearning, of the nature of which he could not as yet conceive an idea. It was the mysterious operation of divine grace, the hidden but painful struggle of his soul in search of the true faith.

This struggle is often a real agony. The soul is anxious to know whether she walks on the path to salvation, or on that of perdition, she is penetrated with terror, and yet she cannot discover the right road. She feels that she is created for truth; that truth must be her only nourishment; she hungers exceedingly after that unknown food. She eagerly desires to do the Will of God; but how, or where? She wishes to love God, but she knows not how;

she fears to lose that God for all eternity, by remaining in a religion which appears already doubtful to her, by professing doctrines which millions of others declare profane and obsolete, by performing actions which are apparently struck with sterility, and deprived of moral and supernatural value, and her anxiety increases as time passes away, and as death and eternity approach. This interior conflict can only be understood by those whom circumstances of birth and education compelled to pass through such a trial. It is God who, in His loving designs for a soul, causes such interior troubles, and leaves her no rest until she has found her repose in Him. To attain this rest, the soul must abandon all prejudices of childhood, all affection for home and parents, and be ready to bear the contempt and hatred of those from whom she had hitherto received but the tenderest marks of love and kindness. The gem of truth and of true wisdom is to be bought at a great price. Such was the struggle of Jacob Libermann. Divine grace accompanied every step and movement of the young Israelite, whose soul was more and more prepared for a change which could only be the work of the hand of God Himself. Jacob Libermann was not to perish in the hour of trial; the approach of Jesus was already felt, and with such assistance and under such guidance he could not fail to reach soon a safe harbour. Without knowing why, the student of Metz gave up the Oriental languages, to devote most of his time to languages which, in all probability, were to be for ever useless to him. Whilst preparing for the rabbinical profession, he unconsciously laboured for the Catholic priesthood.

His interior struggle lasted until the end of the year 1826, when a clearer and purer horizon unfolded itself before him, and when he entered the haven of peace and

serenity, the Church of Jesus, the Son of David. How the veil fell from his eyes, how grace illumined his mind, moved his heart, strengthened and determined his will, how he quitted the path of error, left the synagogue and entered the pale of the Church, he will himself relate in the following Chapter.

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## CHAPTER IV.

M. Libermann's conversion, as related by himself, 1824-26.



THE narrative which we are about to transcribe is invested with the twofold authority of our convert himself, and of M. Gamon, a worthy director of St. Sulpice.

“In 1850,” says this excellent priest, “I was staying at the Solitude of Issy, near Paris, where I had the good fortune to meet M. Libermann. Emboldened by the amenity and condescension which I remarked in all his words, I took the liberty of asking him what I had long desired to hear—the history of his conversion. ‘Very willingly,’ he immediately replied, ‘the more so, as some inexact accounts have been circulated on this point. But I am rather busy to-day; kindly come and dine with me at the seminary of the Holy Ghost, and I promise to comply fully with your desire.’

“Anxious to profit of his kind invitation, as soon as I had finished my retreat, I hastened to the eagerly-desired interview. He was absent when I arrived. . . . He came in just as we were rising from the table. I was happy to be present at his dinner. I shall ever remember with what kindness and simplicity he spoke to the brother who attended him. Oh! how easy it is to content saints! His frugal repast was soon terminated, and, immediately after, he conducted me to a solitary walk, at the extremity of the garden, and there, giving way to that delightful ease which accompanied all his words, he made to me in substance the following statement. . . . I put on paper, almost word for word, what I had heard, and I am happy just now not to have allowed my first impressions to fade away.”

“I was,” said M. Libermann, “about twenty years of age, when it pleased God to begin the work of my conversion. Until then, I had studied the Talmud under the direction of my father, who was a distinguished rabbin. He was pleased with my progress, and flattered himself with the thought that I would one day be the worthy inheritor of his office, his science, and the high esteem in which he was held among his co-religionists. About the period of which I speak, he determined to send me to Metz to complete my studies. His object in doing so was less the acquisition of a science, which I could as well have learned from him, than to give me an occasion for displaying my knowledge and my talents, and to render me eminent amongst the rabbins, who come in great numbers to be instructed in this town. He gave me letters of introduction for two professors of the Israelitic school, one of whom had been his pupil, and the other his friend. It was then that the merciful design of Providence began to make itself felt in my regard. God, who wished to draw me from the error in which I was plunged, disposed my heart, by causing me to meet with disappointments and ill-treatment which I had by no means expected. . . . .

“Until then, I had lived in Judaism in good faith, without in the least suspecting that I was in error ; but about that time I fell into a kind of religious indifference, which, in a few months, brought me to a state of utter infidelity. In the meantime I read the Bible, but with distrust : its miracles discouraged me, and I believed them no longer.

“At this period, my elder brother, then a medical doctor, at Strasburg, embraced Christianity. I, at first, attributed such a step, on his part, to natural motives. I thought that he had found himself in the same state of mind as myself, regarding the Jewish religion ; yet, I blamed him for having, by his abjuration, plunged our parents into

grief. Nevertheless, I did not fall out with him. We even commenced, at this time, an epistolary correspondence, which I began, by slightly censuring him for the step he had taken, and by exposing to him my opinions on the miracles of the Bible. I told him, among other things, that, were those miracles true, the conduct of God would be unaccountable; and that it was impossible to understand, why God should have wrought so many wonders for our idolatrous and faithless fathers, when He no longer does the same in favour of their children, who have served Him so long, and with such perfect fidelity. I concluded that those ancient miracles should be rejected as an invention of the imagination, and of the credulity of our forefathers.

“My brother replied that he firmly believed the miracles of the Bible; that God worked no more miracles, at the present day, because they were no longer necessary; that the Messiah having come, God needed not to dispose his people to receive Him; that all the prodigies of the Old Testament had no other object than to prepare that great event.

“This letter made some impression on me; I said to myself that my brother had gone through the same studies as I had; yet, I still persisted in attributing his conversion to human motives, and the effect produced by his letter was soon destroyed. The doubt which had taken hold of my mind was too deeply rooted to yield to so slight an effort. God, in His goodness, had prepared other and stronger ones.

“At this time, one of my fellow-students showed me a Hebrew book without punctuation, which he could not read, because he was just beginning the study of Hebrew. I ran over its contents with great eagerness: it was the ‘*Gospel translated into Hebrew*. I was very much struck

by this reading. But here, again, the numerous miracles wrought by our Lord Jesus Christ were lying as so many new obstacles on my path.

“I began to read the *‘Emile’* of Rousseau. Who could imagine that this work, so calculated to shake the faith of a believer, was one of the means God chose to lead me to the true religion? It was in the *‘Confession du Vicaire Savoyard,’* that I found the passage which struck me. There, Rousseau exposes the reasons for and against the Divinity of Jesus Christ, and he concludes with these words: ‘I have not been hitherto in a position to know what a rabbin of Amsterdam would reply to that.’

“I could not help avowing to myself, that I did not see either, what answer might be given to this question. Such were my dispositions at this period, and yet the work of my conversion did not make much progress. It was then I learned that two more of my brothers, who lived at Paris, had just been received into the bosom of the Catholic Church.

“This moved my soul to its very depths, for I foresaw that I, too, might ultimately follow their example. Thank God! this so happened. I had a great love for my brothers, and I suffered at the thought of the isolation in which I would soon find myself in my father's house. I had a friend who shared my views with regard to religion. I saw him often. Our studies and our walks were almost in common. He advised me to go to Paris, to see M. Drach, who was already converted; and to examine seriously what I was to do, before taking on myself the obligations of the rabbinic profession. I fully agreed to this proposition. But, I should have my father's approval, and this was no easy thing to obtain. To write to him about my projects would have been the surest means of frustrating them. I, therefore, decided on going to settle matters orally. I arrived at Saverne very

fatigued, having made my journey on foot. My father allowed me a little rest, before speaking to me of his fears; but before the end of the day he sent for me. He wished, without further delay, to clear up his doubts. There was an easy means at his disposal; he had only to question me on my studies, and, in particular, on the 'Talmud.' My answers would be the surest test of my application. He knew well that there is no possibility of imposing on a master, in a subject which demands so much labour, memory, talent, and practice, as the study of the Talmud. This work, though not beyond the stretch of an ordinary mind, requires an acute and ready intelligence to be accurately rendered, and properly explained. . . . Only those who have studied its contents long and recently, could ever be able to interpret them with that facility which characterises the true Talmudists.

"My father was of their number; and, in ten minutes, all his suspicions in my regard, would have been changed into sad realities, had not the Almighty, who wished to bring about my conversion, hastened to my assistance, almost miraculously.

"The first of my father's questions was precisely one on which it is impossible to pass without showing the exact state of one's knowledge. For two years, I had almost entirely neglected the study of the Talmud, and what I knew I had learned with dislike, having read it as one who only wishes to save appearances. However, I had scarcely heard the question, when an abundant light illumined my mind, and showed me all that I should say.

"I was myself in the greatest astonishment; I could not account for such facility in explaining things which I had hardly read. I marvelled exceedingly, at seeing the vivacity and promptitude with which my mind seized upon all that was obscure and enigmatical in the passage, which was

about to decide my journey. But my father was still more amazed than myself; he was overwhelmed with joy and happiness, as he found that I was still worthy of him, and that his fears and the unfavourable suspicions which had been put into his mind concerning me were entirely groundless. He embraced me tenderly, and bathed my face with his tears: 'I truly had suspicions,' he said, 'that they were again calumniating you, when they accused you of spending your time in studying Latin, and neglecting to acquire the knowledge necessary for your profession.' And he showed me all the letters he had received on this subject.

"At supper, this good father, wishing to treat me, went for a bottle of his oldest wine, to rejoice with me over my success.

"Permission to go to Paris was soon afterwards granted; and, despite the warnings he received that I was going to join my brothers, and to do as they had done, he could not believe such a thing. He gave me a letter for the rabbin Deutz (the father of the Deutz who betrayed the Duchess of Berry); but, as from another quarter I was recommended to M. Drach, I addressed myself to him. However, some time afterwards, I delivered my letter to M. Deutz; I even, by way of formality, asked him for a book, which I returned soon after, and then visited him no more.

"I spent a few days with my brother, and I was greatly surprised at his happiness. I was, however, still very far from being changed and converted. M. Drach found a place for me at the *College Stanislaus*, whither he conducted me himself. I was led into a cell, and there left alone, with two works by *Lhomond*, the 'History of the Christian Doctrine,' and the 'History of Religion.' This was for me a most trying moment. The profound solitude, the appearance



of that room admitting the light through a small window in the roof, the thought of being so far from home, from my parents and acquaintances, all tended to plunge my soul into intense sadness. My heart was oppressed with the most awful melancholy.

“Then it was, that remembering the God of my fathers, I threw myself on my knees, and conjured Him to enlighten me in my search after the true religion. I besought Him, if the faith of the Christians was the true one, to make it known to me; but, if it was false, to remove me at once beyond the reach of its influence.

“The Lord, ever near to those who invoke Him from the inmost depths of their hearts, heard my prayer. I was immediately enlightened; I saw the truth; faith penetrated my mind and my heart. Having commenced the reading of Lhomond, I easily and firmly adhered to all that is related therein about the life and death of Jesus Christ. Even the mystery of the Eucharist, rather imprudently submitted to my meditations, in no way disheartened me. I believed all without difficulty. From that moment, my most ardent desire was to be regenerated in the sacred waters of Baptism. That happiness was soon to be granted to me. I was immediately prepared for this august sacrament, which I received on Christmas-eve, 1826. On this festival I was likewise admitted to partake of the Blessed Eucharist.”

## CHAPTER V.

M. Libermann's Baptism and first Communion at the College Stanislaus, in Paris, 1826.



WE meet, during our short but sorrowful journey through life, with a certain number of days, which we ever afterwards remember with feelings, either of joy or of sadness, according as there is attached to such days a remembrance of some sad or happy event. If the life of man is filled with many gloomy days, it counts also its bright and happy ones, days on which this earth of affliction seems to be changed into a paradise.

We signalize as such days the 24th and 25th of December, 1826, which were, no doubt, among the happiest and most memorable in the life of M. Libermann. These were days which the Lord had made, to separate him from the children of darkness, to admit him among His chosen servants, to nourish him with His divine substance, and to fill his soul with grace, life, joy, and gladness.

We devote a special chapter to a more minute examination of these two important events, which the humble convert appears purposely to have left hidden beneath a veil of mystery.

On his arrival at the College Stanislaus, the abbé Froment became his director; M. Drach was requested to teach him catechism, and to remove the difficulties which he might find in the French language. M. Drach could never recall to mind without emotion the eager avidity with which the young Jew received the first truths of our religion; and, looking for an image to embody his

thoughts: "he was," he said, "like a burning stone which speedily devours the water poured on its surface." "God alone," continues M. Drach, "could have infused into him such faith, such piety, and such supernatural light, as, even then inundated his soul."

The missionaries of France, residing near the College Stanislaus, also took a part in this apostolate: they supplied the neophyte with books, and offered their chapel for the ceremony of Baptism, which was administered to him by the Abbé Auger, on the holy eve of Christmas, 1826. His godfather was Baron François de Mallet, and his godmother the Countess Aglaé-Marie d'Heuze, a member of a charitable association of ladies, founded for the aid of new converts. Through gratitude, and as if the better to remember this great day, the neophyte wished to take the names of Francis and Mary, to which he added that of Paul, the ardent defender of the Mosaic Law, for whom, from that time, he felt a particular devotion.

It is always a touching sight, that of an adult being regenerated in the life-giving streams of Baptism; but the ceremony is especially impressive when the adult happens to be a Jew, because of the rare occurrence of such an event. Joyfully did young Jacob advance to be cleansed in the well of Siloë, and to make a new covenant with his God, in the Blood of the new alliance. What delight must have filled the heart of the new Christian, Francis Mary Paul Libermann, on this, his true birth-day, as he reflected on the mercy of God, who from the darkness and slavery of the synagogue had transferred him to the blessed liberty of His chosen children.

Intense, assuredly, must have been the joy of the Israelites, when they had shaken off the cruel yoke of the Egyptian Pharaoh; when a sea had divided its waters to lay open a passage for them; when the waves had

swallowed up the entire host of their powerful and revengeful enemy ; when, after many hardships and sufferings, they, at last, stood on a secure soil, free, under the guiding protection of the Omnipotent Jehovah. Then, Moses and the children of Israel sang to the Lord that admirable canticle of praise and thanksgiving, which, in inspired accents, expresses so vividly the protection of the Almighty, and their victory over their proud, but humbled enemy.

Thus, too, M. Libermann's heart must have overflowed with ineffable joy, when, after nearly twenty-three years' captivity, he was freed from the slavery of Jewish infidelity ; when he had triumphed over a thousand difficulties ; when he looked back on the wonderful ways through which Divine Providence had led him ; when he emerged from the salutary streams of Baptism ; when, revived and free, he stood on Christian soil, a child of God, a friend of Jesus, the true Messiah, and a glorious conquest of His most Precious Blood. On the one hand, as he gazed backwards, there appeared a land of slavery, darkness, sin, and death ; nay more, of eternal damnation. On the other, lay stretched out before his almost dazzled eyes the delightful landscape of Christendom, illumined by the bright light of truth, watered by the refreshing streams of heavenly graces, which take their source in the seven mighty fountains of the sacraments. There he beholds before him the true successors of Aaron ; his eyes are no longer fixed on the Ark of the Covenant, but on the tabernacle wherein is preserved the real Manna, wherein dwelleth, in all His Majesty, the great God of heaven, whose delight to dwell with the children of men, has caused Him to pitch His tents in our midst, to aid and strengthen us on our journey through the wilderness of

this life, to the home of our souls, the promised land of heaven.

“I cannot sufficiently admire,” says M. Libermann, “the marvellous change which took place in me, at the moment the water of Baptism was poured upon my forehead. I became truly a new man. All my doubts and fears disappeared in an instant. The ecclesiastical costume, for which I still felt something of that extraordinary repugnance which is characteristic of the Jewish nation, no longer appeared to me under the same aspect. I now felt for it a sentiment of love rather than one of fear. But, above all, I felt an invincible strength and courage to practise the Christian Law. I experienced a sort of sweet affection for everything connected with my new belief.”

One of the most intimate friends of the neophyte furnishes us with the following narrative on the same subject:—“In one of our conversations, during which we loved to communicate to one another the secrets of our hearts, I asked him what were his impressions during the ceremony of Baptism. He replied in accents, which indicated that I had awakened one of the most cherished souvenirs of his life:—‘Ah! my dear, to tell you what I then experienced would be impossible. At the moment the sacred water began to flow on my forehead, it seemed to me that I was in another world. *I saw myself, as it were, in the middle of an immense globe of fire.* I felt as if living no longer an earthly life; I no longer heard or saw anything of what was going on around me; I was led almost mechanically through all the ceremonies which follow Baptism.’ Never,” continues the narrator, “shall I forget his description of this species of ecstasy, the remembrance of which, after an interval of more than forty years, still presents itself to my mind in all its freshness.”

The foregoing details are completed by the testimony of another fellow-student of the servant of God: "Here is a fact," he says, "which, one evening, he related to three or four students and to myself. Speaking of his Baptism and the exorcisms, he said, that he physically felt his deliverance from the spirit of darkness, and that he then experienced a violent commotion. Whilst uttering these words, he felt a strong sensible impression, which, like an electric spark, vividly communicated itself to us all."

What must have been the feelings of this new Christian, when, on Christmas morning, Jesus had come for the first time to dwell in his heart. "O my Jesus," must he have said, "so late have I known Thee, and yet Thou hast loved me from all eternity. I was dead, and Thou hast revived me; I was Thy enemy, and Thou hast treated me with kindness; I was wandering astray in a land of darkness, and with fatherly care Thou hast brought me to the bosom of Thy holy Church; I was poor and wretched, and Thou hast enriched me with all Thy choicest graces; Thou hast vested me with the bright garment of justice and innocence; Thou hast given me all Thou hast and all Thou art, on this day of divine mercy and amazing bounty towards a poor blind sinner! What shall I give Thee in return, O my Jesus? Oh! I give myself, I consecrate myself entirely to Thy service. From this moment I abandon to Thee all that I am, my understanding with all its thoughts, my will with all its desires, my heart with all its affections, and my body with all its senses." Jesus must graciously have accepted the fervent offering of the humble convert, and in return filled his soul with a thorough Christian spirit, that would enable him, not only to keep the commandments of God and the precepts of the



Church, in an ordinary way, but to enter at once on the path of fervent zeal and consummate sanctity. It may be that on this very day M. Libermann thought of the vocation he would embrace, and of the millions of souls that needed to be brought to the true fold of Jesus. Perhaps he then remembered the words of his pious sister-in-law, "you shall one day be, not only a Christian like ourselves, but a priest and an apostle."

"On leaving the baptismal font," says M. Drach, "the pious neophyte promised the Lord to consecrate himself to His service in the sacred ministry," a resolution which shows with what graces his soul must have been filled on this solemn occasion.

What a marvellous and sudden transformation! On yesterday, Jacob Libermann blindly followed the directions of a father who was an enemy to Christ; to-day, FRANCIS MARY PAUL is the fervent disciple of the same JESUS whom his forefathers had crucified. Yesterday, the synagogue cherished in the young student of the Talmud most promising hopes of a rabbinical vocation; and to-day, the Holy Church receives him with love among her children. His intelligence is illumined by the splendours of divine truth, and the Judaic perfidy of his heart has melted away before the ardour of divine charity. His soul has become the temple of the living God; and the Holy Ghost has for ever taken up His abode therein. He no longer liveth, but it is Jesus who liveth in him.

Let us, before following our convert on the new pathway of a Christian and an ecclesiastical life, pause for an instant, to cast a glance over the dark, rugged ways he had to traverse, from his natural birth in a Jewish family, to his spiritual birth in the Church, by the sacrament of Baptism; and behold once more that feeble, sickly child growing up in the midst of all manner of

sufferings and difficulties, as an unknown flower amidst thorns and thistles, yet destined to rise, grow up, delight the eye, and one day, diffuse its fragrance throughout the entire universe. After a childhood filled with many trials, he is forsaken by his eldest brother, who embraces a religion for which he only feels the greatest hatred; forsaken by his father, who delivers him into the hands of strangers; ill-treated by his masters; oppressed by afflictions from every side, until his heart is totally isolated from all human affections, and his soul lost in the gloomy night of sceptic rationalism. In the midst of that awful night, he is seized as it were, by an invisible hand, which leads him from Saverne to Metz, and from Metz to the College Stanislaus, at Paris, where, like another Tobias, he sees what he had never seen before. He falls down upon his knees in his silent solitary cell, and, in the God of the Christians, recognises the God of his forefathers, whose merciful redemption of mankind had hitherto been concealed from his blinded eyes. He was a Jew, he has become a Christian; he was dead, he now liveth; he now liveth to grace, to die to nature, entirely, unreservedly, for ever. His future life shall be one of constant and total self-denial; one of death to the world, death to its vanities, riches, pleasures, and ambitions; death to Satan and his works; death to himself. His career shall be henceforth that of a fervent lover of Jesus Christ, and of a zealous apostle of souls which the Son of God so dearly purchased at the infinite price of His most Precious Blood.



## Part II.

M. LIBERMANN, A CHRISTIAN AND AN ECCLESIASTICAL  
STUDENT—FROM HIS BAPTISM TO THE ORIGIN  
OF HIS SOCIETY, 1826-1836.



### CHAPTER I.

M. Libermann a student of the College Stanislaus.—His first five years at the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice, 1826-1832.



HE converted Jew, by the grace of God, became almost at once a perfect Christian. A pious and learned writer, commenting on the creation of the world in six days, as related in the book of Genesis, perceives in it an image of the marvellous operations of divine grace in the conversion and sanctification of a soul. On the first day, light illumines this poor soul, which was hitherto plunged in the shadows of death. "Let the light of my grace," says the Lord, "be made in this heart filled with darkness;" and light is made. The firmament is created on the second day, which means that the soul is raised above the perishable things of this earth. The third day, the earth appears after being separated from the waters: thus man emerges from the ocean of his concupiscence, becomes a fertile soil, fit to produce fruits of salvation. On the fourth day, the sun of divine love

inflames his heart with new ardour, and around him shine with great lustre the light of faith and the different virtues, symbolised by the other luminaries. The fishes and the birds sprang into existence on the fifth day: the soul bathes itself with confidence and delight in the floods of divine mercy, and then wings its flight towards the eternal hills. Finally, the sixth day, which beholds the first man created to the image of God, sees likewise the soul revived by divine grace, transformed into the real image and living resemblance of its Redeemer in whom it finds a peaceful repose.

All these wonders of the divine power and goodness were admirably blended in the conversion of the neophyte of SAVERNE, with this difference, that his transformation, like that of the great Apostle St. Paul, his patron, was effected in a day, nay, in a single moment. The entire work was instantaneously accomplished, and with St. Augustine, could the new Christian exclaim in transports of gratitude: "O Lord, Thou hast called me, and Thy voice has cured my deafness; Thou hast made Thy lightnings flash, and their brilliancy has entirely opened my eyes; Thou hast aroused me, and I have recovered life, I sigh after Thee!"

The superabundance of grace which, immediately after Baptism, filled the convert with strength and courage, pre-saged special designs of Providence in his regard. A mysterious voice had, no doubt, whispered in his ear; it was the Divine Master calling him. "Lord," exclaims the new Paul, "what wilt Thou have me to do?" And the same voice answered: "Come and follow me." Jesus will be obeyed. Jacob Libermann is now a Christian; he shall be a priest and an apostle; and the threefold prophecy of Strasburg shall be entirely fulfilled.

The altar is, however, still far distant; and, serious

obstacles will even seem, for years, to hinder him from ever reaching the end of his vocation. His resolution was irrevocably taken ; but then, he was so little advanced in his Latin studies, and his health was so feeble, that it was doubtful whether he could endure the fatigues of many years of a seminary life. Moreover, as he was utterly destitute of pecuniary means, who would provide for his daily support during all the time of his clerical formation ? To these difficulties the new convert opposes an unbounded confidence in the assistance of God.

After Divine Providence, his only resource was the charity of some pious ladies, and the kind patronage of his directors, the Abbés Auger and Buquet. The latter, persuaded that the young convert was called to the priesthood, placed him in the ecclesiastical seminary of the *Missions of France*, which was attached to the College Stanislaus. The charitable ladies who had supplied his first wants after his arrival in Paris, with a generosity which deeply affected the heart of the servant of God, now offered to continue their kind offices in his regard. M. Libermann repeatedly went to express his gratitude to them, but it was especially at the foot of the holy altar that he poured forth his fervent prayers for his kind benefactresses.

Humanly speaking, the problem seemed to be solved ; the future of the new seminarist was apparently secured ; and, his progress both in piety and learning, plainly confirmed such hopes. M. Auger, his spiritual director, was so charmed with his fervour, his innocence, and his love for JESUS in the Blessed Eucharist, that he did not hesitate to allow him to receive Holy Communion three or four times a week. His faith even then could not be shaken. Speaking of his stay at the College Stanislaus, M. Libermann says: "I remained one year at this

college, practising my religious duties with a willing and joyful heart. I did not, however, feel there as much in my element as I was afterwards at the seminary of Saint-Sulpice. Although, at the former college, I was surrounded on all sides by good examples, I happened to meet with a young man who might have done me much harm. For motives which I never understood, he continually spoke to me of my conversion, as of an act which I had accomplished inconsiderately, and without any grounds. He inquired into the reasons which had determined me, refuted them, and by all his arguments, succeeded in reducing me to silence. Yet, my heart remained unshaken, and though I was unable to explain to him the motives of my faith, I felt that I believed firmly."

Five months after his Baptism, M. Libermann was allowed to wear the clerical costume; and, on the 3rd June, 1827, he received the tonsure from the hands of Mgr. de Quélen, at an ordination held in the Metropolitan church. Henceforward, he could foresee no impediment which might prevent him from advancing nearer and nearer towards the holy altar.

But soon, new clouds were to darken the horizon before him. The house in which he lived, had been exclusively founded for the purpose of preparing preachers for the Church of France. The humble convert did not aspire to so exalted a mission; nor was it the intention of his benefactors that he should follow such a vocation. Several other students were similarly circumstanced. This deviation from the first end of the institute, up to that time, appeared to be sanctioned by the silence of the ecclesiastical authority. Mgr. de Quélen thought it his duty to remind the directors of their primitive obligations. This measure did not seem to extend to M. Libermann; and none of the



directors thought for an instant of applying it to him. But, the timorous convert did not judge in the same manner. He communicated his delicate apprehensions to M. Drach, his devoted protector, who has transmitted to us these details: "My conscience," he said, "does not allow me to continue any longer to eat the bread of charity in this house. I am, it is true, determined to accept holy orders, whenever I am called; but I cannot say for certain whether God will give me a vocation for the missionary life."

M. Drach hastened to lay the scruples of his *protégé* before Mgr. de Quélen, in the hope that His Grace would, by a regular dispensation, remove these anxieties. But the holy Archbishop took quite a different resolution.—"Well," he instantly replied, "we will send him to Saint-Sulpice, where we shall give him a free place." Thus was M. Libermann providentially led into the Seminary where, during ten years, despite many trials and sufferings, he was to be the cause of countless graces and blessings. Let us hear his own account of his admission into this renowned institution.

"It was in October, 1827, that M. Drach conducted me to the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice. The opening retreat of the scholastic year had already taken place. M. Drach first expressed his fears about my health: he was afraid the hour for rising in the community might be too early for me. M. Garnier replied bluntly, that such being the case it was useless to come to the Seminary. M. Drach observed, moreover, that I knew Hebrew thoroughly, but that I was far less advanced in Latin. "The theology classes are taught in Latin, not in Hebrew," was the rather sharp reply of the Superior. Those two answers inspired me with some fear, but did not dishearten me. I had afterwards many opportunities of ascertaining, that under

this apparent rigidity, there was concealed an extreme goodness of heart.

“My entrance into the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice was for me an epoch of joy and blessings. The Abbé George, afterwards Bishop of Perigueux, was appointed my *Good Angel*.\* The great charity with which he fulfilled his function edified me extremely, and caused me to love more and more a religion which inspires such sweet and wonderful sentiments. And then, the silence which is so well kept at the seminary; that interior recollection which is discernible on every countenance, and which is the special characteristic of those who dwell in this holy house: all that did me the greatest possible good. I felt that I was in a new element; I breathed more freely. In the beginning I was, however, deficient in one thing: I was completely ignorant of the manner of meditating. Despite the apparent severity of M. Garnier at my entrance, he easily allowed me to rise after the others; and I was thus deprived of the repetitions and explanations of mental prayer, which are given every Saturday morning. Unable to fix my attention, I made use of a book, and meditated by successively producing the acts indicated in the method. This apparently painful exercise was rendered pleasing by the unction of divine grace, and was very profitable to me.”

After his entrance into the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice, his future career seemed decided; he was evidently called to the ecclesiastical state; and, he was now under directors who were eminently suited to prepare him for so exalted a vocation.

\* This term, *Good Angel*, is given, at the Seminary of Paris, to the student who takes care of a new-comer, initiates him in the usages of the Seminary, and charitably warns him of the exterior transgressions which he might commit against the established rules of the house.

Let us here cast a glance at the state of the seminary, in order to have an idea of the various elements which were to concur in the first successful efforts of his zeal.

One name recalls a whole epoch of Saint-Sulpice: Calixte Frère had lived there seven months before M. Libermann's entrance. The edifying life and saintly death of that fervent Levite were still fresh in every mind. From hand to hand passed the few touching pages of his writings, which had sufficed to fill with emotions of fervour all the seminaries of France. Calixte Frère, though dead, still conversed in the midst of his fellow-students; he was still their monitor, by his resolutions of retreat, his thoughts on the subdeaconship, his private rule of life, and especially by his "Elevations," written in imitation of the Canticle of Canticles, which formed the subject-matter of their pious discourses. Many spent their most delightful moments in his company, happy to forget all else to listen to him alone.

At that time, the Seminary of Paris and the Society of Saint-Sulpice had as Superior-General the pious and learned M. Garnier, whose name brings back to the minds, even of those who have not lived under his authority, the happiest association of faith and of science, blended in one individual. Next to him, it is sufficient to mention M. Mollevaut; and, since we must pass over in silence the names of the living, we should at least record a few of the illustrious veterans, who formed the first generations of the new French clergy: Mgr. Flaget, one of the first bishops, one of the angels of the American Church; MM. Ruben, de Gournay, de Saint Felix; then, the friend of the Bishop of Hermopolis, M. Boyer, in whom shone forth a candour, genius, faith, and virtue, worthy of the most glorious days.

Under such eminent masters grew up and flourished

one of the noblest generations of Levites that the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice has ever given to France. Among the pupils were the last conquests of M. de Frayssinous, of Father M'Carthy, of Cardinal de Rohan, men who by the strength of their reasoning, and their persuasive and touching eloquence, consoled the Church amidst the humiliations she had to undergo during the last years of the restoration. There were also among them some distinguished disciples of M. de la Mennais, then especially remarkable for their piety and love for the Church. Thus, on the eve of fresh storms, were to be found under the recently constructed cloisters of the Seminary of Paris, a select number of prelates, who became the edification of their flocks; thus was Saint-Sulpice a nursery of vocations destined to adorn most of the religious congregations; and thus were sheltered beneath the same roof a host of apostles, ready to become, on distant shores, confessors and martyrs of the faith.\*

In the midst of such masters and such pupils, M. Libermann should naturally hold a secondary position; one even obscure and unnoticed by the greater number. This rank, humble as it was, he would have taken both by taste and choice, even if all external circumstances had not combined to assign it to him as a necessity. If he became, little by little, the apostle of the seminary, it was because he was always a truly edifying and holy seminarist. From the beginning he walked humbly and unperceived, though with great interior perfection, on the common path of ecclesiastical simplicity and regularity, laid open to all, and almost universally followed by the students of Saint-Sulpice.

\* Such as the bishops of Angoulême, Blois, Metz, Périgueux, Poitiers, Rennes, Saint Dié, Mgr. La Carrière, Mgr. Luquet, and others.

To proceed thus onward, for five years, on the beaten path of obedience, with a constant and resolute step, especially when he had entered immediately after events which naturally ought to have disturbed all the powers of his soul, is a sign of no ordinary virtue. It is worthy of remark that M. Libermann, but lately a Jew, became, as soon as converted, an exemplary seminarist, both as regards piety and application to study. In his correspondence with his family, he informs us, "that, excepting the spiritual and some other exercises, he was continually occupied, from morning till night, in the study of theology." The manuscripts which he has left testify sufficiently to his assiduity in carefully condensing the lectures of his learned professors.

Nevertheless, that which he sought above all was not the science which inflates, but the charity which edifies. It was before the crucifix that he studied; it was from the contemplation of the sacred wounds of the Redeemer, and from earnest meditation on the Holy Scriptures, that he drew abundantly the science of the saints, without which the priest cannot be truly "the light of the world and the salt of the earth." The humble seminarist contented himself with punctually following, day after day, the rule common to all, peacefully, unassumingly, and in the holy presence of his God. But, for a considerable time, he proceeded no further. Whatever were the ardour of his faith and the aspirations of his zeal, he by no means pretended to set himself up as a censor or a model to those around him. For several years he was, in reality, as one who saw not. He has himself declared, that he passed the first years of his seminary-life, without examining, judging, or censuring anything: "*During five years,*" he wrote one day, with special emphasis, "*I have neither judged nor examined anything.*"

He silently profited of whatever afforded him information, instruction, or edification. Should there be anything less edifying, he still knew how to derive advantage from it, to do better, and to humble himself. Had he to give an advice, he gave it in all simplicity. He never shrank from a work of charity, zeal, or piety; and, if in his generous efforts he encountered difficulties, he surmounted them by the simplest of all means—Humility. Such was the destiny of the venerable servant of God that, during his whole life, humility, his most cherished virtue, was constantly moving to and fro, between two rocks, between action in the light of day, at the inevitable risk of being perceived, and inaction, which he would have considered cowardice. Ever docile to the spirit of God, whose every movement he was most attentive to observe, he knew how on all occasions to steer the fittest and safest course. This prudent reserve he maintained, not only in his relations with others, but also, what is more difficult, in respect to himself.

Yet, notwithstanding his reserve he was already an apostle. At an early period, he heard an interior voice urging *him*, who could as yet hardly express himself in a new tongue, to speak the language of God. He, who seemed to be overwhelmed by his natural timidity and inexperience, who understood his position of a stranger and of a neophyte, had to overlook all that, to treat of spiritual matters, in presence of the friends of Calixte Frèze, the disciples of Frayssinous, of de la Mennais, or of Father M'Carthy. This he did, and with such a striking success that he attracted general attention. "Have you heard the little Jew speak of the good God?" Such were the words whispered among the students during their recreation hours.

From the beginning, there rallied around him the



sodality of *Zélateurs*, a pious association which had existed long before his entrance into the seminary. Conversing more freely with those, he did not hesitate to tell them at once what he believed to be the true road to perfection, what he called the only foundation of true holiness—*self-denial*.

From that day, a first obstacle manifested itself: virtue had to struggle to develop on a larger scale. At each meeting, explanations became more precise, and objections were put forward more clearly. The most docile set to work; initial fervour lent its wings and helped to overcome obstacles; but several would soon lose courage. Then, at the next reunion, a festival, a mystery, a subject of meditation, furnished the apostle of total abnegation with arguments so persuasive, with applications so well adapted, that they were once more forced to surrender. It was, however, easy to foresee that the association of *Zélateurs* was about to undergo a transformation.

Without disagreeing with his first associates, M. Libermann endeavoured to make an appeal to a more numerous and, consequently, more courageous band. Accordingly, at an appointed hour, well nigh all the fervent students were assembled in a retired hall of the seminary. He spoke with great energy on the following proposition: "To live entirely for God, and to die entirely to one's self." M. Olier's maxim: "To live entirely for God," was his *ultimatum*. The adhesion of some and the separation of others were effected in a manner altogether unperceived in the seminary. Each one advanced freely on the road of the children of God, approaching more or less the pathway opened for them by the courageous neophyte. Many persisted in following closely on his footsteps and breathing the perfumes which he exhaled on his path. Like Calixte Frère, he had become a centre around which

many were to unite for their resurrection and perseverance. Need we wonder that he should also be for some a sign of contradiction ?

The amiable subdeacon of Gap, Calixte Frère, as learned as he was pious, had retained until his premature but saintly death, that charming disposition which, even at college, had won for him from his younger companions the surname of Angel of Sisteron. At Saint-Sulpice none were excluded from his attractive friendship, and students of every shade of character could be seen, at all times, gathered around him. Although constantly suffering and lingering at the foot of the cross, he was ever gentle, kind, and affable to all. His cross, like the painted cross of the catacombs, seemed to shoot forth flowers.

A more austere disciple of M. Olier, a Jew formed after St. Paul, M. Libermann was destined rather to finish in a more decided form, than to continue on the same plan, the work of Calixte Frère : his vocation was to give the bread of the strong after the milk of childhood. If there were many natural charms in Calixte Frère, there were few in M. Libermann. He was, indeed, to use the words of Bossuet, " The Jew of unprepossessing appearance and of short stature, with his rude accent and his speech, which betrayed the stranger, exhibiting the plain and repulsive face of his Gospel."

And what shall this picture become, when we shall have to add the horrible stroke of epilepsy and the no less visible convulsions caused by his spiritual conflicts ? It may be easily imagined, that the difference existing between the repulsive features of the poor convert, and the attractive exterior of the Angel of Sisteron, should have produced indifference in some, and in others a resolution to follow a different course.

Nevertheless, the humble Jew was not devoid of graceful

charms and attractiveness. To the fresh impressions of baptismal grace he added the blessings which abound in the novitiate of the priesthood ; it may be said that he was lavishly adorned with them. The gift of tears, which was then accorded to him in an eminent degree, betrayed, despite himself, the abundant dew of the heavenly graces that filled his fervent soul. During the moments of his communing with God, in meditation, in presence of the Blessed Sacrament, at the holy table, he seemed to melt under the breath of the Holy Ghost. Standing or kneeling, he could be seen, his face turned towards heaven, every feature immovable, his gaze fixed on an object so full of sweetness in its contemplation, two streams of tears flowing abundantly from his eyes. It was often remarked, that these tears, which seemed to ascend from his heart, to be freed at his eyelids, never altered in the least the contemplative immobility of his look. Such a picture would forcibly fix the attention of the beholder ; and, forty years afterwards, his masters and fellow-students still preserved it fresh in their memories.

His appearance left upon all a lasting impression. "At his smile, at his look, at the movement of his lips," says one of his companions, "one involuntarily thought of the gentle simplicity of the dove." After an interval of many years, Mgr. George wrote from Perigueux : "To speak in the graceful language of St. Sulpice, I was appointed his *Angel* on his arrival at that holy house. I remember that I felt greatly humbled and confused, at bearing that title, especially by the side of that holy youth, whose virtues have left in my mind a remembrance as precious as it is delightful."

We transcribe, with religious respect, the testimony of another prelate, Mgr. Dupont des Loges, who, at the present day, edifies and consoles the mourning diocese of

Metz. "My memory," he writes, "supplies me with few details concerning M. Libermann's first years at the seminary of Saint-Sulpice. He always avoided singularity; a modest exterior, a simple and uniform conduct, a manner of living, common in appearance, hid from the eyes of men the treasures of grace which adorned this chosen soul: a few only of his companions had divined his worth. One of the things which struck me most was his devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. It is customary for the seminarists of Saint-Sulpice to pass, every week, half-an-hour in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, each going on the day and at the hour assigned him. It was my function, during several years, to draw up the list of adorers. In order to have with me, during the adoration, a model who might excite my devotion, a fervent soul that might repay our Lord for my distractions and slothfulness, I appointed M. Libermann for the same day and hour as myself. I had every reason to congratulate myself on this innocent expedient. How often did I contemplate him at my side, in a sort of ecstasy, his breast heaving with burning sighs, his countenance on fire, his eyes half open, and overflowing with silent tears, presenting a picture somewhat similar to that of Saint Aloysius at the foot of the altar! This image is still present to me, still moves and confounds me."

It is natural to conclude that this affective prayer was a kind of perpetual adoration, which he continued even when away from the tabernacle, and which often naturally led him back to the holy altar. His room resembled an oratory: a table, covered with a white napkin, represented the altar; a crucifix was laid upon it; on the wall above hung an old engraving, a remarkable portrait of M. Olier. These objects, with one or two pictures, composed the only

adornments of his cell.\* M. Libermann cherished a great love and veneration for M. Olier, his great model. He had always at hand some of his treatises, especially his "Catechism of Interior Life," the reading of which he recommended even to laymen. But the Gospel according to St. John was the favourite food of his soul, and the substance of his daily meditations. He loved it, because there Our Lord speaks more abundantly than in the other evangelists. With these means, aided by the guidance of his holy directors, and the virtuous examples of many fervent seminarists, who, in their turn, looked on him as a pattern, the generous convert could not but make rapid progress in the path of perfection.

Souls favoured with sensible graces are not always exempt from the faults and imperfections of human nature. "Sometimes," says the venerable servant of God, "these souls become hasty, taciturn, discontented with everybody and with everything; at other times they envy those whom they see more favoured than themselves; they blame and censure rigorously all others."

That M. Libermann was not subject to such faults his many fellow-students of Saint-Sulpice are ready to testify.

\*The crucifix was for some time in the possession of a missionary, M. Douay, who, when leaving for Cochin-China, entrusted it to M. Ducournau, a Marist father. The latter, after having for a long time preserved it as a relic, generously ceded it to the disciples of M. Libermann. "I have from him," says another of his fellow-students, "a relic which is very dear to me: it is an engraving, on rough paper, representing St. Vincent de Paul. M. Libermann gave it to me, at the epoch of my deaconship, 20th December, 1828.—On the reverse of the engraving are written the following words, preceded by the sign ✠ 'Dilectissimo in Christo Jesu diacono Goffreteau, F. M. P. LIBERMANN.' M. Libermann received minor orders on the same day." It is a custom, among those who are ordained, to exchange some pictures with one another.



They are unanimous in extolling the humble charity and unalterable sweetness of their holy companion. We cite but a few lines, written by a distinguished member of the clergy of Paris : “ I remember M. Libermann perfectly ; even his features are present to me in a most precise manner. . . . When collecting my thoughts before the image of this great servant of God, whom to have known, and to have had as a brother, I consider now more than ever as an honour, I think I can affirm that he constantly exhibited a signal goodness and serenity which were like the habitual reflections of an angelic soul.

“ His piety was proverbial amongst us, and there was connected with his person a spirit of holiness and respect which partook of veneration. It was easy to perceive, beneath a most graceful and amiable simplicity, a soul intimately united to God, and thoroughly conversant with meditation ; and, to express all I feel, when I compare him with those of my good confrères whose piety and virtue have left in me the most salutary impressions, I find none who has surpassed him, none to whom I might have more spontaneously and more truly applied the words, *He is a Saint.*”

But it was especially in his relations with the poor, who obtained relief at the seminary, that he displayed his sweetness, goodness, and tender charity. Relating to this subject, one of his fellow-students favours us with the following narrative :

“ During a considerable period of our seminary career we were entrusted with the charge of distributing twice a week clothing and other articles to the poor of Paris ; whilst doing so I had many occasions of admiring his charity and tender compassion. I remember, among others, the following incident :—When I was present for the first time at this distribution, I found that these good



people, in their eagerness to receive what was destined for them, were hurrying forward with too much precipitation. I saw in this a disorder which I thought should be remedied, and I said to M. Libermann: Could we not tell them, that nothing will be given to those who come forward in such a manner?—‘Oh! how could we impose a penance on the unfortunate!’ he instantly replied, in an accent marked with astonishment and commiseration. We gave in turn a brief instruction to these poor people. One should have heard him speak to understand the charity with which he was animated. His words were very simple, like all his actions, but most gentle and penetrating.”

Whilst he was extremely kind and charitable to others, M. Libermann was very rigorous towards himself. Even at that time, he was already a saint, as is asserted by all who knew him at Saint-Sulpice. A few words of the same witness give us an idea of the spirit of fervour and mortification which, even then, consumed the holy convert: “I still remember that, whilst occupying a room next to his, I was often awakened in the middle of the night, by the sound of the hard strokes of the discipline with which he lacerated his body, already so weakened by sickness. Besides, it was easy to perceive by his whole conduct that he was extremely mortified, although an air of sweet gaiety was always reflected on his countenance.”

Abnegation and mortification for himself, sweetness and amiability for others, such were from the outset, and such remained to the end of his life, the chief characteristics of M. Libermann.

He had started late upon his course, but he advanced with giant strides on the path of self-denial and of interior life. We might justly apply to him what was

said of the Venerable Grignon de Montfort, during the stay of this servant of God at Saint-Sulpice:—"From the very beginning he appeared in the midst of those fervent youths like an eagle which raises itself aloft, and loses itself in the clouds, leaving far behind even the most perfect ones."

Yet, not without an effort did he thus raise himself to a high degree of perfection, nor was he permitted to enjoy long the delights of heaven. His life was not to be spent on Thabor, but almost entirely on Calvary, at the foot of the cross. He, too, like his Divine Master and Model, was to be a master and a model of apostles, of men of sacrifice; like Jesus, he was to be a man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity.

God seldom stamps a soul with the seal of His holiness, without marking it first with that of His Cross. M. Libermann knew this by experience, both in himself and in others. In speaking of this preparatory trial, we shall borrow his own words:—"As soon as the finger of God touches a soul, to fashion it to His image and to the resemblance of the saints, a first and lively charm draws it away from exterior things, and causes it to enter into itself. If divine grace meets with a great amount of energy and activity, a conflict will almost of necessity ensue. The soul contracts, as if to fortify itself; the superior faculties are brought together, bent, and sometimes entangled in this almost inevitable but momentary concentration. Another state soon follows, when these compressed forces, reassuming a freer action, produce, so to speak, an explosion in the most sensitive part of the soul. Contradictory movements almost simultaneously manifest themselves: the noblest and purest passions of the soul are at war with the lowest; and at the same time as the superior part sets itself free and is being illumined, the imagination and sensibility appear to

precipitate themselves into the inferior regions. Trouble is then considerable, and the soul feels great difficulty in preserving its equilibrium. After this first commotion, one or other of the two following alternatives usually occurs: if sensible grace remains in the midst of this effervescence, then the spiritual delights reach a species of intoxication, and the soul is easily carried to pious excesses of fervour and mortification. St. Bernard and St. Francis of Assisium have evidently passed through this state. If, on the contrary, the well of sensible devotion dries up, the soul falls into a kind of vacuum; its insatiable aridity gnaws its very self, and from this abyss of desolation rise the mournful wails of sorrow, melancholy, and of an overwhelming weariness of things and persons. St. Francis of Sales, in his youth, underwent this dreadful crisis; he went so far as to persuade himself that he was predestined to damnation. M. Olier, at a riper age, in the full strength of his manhood, felt the same shock, with so great an intensity, that he seemed struck with dizziness: one might have believed that idiotcy had seized *him* who was to astonish Bossuet, and to be acknowledged by Fenelon as his master."

Did M. Libermann experience all these symptoms? Was the first explosion, to use his own expression, followed by either of the alternatives we have just described? We may unhesitatingly affirm, that he has passed through both of these states in succession. This explains two different aspects of his piety, which were remarked, during the first years of his seminary-life. To the most expansive effusions of devotion, to a spiritual joy, which seemed to glow from his whole person, to light up his countenance, to inflame his words, succeeded, towards the second year, a something more austere, a sort of uneasy state of suffering, and, as it were, an effort of some

concentrated pain. To understand the real state of his soul, it is important to distinguish carefully these two phases of his spiritual life.

M. Libermann had made his first steps in the ecclesiastical career, happy, as we have seen, at his outset in the seminary, ascending, so to speak, by a gentle and flowery slope, to the God who was to rejoice his youth, and who already, at the holy altar, showed him the crown of the priesthood. He was soon to break with the world, by the irrevocable step of the subdeaconship; and he now understood more keenly the entire sacrifice of the soul—the total annihilation of the old man. The future subdeacon already beholds the face of his Heavenly Father and the radiant tabernacles of the land of bliss. Intense joy fills his soul; he shall, at last, make some return to his God for all the graces he has received. The day of being glorified is nigh; that day which he had hailed with all the desires of his heart is at hand.

For many, the period of this solemn sacrifice is one of supreme agony. It is often the moment the enemy chooses for making the last effort to launch young men back into the world. At the approach of the subdeaconship, all earthly affections are submitted to a most painful trial. A father and a mother deeply wound and move the heart. Nor could our pious acolyte have been unmindful of his childhood, of his relatives, particularly of his aged father, who, till then, continued his furious persecutions against him.

Not the least painful of the many trials which M. Libermann had to undergo, was assuredly his struggle against his father, who had endeavoured by every means, both of persuasion and intimidation, to stop him on his way, and to bring him back, with or against his will. M. Drach, sole confidant of their correspondence, could not

recall to mind, without a feeling of horror, the letters of the frenzied rabbin of Saverne, his imprecations against his Christian sons, and his blasphemies against our Divine Redeemer and our holy religion.

Such a contest with those one loves most in this world is always painful, but never and nowhere is it more so than it is in Jewish families ; Providence seems to have ordained that the natural ties should be closer there than elsewhere. The isolation of the Israelites in the midst of Christian populations, their surprising permanency, after more than three thousand years, and all that has been said of their early education, give us a sufficient idea, on the one hand, of the strength of those intimate connexions which link their families together, and, on the other, of the abyss which separates the Jew from the Christian. From this we may gather, how painful must be the rupture which severs the Jewish convert from all home affections, and childhood's love—love and affections which nowhere on earth can ever again be found in a like degree. Those feelings, naturally good, are not destroyed by faith—faith rather ennobles and strengthens them. The greatest grief of M. Libermann must have been, to behold by the light of the true faith the profound darkness in which his father was still plunged ; to see that father's obstinacy augment in proportion to the graces that shone on his family, thus witnessing at the same time the ever-increasing miracles of God's Mercy, and the more and more terrible manifestation of His incomprehensible Justice.

Although M. Libermann had avoided acquainting his father with his conversion, his ecclesiastical vocation, and his entrance into Saint-Sulpice, all was known at Saverne, even from the year 1828, and the letters he received from home were more and more vehement. One of them was delivered to the seminarist during recreation, as is the


custom. He could not peruse it, without moistening it with his tears, in presence of his fellow-students. They saw him overwhelmed with anguish, and unable, amid his sobs, to refrain from uttering these words of the martyrs: "*But I am a Christian! I am a Christian!*" In a long and very touching reply, M. Libermann gave to his father all the motives of his conversion, established by evident proofs the divinity of the Christian religion, and implored him to follow his example with all his family. This letter remained unanswered, and, shortly after, the heart of the holy seminarist was plunged into the deepest grief, by the sad intelligence that his beloved father had died an obstinate Jew.

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## CHAPTER II.

M. Libermann's sickness and other trials at Saint-Sulpice,  
1827-1832.

WO months after his Baptism, M. Libermann suffered from a nervous affection serious enough to be remembered eighteen months afterwards, when he wrote to one of his brothers: "My nervous disease is, I believe, on the decline; since the month of February, last year, I have not had any strong attacks. I rise now at five in the morning, and I make my meditation, an exercise which might especially tend to irritate my nerves; and yet I am in no way affected: it is, no doubt, a grace which God has bestowed on me, and which I have not merited." (27th July, 1828.)

Vacation was near. M. Libermann spent it at the Seminary of Issy. The pure and vivifying air of this pious solitude added fresh vigour to his constitution, so that at the opening of the next scholastic year he was strong enough to resume, with renewed ardour, his course of studies. He had now sufficient cause to believe himself completely restored, after he had for an entire year, without interruption or fatigue, gone through all the studies and exercises of the seminary. For this reason he had the consolation of receiving Minor Orders from the hands of Mgr. de Quélen, on the 20th December, 1828.

But his recovery was far from being complete: symptoms of nervous debility soon reappeared, to such a degree, that he thought he should have to interrupt his studies, and even leave the seminary. It was then he wrote to

his eldest brother in the following terms: "At the end of last year my nerves tormented me very much. I think that mental application has fatigued me. As soon as I try to work a little, I feel an excessive pressure, as if my forehead and temples were girt with an iron band. All this compels me to rest for a few years, until my health is entirely restored. I am resolved to retire for some time from the seminary. I do not know as yet whither I shall go; but this gives me no anxiety. The Abbé Auger, director of a college at Paris, has offered me an employment wherein I would not have to study. Notwithstanding my sufferings and trials, I am always very content, and I can assure you that I have never been so happy. . . ."

Nevertheless, the holy acolyte remained at Saint-Sulpice and resumed his theological course once more. The quickness of his intelligence, and the accuracy of his judgment supplied whatever his feeble health took away from the assiduity of his labour, and the energy of his application. Moreover, his pious directors, who greatly admired his virtues, did not wish to relinquish the hope of advancing him to Holy Orders; and when the time for ordination arrived, they believed it their duty to call him to subdeaconship. He accordingly passed his examination and followed the exercises of the retreat. But God had reserved other and greater trials for His servant. On the very eve of the great day on which he was to consecrate himself irrevocably to the service of his Divine Master, he was struck, as if by an invisible hand, and a most violent crisis caused all his most cherished hopes to vanish. He was in the room of his spiritual director, giving him, with his usual tranquillity, and without any apparent fatigue, an account of his interior. Standing in front of the fire-place, he is suddenly seized by a violent nervous convulsion: his features are distorted, his eyes

become fixed and grow dim, his lips turn livid and are covered with foam; struggling for breath, he falls insensible at the feet of his director, who courageously takes him in his arms and carries him to his bed.

The symptoms of epilepsy were manifest, and his directors had to conform in his regard to the laws of the Church, which, in such cases, prohibits admission to holy orders. Thus was the sorely-tried seminarist struck with the falling sickness, a disease which the world justly considers as the most dreadful of all evils.

We have mentioned this terrible disease, and we wish to evade none of the canonical, theological, and physical consequences arising therefrom. We confess that we are in presence of an epileptic. How shall we hereafter speak of the spiritual ways which God wished him to follow, without having at once to meet the objections of many who, in the name of a so-called science, will ascribe his holiness to his sickness, and his progress in holiness to the gradual progress of epilepsy, which, they say, often causes the intelligence to wander through the most extraordinary and most imaginary regions?

We may, however, regardless of the opinion of human science, fearlessly advance in our labour, on the one hand because, regarding epilepsy, the progress of science has been slow, and its investigations most elementary; on the other hand, because even those elementary experiments of science have not been verified, but totally contradicted in the case of M. Libermann.

This dreadful disease has, up to the present day, defeated all the efforts and disconcerted all the theories of science. The *Dictionnaire des sciences médicales* begins its article on "Epilepsy," by saying, that "It is a sickness so extraordinary, and so far beyond all comprehension or explanation, as regards its causes and symptoms, that the

ancients believed it to proceed from the anger of the gods." Although Hippocrates contested this belief, he nevertheless gave it the name of "*The Sacred Malady*." Aretæus calls it the "*evil of Hercules*;" and Celsus, one of the last physicians of pagan Rome, styles it the "*morbus sacer et major*."\*

This avowed ignorance of science, regarding epilepsy, would of itself be a sufficient answer to all the scientific objections which might be brought to bear in our case. Besides, if science declares her incompetency, not alone to cure the disease, but even to discover its origin, its natural development, its causes and symptoms, that incompetency becomes still more manifest as regards the relations which epilepsy might have with the intellectual, and especially with the supernatural order.

Being in presence of an epileptic who, before and after his most terrible attacks, has been favoured with graces of the highest order, we do not hesitate to see here something more than mere natural phenomena, and we fear not to declare, that we consider his disease as one of those mysterious means which God is frequently pleased to employ in order to accomplish the work of divine grace. God can still select the weak to confound the strong, and what is humble and infirm to confound what is glorious and full of human wisdom.

During ten years, M. Libermann was the agonising victim of so awful a sickness. It had seized him at the moment he was about to take his final step in the sanctuary, as subdeacon. A barrier, a canonical impedi-

\* "*Dictionnaire des sciences médicales.*" t. xii, p. 510, art. d' *Esquirol*. —The treatment of epilepsy has, at all times; baffled the efforts of medicine. In 1852, Dr. Lelut wrote as follows: "I have charge of the epileptics at the Salpêtrière. I have treated thousands of unhappy patients of both sexes, a prey to this sickness. *I have seen none, or nearly none, cured.*" (*Du pronostic et du traitement curatif de l'épilepsie, par le Dr. Herpin, Paris, 1852, p. 481.*)

ment, was thrown across his path, and, in all probability, was to keep him away for ever from the sacred steps of the altar. His malady had commenced exactly at the age when, according to an aphorism of Hippocrates, it is usually incurable: "Epilepsy," he says, "when coming at the age of twenty-five, generally lasts till death." It was precisely at that age that M. Libermann was first attacked. Since then, the violent crisis, called the *great evil*, came at certain periods more or less distant; but the minor symptoms, called the *little evil*, were very frequent. During the first years, the attacks were repeated and severe; if later on they appeared to decrease, it was only because the malady seemed to meet no further resistance in the exhausted frame of the sufferer.

All those who saw him during these sorrowful humiliations, were struck with his admirable serenity; no one perceived an interruption in the joyous and kind amenity and charity which accompanied his relations with others; no one ever surprised him in any of the melancholy fits which are usually observed in those who suffer from epilepsy. M. Libermann was an exception to rules which science lays down as universal: "After their attacks," says the *Manuel de médecine*, "all epileptics are sad, ashamed, and very susceptible; the fits are often accompanied by a deep melancholy, with an inclination to commit suicide. Almost in every case, a succession of these attacks causes an alteration in the intellectual faculties. In most patients, the memory is weakened little by little, and the intelligence gradually loses its energy; in others, the crisis is followed by real and most violent fits of mania, which bring them insensibly to the fatal term of insanity or death."

Now, it is undeniable that for over ten years M. Libermann was subject to this disease, in all its physical and

moral intensity. Whence did it come that he had precisely those dispositions of mind which were in direct opposition to the inevitable symptoms of this malady? How was it, that instead of constantly progressing towards the fatal term of idiotcy, he became an experienced director of souls, an accomplished master in the spiritual life? How has he been able, in his conversations, letters and treatises, to discuss with a rare facility, and frequently in quite a superior manner, the most profound questions of mystical divinity? How was it, that at the end of ten years of epileptical disorder, he wrote his admirable Commentary on the Gospel of St. John? On the whole, human science is reduced to take refuge in incompetency and in a modest silence. But the problem is still more complicated, and that in two ways.

Hypochondria, which this malady develops, is proportionate to the frequency of the crises; and it increases with their intensity. Now, it is certain that, during the first five years of his sickness, he was subject to very many and very violent attacks. He would be seized on the threshold of a door, on a staircase, in the midst of a crowded recreation-hall, without even being able to move out of sight or out of danger. He had to be lifted up, to be carried aside, that he might slowly recover and resume his wonted appearance. Yet, it was specially during these five years that he abounded and "superabounded" with a joy, which glowingly beamed forth from his countenance, and attracted the attention of all the witnesses of his humiliations.

Later on, the malady was on a noticeable decrease. Yet, it is in this second period that we must place five years of spiritual dryness, the bitterness and desolation of which he only who has personal experience of such, could adequately describe.



It is evident that in the case of M. Libermann the natural order is reversed, and that the effects produced upon his soul by epilepsy are in a twofold and direct opposition to the observations of science. To the five years of violent crises, there corresponds not a state of increasing melancholy, but one of great interior delights, and of a joyful and unalterable peace, whilst to the increase of his physical strength, there corresponds a most painful period of spiritual desolations. This contrast is so unusually exceptional, that to illustrate it, even by means of analogies, we must have recourse to reminiscences from the Gospels.

Let us recall to mind the joys of Thabor, the transports of the three happy disciples, the exclamation of St. Peter: "Lord, it is good for us to be here, let us build three tabernacles!" But the Lord speaks of His sorrowful Passion; and here He is presented with a young epileptic, struggling on the ground, foaming, and gnashing his teeth.

Compare these two pictures. Like the poor incurable child of the Gospel, the sorrow-stricken acolyte falls wretchedly upon the earth; yet, he still remains on the mountain of contemplation; he hears the voice of the Eternal Father, Whose arm spared not even His own well-beloved Son; he reposes under the tent, and there feels happy with "*his dear malady.*" He is at the same time Job covered with ulcers, and Job "in the days of his youth, when God was secretly in his tabernacle, and when the lamp of God was shining over his head, whilst he walked by His light in darkness."

"One of his first fits of epilepsy," says a fellow-student, "came upon him during recreation, in the large exercise-hall, where we were walking on account of the bad weather. I was by his side with one or two other seminarists. We carried him to his room, laid him on his bed, and only left him after the crisis had completely disappeared. It

would be difficult for me to say with what serenity and gentle gratitude he spoke to us, from the moment he had recovered consciousness."

"It was from himself," says another of his companions, "that I heard of his being subject to the falling-sickness. He appeared to be no more affected by it than if it were a mere trifle. I believe that within his heart he was rejoiced and thankful to God for his trial, as for a grace and favour. I have seen him several times in humiliating circumstances, in the presence of his superiors and fellow-students. There he was in his true element: not the least sign of embarrassment or anxiety could then be perceived in him; he always showed forth the same modest and graceful serenity."

"About this time," says another witness, "a German prelate, well known for his eminent virtues, who was looked upon as a real *Thaumaturgus*, was spending a few days at Saint-Sulpice. Many spontaneously conceived the idea of asking him to offer up a novena for M. Libermann, in whom all took the liveliest interest. The prelate readily acceded to their desire, but he wished M. Libermann to give his consent, and to unite in intention with their prayers. But the holy seminarist replied, that he did not deserve that God should work a miracle in his behalf; that he would feel grateful to the prelate if he deigned to offer up the novena, but that he did not think he ought to ask such a favour. I believe that the novena was not offered up, but the venerable prelate was greatly edified by so strong a faith."\*

After the preceding fact, we will not be surprised at

\* This prelate was probably Prince Alexander de Hohenlohe, very renowned at that time, on account of divers extraordinary cures attributed to his prayers.

hearing M. Libermann reply in these terms to one of his friends, who wished him perfect happiness : “ You wrote to me, my dearest, saying that you would wish to see me happy. I do not know what you mean by that. Would you wish me to be rich, in good health, and to suffer nothing here below ? Unhappy man ! you wish me to be in hell ! Oh ! my dear friend, leave me my poverty, my dear malady, and a thousand other sufferings ; it is only sufferings which can render me like our Lord Jesus Christ. If you wish to see me happy, come and see me ; and your wish will be fulfilled. I am a Christian. Our Lord Jesus Christ has died for me. I am almost overwhelmed with His graces and blessings. I share, in a slight degree, His sufferings and His cross ; and I hope that He will give me still more of them ; and why should I not be happy ? O my God ! what, then, is required to be happy ? ”

Thus was accomplished to the very letter, in the humble acolyte, that saying of the great Apostle : “ *Virtue is made perfect in infirmity.* ” His virtue was completed and perfected by a humiliating and cruel sickness, and, like St. Paul, he loved to delight in his infirmities.

In consequence of these infirmities his feebleness was so great, that he could hardly remain on his knees during the Communion. When hearing Mass, he would be sitting aside in a little chapel, dedicated to St. Joseph, to whom he had, during his whole life, a special and most affectionate devotion. He had not always strength enough to assist the celebrant at the altar ; but he always prayed with an angelic peace, and even with tears, which had their source, less in bodily sufferings than in the effusion of his soul wounded by divine love.

He was noticed at times as if struggling against epileptic attacks, which seemed to yield before the energy of his prayers ; and he continued to pray the more ardently as his

agony was nearer and of longer duration. This extreme fervour reflected itself on his sorrowful features, especially at the moment of Communion. Often the priest, who gave him the bread of the strong, felt himself pressed to unite his own aspirations with the fervent dispositions of this all but exhausted and fainting victim.

When he could have a presentiment of a crisis and reach his room in time, he would close the door, fall down upon his knees before the crucifix, sink into convulsions, and there, in the presence of his agonizing Redeemer, offer up his own humiliations and sufferings. There he was, broken as the insensate clay under the potter's hand, submitting in silent humility, and without resistance to the powerful hand of his God, Who fashioned him in blood and in tears, with a view to making him a model of sufferings, a new apostle of self-denial.

The violent crises came after long intervals, usually at the approach of ordinations. When on these occasions, he would see all his fellow-students in succession outstepping him, and joyfully entering into the divine splendours of the sanctuary, he would not only be fully resigned, but he would feel happy, and sincerely rejoice at their good fortune. After the imposing ceremonies of an ordination, there is a custom which reminds us of the ancient "*agapes*:" it consists in passing from rank to rank a chalice of wine, to which all the "*ordinands*" approach their lips. "After a period of fifteen years," writes one of his fellow-students, "I still remember, with the greatest delight, his recollected and humble appearance, as he presented the chalice to the '*ordinands*,' and with what an air of charity, joy, and tender interest, he would give them the kiss of peace, when the ordination was over."

By a special gift of God, as well as by the energy of his will, he visibly overcame approaching crises, even though

he was not engaged in sacred ceremonies. A pious lady was addressing to him a few words at the moment, when some slight symptoms began to alter his countenance. Perceiving that the lady was about to suffer as much as himself, he raised his eyes to heaven saying: "Lord, have pity on Thy servant!" He pronounced these words with so lively a sentiment of resignation and faith, that God heard his prayer and caused the threatening storm to be replaced by an increase of peace and joy, which enabled them to continue the conversation to the great consolation of both. His bodily sufferings only tended to lift his soul more and more towards God, and to raise him higher and higher in the supernatural life.

We learn from a letter which, in his humility, he recommended to be burned, that, during his seminary course, he passed through all the phases of the spiritual life; through the most ordinary, as well as through the most intense degrees of affective prayer; that he even plunged into states, which not only his directors, but even the best mystical treatises did not sufficiently explain. One of his directors, M. Gallais, did not hesitate to declare publicly that, in his opinion, there was not a soul in France more advanced in mental prayer than M. Libermann.

Could it be supposed that he lived in a state of bright illusion, and that he ignored the dreadful reality of his painful position? Let us hear him, as he freely unveils his feelings, in a letter to his brother: "I have not been promoted to the sub-deaconship, because my sickness has not yet entirely left me; and, probably, I shall have to suffer from it for a long time. Consequently, I shall not be able to advance for several years hence, and perhaps never. Is not this most painful and insupportable? Such would, no doubt, be the language of a child of this world, who only seeks his happiness in the goods of this earth,

and who acts as if there was no God for him. It is not so with the children of God, with true Christians: they are contented with what their heavenly Father sends them; for they know that whatever comes from Him is good and useful to them, and that the evils which God seems to send to His children are, in reality, only blessings. Woe to the Christian who has everything according to his will! he is not loaded with the favours of his God. This is why, my dear friends, I can assure you, that my dear sickness is a great treasure to me—one preferable to all the blessings which the world offers to its votaries—because those pretended blessings, in the eyes of a true child of God, are but dust and misery, only tending to estrange us from our Father Who is in heaven. As for me, I hope that if our Lord Jesus Christ continues to grant me the graces which, till now, He has bestowed upon me—graces which I no way deserve—I would lead a life entirely poor, and solely devoted to His service. I would be richer than if I possessed the whole world, and I defy the world to show me a happier man than I would then be; for who is richer than he who does not wish to possess anything? Who is happier than he whose every desire is accomplished? And why should you be afflicted on my account? Do you think that I shall die of hunger? O my God! Will the Lord, who feeds the birds of the fields, no longer find means to nourish me too? He loves me more than He loves the birds of the fields.

“But, you will say, if I were a priest I might have a position, and assist my family. No, my dear friends, it shall never be so; my body, my soul, my entire being, and all my existence belong to God; and, if I knew that there still remains in me the least fibre which would not belong to Him, I would tear it out, and trample it under foot, in earth and dust!



“Whether I be a priest or not, whether I be a rich man or a beggar, all that I am, and all that I possess belongs to God, and to no one else but to Him; and I beseech you not to ask me to act otherwise, for this would be unjust and useless on your part. The bonds of charity which bind and attach me to my Lord are too strong to be broken by you, even though you wished to do so, what I do not suppose; provided, however, that my Lord Jesus deign to continue to grant me His favours, which I certainly do not deserve. . .

“I have forgotten to tell you,” he adds, “that I shall remain at the seminary as long as the superior will be pleased to keep me. I have not asked him, nor shall I ask him, why he does not send me away from the house; perhaps he still entertains the hope of having me ordained in a year or two. However, I rather think that he keeps me through charity, for he knows that I have nothing, and he pities me. At all events, it is the Will of Providence that I should still remain, and it is my duty to act in conformity with that Will” (Letter of 8th July, 1830).

Although his physical emotions did not disturb his unalterable peace, he could not help being deeply affected by the social convulsions of his country, solely because they apparently compromised the interests of Almighty God. Dom John Salier, one of his fellow-students, who died in the odour of sanctity, at the Grande Chartreuse, writes as follows:—“I have often seen my friend, M. Libermann, shed tears, but never in such abundance as during the disturbances in July, 1830. The seminarists of Paris had gone at an early hour to spend their holiday at the Seminary of Issy, when about eight o’clock the tocsin and the sound of the cannon began to be heard. Soon after, intelligence arrived that Paris was in arms, and that impiety was triumphant. All the students were seized with

terror; everyone spoke only in whispers. Great fears were entertained regarding the superior-general and the directors, who had remained in Paris. Hours passed away, but no news reached their ears, save the redoubled roars of the cannon, and the distant sound as of a raging sea. Wishing to recollect myself, I directed my steps towards a solitary walk, where I met M. Libermann, his cheeks bathed in tears, and I asked him the cause of his affliction. 'No one,' he replied, 'thinks of our Lord, and yet it is now especially, that we should think of Him; that we should pray to Him; that we should unite, in order to succour souls; and that we should die, if so it were required.'"

The sorrowful acolyte forgot his own interests to think only of those of God and of His Church. This ardent love was rewarded by a remarkable vision, the details of which have happily been preserved by MM. Faillon and Pinault.

On the 16th July, 1831, on the festival especially consecrated in the seminary to the priesthood of our Lord, whilst, during High Mass, he was meditating on the mystery of the day, and renewing, no doubt, the humble confession of his unworthiness, our Divine Master, as if to answer his thoughts, deigned to show Himself to him, in a distinct and sensible form, as Supreme Pontiff. He saw the Redeemer, His hands streaming with light and graces, ranging around Him all the students of the seminary, going through their ranks, giving to each one a share of His bountiful gifts, excepting only himself. . . . At the same time, our Blessed Lord seemed to offer him his companions, and, as it were, to place at his disposal the treasures He had distributed to them all. He soon after related this vision, with his usual calm, to his spiritual director. Of the various interpretations which might have presented themselves to his mind, he accepted but one—that which assigned him the last place. Another extra-

ordinary fact is related by a lady—one of the witnesses who gave testimony in the process of the Ordinary, for the introduction of the cause of Father Libermann:—

On the day of her consecration to the Blessed Virgin, whilst she was assisting at Mass at Saint-Sulpice, she perceived around the head of the seminarist, who was attending the priest (M. Faillon), a luminous aureola, which was of such brilliancy that she thought for a moment his garments were on fire. She learned afterwards that the young seminarist was Jacob Libermann, a son of the rabbin of Saverne. M. Libermann became, in after years, her spiritual director, and, as such, addressed to her several of his admirable letters of direction.

The revolution of 1830 well nigh changed the prospects of his future career; but his new trials only brought his virtues into still greater prominence. An orphan, he had found in the seminary a second home. To him who had passed through the complicated phases of a spiritual birth which was not at an end, his masters were now more than ever necessary. Nevertheless, his superiors who had so long filled towards him the office of the kindest of fathers, being only the administrators of a diocesan seminary, had to discharge a rigorous duty. The revolution had dissolved several charitable associations, and had most likely affected that one which, until then, had so generously provided for the destitute convert. It had, besides, scattered a large portion of the funds destined for the education of ecclesiastical students in the seminary of Paris. Could the remainder be laid out, during an unlimited period, in favour of a subject, whose ultimate success seemed altogether hopeless? It was necessary to deliberate on this question, to solve it negatively, and to apprise M. Libermann of this severe conclusion. He received with perfect peace the communication which obliged him to leave the seminary.

And when, with an affectionate solicitude, they asked him what would become of him : " I cannot return to the world," he replied ; " God, I am confident, will provide for my wants." M. Carbon, to whom this reply was made, and all his masters, were so deeply moved by his heroic peace that, by a second decision, no less unanimous than the first, they generously determined to retain him, at the expense of the society, in their house of Issy as long as it should please God.

## CHAPTER III.

M. Libermann at the Seminary of Issy. His interior conflicts.  
1832-1837.



ON the left bank of the Seine, a few miles from Paris, rises a charming hill, whereon is situated the picturesque village of Issy. It possesses many of those beautiful villas which give to the surroundings of the French capital their handsome and pleasing appearance. One of the most attractive, perhaps, is the Branch House of the Seminary of Paris. There the novices of the Society of St. Sulpice are formed, in silence and solitude, to the spirit of their venerable founder, M. Olier; there also are trained up in their philosophical studies the future theologians of the seminary of Paris and the *élite* of the French priesthood. M. Libermann retired to this pious solitude about the middle of the year 1832. He could not have chosen a place more suited to his dispositions. But a place which may appear a Paradise or a Thabor is frequently, by God's permission, changed into a Garden of Olives or a Golgotha. Issy was to be for M. Libermann both an Eden and a Gethsemani, a Thabor and a Calvary. At first his health seemed to feel the strengthening influence of the pure air of Issy; but this amelioration did not continue. In a letter to his brother, he writes: "My health is always in the same condition. There has been an interval of fourteen or fifteen months, between one fit and another; but at the end of this period, there came another, but only a slight one. The next attack may delay as long, perhaps not; however, this matters little. Love

God with your whole heart; that is better than all things else" (Letter, Sept., 1835).

This improvement in his health enabled him to endure the greatest fatigues and to make himself generally useful in the seminary. He was the ever ready commissioner of all. Almost each day he made the journey from Issy to Paris, besides long walks through the city, carrying letters and parcels to and fro. Several times during vacation he was able to undertake, on foot, long and weary pilgrimages, so as to astonish his companions, as much by his indefatigable ardour, as by the fervour of his devotion. In 1835, he visited several seminarists of the diocese of Amiens, such as MM. Duquesnay and Daveluy, who were called to do so much good: the first in France, and the second on the missions, where he earned a martyr's crown. The Abbé Maugot speaks in the following terms of this charitable excursion: "I saw M. Libermann for the first time, in 1835, when he passed through Amiens. He appeared to me as if urged by a most burning desire of seeing our Lord Jesus Christ reign in all hearts. He only spoke to me of this good Master, and of the fervour of a great number of the Sulpician seminarists."

With the return of his physical strength, he felt his mental faculties recover their former energy; and this favour he humbly attributed to the goodness of God: "I perceive," he wrote to a friend, "that my mind has recovered a certain strength and elevation, and my judgment some extension and rectitude. But it is certain that it is grace alone which created what did not exist, fortified what was weak, and rectified what was defective. This is so true and so clear, that were I to become an infidel, my reason could never deny the existence and the action of grace in my soul." To renounce himself, and to live solely for God, was already the moving maxim of his conduct.



But the farther he advanced in the path of self-denial the more his soul was lost in a region of aridity and darkness, walking, as it were, on the ruins of self. Although constantly afflicted, both exteriorly and interiorly, it cannot be said that he had become familiarized with difficulties. As we penetrate further into the interior of his soul, we perceive more and more distinctly the work of death which is going on there; it echoes like the deadened sounds of an underground demolition, the last blows of which shake more deeply the very lowest foundations. M. Libermann himself confesses that, towards the end of this epoch, he had become, as it were, insensible to everything, particularly to joy. There was no room for joy in his broken heart, because, as the Scripture says, "There was nothing but solitude and affliction in his paths."

But, whilst nature was being demolished piece by piece, the edifice of grace and perfection rose higher and higher, and the desolate solitude of his soul was a sanctuary ever embalmed with the unruffled peace of the Lord.

It is especially during his sojourn at Issy that we must study the constant progress of self-denial, the gradual death of nature, that unremitting yet ever victorious struggle which caused, during several years, what we may call his sorrowful agony. The man of earth was gradually dying away, whilst the man of heaven was growing up amidst constant tribulations.

He suffered much and long, yet even his most intimate friends, whom he had always edified by his unalterable serenity, could hardly perceive that he no longer enjoyed his former delights; but they were astonished to hear him repeat several times that he was no longer able to meditate.

This trial must have lasted a considerable time, for long afterwards he made the same avowal to M. Pinault,

who, having found him overwhelmed by the weight of his afflictions, sought to encourage him by the remembrance of the saints, and the example of St. Vincent de Paul. "Alas!" he exclaimed, "St. Vincent de Paul was at least able to meditate."

Of all the sufferings by which a soul in a state of aridity is afflicted, inability to pray is the most poignant, for it is like the disgust of a sick man, who is tormented by a gnawing hunger in sight of a well-spread table. M. Libermann thus describes this state, in a letter to a novice: "The soul is afflicted, but is not in danger, it is not even sick; it resembles a man who is a prey to a violent headache; he suffers much, and the symptoms of his malady are very serious, but in reality nothing is injured. To such a soul meditation becomes impossible; for it is deprived of the use of its two most indispensable instruments—imagination and sensibility. The one is agitated by a storm; the other is in a state of aridity; and the soul, apparently annihilated amidst the restlessness of the senses, feels discouraged. Temptations are frequent: the whole sensible part wherein the good and evil passions reside is in a state of ebullition, and the effervescence is the more powerful, because, whilst the activity of the mind is violently agitated, we feel in our interior the greatest aversion for natural satisfactions. The spirit of faith remains; it desires to repose in God alone; it is the anchor which sustains the soul amidst the storm. Finally, the tempest will only serve to purify the atmosphere."

Add to these spiritual trials the humiliations and the inevitable consequences of his dreadful sickness. More than once he was struck down by the crisis as if by a sudden flash of lightning. On one occasion he nearly lost his life in a violent attack which seized him, as he was reaching the top of the stairs, in the philosophers' seminary.

The sudden shock might have thrown him backwards and precipitated him down stairs; he saw his danger and uttered a loud cry, which brought to his assistance all the occupants of the adjoining apartments. He was carried to the infirmary in fearful convulsions. M. Lombard, a physician of great practical experience, came soon afterwards. Knowing that in such cases the patients are usually, after the crisis, a prey to the gloomiest desolation, he was thinking of addressing him a few words of encouragement when, to his great surprise, he found that he had already recovered his serenity. His beautiful soul shone forth through his disturbed and sorrowful features, and in his looks there beamed an angel's smile. The physician had no sooner left the infirmary than he exclaimed: "What, then, is M. Libermann?" The infirmarian, M. Duquesnay, since Bishop of Limoges, did not at once fully understand the meaning of the question. "I know," continued the doctor, "what disturbances such crises produce in all the senses, and even in the innermost part of the soul. I have found him tranquil and almost happy; he must be either an angel or a saint."

However, M. Libermann sometimes experienced so great a disgust for life, that he could not entirely free himself from the strange temptation of committing suicide; he understood so well the danger of this temptation, that he had recourse to the scrupulous precaution of never keeping any sharp instruments either on his person or in his room.

One day, as he was passing over a bridge in Paris, in company with a seminarist, who was then in great affliction, he endeavoured to console him as best he could, when his companion, more and more disturbed, abruptly said: "It is all very well to give these advices when you are yourself happy and peaceful. It is easy to perceive,

by your tone and your appearance that you have never passed through such trials." . . . "Ah! my dearest," M. Libermann gently replied, "I do not wish you to pass through the painful ordeal through which I have passed. God grant that life may never be such a burden to you as it is to me! I can hardly pass over a bridge without being assailed by the thought of throwing myself into the river, to put an end to my sufferings. But the sight of my Jesus sustains me and gives me patience."

In addition to the infirmity of his body and the desolation of his soul, he had to endure the assaults of a spiritual agony, the bitterness of which cannot be described. God is pleased to train his servants on those interior battle-fields, where He Himself has descended and fought a fight unto death. It is, indeed, a fearful thing even in this life to fall into the hands of the living God! St. Teresa was terrified at the thought of such a trial; like holy Job, she asked the Lord why He was pursuing a dry leaf, and how so frail a straw could contend against a giant? This state is what St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi called the lions' den, and which M. Libermann in his turn described as the "*tomb of Lazarus.*"

"The goodness of the Lord," he says, in his commentary on St. John, "is immense in our behalf; but His merciful views being greater and more penetrating than ours, He permits us to expire in affliction, that He may afterwards enrich us with greater and more perfect graces. . . ."

In this trying state the soul is entirely benumbed and powerless; all her faculties are enveloped in darkness and tied up, as were the members of Lazarus in his tomb. Although a friend of Jesus, like Lazarus, the soul, if not assisted by the Lord, is unable to awaken from her piti-

able and terrible sleep, unable to rise or to make a single step towards her Beloved. Divine love is within the soul, as it was in the soul of Lazarus, but it appears latent and inactive; it cannot manifest itself by formal acts, yet it is sufficiently strong to attract the divine tenderness of Jesus. He Whose mind knoweth all, and Whose heart is replete with the tenderest love, goeth Himself to arouse His sleeping friend. "This is what Jesus does every day for those souls who possess within themselves His divine love, and who, spiritually, are in the same state as Lazarus, through interior incapacity, troubles, afflictions, and temptations of every kind, which overwhelm and bind them so much, that they feel as if they were dead. They are filled with cares, languor, and feebleness in the service of God; the fears and anguish of death surround them on all sides; sometimes the powers of their souls are so fettered and tied down that they are not even capable of being impressed by fear and anguish.

"Let such souls be of good courage! Jesus, their Lord, does not forget them. They cannot go to Him; they are constrained to remain buried in the dark sepulchre of their interior, unable to rise and go in search of Him, Who alone can cure them. But Jesus loves them, and delights in them. He says to His angels and saints: 'Our friend sleepeth; but I go, that I may awaken him from his sleep.' He makes him wait for some time, as he made Lazarus wait in the tomb. But sooner or later, He will come with the great tenderness and infinite mercy which fill His Adorable Heart; and by a new and even more perfect life than before, He will largely compensate for all the suffering, anguish, and sorrow which this soul will have sweetly, patiently, and confidently endured for His love."

Jesus came ; He had left Lazarus during four days in the tomb ; His new friend remained there more than four years, during which he saw all his faculties absorbed, his body broken and weakened, his soul made captive and desolate, his entire being overwhelmed with affliction—an object of repugnance to himself and to all others. Jesus came, not to raise him up to life, but to die with him, and in the intimacy of a common sepulchre, to reveal to him all the secrets of spiritual annihilation. This other Lazarus knew the cross, and what more did he want to know ? He measured its breadth, its weight, and its height, and from that time spoke so abundantly of this supereminent science that it was easy to perceive that he possessed it in its plenitude.

To understand even a part of his sorrowful state we should have surprised the agonising victim, seeking refuge in the chapel of Loretto, and there, alone in the most hidden corner of the *Santo Camino*, his forehead pressed to the earth, out-pouring in the presence of his Lord, the woful aspirations of his sorrowful soul. Who could express what those aspirations were ? They were the ineffable sighs of the Holy Spirit, when He is pleased to descend into a privileged soul, to cause her to pass through the crucible of tribulations, to make her hunger and thirst after justice, and to kindle in her the flame of apostolic zeal. To comprehend those sighs we should have followed the desolate acolyte, as he retired to the most solitary spot of the demesne, to kneel down before the statue of "*Our Lady of the poor*;" and there we should have attentively listened to the silent whisperings of his heart, the language of which the Angel of Gethsemani could alone understand.

One day, however, the venerable servant of God inadvertently betrayed his secret. To console a friend who



was sinking beneath the weight of similar trials, he has, as it were, traced his own picture, and reproduced a faint echo of his sighs at the *Santo Camino*, and of his fervent aspirations before “*Our Lady of the poor.*”

“Oh, man of sorrows and crosses!” he exclaimed, “how happy you are to have so excellent and so continual a share in the divine cross of Jesus! What more can be desired by a servant of God, after such great graces and favours? To labour for God’s glory, to convert souls, is no doubt a noble thing; but I assure you that I do not consider it so great or so glorious as to participate abundantly in the divine cross of Jesus. . . .

“A man crucified and reduced to the extremity in which you are, is, I confess, miserable, useless, incapable of anything, a burden to himself, on account of the attention which he must bestow on his body, and on account of all the afflictions which press upon his soul. In addition to that he is a burden to the society to which he belongs; he eats the bread of the poor without being able to do the least thing to gain it; he holds the place of another who might be able to render some service. Nothing in himself, no use to anyone, nothing before God, nothing before men; despised, unknown, forgotten, neglected, and looked upon with indifference as a useless man, he is pitied through charity as a poor man who is to be commiserated, because he is worthless to all his brethren, and only kept in the house through compassion, and for the love of God, without having any hope of doing the least good save to exercise the patience of others. Sometimes even he causes grief to his superiors, and to those who are more occupied in attending him, than they are in attending the most useful members of the community. What a life for the man of earth and dust! What a fearful torment for pride!—and that without any hope of a change for the better.

“But for the man of God, who has nothing so much at heart as to correspond with all the designs of sanctity and love, which God has in his regard, all these evils are so many treasures. He feels all his misery, poverty, and nothingness; he sees that men forget him; that they look upon him with indifference; that they pay attention to all others, and never think of him, or only do so with coldness, as of something insignificant. He knows all this, he feels it keenly, he is thoroughly penetrated by this thought; and his soul pours itself out before God with great love and profound humiliation. It is in this manner that he begins to embrace a life of holiness, by the separation from, and the abandonment of all creatures. His soul is ever prostrated before God. He finds nothing anywhere; in the end he cannot even bear the idea of seeking anything anywhere else but in God alone. This individual having nothing, and finding nothing either in himself or elsewhere, enters into his soul’s inmost recess, and there dwells in his poverty, destitution, and impotence before his God and Sovereign Lord. What an excess of love! What an admirable sanctity lies hidden in afflictions and humiliation! Oh, man of sorrows, be full of joy! The love of Jesus for your soul and the designs of His mercy on you are very great; but rejoice in the extreme humiliations of your heart, before Him and before all His creatures.”

It was just when all seemed to be dried up within M. Libermann’s soul, that copious streams of living waters began to gush forth around him. From the foot of “*Our Lady of the poor*,” from the sombre enclosure of the *Santo Camino*, he shall enter on an admirable apostolate, and enrich many souls with the treasures of his zeal, piety, and holy edification.

It was about this time that Providence furnished him with an excellent occasion of repaying the debt of grati-

tude he owed his masters, by the devotedness which he displayed and communicated to the students during the cholera. This memorable event exhibited, in the brightest light, the apostolic and truly sacerdotal spirit that pervaded the students of Saint-Sulpice, and which is admirably described by M. Libermann himself. After mentioning the change which the scourge produced in the religious dispositions of the people of Paris, the conversion of the celebrated Casimir Périer, the reception given in the hospitals to the proscribed archbishop, and the blessings invoked on him by the patients, he continues as follows :—“ The superior, having offered his services to the minister, informed the seminarists, that those who desired to attend the sick had only to give in their names; that they would remain at the seminary in Paris, while the rest of the community would repair to the country-house and continue their studies as usual. He told them at the same time that those who wished to go home might do so. Only four availed themselves of this permission, less perhaps through fear than at the request of their parents. The others gave in their names, earnestly soliciting as a favour to give their services to the patients. The superior, not being able to allow all to remain, selected thirty, and sent the others to the country-house. These latter were much afflicted; but being at the same time entirely resigned to the holy will of God, they obeyed with as much cheerfulness as if they had been granted what they had so much desired.”

In this long letter, which we reluctantly abridge, he does not, although writing to his brother, say as much as one word which would make him appear personally on the scene. But the circumstantial details sufficiently betray the eye-witness. It is known from other sources that he was the leader of the privileged band, and the soul of an apostolate, which was no less admired

than the heroism of his masters and of Mgr. de Quélen. "Those who remained in the service of the sick were inundated with joy; they attended the patients with a care and zeal worthy of their burning charity. Amongst the great number of sick persons received at the seminary, only forty-two died of the epidemic, and those were brought there when already in a dying state. . . ."

M. Libermann then speaks of the heroic courage with which the students assisted the sick and dying, and continues in these terms: "One of my friends, a fervent seminarist, related to me that once only he trembled while a poor man was dying in his arms, because he thought that he was unprepared, and had not received the last sacraments: which, however, was not the case, as the man had made his confession beforehand. The attention paid by the seminarists caused the conversion of all those who were brought to the seminary, however badly disposed they were previously. . . . It is also worthy of remark that up to this not a single student has taken the cholera, either of those who attend the sick or of those who are at the country-house, although human precautions have been almost entirely neglected. The most Holy Virgin, the loving patroness of Saint-Sulpice, has visibly protected us, and will protect us to the end."

## CHAPTER IV.

M. Libermann's apostolate in his family, 1826-52.



HE Apostle St. Andrew had no sooner made the acquaintance of our Blessed Lord than he endeavoured to procure the same blessing for his brother Simon, and St. Paul had no sooner entered on the path of truth than he was consumed with zeal for the salvation of his brethren who were still plunged in the darkness of unbelief. How astounding is the utterance of this zealous apostle! "I speak the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great sadness, and continual sorrow in my heart. For I wished myself to be anathema from Christ, for my brethren, who are my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom belongeth the adoption as of children, and the glory, and the Testament, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises: whose are the Father's, and of whom is Christ according to the flesh, Who is over all things, God blessed for ever" (Rom. ix. 1, 6.) Such must have been M. Libermann's feelings after his conversion, when he thought of his parents, relatives, and friends, and of the seven millions of Israelites who obstinately persevere in darkness, though they are surrounded on all sides by the divine splendours of the New Law. God had enkindled in his heart the same fire of love, charity, and zeal which inflamed the hearts of the Apostles. He had found a rich treasure, and this treasure he wished to communicate to others who were as needy as he had been. He had "*gone and seen the great*

*sight*" (Exod. iii. 3) of the Christians' camp ; he had perceived in the distance the promised land flowing with milk and honey ; and he thought with grief of his Jewish brethren still sojourning in the wilderness—nay, more, still held in a captivity more cruel than that of Pharaoh ; he wished to announce to them the glad tidings and to lead them through the Red Sea of the Precious Blood ; he had found Jesus, the true Messiah, and he wished to conduct all his brethren to the feet of his Divine Master ; he had met the fountain of life, and, like the Prophet Isaias, he desired to cry out :—"All you who thirst come to the fountain !"

He had spared neither prayers nor persuasion to bring about the conversion of his father, but God did not favour him with this consolation. His efforts were attended with greater success amongst the other members of his family ; he had the happiness to see five of his brothers become children of the Church and his spiritual brothers in Jesus Christ. The relationship of divine grace was infinitely dearer to his heart than that of nature. On receiving a visit from one of those converts, during his stay at Saint-Sulpice, he conducted him to the Church of Notre Dame, where both prayed together with such fervour that, when coming out, they embraced each other at the door of the church, shedding tears of joy. Holding his brother pressed to his heart, the holy seminarist exclaimed : "It is only now I recognise you ; if you were to forget your religion, remember that I would recognise you no longer." He was especially rejoiced at the conversion of his brother David, the last who made his abjuration. With a heart still overflowing with delight, the venerable servant of God describes the ceremony in the following letter :

"My very dear brother and my well-beloved sister in our



Lord Jesus Christ, I am going to give you an account of yesterday's delightful and holy ceremony; I reckon that day among the happiest and most pleasing of my life. David, at length, belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ! And why should I not rejoice? He has become my brother, according to the spirit; we are now united by that true fraternity which alone shall last through all ages. This grace is very great; let us pray to God that he may put it to profit.

"He was baptised on yesterday, at eleven o'clock. I think the ceremony lasted over an hour; it was most beautiful and touching; the eyes of all present, especially of the godfather, a man of great faith and piety, were filled with tears; David himself was extremely moved. I found him very well disposed, much better than I was when in the same circumstances. . . .

"He arrived in Paris, on the very morning you had announced; I was waiting for him at Felix's residence; David and myself remained together ever since. I introduced him to a Jesuit Father, to have him instructed in the Christian religion. The father was just the right man; from the first day they became very good friends. I did not, however, dare to tell him at once that I was bringing him to a Jesuit, lest I should frighten him: it was only when I saw that he was well pleased with him that I told him who the priest was. During eight days, they went amicably together through their business, and the father found him so well instructed that he did not hesitate to baptize him on Sunday, the Feast of Corpus Christi.

"Mr. Drach took care to procure him a godfather and a godmother, who were Mr. and Mrs. Récamier. I am delighted at this, because Mr. Récamier is a holy man, so full of faith that I could not help admiring him. I trust his example and prayers will influence our brother to

persevere in his good dispositions. On the other hand, when I saw the great interest M. Drach takes in us all, I was sensibly moved: he was all attention to assist David during the ceremony, standing by his side, making him rise and kneel when required, pointing out to him the prayers, and aiding him in all he had to go through. . . . The ceremony took place at the College Stanislaus. M. Drach invited only a few persons, because he knew David wished to make his abjuration without too much publicity. . . . I was especially touched by the exorcisms which are made at the door of the church. He received the names of Mary Joseph Philomena. After his Baptism he assisted at a low Mass, at which he received his First Communion, being still clothed in the robe of innocence. It was clearly visible, during all these beautiful ceremonies, how deeply he was penetrated with sentiments of faith and piety. On to-morrow (Tuesday), he will be confirmed in the convent of the Sacred Heart; the ceremony will take place at half-past eight o'clock. Behold, then, my dear sister-in-law, how much our Lord loads your good Mary Joseph with favours, and that in so short a time. Let us, I beseech you, pray that God may be pleased to preserve him in His grace, and to increase his piety and fervour, so that he may remain firm amidst the many dangers, to which he shall be exposed in America.

“ This occasion ought to be for us a time of special renewal of fervour, as it recalls to our memory all the graces God has bestowed on our poor family—graces which we had in no way merited. Let us also remember the signal graces which He has conferred on each one of us in particular, as well as our frequent want of correspondence with His great favours. See how full of mercy our good Jesus is for us: He has brought us out of corruption and misery, to attach us to Himself; we were

infidels, He might have abandoned us; but, on the contrary, He redoubled His favours, and at length compelled us to give ourselves to Him, and to love Him with tenderness. Let us, I entreat you, love this dear Lord, this sweet Jesus, our Father, and our well-beloved Saviour; let us give Him our whole heart with all its desires and affections.

“Let us part with ourselves, part with our self-love; let us renounce Satan, his works, and his pomps. We renounce Satan by giving our hearts to God alone, by loving Jesus with the greatest tenderness of soul. We renounce the pomps of Satan when we detach our minds and hearts from the world’s deceitful vanities, and when we do not look for the esteem or praise of men. We renounce the works of Satan when we never allow ourselves to be given up to the desires of the world’s frivolous joys; when we never follow the disorderly affections of our hearts; when we love God alone; when we only seek to render ourselves pleasing to Him in all things; and when, for His sake, we love our neighbour, our enemies, and all those who wish us evil, those who are displeased with us and speak evil of us: this is what we promised to God in our Baptism. Let us pray to our dear Lord Jesus and the most holy Virgin, that we may obtain the grace to accomplish perfectly this holy promise which alone makes us true Christians.” (Letter, 29th May, 1837.)

He had been less successful in his endeavours to convert his sister Sarah, whom, during a visit to Saverne, he contrived to meet at the house of a pious Christian woman. It was on the 11th of September, 1835, the eve of the Jewish new year. Sarah came to the appointed place; she did not at first recognise him, as he wore the soutane. Her brother, in order not to hurt her sensitiveness before a stranger who happened to come in, but who

was immediately requested to withdraw, turned a little aside, but it was too late. Sarah had recognised him, and uttering a cry of surprise and terror she fell back in a chair. Having recovered her strength, she threw herself on her brother's neck, weeping and exclaiming: "Ah, I am so unhappy!" Her unhappiness was caused by her separation from those of her family whom she loved most. He spoke to her of her converted brothers, and showed her some of their letters which caused her to shed fresh tears. She could not understand the reason of his change of religion.

"We were so moved," says M. Libermann, "that we both wept together like children, without being able for a long time to say a single word. At length I mastered my feelings, and gradually succeeded in dispelling her sadness. We then spoke of religion; although she believed in my sincerity, yet she could in no way be convinced of the Christian truth. Her prejudices against our good Lord Jesus and our most holy Mother were so great that it was impossible to remove them from her mind. You may imagine my affliction when I heard her blaspheming all that I hold dearest in heaven and on earth." On the following day, after two more similar interviews, they separated, with the same grief on the one side, and the same obstinacy on the other. When on his return to Alsace, a few years afterwards, he was about to make a new effort to bring this daughter of Abraham to the feet of the Messiah, he was informed that his poor sister Sarah was no more.

On hearing this painful news the venerable servant of God exclaimed with admirable resignation: "God has allowed this; I have only to submit to His adorable will." He had also an interview with his half-brother, but without result: the latter is now a Jewish rabbin. If M.

Libermann was so zealous to bring about the conversion of the Jewish members of his family, he bestowed a no less continuous attention on those who were Christians, particularly on his brother Samson, and his sister-in-law, who by their prayers, conversations, and correspondence, had so powerfully contributed to his own conversion. To encourage their progress in Christian perfection he explained to them the advantages of mental prayer, which, he said, St. Vincent de Paul recommended to all lay persons whom he directed, even to servants. Though his brother was engaged in one of the busiest professions in life he wished him to devote half-an-hour each day to meditation, and he sent him the Sulpician method of mental prayer, and "M. Olier's Catechism on the interior Life." He sought especially to inculcate on him the fundamental principle of Christian life, self-denial, detachment from the false goods of this world—honours, pleasures, riches—and resignation under every trial that God might send him. On the occasion of a disappointment about a journey he wrote: "You cannot imagine what a joy I feel in my inmost soul at being unable to visit you this year; it will teach you to deny yourselves and not to gratify all the desires of your hearts. Until now you might have thought that to renounce forbidden desires was quite sufficient for good Christians, and that consequently they might freely indulge in innocent pleasures. This is true to a certain extent; but it is also true that a perfect Christian renounces even lawful pleasures, particularly when such renunciation seems to be the will of God. . . . I beseech our Lord Jesus Christ to grant you grace to deny yourselves, not only on this trifling occasion, but in everything and everywhere, that God alone may live and reign within your hearts. Let no unlawful affection enter them, and you shall be happy, even on this

earth. It is needless for me to speak any further on this subject; you must feel yourselves that I am right in all I have said; so put it in practice; it is not so difficult as you imagine. The graces one receives on the road of self-denial are immense, and give us a remarkable facility for performing the most difficult actions. They raise us above all creatures, make us masters of all our actions and of all the movements of our hearts, and give us such liberty of spirit and such perfect peace that nothing is able to disturb us. He who endeavours to deny himself in all things and to give himself unreservedly to God is master of heaven, earth, and hell. God grants him whatever he desires; he is dear to the most Blessed Virgin, and to the holy Angels and Saints. All the creatures on earth may conspire against him; he dreads them not, and will never change his conduct through fear of them; as was clearly evidenced in St. Basil and others. The devils tremble in his presence, because they recognise in him the sovereign power of God Himself."

Nothing is more edifying than the correspondence which he kept up with his brother, his sister-in-law, and their children. It breathes forth the candid spirit of the patriarchs, mingled with the heavenly fragrance of faith and Christian charity, which are peculiar to the law of grace. How charmingly he consents to be godfather to one of his nieces, and how zealously he explains the duty of parents to give early to their children a solid Christian education!

"My dear friends, you have caused me unspeakable pleasure in appointing me godfather of my newly-born niece. I am delighted to have a little daughter in Jesus Christ. May He preserve her in good health, and bestow upon her His gifts and graces, in order that she may become good, pious, and amiable before God and man! Her



dear and pious mother is right in asking from me no other sweets for her than prayers; I could not give her sweets of this world, but I shall do all in my power to procure for her heavenly and divine sweets, which are far preferable, and whose suavity and delicious taste shall last for eternity.

“Yes, certainly, if my prayers are agreeable in the sight of God, my dear little spiritual daughter, and all of you, shall be perfect Christians, and you shall love the Lord with your whole heart and with your whole strength. This is the greatest and only happiness I can wish those who are so dear to me as you are; and, assuredly, you will not doubt the truth of these words, when once you have tasted this happiness.

“On this occasion, I beg leave to say to you a few words on the education not only of my god-daughter, in whom I am as justly interested as yourselves, but also of your other children, who are equally dear to me. I beseech you to bestow the greatest care on their religious training, to teach them the Catechism well, and to bring them up in solid piety. The religious education of country children is usually greatly neglected; and yet, O my God! that is the principal care which parents owe them. They endeavour to procure for them all sorts of temporal advantages, deceitful goods, which pass away like smoke; and they neglect the real and durable goods, which would one day accompany them into eternity, and ensure their everlasting happiness. Do not, I entreat you, act in such a way with your children; preserve them always in a truly Christian piety: piety is very delightful and very amiable, as you shall find after some experience. And not only your children, but you yourselves also will gain by so doing; for what child loves and obeys his parents better than he who is pious and truly Christian? He cannot

love Jesus Christ without tenderly loving his parents; he cannot please Jesus Christ without being perfectly submissive to them; he knows what God exacts from him, and endeavours punctually to accomplish His amiable will. And if you bring up your children in a truly Christian manner, the blessing of God will rest upon you; He will shower on you His graces and favours and infallibly lead you to eternal life." (Letter, 8th April, 1829.)

A few years after, on hearing of the birth of his brother's sixth child, he writes: "The care taken by a father to bring up his children in a Christian manner, entitles him to share in the merits of the entire life of our Lord Jesus Christ on earth. Why did our Lord come into the world, if not to save and render eternally happy those dear little ones whom He entrusts to your care? How dear to His Heart are those good little friends! If our Lord came into the world, lived and died to procure the salvation of these little children, why should you not endeavour to co-operate with that divine grace He merited for you, to promote and accomplish His Heart's most ardent desire—the salvation of your children? Remember well, you hold for them the office of priest, missionary, and guardian-angel, in order to lead them to a happy eternity. . . . The six children whom God has given to you are six talents committed to your care; it rests with you to make them fructify. They are an admirable treasure which you will have to return to Him in heaven, and you shall be rewarded a hundred-fold, even in this world, if you turn this treasure to advantage. What a happiness it will be for you to see yourselves one day in heaven in the midst of six elect! Every ray of glory God shall shed on them will be reflected on you, and will render you more resplendent than the sun." (Letter, 3rd Jan., 1835.)

In another letter he says: "God has blessed you with

many children. Was it that you might abundantly supply them with earthly riches? No, certainly not. He has one only Son, Whom He has begotten from all eternity; He sent Him on earth and 'in Him He was well pleased.' Did He bestow on Him an abundance of earthly treasures? No; on the contrary, He wished His well-beloved Son to be always poor and destitute. And would you love your children more than Jesus was loved by His Father! Love them, I entreat you, the same way as God loves His Son, that is to say, with a holy and heavenly love. Procure for them what alone is important—the salvation and sanctification of their beautiful souls. Consider yourselves very happy, because it has pleased God to make use of you, that He might have seven souls more to glorify Him for all eternity in heaven. Penetrate in spirit into the dwelling of God Himself, and there behold the seven crowns you shall one day find in Paradise, the seven brilliant stars with which you will adorn the heavens. It now rests with you to shed a great lustre on them, by a holy and Christian education, that will one day make of them great saints. Is it not worth while to suffer a little in this poor world to obtain such an end?" (Letter, 31st Dec., 1837.)

The language of the servant of God assumes a special charm when he addresses himself to children: "Dear Mary," he writes to his god-daughter, "your letter informs me of your desire to love our dear Lord; although you did not expressly tell me so, yet, I remarked that good sentiment: you are right to have such a desire; you must strengthen it more and more. Love the most holy Virgin with your whole heart, she is your good Mother, even more than your own mother, and your godmother; you must love her more than your mother, your father, your godmother, and your dear uncle. She loves you so much that she wished them to call you after her own

name ; prove yourself worthy of so lovely a name. Be gentle, modest, and obedient to your father and mother, and be also very kind to your dear little brothers and sisters. Pray fervently to the Blessed Virgin, that she may send me to see you once more, and that we may talk together in the garden as we did last year. Be very pious, and do your best to please God and the Blessed Virgin, and you will obtain this grace, if not this year, at least some other time."

"Your little letter," he said to another niece, "has given me great joy before God ; be firm in your resolution, take care of yourself ; the world will try to seduce you, do not allow yourself to be caught in its snares ; love solitude and retreat, and do not seek company ; be on your guard and do not commit sin ; be very devout to the Blessed Virgin, your Divine Mother ; have recourse to her in all your wants and anxieties. I do not consider you holier than you are, but in my last letter I have given you some advices for the purpose of urging you to become better. You must always advance in the love of God."

Having learned that one of his nieces was filled with great fear at the approach of her First Communion, he hastened to write to her : "Do not fear, dear child ; Jesus, the most sweet and amiable Jesus will come, with great complacency, to embrace you in the ineffable tenderness of His love. He will not come to you as a judge : all the sins of your life will be forgotten. In the excess of His love He will only think of pressing you to His Sacred Heart. Do you think, dear child, that St. Stanislaus Kostka was afraid when, in a vision, Mary deigned to place the holy and amiable Infant Jesus in his arms ?"

He then exhorts her, when Jesus will repose in her soul, to give herself to Him with generosity, to offer Him the sacrifice of herself and of all earthly pleasures ; for the

more generous her heart will be, the more will Jesus delight therein. What she ought to ask from Mary, on this day of joy and blessings, is never to do anything which might separate her from Jesus, but to be always like Jesus, by the perfect imitation of His holy life.

Ever anxious to guide the steps of his relatives in the way of the evangelical counsels, he endeavours, above all, to fill their hearts with sentiments of confidence, love, and generosity. "I recommend to all of you not to tread in the path of fear, but in that of sacrifice, sweetness, and humility, in the way of love, of pure love. Fear is unworthy of souls chosen by Jesus and Mary; it is incomprehensible in them."

He completed these counsels and instructions by his oral exhortations during several weeks, which at various epochs he spent in his brother's family. His presence, not less than his holy conversations, was a continual sermon to all who lived with him. "When he came to our house," said his eldest nephew, "he hardly ever left it except to go to Church. Whatever free time he had, he employed in his correspondence, which was even then very considerable. The air of serenity and heavenly peace ever visible on his countenance made a deep impression on us all. The first time he came to see us (we were still living in the country), he sometimes walked with us in the garden; and suiting his words to our youthful minds, he spoke to us of the happiness enjoyed in the service of the Lord.

"One of my sisters in particular was so struck with his discourses that she never forgot them. Recalling to mind afterwards these conversations, she compared them to that of the disciples of Emmaus, with whom she could justly say: 'Were not our hearts burning within us, whilst he spoke to us?' These pious colloquies contributed most powerfully to strengthen her resolution of embracing the

holy religious state, in which she died in the odour of sanctity.

“During the time that we had the happiness of possessing in our family this angel of peace, the interior of the house was a real image of heaven. God seemed to inundate us with His blessings. There were amongst us some ardent and impetuous spirits, whose vivacity raised at times not a few petty storms ; but whilst our uncle was there, not the least sign of impatience was ever observed ; his mere approach commanded a good understanding among all ; at the sight of him words of bitterness dared not be uttered ; union of hearts became perfect, and all knew only how to love and to endure.

“ It happened, however, that one of my brothers, then seven years old, became very incensed against one of us who had contradicted him. Prayers, threats, promises, nothing could appease him ; he wished, he said, to forgive, but only after being revenged, and he remained in these dispositions the whole day. Towards evening, our uncle, as usual, assembled us around him for prayer. Everything went on well until the *Our Father* ; but when we came to the words, “*forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them who trespass against us*”—our uncle, who until then had remained in deep recollection, addressed the culprit in a severe tone : ‘My dear N., you cannot make this request of God without condemning yourself ; for since you do not wish to forgive, God no longer loves you, and He will not pardon any of your faults.’ Overcome by these words, the young child, hitherto so obstinate, runs immediately to his brother, embraces him, asks his pardon for the pain he has caused him, and then returns triumphantly to his uncle to finish his prayer.”

He was understood by all, even the youngest ; his evangelical language produced most abundant fruit ; he soon



saw the spirit of sacrifice expanding itself in those docile souls, and in a few years that spirit, like a divine seed, produced five times the hundred fold of holy virginity. A nephew and four nieces consecrated themselves to the Lord.

The instructions given by M. Libermann to his relatives are deserving of the attentive consideration of all those who have the happiness of being called from the midst of their brothers and sisters to take their rank among the elect of the sanctuary. Those who are thus called fear too often, especially in the beginning of their clerical career, not to be prophets among their own kinsmen and friends ; they do not sufficiently consider what an effect the first appearance of the priestly garb may produce in the midst of a Christian family, or what good may result from the pious conversations of a seminarist within the circle of domestic intimacy. A fervent seminarist will often find in the bosom of his Christian family the silent recollection of the tabernacle, with the calm stillness of his cell and the peaceful solitude of the seminary, if, morning and evening, brothers and sisters assemble together to pray in common to the Lord. It frequently happens that in that familiar intercourse he gains decisive sacrifices for a whole lifetime, especially if he asks such with faith, perseverance, and discretion. Often the most persistent obstinacy, deaf to a father's voice or unmoved by a mother's tears, gave way at the first word of a brother priest, or at the least advice of a sister consecrated to God. In such cases a sister or a brother is truly a friend given both by nature and by grace.

## CHAPTER V.

M. Libermann's Wonderful Apostolate at the Seminary of Issy,  
1833-1837.



WHEN the cholera had ceased its ravages, the Seminary of Issy gradually resumed its ordinary peacefulness and regularity. The sudden crowding together of all the students into one rather confined building, the continual sorties, the active movement of an ambulance, and a certain confusion in the spiritual exercises, unavoidable for those in care of the sick, might have been more than sufficient causes to disturb the good order of even the best regulated institution. But God did not permit the Community of Issy to suffer too much from the effects which were naturally attendant on so extraordinary an event. The masters and pupils who had displayed such heroic devotedness during the plague were deserving of great rewards, not the least signal of which were the good works soon about to be accomplished in their midst through the instrumentality of M. Libermann.

The humble convert of Saverne had now reached the end of a painful preparation for a most admirable apostolate. During five years he had lived and delighted in humility, silence, and solitude, resignedly breathing forth the fragrant odour of his faith and of his loving devotedness to God, without judging or examining anything, without even considering himself or the spiritual ways through which he was proceeding. His life of action now commences. From the night of the tomb, he passes, as it were, into a new horizon; he sees, he speaks, he weighs discreetly, with the weights of the sanctuary, all that God calls him to

see, to say, and to judge. The heart of M. Libermann was consumed by zeal for the glory of God, and this divine flame would have burst forth and spread, even though the house of Issy had been as regular and fervent as the seminary of Paris; for who could have quenched that fire of love which God Himself had been pleased to enkindle?

It was easy to perceive that the disturbances of 1830-1832, had effected a change in the dispositions of the seminarists. Even the most edifying among them had imbibed a somewhat worldly spirit during their visits to Paris. They had resumed, without great reluctance, the secular dress, and, as a natural consequence of those sorties, lost not a little of their former fervour. Their pious friend, M. Libermann, followed them with a saddened gaze. Sometimes even he was unable to control his grief when he saw them dressed in their worldly attire, leaving the seminary, or returning from the bustle of the distracting city, and bringing with them that deleterious dust which inevitably adheres even to the most religious hearts.\*

This was a critical moment. It was greatly to be feared

\* When the seminary of St. Sulpice had been re-established after the great Revolution, M. Emery was compelled, by the circumstances of the times, to tolerate the use of the secular dress for the sorties in Paris. Whilst he was reflecting on the means of reforming this abuse he chanced to be visited by a lady of high rank, who, among other things, congratulated him on having restored everything to its ancient footing. "I have seen," she said, "the seminarists going out on their walk, and I have remarked with pleasure that several were, as formerly, followed by their *footmen in livery*."

This word was not to be lost, and M. Emery better than anyone knew how to turn it to advantage. This anecdote, related with as much wit, and no less *à propos*, by M. Garnier, contributed also to the disappearance of the "*footmen in livery*" after the disturbances of 1830-1832.

that the two seminaries, declining in fervour, would no longer realize the same amount of good as formerly. The least decrease of fervour in the young generations of the priesthood is often the beginning of great evil. Decrease in fervour is the first step on a sloping, slippery ground, on which, unless timely precautions be taken, a community descends rapidly towards the goal of dissolution. M. Libermann dreaded so great a misfortune, and he earnestly besought the Lord to re-encindle the spirit of fervour among the seminarists.

His heart was filled with the deepest sadness; more than once he was surprised, alone in his cell, prostrate on the floor, or with his eyes raised to heaven, and pouring forth torrents of tears. He continued his sighs even during the night, and his companions in the adjoining rooms were often interrupted in their sleep by the sound of the flagellations, which his spirit of zeal and mortification urged him to inflict on a frame already so much exhausted by suffering.

But what could he do, pressed down as he was by the ever increasing weight of his humiliating infirmity? What could he do, he who was neither a pupil nor a director; he who was only retained through commiseration, and, as a kind of domestic discharged the humblest offices in the community?

The servants of the house remembered with delight the joyous and ready obedience with which he applied himself to all his duties, and how willingly and charitably he acted as the attendant of everyone. To him, in preference to all others, the procurator entrusted the commissions for Paris, and never, as he has often repeated since, had he to make the least reproach to the holy commissioner. The students also freely profited of his readiness and obliging disposition to load him with their various little commissions.

Deeply recollected, as if in meditation, the holy servant of God would proceed along the road, and peacefully perform a journey of several hours in the most crowded streets of the populous city. His strength alone would sometimes give way, and compel him to remain at the seminary. There was a time when, during fifteen or eighteen months, he was almost constantly occupied in cleaning the groves and avenues of the demesne. Who, when seeing him engaged in those lowly occupations, could have imagined him to be the elect of God, destined to revive the fervour of the three houses of *Paris*, *Issy*, and *La Solitude*?\* And yet it was this silent and persuasive apostolate which, without his suspecting it, laid open before him the path of his future action and holy influence.

Being resolved to enter upon this path, he first addressed himself to the most simple souls, to a few pious servants who, during their free moments, would assemble in the door-keeper's lodge. This humble audience listened with avidity, and understood his instructions which, for a long time afterwards, were remembered in the lodge where the name of the zealous catechist would only be pronounced with the greatest veneration.

From the porter's lodge good Father Libermann, as he was already called, transferred the scene of his apostolate to the infirmary, which charity, as well as the state of his health, often compelled him to visit. Whilst there, he was all kindness and attention to the patients in everything they might require. He took care to refer all things to God, the love of the cross, and his favourite virtue, abnegation. He arranged everything so well that, despite the unforeseen occurrences of an infirmary, all the

\* *La Solitude* is the name of the house (at Issy) wherein are formed, in a separate community, the novices of the *Society of Saint-Sulpice*.

exercises of piety found each day their place in regular succession and at the most favourable moments.

Should he find that some patients were giddy, thoughtless, or immortified, he would know how to warn them, by means of an ingenious stratagem. As he was appointed to preside at the particular examen, he would, whilst pretending to read the text of *M. Tronson*,\* depict in the liveliest colours the defects of his hearers, who never failed afterwards to express their surprise at the marvellous and picturesque exactness with which the author had described their failings. The discourses during recreation were not unfrequently an excellent and fruitful commentary on the particular examen.

After the sick, M. Libermann lavished the cares of his gentle charity on the new-comers. As soon as a seminarian would arrive he would assist him in carrying his trunk, lead him to his room, sweep it, make his bed, often by stealth, so that when returning in the evening the stranger would be surprised at finding everything in such perfect order. *An Angel had passed there*, as they used to say in the seminary.

After a lapse of thirty years, one of his fellow-students still remembers with emotion the charity of the humble acolyte: "On my entrance into the seminary of Issy, Father Libermann was given me as angel, to initiate me in the rules and exercises of the house. My health being feeble, he took care of me with admirable charity, encouraging, consoling, aiding me with his counsels, and surrounding me with his most attentive cares. . . . Without being asked, he rendered me the most humble services, and sometimes

\*M. Tronson was superior of the seminary of Saint-Sulpice in the 17th century. His celebrated work, "*Examens particuliers sur divers sujets propres aux ecclésiastiques*," appeared for the first time in 1690.



when he would enter my room and find it in disorder, he would arrange everything with a devotedness worthy of the most attentive servant."

He understood how important it is to give from the beginning good habits to the new-comers. Having remarked that one of them, a student of a very lively disposition, would, at the first call, abruptly hasten away from his occupation, and run with all his might, so as to be quite breathless, M. Libermann, without either advising or reproaching his young friend, would take care to be at the proper time on his passage advancing towards him with the greatest gravity. At other times he would assist him in his work, and do very calmly what the other had just done most precipitately. Should he be called away, even on pressing business, he would first peaceably finish what he had commenced; then, even after a second call, would retire very quietly at the risk of scandalizing the petulant seminarist, who understood and never forgot the lesson.

By thus evangelizing the poor, the sick, and the new-comers, he was only making a trial of his strength for an apostolate on a wider and harder field. Apart from the difficulties arising from his inferior position, there was on his way one great difficulty which sprung from the very composition of the seminary of Issy. This institution comprised, first, the "Issyans," who included the philosophers, the students of physics, and the mathematicians; secondly, the novices of the Society of Saint-Sulpice, who occupied the Solitude—a delightful hermitage, situated in the remotest part of the demesne: they had no communication whatever with the secular ecclesiastical students; lastly, though only accidentally, the theologians of Paris, who came once a week to spend their holiday in the vast enclosure of the park of Issy.

Separated from his former zealous companions of Saint-Sulpice, M. Libermann was now surrounded either by mere

beginners, who had just left the world, or by an *élite* of learned philosophers, who were entirely absorbed in their dry and laborious studies. The short sojourn of the theologians on walk-days naturally caused only distraction in the house; it was the day for exchanging news, and of all days the most difficult to sanctify in the seminary. Such was the movable theatre whereon the zeal of the holy acolyte was to be exercised, the shifting sands on which he was to plant the bare, unadorned cross of abnegation, such as it always appeared before his eyes. For beginners this was too much. The theologians could understand him better, but they only passed before him once a week. There remained the students of physics, of mathematics, and geology; but these lived in another world, and spoke another tongue, one almost unknown to him.

This difference was noticeable even in their professor, who, after mature consideration, had adopted a strict reserve towards M. Libermann, whom he regarded with uneasiness and suspicion. The increasing influence of the latter appeared to him an anomaly, which might, after a time, impede the direction of the superiors, and even interfere with the most intimate relations that exist between confessors and their penitents. He was consequently resolved to set everything right, and only watched for an opportunity of manifesting his authority.

M. Libermann, on his part, had cast his eyes on the same professor, in the hope that he might become the beginning and centre of the regenerating movement which he was then contemplating. He accordingly endeavoured to be frequently in his company, and to join more willingly the groups of cheerful students who, during the recreation hours, usually surrounded their learned master.

At the departure of this professor on a scientific expe-

dition, M. Libermann profited of the occasion to give him a letter for his brother at Strasburg. The reserved, apparently cold, though polite terms, in which he speaks of the distinguished traveller, evince more prudence than indifference. "The gentleman," he writes, "who brings you this letter, is the professor of physics and mathematics in our seminary; he is, consequently, a Sulpician, and one of the directors of the house. He is going to Strasburg with a society of *Savants*, of which he is a member; they intend to make geological researches and experiments in the Vosges mountains" (Letter of 24th August, 1834.) He then recommends his brother to give him a good reception.

The walk of the *quarantaine*, where the youthful *litterati* usually assembled, had acquired no small amount of celebrity. There, were grouped together a select number of seminarists, for the most part very talented, elegant speakers, and able to converse fluently and agreeably on literature, poetry, philosophy, and especially geology; in a word, on almost every subject save, perhaps, on asceticism and piety. It was not without a slight tinge of irony that they were commonly styled the *Scientifiques*.

M. Pinault was a recent conquest from the State University. He had generously given up an honourable position and the prospects of a brilliant future, and entered the humble enclosure of an ecclesiastical seminary to devote his life to the service of God, and the education of the aspirants to the priesthood. He had been professor at the Normal School; he was a member of the Geological Society of Paris, and, as such, he was held in the highest estimation by the leading representatives of science. At that time he was about to publish his lectures, which, even under the form of autograph copies, had already enjoyed the honour of being the classical text in several seminaries

of France. It is not surprising that, with such a name, very ably supported by the ease and captivating charm of his discourses, M. Pinault should have been surrounded by so great a prestige.

He was not the only one who brought to the seminary a name made famous by public teaching; nor was he the first who imparted to its inmates that love of erudition and scientific research which was so greatly favoured by the circumstances of the time.

This was the epoch when Cuvier gave so great an impulse to the science which he created; when the revolutions of the globe were debated as ardently as its political cataclysms. Natural history was an agreeable diversion, and presented striking analogies with the mournful drama which was being acted throughout the world. The deepest minds already prophesied the reconciliation of the world with religion through the medium of science, and especially by the study of the six days of Genesis. On all sides were discovered, buried beneath the strata of the globe, biblical medals, more or less defaced, on which the inspired narrations of Moses could still be deciphered. The scientific fever had likewise penetrated into the seminaries. Everywhere the sciences began to be more actively taught; everywhere were multiplied, at great expense, *cabinets* of physics, chemistry, and natural history. Science took, perhaps too easily, the ascendancy over liturgy, ecclesiastical history, and canon law, which subjects had been rather sadly neglected since the great Revolution.

Nowhere did those scientific discussions offer greater attractiveness than around the learned and spirited professor of Issy, who spoke in one of the most beautiful geological horizons in the world, on a soil bearing at every step evident traces of the commotions which have convulsed the earth. From the heights of the plateau of Issy,

even from the avenue of the Quarantaine, he could point out to his young auditors the whole basin of Paris, and descend with them, stage by stage, even to the antediluvian catacombs. It can be easily imagined that the members of the Issyan Athenæum must have experienced some of the emotions which pervaded the Areopagus, when M. Libermann, like another Paul, commenced to unveil his doctrine, and spoke, not of a mere earthly science, but of a higher one, the true and solid science of the saints, which he summed up in the one word—abnegation.\*

\* M. Libermann loved science, but science accompanied by sanctity. Let us abridge his opinion on this subject: “You desire,” he says, “to know what we ought to think concerning study. The priest must possess two things—science and sanctity. It is certain that the first, the principal, the most important, is sanctity; for the highest theological science cannot save a soul without grace. The Holy Ghost alone gives grace, and in greater abundance to a holy priest of ordinary, but sufficient amount of science, than to one who possesses a middling piety and much theology. Science must not, however, be despised; it is also necessary, although in a less, yet sufficient degree.

“We must distinguish three kinds of science: the first kind is purely natural, and is acquired with all the ardour and endeavours of the mind relying only on its own strength; this science is empty and unworthy of a priest.

“The second kind is purely supernatural, and is acquired in contemplation; it is only given to a small number, and has always been rare in the Church.

“The third kind might be called *mixed science*; it is to this that all the seminarists must devote their attention. To obtain this science it is necessary to be moved by a supernatural principle, as for instance, the motive of pleasing God, and doing His holy will; to apply seriously our natural faculties to the study of science, in a spirit of recollection and love of God, and with an entire confidence in Him alone. We must, at the same time, avoid that indolence and natural sluggishness which incline us to repose, and also the disgust which serious application may generate; we must guard against too great a love or passion for study, renounce ourselves by humbling ourselves before God, and by keeping away from us as well vain complacency which delights in



It must not, however, be supposed that M. Libermann would speak on holy subjects exclusively. He was, on the contrary, most attentive not to separate, by unseasonable differences, the fervent from the *Scientifiques*. He would readily take part in any conversation, even though it should be on learned topics. Sometimes he would dexterously slip in a text from the Holy Scriptures, and cautiously introduce St. Paul; now and then he would excite their curiosity by some Hebraic etymology, which might provoke questions about his rabbinical reminiscences, and captivate the attention of the most indifferent. Often a text of St. Paul would afford him an occasion to unveil a new field of spiritual doctrine, and to engrave on the most obstinate minds truths which ever afterwards were carefully remembered.

The humble apostle, who was assuredly not gifted with great natural eloquence, had as interlocutors, sometimes as adversaries, students who were models of conversation, and skilled in the art of debate. He always gave his opinion in a manner so sensible, and so much to the point, that though his words did not always charm the refined ears of his hearers, they never failed to carry weight and conviction with them; for he spoke the language of truth for the sake of truth alone, and directed the attention of others more to truth than to himself.

He was the same on all occasions, ever calm, humble, and charitable. Whether applauded or contradicted, loved success, as discouragement in difficulties. It is particularly all-important to work in a spirit of recollection; for otherwise our mind will contract by degrees the habit of acting by itself independently of God, and this is a real evil. But the greatest danger is that our mind acquires an extraordinary natural activity, which renders it incapable of pliability and docility to the inspirations of God; this is very injurious to the things of God, and may become a terrible obstacle to meditation, to the knowledge of ourselves and of souls, and to the action of grace in us."



or despised, consoled by God's blessings or afflicted by trials, he constantly preserved his peace ; and whether he was left alone or surrounded by enthusiastic friends, he always had the same love for all, and ever strove to benefit all without distinction by his prayers, as well as by his holy example and pious discourses.

Meanwhile, the learned professor and the zealous acolyte mutually watched each other, the former to put a stop to a movement which caused him some uneasiness ; the latter to place the distrustful observer himself at the head of an urgent crusade. But all M. Libermann's hopes might have irrevocably vanished in one of those unexpected trials in which the holiest and most learned are frequently found wanting. During a walk he happened to express, on a matter of trifling importance, an opinion entirely different from that of the professor, when, quite on a sudden, he received from the latter a public and severe rebuke, spoken in a real magisterial tone, and capable of utterly disconcerting a man of even the greatest *sang-froid*. But immediately and without embarrassment, M. Libermann excused himself so well and so humbly, said all that he should say so justly, and resumed so easily the lowest place, that the professor himself was struck with amazement. If both had come to a mutual understanding, to give the students an exemplary lesson, this affair could not have ended more satisfactorily. Although not as yet entirely conquered, the professor could not refrain from uttering a sentence which was not forgotten ; "Decidedly," he said, "this is either a saint or a superior man, and in either case he must be tolerated."

On his part, M. Libermann continued to mature his plans. Every day he was more and more confirmed in the thought of taking as the lever of his operations the very obstacle thrown across his path, and of placing this very

professor at the head of his most zealous co-operators. His deeply-penetrating look perceived in his adversary something more than the eminent man of science; he had discovered in him the man of deep and lively faith. In his turn he only watched for an opportunity to disclose to him the thoughts of his mind. When that opportunity presented itself he was ready, and he turned it to advantage.

As M. Pinault was one day setting out for Paris, M. Libermann met him at the gate of the seminary; both entered the same carriage, and found themselves side by side. The first moment was a rather critical one. A timid smile of the modest seminarist might have betrayed his desire of turning so fortuitous a meeting to profit. The professor, too, was anxious to pursue his inquiry; he first broke the ice by questioning his fellow-traveller on a certain number of points which troubled him. They stood, at the very outset, on the slippery ground of personal questions; but the prudent interlocutor, avoiding proper names, passed to principles, and generalised his answers. As the professor insisted in a prudent yet persuasive manner, M. Libermann reminded him of the times and spirit of M. Olier, of his doctrine, his maxims, and his ruling thought; he compared the past with the present, and easily obtained the avowal that there was something to be done; it was the *Quid me vis facere* of St. Paul.

We have before our eyes a few pages entitled *Notes for Issy*, written by M. Libermann. In these notes the holy acolyte develops the plan of reform, which he most likely unfolded to M. Pinault during their decisive conversation on their way from Issy to Paris. He proposes to revive the fervour of the two seminaries of Issy and Saint Sulpice; to employ as auxiliaries and instruments not the cleverest nor most influential, but the most fervent; and to unite

them by the bonds of an effective charity, with the view of their advancing, above all, in the spirit of self-denial. This was to be the fundamental principle of the association. Through the fervent he meant to diffuse the spirit of pure faith, and to propagate the work of clerical perfection, not merely by a few passing words on some spiritual subject, or some isolated example of edification, by a small circle of unknown and timid promoters, but openly, boldly, through a majority of Issyans of good-will. These, under the guidance of a director, would first act upon the seminary of the philosophers, which, in its turn, would react on that of Saint-Sulpice, and through the latter on all the seminaries of France.

“It is,” he says, “of the highest importance for the Seminary of Paris, that the students of Issy be maintained in the greatest possible fervour. If, after two years of philosophy, the Issyans go to Paris, tepid, dissipated, and full of themselves, they will soon have ruined the spirit of fervour which they find there. On the contrary, if the students of Issy are well formed, they will not fail to produce a good effect among the seminarists of Paris; and if they do not increase their fervour, they will, at least, keep it alive.”

This alternative is evident, since the greater part of the Seminary of Paris shall always be composed of students coming from Issy; the few who come from other places, usually well disposed, timid and docile, will follow the good or bad impulse given by the greater number.

M. Libermann foresees all the objections which might be raised, and suggests the necessary means of avoiding the indiscretions to which the members of such associations might be exposed. His plan was not to separate the fervent from the others, as it were, into two distinct camps,

but to rally, to unite the fervent into a compact, generous, devoted battalion of *Zélateurs* who would gradually increase in number, mingle with all, and finally, by their good influence and prudent activity, establish the reign of fervour in every heart.

This is a most efficacious means of renewing the spirit of fervour in colleges and seminaries, one that is also applicable to communities having novitiates and houses of probation. We must, nevertheless, remark, that it is a means more suited for exceptional situations than for a regular state of things. M. Libermann himself, being later on at the head of a community where all went on in perfect harmony, regularity and fervour, had no longer recourse to such extraordinary expedients, and preferred to maintain the common rule in its strict simplicity. But at the Seminary of Issy, the common rule, despite its intrinsic excellence, appeared, in consequence of extraordinary circumstances, to be for the moment inadequate, so that it was necessary to adopt, at least for a time, more energetic measures for the purpose of reviving and strengthening the ordinary rules. This end being once attained, such means could, and even should be abandoned.

The blessings which, as we shall see, God has showered on this enterprise clearly prove that, in undertaking it, M. Libermann was obeying a supernatural impulse.

The plan of the association, which its carrying out will show in a still clearer light, greatly pleased M. Pinault, who gave it his full approval. The reflections of the humble acolyte had made a deep impression on him. Whilst, mingled with the noise of a public road, the words of his fellow-traveller faintly fell upon his ear, another voice spoke within his soul.

M. Pinault had long before felt the emptiness of


human sciences, though he had for them as much taste as aptitude. "Excepting some temporal advantages," he asked himself, "what benefit do man and society draw from them? Of what use are they?" Nevertheless, he did not as yet sufficiently understand the true science of the saints, nor believe that it was treasured up in such abundance in the poor, sorrow-stricken seminarist. This long dialogue was to him like a revelation: "I felt," he said afterwards, "that M. Libermann had truth on his side, the true science, the truly useful thing."

The professor had understood, was subdued, and had promised his co-operation. The project was approved of by the superiors, and the "*Pious Meetings*" of the fervent students began. Such was the origin of an admirable association which, during several years, was to be wonderfully blessed by heaven, with M. Libermann as its soul, and M. Pinault as its centre, its rallying-point and director.

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## CHAPTER VI.

M. Libermann's Wonderful Apostolate at the Seminary of Issy  
(continued). 1833-1837.

HE holy servant of God did not labour for the spiritual welfare of a few students only; he extended his saintly influence to the whole community of Issy, and even to that of Paris. Believing himself for ever excluded from the priesthood, he wished at least to animate with the sacerdotal spirit the numerous phalanx of the levites, who were soon to be engaged in the midst of the world, in the arduous work of the salvation and sanctification of souls. His zealous endeavours were generously seconded by M. Pinault, and the association of the fervent students. The rules of this pious sodality were clearly laid down, and its working was as admirable as it was ingenious. The weekly meeting was fixed for the walk-day. During winter it was usually held in the park; during summer, in the country, or in some retired spot of the *Bois de Fleury*; during vacation they would meet at some distant pilgrimage, which they would have selected as the end of their excursions.

At each meeting they divided into a certain number of groups, each having its own president, whose duty it was to propose the subject of the conversation, and to develop it by a few reflections of his own. The substance of these edifying discourses was often furnished by M. Libermann in little billets which he transmitted to each president. The subject was usually practical, and connected with



some fundamental point of Christian perfection, so that it might be easily applied by each one to his own spiritual necessities. Previous to the meeting, each member meditated on the point to be discussed, especially the president, who, if necessary, consulted the director of the association.

During the meetings, they only spoke on pious topics, but simply and cheerfully from the abundance of the heart, without great mental efforts, and without confining themselves too strictly to the question at issue. They would often begin with one subject and end with another. Before separating, the members were at liberty to exercise towards one another the duty of fraternal correction or monition.

However interesting the conversations might be, they were not to exceed half-an-hour, after which all were to disperse among the nearest band of seminarists. At the commencement, M. Libermann was most attentive to keep up this rule, and he would pass from group to group to see to its perfect execution; but later on, he allowed greater liberty on this point. Each circle consisted of four or five members who varied at every meeting, so that each member would pass once a month through all the groups. The seminarists were free to retire at any time. To obtain a tacit *cong e*, it was sufficient to be twice absent from the pious conversations.

Besides the weekly meeting, they would speak on edifying subjects whenever they chanced to be alone, without, however, departing from the pleasant cheerfulness of recreation. Should they meet with other seminarists, the conversation would at once turn on a wider ground, and take in historical questions and edifying anecdotes. Not only did the recreations not degenerate into melancholy, in consequence of too much seriousness; they even became far more animated and cheerful.

The members of the association increased rapidly in number, especially during the first year. It had commenced with seven fervent students, and by a careful selection of new applicants this number was soon multiplied. To be admitted, the aspirants should be well tried, and have obtained the majority of the votes of the members, together with the sanction of the director.

M. Libermann was the life and soul of the pious meetings. His words, though simple, were like ardent flames which enkindled the fire of divine love in the hearts of his disciples. Often, after a walk or recreation, they felt themselves more fervent and animated with greater zeal than after meditation, so that they retired from his company to their studies, repeating within themselves the words of the disciples of Emmaus: "Were not our hearts burning within us, whilst he spoke on the way?" . . .

"I know," writes one of them, "that the grace and impression of those conversations were so effective, that often, during several days after, we could not choose any other subject of meditation. I know that the most painful sacrifices against which nature had long struggled, were soon made, owing to the heartfelt words of our pious director. No wonder that we regarded those days as days of sanctification." A most active auxiliary of M. Libermann says that "they felt the necessity of conversing together of God. The interior movement which urged M. Libermann to his holy apostleship, and the admirable results of his efforts induced him to collect into one compact group all the fervent souls, in order that, more numerous and more united, they should be as a hearth filled with coals, more or less ardent, from the union of which there might arise a flame that would set all around on fire."

"His piety," writes another, "was altogether free from

affectation or fear, always cheerful, practical, and without excess; always grounded on solid theology, on the example of our Lord and the saints. In substance his doctrine was that of M. Olier, whose spirit he is said to have revived."

"The spiritual doctrine of these groups," says another already mentioned, "was based on the principles of M. Olier; self-denial and total death to one's self, love of contempt and of crosses, mildness, peace, mortification of interior and exterior activity, union with God, imitation of our Lord, of the Blessed Virgin, and of the saints, a most tender and filial devotion to Our Lady, the spirit of charity, zeal to spread and preserve fervour, and zeal for the good order and decoration of the house of God.

"M. Libermann attached great importance to the maintenance of an association of 'Holy Apostles,' which had previously been established in the seminary. He enriched it with his most ardent zealots, who found in its bosom a centre from which they derived the strength necessary for giving life and discipline to the groups of the fervent. He is said to have drawn up the still existing rules of this association. It was the duty of the apostles to receive new-comers, to habituate them to the rules of the seminary, to associate them with the most fervent, and to incline them to embrace generously a life of perfection and holiness."

As a conclusion of the preceding testimonies we transcribe, with special delight, some lines written by a most venerable prelate:

"I was towards the end of my sojourn in the seminary, which I left long before M. Libermann, that he commenced his exercise among his confreres that kind of apostleship which produced such abundant fruits of grace. God had gifted him with a royal sceptre over hearts,

which he zealously made use of to lead them to a life of perfection. It was thus that he gathered around him several very talented and fervent young men, with whom he laid the first foundations of his Congregation. What appears to me most remarkable in this success is that, humanly speaking, it cannot be explained. M. Libermann was not endowed with those brilliant qualities which produce lively impressions; he never departed from his calm and humble modesty. His words were very simple, but God communicated to them great efficacy."

So great was the success of the appeal made by M. Libermann to his most fervent *confrères*, that in a short time two-thirds of the pupils of Issy were enrolled in his association. The impetus once given, the movement had become general, and had exceeded the brightest anticipations both of the promoter and the director.

Numerous groups of students hastened to greet them, whenever the one or the other appeared in recreation. The walk which they chose was overcrowded; three or four ranks moved forwards and backwards around them as they advanced or receded. Fervour had spread like fire, and spiritual conversations, which before seemed impossible and impracticable, had now become quite natural. They were kept up for hours, and during walks and recreations passed from rank to rank, to such a degree that it was necessary to moderate, rather than to stimulate the fervour of the students.

In the meantime, the scientific, literary, and philosophical discussions fell into disuse, and almost into disgrace, yet not without hotly contesting the ground. The fervent apostle had for a while to withstand a war of epigrams and assaults, which became for him new means of securing a more complete victory. The most sudden

and most aggressive contradictions never took him by surprise; his peace was ever undisturbed, his mildness ever unalterable. The following anecdote will show how he fought, and why he conquered:—

Prominent at the head of his opponents stood M. Maigna, a youth of great talent, whose ardent soul seemed to be wholly buried in studies, particularly in sciences. He was so passionately fond of mathematics, that he frequently surprised himself describing geometrical figures on his hands, even during his visits to the Blessed Sacrament.

For a considerable time M. Maigna scarcely allowed an opportunity to pass without directing his witty and malicious invectives against the devotees, the mystics, the Libermannists. At last he found an opportunity to give vent to all the bitter sentiments which filled his heart against the zealous apostle. The students, being allowed on certain holidays to select their places in the refectory, it happened that on one occasion M. Libermann, having humbly waited, napkin in hand, until all had made their choice, found that the only vacant place was beside M. Maigna. At the sight of this unwished-for neighbour, the well-known leader of the opposition could not refrain from manifesting his displeasure, to the great hilarity of all around, who attentively observed the scene. After a silence which presaged an explosion, M. Maigna, no longer able to contain himself, said to his neighbour: “Ah, if you knew how much I detest you!” “And you,” promptly replied M. Libermann, “if you knew how much I love you!” These words were accompanied by a look and a smile, which clearly bespoke the wonderful virtue of the saint. The astounded opponent sank into a profound silence, and, until the end of the repast, meditated on the contrast between M. Libermann and himself. When coming out of the refectory, M. Maigna desired to know



the secret of that power which had subdued him. M. Libermann opened the New Testament, and read for him a passage of St. Paul, which unveiled the whole mystery: "*Pax Dei quæ exsuperat omnem sensum.*" "The peace of God," he said, "not only surpasses every thought, but triumphs over every natural sentiment, '*exsuperat.*'" The arrow penetrated to the innermost recess of the young student's heart, from which it could not be extracted: the victory was complete; M. Maigna was conquered. He rejoined his former companions, repeating the words of St. Paul: "*Pax Dei quæ exsuperat omnem sensum.*" "Do you know this peace?" said he to them; "I have seen it, I know where it is; I am desirous of seeking and finding that peace." They all thought he was jesting, and they were greatly amused at what they considered to be a mocking imitation. But he persisted, and emphatically declared that he would carry out his resolution at the risk of being looked upon as a fool. He was true to his word. He then made two divisions of his books: on one side he arranged the poems, histories, and works on science; on the other his treatises on devotion. When showing the first, he would say: "There is the old Maigna;" and pointing to the second: "Here is the new Maigna." From that time he could not be separated from M. Libermann, to whom, at every recreation, he would lead some new follower.

M. Maigna had now become quite another man, and he persevered in his fervent dispositions all the time he remained at the Seminary of Paris. He was so edifying that M. Libermann held him up as a model, and exhorted the most perfect to seek his company. M. Maigna died at an early age, and it was only after his death that all the heroism of his piety became known; how, in particular, he escaped the notice of his companions



whilst watching and attending for a considerable time, almost every night, an old sick porter, who preceded him only by a few days to the peace of the Lord.

This porter, one of M. Libermann's first conquests, had become so exemplary, and lived in such union with God, that the most pious and enlightened of the pupils asked as a favour to spend a part of their recreation in his lodge, to hear him speak of God and the spiritual life. It is not unlikely that more than once the aged invalid and his mysterious attendant have, like the saints of old, spent entire nights in colloquies which, no doubt, they have since continued in heaven.

God visibly blessed the work of the humble Libermann, who, by means of the "Pious Meetings," re-enchanted the spirit of fervour in the two seminaries of Issy and Paris. Willingly would we reproduce in all their simplicity the ingenuous discussions of those meetings; unhappily, we possess only a few imperfect fragments, which are but the faint echoes of the burning colloquies between those fervent seminarists and their saintly leader.\*

The conversations of the meetings although most familiar, were, nevertheless, carried on with a certain solemnity, which more than once appeared to embarrass the modesty of the humble acolyte. He was much more winning and persuasive in those private conversations which, with the sanction of the directors, he had with many of his fellow-

\* Several of his notes to the Presidents had been collected, under the title: *Subjects to be spoken of on to-morrow*. Hearing that this collection was being circulated in several seminaries, he hastened to submit it to the judgment of a learned theologian, who had merely to correct some slight inaccuracies of language. M. Libermann transmitted the corrections to his pious correspondents. Nothing could be more delightful than his considerations on the "Blessed Sacrament," the "Sacred Heart," the "Ascension," the "Interior Life," the "Priesthood of our Lord," the "Presence of God," &c.

students who eagerly sought for his holy counsels. The remembrance of those intimate communications remains, even now, still fresh in the minds of those who had the happiness of enjoying his friendship.

“He possessed,” says one of them, “a particular gift for directing souls, and helping them to advance on the way of perfection. Those who felt strongly attracted towards God, were as if irresistibly drawn to His holy servant ; all those who earnestly sought to sanctify their souls grouped around him as their centre.” No less expressive are the terms in which, after the death of his sage monitor, the petulant seminarist before mentioned describes the salutary influence exercised, in his time, by the humble and zealous apostle of the meetings. “It is impossible to express how much good M. Libermann has done us ; his gay and easy manner of conversing on the truths of religion was full of attractiveness ; his goodness gained all hearts ; he moved the souls of his hearers by the sincerity of his zeal and by the deeply penetrated appearance of his countenance. . . . A glance at M. Libermann was sufficient to dispel a temptation, to encourage the faint-hearted, to calm the most agitated soul, and to cause dissipation to give place to recollection. I have often tried the experiment, even by looking at him from afar, and my *confrères* have frequently spoken to me of similar impressions. The most ardent among the seminarists, those who had been in more frequent contact with the world, he followed in preference to all others, and it was among them that, despite no small amount of resistance, he made his greatest conquests. I have seen one of them who had been most thoughtless and unsteady, never, for a single moment, raise his eyes in the refectory during the space of two years.

“God had given M. Libermann great and clear lights

concerning souls, and the interior ways and operations of grace. He would in an instant read a soul through and through; he even seemed to have known it beforehand, and to have derived his knowledge from a kind of inspiration. I have had, thank God, very excellent directors, men of great name; but, I can affirm, that no one has ever understood me as thoroughly as M. Libermann. At the very first interview he clearly saw the nature of my disposition, and prescribed the remedies to be employed, whilst at the same time he pointed out the connexion and drift of many things which, until then, I had never observed in my soul. I found in him the same perspicacity and clearness of insight when there was question of examining and deciding my vocation. No one has ever more lucidly laid the present and future before me, nor more completely determined a point so delicate and so important. It was because our directors knew him, that they often referred us to him, as did my director on that occasion. They declared that they themselves had greatly advanced in the knowledge of spiritual things by their conversations with M. Libermann."

The holy influence of the servant of God was felt also in the novitiate; his pious discourses afforded a special charm to the *Solitaires*. "He was only in minor orders, and we were priests," wrote one of them, "yet, how heartily did we not become his disciples, and learn from him the ways of self-abnegation, and of abandonment to our Lord! Those were the ordinary themes of our conversation; he was inexhaustible on these points; and his words were always unctuous, abundant, and full of simplicity; few citations, but many commentaries on some words of St. John, or St. Paul. He was himself the example of the virtues which he recommended to us."

Those who seemed specially called to a higher state of

perfection, found in him the helps they required to discover the hidden ways of God, and the operation of divine grace in their souls. A venerable missionary of the United States wrote as follows:—"I have always considered Father Libermann as the father of my soul, and I have continually thanked God for having granted me the favour of his holy example and charitable counsels. I say counsels, but I must add, that Father Libermann not only had received from God a singular grace for leading apostolic souls to perfection, but that he also possessed the gift of discovering and of begetting them in Jesus Christ, so that those souls, conscious of what they had received from him, were penetrated towards him with feelings of truly filial affection."

More than once was the holy servant of God found before his crucifix, bathed in tears, deploring the infidelity of some young men whom he believed to be called to perfection. He spared no pains when there was question of gaining over to Jesus Christ those souls who were especially called to reproduce His loving image before the eyes of men. It is related that, in his ardent zeal, he one day fell on his knees before a seminarist, conjuring him to become more fervent, a request which the seminarist promised to comply with; and, as the sequel showed, he faithfully kept his word.

The influence of M. Libermann at Saint-Sulpice, according to the testimony of M. Luquet, was so extraordinary, that in a single year nearly fifty seminarists entered on the religious life, or on the apostolic career in infidel countries. A director compared this epoch to the brightest days of St. Sulpice, and did not hesitate to affirm, that since the time of M. Olier, such fervour had never existed in the seminary.

The following interesting narrative, referring to this

epoch, has been found among the papers of Dom Salier, whose name we have already mentioned, and who was intimately acquainted with Father Libermann at Issy:—

At the head of the document in question, we read these words:—“IN CHRISTO MEMORANDUS LIBERMANN. *My recollections of this dear friend, whom I venerate and invoke in the interior of my soul, as one of the greatest servants of Jesus and Mary.* ‘This dear friend,’ he says, ‘has benefited me, not only when near, but also from afar. A few days after I had received the holy habit of novice, or perhaps on the very same day on which I received it here at the *Grande Chartreuse*, I lost my scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and I neglected to procure another. The following night, whether sleeping or waking, I know not; but this I know, that I was on a sudden seized by so violent a temptation against the angelic virtue, that I do not remember ever to have found myself in such a cruel situation: I was, as it were, shut up in a hole in the wall, so narrow that I could not stir; I resisted the temptation, but as I did not think of praying, it went on increasing. At that critical moment, M. Libermann, clothed in a surplice white as snow, with large, flowing wings, such as are worn at Saint-Sulpice, and with a heavenly countenance, appeared before me, holding in his hand a scapular of Carmel, to which he seemed desirous of drawing my attention. The sight of this scapular at once delivered me from all temptation. At the same instant, I saw following M. Libermann several other seminarists of Saint-Sulpice whom I did not know, but who, like him, appeared to me favoured with angelic purity. They wore the same kind of surplice, and held in their hands a similar scapular, as valiant warriors returning from the field of battle, carrying palms of triumph. They were arranged in order near M. Libermann. After I had contemplated

them to my satisfaction, they advanced a few paces, and then all disappeared. I did not fail, on the following day, to procure a scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and since then, thank God, I have never been without one.'"

Several regulations dictated or inspired by M. Libermann, are preserved in the seminary to this day; in these he teaches the students how to sanctify even the humblest functions, or the most ordinary actions of their daily life. His deep interior spirit is admirably reflected in his regulations "for the sacristans," "for vacation," "for distant pilgrimages, such as that to Our Lady of Chartres;" but that supernatural spirit appears especially in his charming biography of Francis Liévain, a student, who of all others resembled him most, and whom in his letters and conversations he constantly held up as a perfect model of every virtue. The letters exchanged between these two souls are filled with that fragrance of piety which proceeds only from the hearts of saints; and when M. Liévain, in the bosom of his family, is consumed by sickness, and still more by his ardent longing after Jesus, M. Libermann, unable to appear in person by the bedside of his young friend, encourages him, in a touching farewell, to quit this land of exile for a better and happier country.

This biography, which he composed at the request of his superiors, is the true picture of a perfect soul, and in it he has unconsciously depicted the exact features of his own. The souls of the two friends were formed by the same breath of holiness, and, inasmuch as God had been pleased to stamp upon both the same image, namely, His own resemblance, they were truly brothers. This is why he could not describe the one without portraying the living image of the other. The brother of the holy youth, Alexander Liévain, who also died at an early age, after having, during fourteen years, directed the great Seminary



of Arras, wrote the following lines, when transmitting the letters of his brother to the sons of the venerable Libermann:—

“These letters alone would suffice to fill us with the highest esteem for your saintly father. What love of God!—what piety!—what detachment! I imagine I see these two friends who were so united to God, and in God here below, now congratulating each other in heaven for having so much incited each other to the love of God and to the practice of perfection. If this good brother whom I in a certain sense regret were alive, I am sure that, from his very intimate relations with M. Libermann, he would have many interesting details to communicate to you. As for me, I can only say what many others must have already told you, that he edified us all by his kindness, his sweetness, his amiability, his truly tender devotion to the Most Holy Sacrament, which was betrayed by his tears during the elevation and at Holy Communion. We already considered him a saint; he was really one of those of whom it is written: ‘*Ibunt de virtute in virtutem*’—‘*They shall go from virtue to virtue.*’\* I believe that he holds a very high place in heaven. ‘*Fiant novissima mea sicut novissima illius!*’—‘*May my last moments be like unto his!*’”†

As we have previously said, the holy crusade, necessitated by an exceptional situation, was to last only for a time. If, like every energetic movement, it had its fault, that fault was the excess of good: the excess disappeared and the good remained. The principal end which the zealous promoters had in view was attained, and the result promised to be lasting.

M. Libermann had now accomplished a threefold mission; he had restored and strengthened the best

\* Ps. lxxxiii., 8,

† Numb. xxiii., 10.

traditions of former times, and added new ones for the purpose of keeping alive the spirit of piety and fervour among the students; he had deposited in the hearts of all fruitful seeds of virtue, perfection, and holiness.

Could a mission so varied and so extensive be fully accomplished without some false steps being taken, if not by the humble apostle himself, at least by his auxiliaries? Far from contesting it, we would wish to expose them in detail, as they might prove instructive. Indiscretions were, no doubt, committed, as always happens in such cases; but they must be attributed to inexperience, inadvertence, or to the diversity of sentiment and character which, unhappily, but too often introduce an element of discord even into the holiest enterprise. Some, after assisting at the meetings, would soon through inconstancy abandon them, and afterwards, at least in some cases, communicate their aversion to others.

One of the first illusions of the promoters was, to have reckoned too much on an impossible secrecy, and to have sought to surround the association with a veil of mystery, which usually is very easily penetrated in such like undertakings. Informed of everything, the "profane ones" saw in the "pious meetings" secret committees of perfection, from which they thought themselves rather capriciously excluded. It was, however, only after M. Libermann's departure that difficulties appeared on the surface, and that at last there arose a clamour of opposition, sufficiently loud to decide the prudent directors to suppress the association; yet, even in suppressing it, the superiors testified to the good it had produced, and especially preserved the essential part, namely, the pious conversations and the practice of all the means of clerical sanctification.

The venerable Superior-General of the Sulpicians has depicted in the following words the sojourn and good

works of M. Libermann at the Seminary of Issy:—"A strict observer of the rule, he was all to all, showing an extreme zeal in order to enkindle the fire of divine love. He had grouped around him the most fervent of the seminarists, and he exerted all his influence to inflame each one with zeal for the glory of God. He never made use of his ascendancy for any other end; this is why we considered him as a powerful auxiliary."

The ten years of hospitality which the Society of St. Sulpice had generously afforded him, habituated M. Libermann to consider himself as a son of M. Olier, and to take the liveliest interest in anything connected with his benefactors; he was not, however, troubled, after a natural and worldly fashion, about the greater or less reputation of the society. To him Saint-Sulpice appeared surrounded with a supernatural light, a house of God, a field cherished by the Lord, Who loved to find therein the delightful flowers of all virtues, the sweet perfumes of true piety, and the heavenly fruits of sanctification. There he saw the Lord's anointed receiving as a precious seed the new vocations to the priesthood, training and developing them until their consecration by the Sacrament of Holy Orders. There he hoped to see realized more and more the ideal of a good seminarist and holy priest, such as it was depicted by M. Olier. This is why he had, according to his own expression, "an extremely great veneration and tenderness for that holy Founder and very beloved father, who had begotten him in his dearest Lord Jesus;" and this is why he felt the same veneration and tenderness for his society, which is destined to perpetuate the true apostolic and sacerdotal spirit. Spiritual life was M. Libermann's entire existence; as long as he lived he loved Saint-Sulpice, he exalted M. Olier, in order to diffuse on all sides the spirit of fervour and angelic innocence which is

so incessantly recommended by that great servant of God.

His affection for the Founder and Society of Saint-Sulpice included all his masters, whose authority he strenuously maintained on all occasions: one instance of this will suffice:—

He was already separated from Saint-Sulpice for nearly three years, when, on the 1st of May, 1840, he received from a seminarist, whom he only knew by correspondence, a brief note, containing expressions which seemed to him somewhat disrespectful towards his directors. Immediately, as he says, he is wounded to the heart; he leaves every other occupation to reprove his correspondent; and in doing so, he evinces a vivacity which he never exhibited in a personal cause. He beseeches his indiscreet young friend to place himself humbly in the presence of God, in order to hear him in peace: “I feel urged,” he exclaims, “to tear you to pieces, O dearest! If I could, I would break, I would reduce your soul to fragments; I would grind it to dust at the feet of our Lord, because I perceive in it a self-love which is infinitely dangerous. You judge those who are entrusted with the guidance of your soul; you examine whether they are right or wrong. Where, then, is that simplicity of childhood by which we must obtain the kingdom of God? You have caused me pain; yes, dearest, you have caused me pain, and much pain, too! Not that I am uneasy at being judged and condemned by you; that matters little to me: *mihi pro minimo est*. But I am troubled at seeing you judge those who direct you.” He concludes this severe rebuke with the following words, which we have already partly quoted in a previous chapter: “Content yourself with serving God in the humility of your heart, and in perfect love, without allowing yourself either to examine or to judge. In truth,

I assure you, that I have passed the five first years of my seminary life without examining or judging anything. Now that I am obliged to examine and to judge, I do not find myself so much at ease; my greatest wish would be to retire and have nothing to do with anyone; for in all this I see great affliction of spirit" (Letter, May 1st, 1840).

Thus, during five years, an exemplary seminarist by his docility, obedience, charity, regularity, and fervour, he added to the treasure deposited in the seminary by two generations of fervent Levites. Then, during five other years, he preserves this treasure which, for a while, had been endangered, and transmitted it to others with an increase of riches of which God alone knows the amount.

And now let us return for the last time to the *Avenue of the Quarantaine*, where, after a long absence, the apostle still appears at intervals by a message, or a kind of circular addressed to the "fervent." These letters usually arrived during the vacation a few days before the opening of the classes for the *rendezvous* of his zealous followers, who sacrificed the last of their holidays in order to concert their plans and projects for the ensuing year.

We still find them nearly all assembled together in October, 1837, listening with avidity to the reading of a long and beautiful letter, which a messenger from Brittany had brought to them from their holy friend and master. (Letter of 3rd October, 1837).

Those friends will soon be dispersed for ever: Alexander Liévain will follow his brother to the tomb; the new Maigna will soon be laid in a fresh grave by the side of the old porter whose eyes he closed in death; Eugene Tisserand will disappear in a tempest; Paul de la Brunière will fall under the axe of the long-haired Tartars; one will penetrate into the forests of America, and another will hide himself in the caverns of Tonquin. . . .

Let us, on leaving Issy, repeat the touching farewell which one of those seminarists, M. Luquet, an intimate friend of M. Libermann, when writing to a former *confrère*, addressed to the cradle of his sacerdotal life a short time before his departure for the foreign Missions of India. His only desire was to offer once more the adorable Sacrifice in the hallowed chapel of Loretto:—

“Probably,” he exclaims, “it will be granted to me to offer up, for the last time, the holy Sacrifice in that sanctuary, where I have received so many graces, and the recollection of which shall remain engraven in my heart as a cherished remembrance of the past, and as a powerful security for the future. I shall ever bear in mind the ineffable tenderness of Jesus and Mary, who are pleased to enrich the dear house in which you dwell with immense treasures of blessings. I shall never forget that blessed “Solitude,” in which it has been given to me to rest for a while to calm my soul, so long and so wretchedly agitated by the dangers and storms of a life spent far from God. I shall always remember the edifying examples with which I was surrounded, and which were all powerful over my heart; the delightful intimacy that existed amongst us; the pious conversations during which divine love gradually found its way to my soul. I shall always give thanks to Jesus and Mary for having granted to me the invaluable favour of being present at those fruitful recreations, during which we profited more abundantly than during those exercises in which the thought of God was more directly the occupation of our mind. I shall always bless my adorable Master, my Saviour, and my God, for not having, despite the numberless miseries which I have felt and still feel in me, established, between counsel and precept, any of these deplorable distinctions which destroy, in the innermost part of the heart, that divine life, without which there is



no zeal, no holiness, no love. Always and everywhere shall the cherished remembrance of those days so swiftly passed, impart new vigour to my soul to advance in the sweet service of Him, to Whom I have consecrated the remainder of a life of which the world has, alas! consumed so great a portion. I shall always bless thee, O hallowed earth! which saints have trod, and which brings forth saints. Dear house of Issy, how sweet is thy memory to me, how closely it is connected in my heart with the divine thought, which is to conduct me to the gates of that happy death after which I sigh, in whatever land our Lord may lead me to, and in whatever manner He may be pleased to prepare that death for me!"

Little did the future Bishop of Hesebon think, whilst tracing those lines, that twenty years later, after having several times crossed the stormy seas of the Indian regions, he would, in the full bloom of manhood, be devoured for six months by a cancer, and breathe his last at Rome, in a French seminary, attended and consoled by the sons of the Venerable Libermann.

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## Part III.

M. LIBERMANN, FOUNDER OF THE SOCIETY OF THE HOLY HEART OF MARY, FROM THE ORIGIN OF THE SOCIETY TO HIS ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD, 1836-1841.

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### CHAPTER I.

M. Libermann and his first disciples, MM. Le Vasseur and Tisserand, 1836-1837.

**T**HE life of a founder of a religious order, like the life of Jesus, the Founder of the Church, presents a triple aspect, which we cannot contemplate without perceiving, as it were, a divine image reflecting itself on the world. It would seem as if God could not stoop down to our poor earth, without casting a ray of His eternity on the present, the past, and the future. This triple image shone forth with singular brightness in the Son of God made man. In the fulness of time He came and dwelt amongst us, to restore the past, to preserve the present, and to secure the future. He had been clearly announced, and anxiously expected during many ages. "The voice of one crying in the desert" had invited the world "to prepare the way of the Lord;" and,

when the Lord appeared, the same angel of the wilderness humbly pointed Him out to the multitudes as their Leader, their Master, and Redeemer; "Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him Who taketh away the sins of the world." To establish His work, the Son of God deigned to call on a few children of men, that they might become His auxiliaries: at the sound of His voice, apostles and disciples flocked around Him, to learn His doctrine, imbibe his spirit, and share in His mission. The Saviour expired on Calvary; the world was redeemed; the Church was established; and, from the foot of the cross, whereon hung the dead figure of the God-Man, men could behold, with grateful amazement, the past, the present, and the future, crimsoned, redeemed, and revived by the most Precious Blood.

Jesus is the perfect prototype of the founders of religious societies. In the lives of these men of Providence the threefold image of God glitters with heavenly splendour. Their works, like the Church of Jesus, are generally works of reparation; rich mines opened at the proper time, to provide for present and pressing necessities, and abundant stores of priceless treasures for all coming ages. All their steps resound on the earth which they tread, and awaken echoes that are prolonged through centuries. They soon see themselves surrounded by fervent disciples, who take up their spirit and zealously aid them in carrying out the wonderful designs of God in their regard. There was, in this respect, no exception for the venerable Libermann, whose religious family was to revive an ancient institution, to give grace and salvation to millions of utterly abandoned souls, and to supply devoted missionaries for generations yet unborn. His sphere was to be the more extensive, as he was to establish his society in the centre, which, after God, corresponds to

the widest circle—the most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary.

As we have now reached the middle point of M. Libermann's active life, it is well to show him in his proper light, and to point out the triple horizon which, like a threefold aureola, displays itself around him. His past will still extend, and we shall find that his work was prepared a century beforehand. His precursors will have in some manner divined his conceptions, and, as much as possible, realized them before him in the very place which he was destined to occupy. What will his work be in future times? He alone, Who directs the actions of His saints, could answer this question. The saints themselves, though standing at the origin of their foundations, often, whilst here below, do not foresee the fruitfulness of their works, the glorious future of which they will only know when, clothed with immortality, they shall behold their God as He is, face to face. During many years of trials, the venerable Libermann carried within his heart, though almost unconsciously, the precious seed of the tree which God had destined him to implant in the bosom of His Church upon earth.

The Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary appears inseparably united to him: with him it enters Saint-Stanislaus and Saint-Sulpice; it springs from the first tears of his contemplations; it is warmed by the fire which is more and more enkindled in his breast, whilst by his ardent discourses he inflames the youthful hearts of his fellow-students; or, whilst, victim of a dreadful disease, he lies prostrate, as a resigned holocaust before the tabernacle of Jesus, or at the foot of the altar of Mary. With him it passes through a long and deadly agony, and through the sorrowful humiliations of the tomb. During five years it is bound up with him in the

swaddling clothes of humility, and, though mute, it already gives to God the homage of the speechless infant, that homage which is called the most perfect praise.

Already this society begins to define its end, and to muster its members ; and he whom God had designed to be its founder, its centre, and its life, has not even the least suspicion of the movement. He quits Saint-Sulpice and his friends, and, as yet, not a corner is raised of the veil which hides from him the vast prospect of his future career. Beyond the seas, in a little island, an unknown stranger will first perceive a glimpse of the Jewish convert's destiny. That stranger will cross the ocean, carrying within his heart a message the object and nature of which are entirely hidden from him. The mysterious message gradually spreads light around the venerable servant of God ; it again traverses the seas ; it moves the hearts of many, without apparently attracting the attention, or captivating the heart and sympathies of M. Libermann. The humble convert was in the hands of God, Who is so truly admirable in the inscrutable ways by which He carries out His designs, and Who loves to select the weakest and humblest instruments in order to manifest the greatness of His power, the depths of His wisdom, and the infinite tenderness of His unspeakable mercy towards the children of men.

Among the disciples of the venerable Libermann at the Seminary of Issy, there was one whose career is so closely intertwined with that of his master and model, that a brief sketch of his life is here indispensable.

Frederick Le Vasseur was born in the island of Bourbon, on the 25th of February, 1811. By his father he was descended from an ancient family of Rouen, and by his mother he belonged to the Sigoyer de Bernardi,

one of the best families of the town of Apt, in Provence.\*

During his childhood he had witnessed the sad state of religious destitution, to which the French colonies were then reduced. In those distant possessions the effects of the great Revolution had been, perhaps, even more fatal to religion than in the mother country itself. In the colonies, as in all Missions, the faith had been planted and maintained solely by the religious congregations; and those societies had been nearly all swept away by the revolutionary tempest. Long after the storm was over, the island of Bourbon, which had been evangelized by the sons of St. Vincent de Paul, remained like a desolate and abandoned wilderness. The Society of the Holy Ghost, which was entrusted with the formation of the colonial

\* The Le Vasseur family remounts to James Le Vasseur of Bouquetot, in Rommais, who was born a Calvinist, and saved by some Catholics from the massacre of St. Bartholomew's day (1572). James Le Vasseur, then a child of seven years, was by the aid of his deliverers reinstated in the possession of his inheritance, entered the true Church, and became the parent of a numerous family, which gave many distinguished men to the State, especially to the bar and the army. In 1776, Peter James Amable Le Vasseur, great-grandfather of Frederick Le Vasseur, was ennobled, and honoured with the title of Esquire for himself and his male descendants by Louis XVI., in recompense for important services rendered to the city of Rouen, as administrator of Hospitals, High Sheriff, Judge, Consul, and Syndic of the Chamber of Commerce. He bequeathed his name and title to Louis Francis Le Vasseur, who, in his turn, transmitted them to his two sons, Louis Francis, and Frederick. The latter had three sons, all of whom embraced the military profession. Benjamin and Leon died as marshals, and the third as general of division. Louis Francis, the ancestor of the venerable Libermann's faithful associate, left France, in 1783, to fill important offices in the Islands of France and of Bourbon. He established himself in the latter island, and became the head of a new branch of the Le Vasseur family.



clergy, had been more than decimated by the calamity. It almost exhausted itself to send missionaries to those forsaken dependencies. One of its members, the Abbé Warnet, arrived at Bourbon about the year 1820. This zealous priest was for the young Frederick, as well as for many others, a messenger from God. Being appointed curate of Saint-Denis, the chief town of the island, one of his duties was to catechise the pupils of the college.

Frederick distinguished himself so much among his fellow-students, by his attention to the instructions of the zealous catechist, and by his exemplary conduct, that in a short time he was permitted to partake of the Eucharistic banquet. The ceremony, during which the future apostle of the negroes had the happiness of being united for the first time with his God, was quite an event for the inhabitants of the colony. As they had never before witnessed such a solemnity, they naturally followed all the proceedings with that eager curiosity which is characteristic of *creoles*. The ceremony was preceded by a retreat of three days, which the communicants, although not bound to a separation from their friends, were, however, recommended to spend in special reserve and recollection. Frederick scrupulously followed the advice of the director, and during three days, kept the strictest silence. Previously, when approaching for the first time the sacred tribunal of penance, he was so deeply impressed, that he fainted at the feet of his confessor.

The great day arrived. Over one hundred and fifty children, displaying white banners, marched in solemn procession through a silent and recollected crowd of people, who all followed the ranks and thronged into the church. It was remarked, that whilst the other children renewed their baptismal vows in a tone scarcely audible,

Frederick made himself distinctly heard in every part of the sacred edifice, as if solemnly to declare that his life was to be spent in the service of his God, in waging war against the world, sin, and Satan.

A few frivolous friends, even some relatives, and especially companions in a college, which no longer retained the military discipline of the ancient Lyceums, might have offered great obstacles to the perseverance of young Le Vavas seur. Success in his studies which he pursued with great ardour, might have become another difficulty. His holidays especially were not free from danger: many and pressing were the allurements to parties and pleasures. To sanctify Sundays, keep the days of abstinence, avoid worldly meetings and soirees, or spend some time in prayer, he was often obliged to have recourse to stratagems. A walk, a hunting or a fishing excursion suddenly decided upon, always came at the right time to afford some pretext for refusing the invitation. Frederick's heart belonged not to the world, but to God and to souls; he loved solitude and prayer, and in the morning he usually retired to a neighbouring wood to pour forth undisturbed fervent aspirations to his God; the evening he spent with his younger brother and sister preparing them for their First Communion; and frequently from beneath that sky, which in the southern hemisphere is said to be so delightfully beautiful, they would mingle their innocent infant voices to offer up their simple supplications. It was the canticle of the three children which ascended towards the throne of their Heavenly Father.

Thus commenced the apostleship of Frederick Le Vavas seur. Even then the future missionary already felt his heart burning with zeal for the salvation of the poor negroes. He bestowed his first care on the slave who attended him. He loved to instruct and prepare for death the oldest

amongst them ; but, above all, he reserved to himself the happiness of baptizing them with his own hand. This is the first germ of the Apostolate of the blacks. The day of mercy is nigh for Africa ! Should we not salute, at its very dawn, that rising light which, now faintly glimmering in the distance, shall gradually increase, and enlighten one day with the rays of salvation a continent still buried in the dismal gloom of paganism !

It was, no doubt, this light which attracted Frederick's eye, and directed his course towards France. His father intended him for the law or the medical profession, but the enthusiastic youth only dreamt of the polytechnic school, the prospects of a scholar, and the fame of becoming an eminent mathematician. At his departure, his father gave him this last and singular advice : " Be whatever you please but never a priest, or you will no longer be my son." Frederick candidly promised to be mindful of this request, more through fear of the priesthood than of his father's threat.

He set out in May, 1829, with a numerous company well suited to enliven, at the expense of his faith and virtue, the long passage from Bourbon to France. But his faith was not to be shaken, nor his virtue to be blemished. He strictly kept all the days of abstinence, and, as before leaving he had forgotten to ascertain the precise time of the Ember Days, for greater security, he abstained from flesh-meat on every Wednesday.

M. Warnet accompanied him with his wishes, his counsels, and his recommendations. On his arrival in Paris, Frederick presented himself with his introductory letters to the Abbé Guérin, a former member of the Seminary of the Holy Ghost, and to M. Berthelmy, a pious old man, who had been the preceptor of the princes of Luxembourg. He had also letters for some other priests of the Holy

Ghost ; but, recalling to mind the last words of his father, and fearing to get too well acquainted with the clergy, he did not deliver them.

To avoid the society of his Bourbon friends, he went to reside at Versailles, where, under the guidance of a skilful master, he began a preparatory course for the polytechnic school. M. Guérin, whom he had consulted on the choice of a confessor, directed him to M. Blanquart de Bailleul, then Vicar-General of Mgr. Borderies. The Abbé de Bailleul, despite his many and important occupations, always received the young stranger with the greatest kindness ; he, however, confided him for ordinary cases to a curate of St. Louis of Versailles, M. Wavrechin, who was a native of Guadeloupe and a creole like Frederick.

M. Le Vasseur had already devoted an entire year to studies which deeply interested him, and all betokened a lasting peace. But the grace of God interrupted his scientific projects. One day, whilst he was engrossed with a rather difficult problem, the question suddenly presented itself to his mind, "Is it really by mathematics that you will be able to testify your gratitude to God?" He endeavoured to convince himself that, by directing all his intentions to God, he could serve religion by science. But a second question soon followed : "Is this really the most excellent homage that can be offered to God ? Is there not a nobler and surer sacrifice, and one more worthy of Him ?"

This unexpected monologue perplexed him and placed him at once in sight of the ecclesiastical state. Immediately he hastens to his director, and exposes to him his inclinations and repugnances, his own propensities and his father's protestations : "Whatever you do," said M. Blanquart, "your place is in the seminary."

These clear and decisive words plunged the mind of the young Frederick into still greater confusion. He then consults M. Berthelmy, who recommends him not to act precipitately. For the moment he betakes himself to the study of medicine, and, to that effect, writes a letter to his parents. This letter had not reached Bourbon when his anxieties redoubled to such a degree, that, by the advice of all his friends, he went to ask for a final decision from Mgr. Borderies. The venerable prelate declared that there was no doubt about his vocation.

To proceed with entire prudence, it was resolved that he should continue to prepare for the entrance examination to the polytechnic school. Once admitted, as he had every reason to expect, he could then secure for himself a sort of honourable retreat; but he was to pay dearly for this satisfaction. His interior troubles, added to a constant application of mind, had almost completely shaken his physical strength. He, nevertheless, presented himself for the preparatory examination: he even obtained excellent marks for mathematics and drawing; but, as during the same sitting, he had to solve several problems in trigonometry, and to write an oratorical composition, which, according to the regulations, should have been postponed till the following day, he failed, owing to his violent headaches. He abandoned the contest of his own accord, and, from his long efforts to enter on a career for which God had not destined him, he retained a weakness which increased during six years, and which rendered him unable to apply himself to any serious study.

In the hour of trial, God had prepared for him a great consolation. He found, at Paris, a second mother in the well-known Sister Rosalie, whose eye, quick to discover sorrow, had perceived the many sufferings endured by

the young stranger, as well in body as in soul.\* In order to recover his health, which was completely shaken by sickness, he consulted the celebrated Doctor Récamier. To dispel the anguish of his heart, Sister Rosalie invited him to share in her works of charity; she showed him the road to the poor, and the manner of distributing to them the food of the soul, with the nourishment of the body; she also procured for him, under her own roof, the physician of his soul. Her humble dwelling was a secure shelter for many refugees, after the Revolutions of 1830 and 1848. At the same time as M. Le Vasseur, Sister Rosalie harboured the Rev. Father Genesseau, who, like all his Jesuit brethren, was then held as a mere outlaw in the city of Paris. Frederick was his coadjutor, brother, and spiritual son. Every morning, and frequently before dawn, he would spend his calmest and happiest hours in the modest little community chapel, uniting his orisons with the sacrifices of the saintly old man, and with the prayers of the Sisters of Charity.

After being thus engaged in works of charity and devotion, he yielded to a last illusion, and began, at the solicitation of his friends, the dry and arduous study of the law. But, a few months afterwards, by the advice of the same friends, he entered the College Stanislaus. Here, like M. Libermann, he was treated with the greatest kindness by the Abbé Buquet, prefect of discipline. Frederick soon announced to his father his resolution of embracing the ecclesiastical state.

\* Sister Rosalie was born in the district of Gex, 1787, and died at Paris, 1856. She had entered the Novitiate of the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul in 1802. Her life was generously spent in the service of God and of the poor; and her name has become a household word among all classes in the French capital, where, for upwards of fifty years, she waged an unrelenting war against misery and vice with a charity which has won for her the title of *Mother of the Poor*.



In the meantime, the Revolution of 1830 had considerably affected the circumstances of his family. Moreover, fearful hurricanes, which in the colonies often cause the sudden collapse of the greatest fortunes, followed one another in rapid succession, and, by the awful disasters which they occasioned, placed his father at the mercy of his creditors. At this critical period M. Le Vasseur had recourse to Frederick as his only hope, and implored him to come to his assistance. How could the young student abandon his parents, his sister, and his younger brother? How could he reply to his father: "I am no longer your son?" Assuredly, he could not have done so, had not God interposed, and supplied his place by giving him as brother-in-law an excellent young man, who was in a position to set aright and manage affairs which seemed in an almost hopeless condition.

As we have entered into these details we cannot refrain from being still further carried away by two family legends which, if not vested with a supernatural character, are not, however, devoid of a charming interest:—About this time the mother and sister of the young creole were conversing together in the drawingroom, the windows of which had been opened to admit the evening air, when, to their great surprise, there entered one of those beautiful birds of the islands which, with a pious respect, the inhabitants call the "Bird of the Virgin." It flew directly to take its rest on Frederick's portrait, which had recently arrived from France. The mother could not help asking her daughter what message the Holy Virgin intended to convey to them regarding her brother. A short time after, his mother, in a dream, saw her son surrounded with light, sitting in the midst of her slaves; when the door opened, a venerable lady entered, came up to her, and handed to her from Frederick several letters sealed with a black signet: "My

child is dead!" she cried. "No," answered the lady, "but he no longer belongs to you." She awoke at these words, but their mysterious meaning was still hidden from her. Whether this was an illusion or a presentiment, it must, in either case, be overlooked in a mother. A letter soon arrived from Frederick. His resolution was taken; he would be a priest. He earnestly conjured his parents generously to offer him to the service of God, and to adopt in his stead the new son whom Providence was presenting them with, in the person of his sister's husband. In concluding, he declared, that by refusing his request, they would make him die of grief, but that nothing could change a resolution which had been ripened by four years of deliberation and suffering.

Misfortunes had now dispelled many of his father's dreams and projects. His mother, a woman of noble mind and generous heart, loved God earnestly, and felt but too happy to give up her child to His service; and his sister, in changing her state, had not ceased to be faithful to God and devoted to her brother: she became the eloquent advocate of the absent. Consent was granted, and Madame Le Vasseur herself transmitted it to her son in a letter, such as, on this earth, can only be written by the hand of a Christian mother. She made but one reserve: it was to see her son once more, promising at the same time to leave him afterwards entirely to God and to his vocation.

The condition was fulfilled; Mgr. de Quélen consented to regard M. Le Vasseur as belonging to the ecclesiastical seminary, which was attached to the College Stanislaus, and allowed him to wear the soutane. It was, consequently, in the livery of the sanctuary that he appeared in the midst of his family. The four months which he spent at home were months of a most fruitful apostolate.

His friends felt happy to pray with him and to hear him speak of the things of God, with all the glowing ardour of a neophyte. It was after conversing with him on meditation and union with God, that two pious ladies, aunts of his sister-in-law, resolved to enter on a life of fervour and sacrifice, which has since endowed Bourbon and Mauritius with an invaluable institution—the *Society of the "Daughters of Mary."* This society has been directed for many years by its two first foundresses, Mothers Mary Magdalen of the Cross, and Mary Teresa of Jesus.

His native island presented to Frederick an abundant subject of meditation. It was crowded with negro slaves who were reduced to a most degraded condition. A vivid picture of their great desolation displayed itself daily before his eyes, even in his father's house. His humane pity and his ardent zeal for the destitute negroes seemed to be shared by very few persons; his sympathy for the blacks found but little echo in the hearts of those who had commanded slaves from their infancy, and had never witnessed the blessings of liberty in truly Catholic countries. Grieved at heart, his thoughts would often wander beyond the seas and roam through Africa, amidst the countless children of the unhappy race of Cham, who were still weighed down beneath the oppressive yoke of the spirit of darkness. Such thoughts gradually enkindled the ardour of his zeal, and developed the resolution he had already taken, of immolating himself for the spiritual welfare of the forsaken blacks.

The four months of his vacation came to a close with the last solemnities of Holy Week. After partaking, with his pious mother, of the paschal banquet on Palm Sunday, he laid his affections and hopes at the foot of the cross, bade a last farewell to all he loved most on earth, and on Good Friday embarked for France.

On his return to Paris in June, 1836, he passed some time at the College Stanislaus, where he received the tonsure from the hands of Mgr. de Quélen. At the re-opening of classes, he entered the Seminary of Issy, to commence philosophy. He was received, and introduced into the community by M. Libermann, who was at once his friend, his angel, and his monitor. M. Le Vavas seur soon repaid his kindness by becoming one of his most zealous auxiliaries in the pious meetings. The first year, Frederick was appointed sacristan of the chapel of Loretto; he collected the best traditions of this devout hermitage, and in union with his holy friend, drew up the *customary regulations* which have ever since guided his successors.

His first and chief trial at Issy was an extreme difficulty in applying his weary mind to the serious studies of philosophy and theology, after being hitherto given exclusively to the combinations of pure sciences. During eighteen months this difficulty increased so much, and his health gave way so visibly, that he did not hesitate to say, that without a miracle he could never continue his studies. Another of his fellow-students was in a similar condition; it was M. Tisserand, who with him and M. Libermann was to form the basis of a new Religious Society. Having entered the seminary of Issy a short time before M. Le Vavas seur, Eugene Tisserand had gone with so much difficulty through the first course of philosophy, that, being declared incapable, he was refused the tonsure, and, by decision of the Archiepiscopal council, deprived of the free place which had been allowed him. When dismissing him, his director recommended him, for the honour of the Church, and for the interest of his soul, to renounce the ecclesiastical state. He retired to a Trappist monastery, which after a few months he had to leave through ill health. He reappeared at Issy, and

obtained, not without great difficulty, the favour of a ten days' hospitality. This brief delay having expired, he was, contrary to his expectations, permitted to resume his former place. M. Tisserand was already two months re-installed when Frederick Le Vavasseur entered the seminary.

Eugene, born of a creole mother, and descended from an ancient governor of San-Domingo, was greatly interested in the salvation of the negroes; but his thoughts were exclusively centred on the slaves of San-Domingo, his maternal country. From his infancy he had heard much of the abandonment of the poor blacks, and often listened to members of his family expressing their feelings of indignation against the unhappy priests, who seemed to land on those shores to be agents of evil, rather than ministers of the living God. Some influential persons of the island had even made an appeal to his charity, and conjured him to make known to his fellow-students this great affliction of the Church.

There existed, then, in those two seminarists of creole blood, a latent tendency which urged them to the same end, a common and secret aspiration that found a centre in their mutual confidence in M. Libermann, who was, however, until then, a stranger to their projects of apostleship. Such is the humble origin of the work, which later on shall be called the *Congregation of the Holy Ghost and the Holy Heart of Mary*. Two seminarists, the one rejected from the ecclesiastical state as incapable, the other despairing of being able to pursue his studies, both compelled to rely for their principal chance of success on an indigent acolyte, who, being stricken with a hideous, and, in most cases, an incurable malady, was for ten years excluded from Holy Orders; and even this feeble support was soon to be separated from them and apparently called to another destination. On this triple foundation God will

however, build up a work according to His own Heart, and in favour of the most destitute souls upon earth.

Human wisdom was at an end; the elements necessary to carry out a noble project were seemingly wanting, and generous aspirations such as only inflame apostles' hearts were threatened with absolute fruitlessness. But in the merciful designs of Divine Wisdom, it was decreed that the long-forgotten negro race was not to be abandoned for ever. He Whose omnipotence shall one day collect from the four winds of the earth the scattered bones and dust of the human family, and restore the children of men to life, strength, and many of them to unspeakable beauty, shall likewise, at the appointed hour, reassemble the three poverty and sickness-stricken seminarists, invest them with His power, enrich them with His graces, and establish them the founders of a new generation of apostles. On such a frail basis His Almighty hand will erect a structure, which will rapidly develop into a mighty edifice, that shall shelter the numerous missionaries, who, from every nation, tribe, and tongue, shall hasten to the rescue of the captive descendants of Cham. To MM. Libermann, Le Vavas seur, and Tisserand, may justly be applied the words of the Royal Prophet, when, in a transport of delight, he announced the ultimate triumph of the approaching Man of sorrows, the Redeemer of the world: "the stones which the builders rejected, the same will become the heads of the corners. This will be the Lord's doing: and it will appear wonderful to our eyes. *A Domino factum est istud, et est mirabile in oculis nostris!*" (Ps. cxvii. 22, 23.)



## CHAPTER II.

M. Libermann, though only a simple acolyte, is Master of Novices at Rennes, 1837-1839.

**T** would be difficult to speak of the works inspired by the Sacred Heart, without being reminded of the venerable Father Eudes, who justly deserves to be called its apostle. This holy priest was the first who propagated the new worship: he spent his whole life in spreading it, and devoted to it the congregations of which he is the founder.\* He inaugurated its feasts, drew up its offices, printed manuals, erected churches and chapels in its honour, instituted innumerable confraternities, and gave an impulse to a movement, which has, in the end, extended to the universal church.

The ambitious ones of this earth, it has been justly remarked, look with envious eye upon those whom they call rivals, when the latter come forward to share in their glory. How speedily worldly honours are exhausted! What one man receives, seems to lessen by so much the part reserved for the other. But in the kingdom of God there are no rivals, each one is doubly content at the elevation and happiness of his brother. The glory which God reserves for His chosen children, can be shared by all, without diminishing the part of anyone by an increase in the number of new-comers. By exalting Father Eudes,

\* Rev. Father Eudes, brother of the historian, Francis de Mezeray, was born in Normandy, in 1601, and died in 1680. He established the Congregation of Jesus and Mary (1643), the Order of Our Lady of Charity of the Refuge, and the third order of the Daughters of the Sacred Heart of Mary.

we take nothing from those who, like him, laboured to propagate the worship of the Sacred Heart ; we only assert that God has associated them all in this work of His love.\*

When speaking of Father Eudes' ardent zeal in promoting the devotion to the Sacred Hearts, we wish in no way to diminish the glory which surrounds the virgin of Paray-le-Monial. Nor have we any such intention, when asserting what is not generally known, that the initiative is due to Sister Margaret of the Blessed Sacrament, a daughter of Carmel and of the land of St. Bernard. Moreover, who is not aware that the monastic orders have breathed during four centuries the sweet perfumes which St. Gertrude and St. Mechtilde have drawn so abundantly from the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary ?

There is, in truth, but one author, the Holy Ghost, to whom belongs every beginning. His breath, in passing over the benedictine cloisters, caused the first sparks to fall from the Heart of the Bridegroom ; a dove of Carmel carried off one of the burning coals ; the ladies of the perpetual adoration of the most Holy Sacrament received from their foundress a fire, which shall never be extinguished. It was just that the first fruits should be consecrated to the Immaculate Virgin ; for the Mother should prepare the way for her Divine Son. The Immaculate Heart of the august Virgin is the focus from which this new fire emanates. And what did the Sacred

\* That Father Eudes has been the first *zélateur* of the Sacred Hearts is brought to light by the Rev. Father Ange le Doré, in his excellent little work, entitled : "Father Eudes, the first Apostle of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary," 1870. He justly complains of deplorable omissions in the works, even of the best authors, and points out errors in writers who pretend to the strictest exactness. See pp. 171, 177, &c. " *Analecta Juris Pontificii*," 30 livraison. " *Histoire de la B. Marguérite, Marie, par le R. P. Daniel.*"

Hearts wish but that the fire should be enkindled, and should inflame the whole world ?

Father Eudes is the doctor, who gives to the new worship its precise formula, who establishes its theological foundation, refutes its opponents, determines its practical and liturgical sense, assigns its rites, its hymns, and prayers, causes feasts and societies to be established, and obtains episcopal ordinances and apostolic briefs, destined to propagate and perpetuate the new devotion. He was its ambassador before the nations, the pastors, the princes of the world and of the sanctuary. His long and solemn embassy was necessary, in order that the humble virgin of Paray-le-Monial, when emerging from the splendours of her visions, might, in her turn, be the ambassadress of the Sacred Hearts to the Holy See, and determine the supreme sanction of a devotion which, besides extirpating the coldest and most satanic of all heresies, *Jansenism*, has inundated the Church with consolations proportioned to the bitterness of her afflictions. The same divine spirit animated all these saints, and in the course of time added the different links of the long chain of love, which connects the adorable Heart of Jesus with the hearts of the children of men.

The glorious part allotted by God in this case to the ancient church of Autun, founded by the disciples of the apostle whom Jesus loved, must have justly engaged the attention of the reader. Father Eudes came from Normandy to inaugurate the first feast of the Sacred Heart, in the Cathedral dedicated to St. Lazarus, the friend of Jesus. He found there the name of St. Rhétice, the first commentator in the West, of the "Canticle of Canticles;" the pallium of St. Syagrius, deputed by St. Gregory the Great to expel heresy from Gaul; the recent memories of St. Francis of Sales, and of St. Jane Frances de Chantal,

who, whilst mingling their prayers had "obtained there a glimpse of the coat of arms, blazon, motto, and war-cry," which were afterwards adopted in the order of the Visitation.\* At Autun was printed the first office of the Sacred Hearts, a few months after the birth of Margaret Mary, who, from her infancy, could assist at the festivals celebrated throughout the whole diocese.†

\* Madame de Chantal loved in her widowhood to retire to the Castle of Monthelon, in the neighbourhood of Autun. There she received the holy Bishop of Geneva. The humble pulpit from which he evangelized the poor is still to be seen in the village church. The amiable saint expresses himself with a charm quite prophetic, in a note dated June, 1611 :—

"My dearest daughter ! . . . God has this night favoured me with the thought that your house of the Visitation is, through His grace, sufficiently noble and important to receive His coat of arms, His blazon, His motto, and His war-cry. I have two thoughts, my dear mother ! If you agree with me, you must adopt for your coat of arms one heart pierced with two arrows, and enshrined in a crown of thorns. This poor heart will be surmounted by a cross, and upon it will be engraven the sacred names of Jesus and Mary. My daughter, at our next meeting I will tell you a thousand little thoughts which have come to me on this subject. For, truly, our little congregation is a work of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary." These thousand thoughts, which we regret to ignore, have filled the life and writings of Father Eudes.

† This office was published with the approbation of Mgr. Claude de la Magdeleine de Pragny, dated 20th January, 1648. The first festival was celebrated on the 8th February, as is still the custom in the Congregation of the Eudists. The prelate and the three doctors who gave their votes were persuaded that Bishops had the right of instituting new diocesan feasts, notwithstanding the Bulls of Saint Pius V., of Clement VII., and of Urban VIII. In this case, good faith is beyond dispute, and is admitted by the most ardent defenders of the pontifical jurisdiction. See D. Guéranger, "Inst. liturg." tom. III. chap. v., p. 266, *et seq.* ; "Bouix, *De jure liturgico.*" p. 4, cap. II. Blessed Margaret Mary was born at Verosvre, in the diocese of Autun,

Finally, it was at Baune that Father Eudes founded the first Confraternity of the Heart of Mary, of which mention is made in the history of the Church.\*

The first sanctuaries in honour of the Sacred Heart were endowed by royal princesses; the house of France received the new devotion as a family tradition. When the Martyr-king, Louis XVI., according to his own expression, expected nothing more from men, he received from one of the sons of Father Eudes a celebrated act of reparation to the Sacred Heart, which enabled the ill-fated monarch to look with peaceful calmness on the cruel ingratitude of a great number of his subjects and on the dreadful death that awaited him.† Since then, a first aureola has crowned the virgin of Paray-le-Monial, who was beatified on the 29th August, 1864; and we are now awaiting her canonization, perhaps to associate her triumph with that of the Church, and to proclaim anew the Mother of God, as Patroness of her kingdom of France, under the title of "Our Lady of the Sacred

on the 22nd July, 1647. She was favoured with her first vision about the year 1674. In her memoirs she marks down the 8th of February as one of the days dearest to the devotion, because it was on this day that she received one of the most signal of the favours which were to prepare her for her mission.

\* He had just brought to a close, at Autun, a great mission which lasted from Advent to the end of Lent. Immediately after leaving Autun, he repaired to Baune, there to commence the exercises of a new mission. He took special care to establish in this town the worship of the Sacred Hearts. From Baune the devotion spread throughout the whole neighbouring diocese of Dijon, where Sister Margaret of the Blessed Sacrament had already cleared the way. She died about this time, on the 26th May, 1648.

† Father Hebert, confessor to Louis XVI., with nine of his brethren and many other priests, was martyred at the Carmes (22nd September, 1792).



Heart." Who can foresee the growth of the devotion to the Sacred Heart in France, when the hill of Montmartre will be crowned with the monumental church of reparation, which is now being erected by an humbled and repenting nation?

During the two last centuries the Eudists possessed, particularly in Normandy and Brittany, numerous establishments, which, with the ancient Church of France, had entirely disappeared before the destructive torrent of the Great Revolution. About the year 1826, the Rev. Father Blanchard, aided by some ancient Eudists, restored this pious institute. Amongst his first fellow-labourers, was the Abbé Louis, a popular Breton Priest, who had founded at Rennes the educational establishment of St. Martin.

Being elected to succeed Father Blanchard, M. Louis applied to the society of St. Sulpice for an auxiliary, capable of aiding him in the direction of the Novitiate at Rennes. They deliberated for a long time, when at last M. Mollevaut decided the question by saying to the worthy superior: "Take M. Libermann with you; he is, it is true, only in minor orders, but he is as good as a priest."

Concerning this, M. Libermann had expressed neither repugnance nor desire. He saw in the decision of M. Mollevaut the will of God, and he humbly and religiously submitted. His numerous disciples at Issy and Paris alone were in trouble; all were moved to the heart, when, before starting for a walk, they bade adieu to the servant of God, whom many considered as the father of their souls. (August, 1837.)

Before placing him at the head of the novitiate, M. Louis, no doubt to try the virtue and spirit of M. Libermann, left him for some time amongst the novices. This new trial became for him another means for advancing in



the spirit of humility, as we see in a letter of one of the novices to their friends of the Seminary of Paris:—"God," he says, "consumes more than ever our very dear brother, M. Libermann, with the love of abjection and contempt. His joy is to be despised, and to be looked upon as a man of no great value; he is the last in everything, on account of his inferior ecclesiastical order, and God, Who wishes to raise him, begins by lowering him. He now gives him the grace of a novice, so that, during the novitiate, his example may be even more beneficial to us than his words."

This situation, however, did not last long; for soon after, on the advice of the Rev. Father Lestroan, a Jesuit, who had conducted the opening retreat of the year, M. Louis entrusted the whole direction of the novitiate to the humble acolyte, although there were among the novices several priests who had spent years in the sacred ministry.

He was happy to find amongst the new children of Father Eudes that which most attached him to the disciples of M. Olier. He loves, in his letters, to bring together the two congregations, to compare their origin and principles, their means and their end. He remarks, that the chief object of both is clerical education and the sanctification of the faithful by the priesthood, with this sole difference, that Father Eudes added the exterior ministry. The resemblance in the principles laid down by the founders for the direction of the seminaries, appeared to him so striking, that he recognised in them the same divine spirit.\* Like M. Olier, Father Eudes chose

\* It is evident that Father Eudes and M. Olier were intimately acquainted, and that in consequence, they must have exchanged their views on the direction of seminaries. "M. Olier invited Father Eudes to Saint-Sulpice (1651), to second, by his eloquence, the holy

Jesus and Mary for the foundation of his Society. He assigned to it as patrons those saints who had stood in the closest relation with our Blessed Lord: in the first place, the Most Holy Virgin, St. Joseph, St. John; in the second place, St. Anne, St. Joachim, and St. Gabriel. Like the Solitude at Issy, the novitiate of the Eudists is placed under the patronage of this holy archangel. Like M. Olier, Father Eudes confided his children to the immediate protection of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

M. Libermann says on this subject: "The views of Father Eudes on the Sacred Heart are admirable; that is our chief devotion, and the foundation of all that we have. The Most Holy Sacrament is another of our great devotions, and there is a feast for the priesthood of our Lord, but not so solemn as at Saint-Sulpice." M. Libermann continued, till the end of his sojourn at Rennes, this language of affectionate devotedness. In his letters he recommends to his friends the least interests of the Congregation; he opens its gates to several, and uses all his influence to multiply its vocations. At the same time God bestowed His choicest blessings on the little community.

M. Libermann himself characterized in the following terms the spirit of the Novitiate of St. Gabriel; it will be easy to perceive therein the perfect image of his own soul: "Our life," he says, "is sweet and peaceful; there reigns a perfect union and charity in our little community. We are always together, conversing gaily and peacefully.

lessons which he himself gave with such power to the young priests under his direction." ("Life of Father Eudes," By M. Ch. de Montjoy.) M. Olier held Father Eudes in such esteem, that from the pulpit of Saint-Sulpice he proclaimed him "*the marvel of the age.*"

No one ever appears displeased with another. It would seem as if each one does what he pleases, and yet obedience is perfectly observed. The reason of this is, that everything is done with contentment of heart, with peace and charity. Pray to God that He may continue to bestow His grace upon us, and increase it, so that we may sanctify ourselves in His holy love.

“We have,” he adds, “a charming little chapel, well adorned, and well suited to inspire devotion. Its inconveniences are, that we must ascend high, and the door is very narrow; but this reminds us of heaven, which presents the same difficulties. When once we are there, we forget all it has cost us to reach it, in the contentment with which we are filled. It is the same thing with our little heaven, where we, as well as the angels and saints, possess our God of charity. . . .”

He, however, soon perceived that his situation at Rennes was very different from what it had been at Issy, where he had learned to know how much it costs to do good, even in an ancient and perfectly constituted work. Even there, despite un hoped-for consolations, despite the benevolent support of his masters, and the increasing number of his friends, he had to fight hard the battles of the Lord, and when leaving it, the struggles of his life were by no means at an end. Destined to become himself the corner-stone of a new edifice, it was necessary that he should be fashioned and strengthened by other strokes, which as yet he had been unable to experience.

It was especially necessary that he should know what God always keeps in store for new religious societies. It may be said that for institutions, as for souls called to perfection, there exists what we have previously designated as the initial trial. It is a transitory state, during which they pass through unexpected crises, which seem to be

beyond the ken of all human foresight. It is a birth which can almost be compared to the sufferings of a painful death. Satan is undoubtedly there: if it is impossible for two or three to assemble in the name of God, without the enemy going about seeking to devour them, he must needs rage with particular fury when there is question of an association destined to set in array against him entire battalions of men of prayer and mortification.

But, if he wages war against all new institutions, with still greater rage will he pursue that one which rises from its ashes, and which finds in the dust of fifty years enough of life to collect its bones, and become once more a powerful stronghold of God and His Church. It seemed as if the Holy Ghost wished to describe those battles in the vision of the Apocalypse, where a woman appeared, heaving deep sighs, on the point of being delivered in the presence of a dreadful dragon which stood before her ready to devour her son. "But the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God." (Apoc. xiii. 6.)

Destined to be a founder, M. Libermann was prepared in the novitiate of St. Gabriel for the trials and combats of his future career, which was as yet entirely hidden from his view. His friends might have thought that his life was one of unbroken peace; but it was the peace enjoyed on a battle-field, where he and his enemy were trying their strength.

The Eudists had nobly fought the good fight during one hundred and fifty years; the enemy knew them. M. Libermann's arrival was to Satan a great source of annoyance, and the contest began. Let this suffice to make us comprehend a kind of suffering, of which he constantly avoided giving an explanation. He could not, however, conceal that his sufferings at Rennes surpassed all he had as yet endured, and he has clearly given us to

understand that they originated from a satanic intervention. Many questions addressed to him, numerous visits to Brittany, have thrown no light on this matter. It would seem as if he purposely wished to let this epoch of his life remain shrouded in an impenetrable mystery.

It may be that God permitted this trial, to make him advance still farther in the path of self-denial. Until his departure from Paris, success had continually attended his spiritual apostolate. It was different at Rennes, where, for a time, the efforts of his zeal and devotedness seemed baffled and destroyed by the agency of the spirit of evil. We see in the following letter that M. Libermann must have felt such a trial all the more keenly, as, at the beginning, he had promised himself a very different issue.

“My good Father Eudes,” he wrote to his friends, “is a wonderful man : his constitutions are superior to anything I could have dared to expect. Return thanks to our good Lord, Who has favoured us so much. I now perceive that we would always have lingered in a state of indecision, had not divine charity conducted us hither. I have great hopes, at least for the sanctification of those good gentlemen ; as for myself, I fear I shall always remain the same.” But as if he did not wish to conceal from himself either his adversary or the struggle he would have to encounter, he immediately adds :—“ Pray for me ; the devil at this moment torments me to force me to give up a work which enrages him, and seems to turn against myself. In all this, I am, perhaps, very guilty before God. This is a riddle for you ; but I can say no more on this point. Be satisfied with knowing that I am in very great danger. Sometimes my trouble is so excessive that it surpasses all comprehension. Still we must go on ; the Lord wishes it ; for thereby He is greatly glorified. The devil is foaming with rage, and

causes me to endure unheard-of anxieties. But, our good Lord gives me new strength ; I by no means yield, despite the fury of the demons. Pray for me, that the most holy name of God may be blessed and glorified. Observe the greatest secrecy regarding what I now tell you ; pray, and that is all." (Letter of 26th October, 1837.)

Some days afterwards, his troubles seemed to have diminished. "In our novitiate," he says, "all is wonderful. I hoped at first to be able to derive some little profit from the great favours which God, as I clearly foresaw, would pour down on our little seminary. But I am now afflicted to see that I shall leave it as poor a man as when I entered. . . . May the most holy name of our Lord be blessed ! At least, my dear brothers shall profit of them, and this is to me an abundant source of consolation. I already witness great wonders ; I alone am ever in my nothingness and poverty." (Letter, 31st October, 1837.)

A month after, the contest raged anew, but then it was accompanied by temptations of despair :—"It is not good," he writes, "to be placed over others. I am not superior of the novitiate ; on the contrary, I am the last of all ; but I am charged with directing the consciences of our dear brothers. This is what gives me a great authority in our dear little community. You cannot imagine what grief and trouble this has caused me for the last month or six weeks that I have this function. There were moments when I thought that our Lord was going to abandon and cast me away from Him. Continue to pray that this may not be so, for as yet I am not entirely free from fears. I abandon myself into His hands, and to the divine and adorable disposal of His Father, that He may in all things do whatever seems good to Him. . . . May He and His holy Will alone live and reign in all things, and in all



places ; I, however, confess, that the idea of being cast away from the bosom of our good Master causes me to tremble ; but I trust that such will not be the case. I have resolved not to think of it any more, and to let Him do with, and in me, whatever He shall think good. May Jesus be ever blessed !" (Letter of 1st December, 1837.)

In addition to his many sufferings, one of his novices was seized with a sort of obsession, from which he was however delivered by the prayers of his saintly director ; another who had come from Saint-Sulpice with him, on a sudden, animated by the spirit of discord, turned against him, and for a long time put his patience to a severe test. Moreover, God permitted him to be again most violently attacked by the frightful malady from which he thought himself almost completely cured.

On the 7th of February, 1838, the vigil of the Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the whole community assembled at the hour of Vespers, to hear one of its members speaking on the richness and goodness of this admirable Heart. The master of novices was unexpectedly requested to give the accustomed conference. As he was beginning to speak, "all at once," writes an eye-witness, "he fell to the ground, struck by a violent attack of epilepsy ; and whilst he remained stretched on the pavement before our sorrowing eyes, we witnessed for more than a quarter of an hour all the sad effects of this awful malady. The following night he had to be watched, and he remained for several days under the influence of the attack." It was, it is true, the last, but for the patient, the most humiliating.

Beyond any supernatural explanation, it would be easy, but superfluous and unjust, to attribute his partial want of success to certain secondary causes which would satisfy a

superficial observer. A simple acolyte, an unknown stranger, subjected to irregularity by an incurable malady, he was suddenly placed at the head of a novitiate, composed of priests and levites, several of whom were older, more learned, and, at least in worldly matters, more experienced than himself. He had naturally to cope with the many difficulties that are inherent to every rising and varied institution. Owing to the nature of the work and the circumstances of the time, it was necessary to unite exterior action with interior life, and to transform mere novices into catechists and missionaries. M. Libermann has himself acknowledged that these were for him all but insurmountable obstacles. It would, however, be wrong to throw any blame, either on the work itself or on the persons connected with the work. All that we can say is, that these first trials were ultimately as useful to the novices as to the master.

Do we intend to say that he did not succeed? By no means, for there are defeats that are truly victories before God. It is He, Who, to aid our humility or put down our pride, permits our ignorance to mistake the remedy for the wound, life for death. What M. Libermann in his humility considered as a failure, his disciples considered as a success. One of them thus expresses his remembrance of the novitiate of St. Gabriel: "All the power of his direction lay in his unlimited charity. He possessed the gift of inspiring the most entire confidence, his conversations filled the hearts of his disciples with a delightful sweetness which determined them to aim at perfection.

"He was indefatigable. 'Come to see me every day,' he used to say to me, 'and whenever you have any difficulty.' He said the same thing to everyone, and we always found him ready to receive us. During the winter,

he worked with us in the community-room, wherein a fire was kept. I heard his pen run over the paper with the greatest rapidity, as he was replying to the numerous letters which he received from Saint-Sulpice. If anyone applied to him, he would at once interrupt his writing in perfect peace and amenity. His sole end was to establish the reign of our Lord in every heart, . . . and nothing discouraged him, provided he saw in us the will of working at our perfection." But, let us abridge the testimony of his most distinguished novice, M. Poirier, afterwards Bishop of Roseau, and one of the most zealous apostles of North America. "I consider," he says, "as a special favour of Divine Providence, the time I spent with him in the novitiate of the Eudists.

"I have always present to my mind the clear, lucid, and consoling decisions he gave me more than once, in the communications which I made to him of my interior; for he possessed my entire confidence. I can also affirm that this confidence was shared by all the members of the society, especially by those who, like myself, were in daily relation with the worthy '*father*.' I love to give him this name by which we all addressed him, though he was only in minor orders. . . .

"A short time in his company sufficed to show that he was a truly interior man; he spoke little, and never have I heard him do so uselessly. All his conversations were replete with the habitual thought of the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

"Every evening it was our custom to speak only on holy Scripture. Each one cited, in his turn, a text, which he explained as best he could. . . . It was then that the learning and piety of Father Libermann shone forth. His extensive knowledge of the Hebrew language, of Jewish traditions and usages, enabled him to give us explana-

tions that were full of interest. . . . We were all persuaded that his great purity of conscience obtained for him special lights from God. This gift of God was particularly manifest to those who consulted him on the doubts and troubles of their conscience. For my part, I can from experience affirm, that there are few servants of God who possessed, in such a remarkable degree, the discernment of souls. He was never mistaken in deciding a vocation, or in the issue of projects on which he was consulted. He has been a prophet; he had predicted to me when I left for this mission that I would be director of the college already founded here, that we would have much to suffer, and that the success would not compensate for our labours. And, in truth, after many difficulties and much opposition, I was compelled to leave it, and the establishment has since been dissolved.

“I always observed him closely united to God. Whether on walks, or alone in the garden, in our common recreations, or with strangers, he seemed ever to be under the eyes of God. . . . He was animated with a great detachment from creatures, and a great love of poverty. Before taking the vow, he already practised it, and perhaps more perfectly than many religious. There was not in his room a single object that was not absolutely necessary. Although his dress was always neat, it could, however, be noticed that he preferred such garments as were old and patched.

“Despite his feeble state of health, he was so calm, so mild, and so regular at every exercise, that to have an idea of his habitual sufferings, it was necessary to know the sickness with which he was afflicted. However, until the close of 1839, the crises of his malady were less frequent and less painful: in most cases they were but slight faintings. Several of us considered his infirmity as

a trial, destined to preserve in this chosen soul the spirit of humility, of union with God, and of total abandonment to His adorable will. Indeed, I am in no way surprised that he was delivered from it at the moment appointed by Divine Providence. I even feel convinced, that by conferring such a favour on His servant, the Lord has wished to give him a pledge of His protection, and a sign of His approval of a work undertaken for His glory."

The trials he met with, whilst master of novices at Rennes, afforded him the inestimable advantage of thoroughly studying the spirit of Father Eudes, of whose rules and writings he copied, with his own hand, no less than four hundred pages. Every evening, during his only moments of spare time, he could be seen by the sickly gleam of his light, despite the intensity of the winter's cold, rapidly filling, without stopping or correcting, the long sheets of a rough, common scroll paper. From that time his correspondence begins to breathe a higher tone, a new animation, which was like a gentle reflection of the admirable writings of the venerable Father Eudes.

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## CHAPTER III.

The Society of the Venerable Libermann and our Lady of Victories, 1838.



THE society of the venerable Libermann shall be the work of Mary ; its first idea shall be conceived before the altar and under the auspices of our Lady of Victories. Its first members shall meet before the throne of the Refuge of Sinners. The Queen of Apostles shall inflame the hearts of the new missionaries with the burning zeal of her own Immaculate Heart ; as a tender Mother, she shall bless her devoted sons and their noble project ; and, from the hallowed Sanctuary of "*Notre Dame des Victoires*," like children from their natal home, Libermann and his disciples will sally forth to the farthest regions of the earth—the apostles of the Holy Heart of Mary and the saviours of the most abandoned souls. As the venerable Libermann and his disciples have ever clung so closely to the altar of *Notre Dame des Victoires*, a brief notice on this pilgrimage and its saintly originator, far from being out of place, is here most necessary, and almost indispensable.

Charles Dufriche Desgenettes was born of a respectable family, at Alençon, Normandy, in the year 1778. From his infancy he evinced considerable aptitude, great taste for study, and extraordinary powers of memory ; but he was of an ardent and impetuous temperament, which, had it not been checked in time by his prudent and pious mother, might have stifled his good qualities. From his



tenderest years, piety and zeal held sway over his heart, and already the germ of an apostle was apparent in him. Whilst, during the worst period of the Revolution, his father languished in prison, Charles became the support of his mother, and one of the most active instruments which God made use of to lessen, in the town of Dreux, the dreadful effects of the "Reign of Terror." Thus, it was on the motion of this fearless youth, then scarcely sixteen years of age, that the prison gates of Dreux were thrown open, and his father with more than one hundred and fifty notables restored to liberty. Charles even obtained from the town Councillors the keys of St. Peter's Parochial Church, wherein, for a time, the Catholic worship was solemnly celebrated.

No one possessed in a higher degree that compound of boldness and skill necessary to conceal and aid the proscribed priests who, despite the sanguinary laws of impious men, had remained in France to celebrate the divine mysteries, and to administer the Sacrament to the dying. So great was his zeal, that he learned from his mother and sister how to knit stockings for the confessors of the Faith—an ingenious invention of Christian charity, which reminds the reader of that generous French girl who, having no other means of assisting the imprisoned priests, heroically sold her beautiful tresses for the martyrs of a godless Revolution.

Whilst living in the country, young Desgenettes took the greatest delight in visiting farm after farm, to instruct the little peasant children in the principles of the Christian doctrine. His life in the Seminary was no less edifying than had been his life in the world. The dream of his youth was realized when, in 1806, he was ordained priest. Then, especially, he displayed his zeal in all its intensity. He was successively curate, president of a boarding-school

l'Aigle, and parish priest. In 1813, he won the grateful admiration of all by his utter disregard of danger in assisting, at Argentan, the prisoners of war who were being decimated by a dreadful typhus. Soon after he was appointed pastor of an all but infidel parish in the suburbs of Alençon. Here, again, his sterling qualities soon drew the people around the pastor. The Abbé Desgenettes gained especially the respect and affection of all, by his magnanimity towards a parishioner who had cruelly assaulted him. He not only generously pardoned the culprit, but he even did his utmost to liberate him, and, whilst he was in prison, bestowed the greatest cares on his family. Many lost sheep were brought back; the parish was nearly transformed, when, in 1819, circumstances quite providential, called him to Paris almost in spite of himself. In this city he effected much good, the first year as curate, and afterwards as parish priest of the church of the Foreign Missions. He did not hesitate to sell his patrimony, in order to establish an institution for the Christian and professional education of several hundred girls. In 1832, he was appointed parish priest of our Lady of Victories. This parish, placed in the centre of business and pleasure, was then, perhaps, the most infidel portion of the French capital. Its church was totally deserted. Scarcely did a few timid Christians, mostly women, out of 17,000 parishioners, ever appear at divine worship on Sundays or holidays, and but very few frequented the Sacraments even at Easter time. During four years, M. Desgenettes laboured with untiring zeal, but apparently without producing the least impression on a blind and indifferent people. Anyone but a saint would have lost courage; M. Desgenettes himself began to despair. Attributing his failure to his unworthiness, he seriously thought of tendering his resignation; but such

were not the designs of Jesus and of Mary. One day, in December, 1836, the humble curé, filled with the thought of resigning, began to offer the Holy Sacrifice. On a sudden he is seized with great interior agitation. At the *Sanctus* he strives to restore peace to his soul, when he hears these words pronounced beside him, in a clear and distinct whisper: "*Consecrate thy church and thy parish to the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary.*" At first the poor priest fancies he labours under an illusion, the effect of his disturbed mind. "I am then," he says, "not only a useless parish priest; I am, moreover, losing my senses; I must resign without delay." Reassured by this resolution, he finished the celebration of the Mass. Thanksgiving was longer than usual, for his project of retiring had returned more urgently than ever. He was alone, kneeling in one of the stalls in the choir, on the point of going to write to the Archbishop, when the same mysterious voice again resounded near him, saying with an accent full of majesty and command: "*Consecrate thy church and thy parish to the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary.*" The good curé felt deeply moved. He had heard the expression of God's will; henceforward, his trust is in the Lord and in His Blessed Mother. He humbles himself, and for the first time addresses his fervent prayers to the peerless Heart of the Virgin Mother. On that same day, he wrote, with astounding facility, the statutes of the Confraternity of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Mgr. de Quélen, the then Archbishop of Paris, not only sanctioned them, but even commanded the holy pastor to begin at once: "You shall commence on Sunday," he said; it was then Friday. On Sunday morning M. Desgenettes ascended the pulpit, and in an all but empty church announced to the few women who formed his audience, that on that very evening were to begin the offices of the Confraternity.

In the evening the good parish priest enters his church with a heart replete with sad forebodings, when to his great surprise he finds it crowded with people of every age and rank. He gives an instruction, which is followed by the chant of the Litanies of the Blessed Virgin. At the invocation, *Refugium peccatorum, ora pro nobis!* a spontaneous and supernatural emotion seizes the whole multitude, who, with one voice repeat, three times, this ardent aspiration of confidence and repentance, *Refugium peccatorum, ora pro nobis!* M. Desgenettes, too, is deeply moved, and cannot but admire the goodness of God, who, in an instant changes and draws towards Himself the most rebellious hearts. Such was the origin of the Archconfraternity of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Millions from every part of the world joined the association, and in a short time was organized the mighty army of devoted clients of heaven's bright Queen. Who could say how many miracles were wrought, how many sick were healed, how many sinners converted, how many graces obtained through the powerful intercession of Our Lady of Victories? The very stones of that once desolate temple now proclaim the great power and tender goodness of Mary; its walls are covered all over with *ex-votos*, *médailles* and *croix d'honneur* of military men, marshal's batons, generals' swords, symbolic hearts and thousands of marble slabs, which express, in letters of gold, the grateful affection of innumerable servants of Mary. Assuredly one cannot conceive a more touching or more eloquent decoration for a church. *Notre Dame des Victoires* has become one of the most renowned shrines in Christendom, and the cherished resort of the Children of Mary. Not a priest arrives in the French Capital but longs to offer up the spotless Victim on the altar of Mary Immaculate; not a missionary sets out for

his distant post, but is anxious to obtain the blessing of the Queen of Apostles, both for himself and for the nations he is going to evangelize; not a Catholic passes by the church, but enters to recommend his intentions to his heavenly Mother. Every land has heard of the many wonders recently wrought in the Kingdom of France, which, despite its faults, seems still to be, as it was in the time of St. Bernard, the privileged kingdom of Mary: *Regnum Galliæ, Regnum Mariæ*.

Notre Dame des Victoires is still, as it has been for over forty years, the brightest and most frequented spot in Paris. Every day, from early morn till late at night, the sacred edifice is lit up by the chaste splendour of countless tapers, which silently consume themselves before the throne of Mary—bright symbols of the innumerable graces which flow from her Immaculate Heart—touching emblems of the many glowing souls that, in their simple piety, presented these humble offerings to the spotless Queen of Heaven. Every hour, crowds of pious worshippers of every age, rank, and sex, may be seen prostrate before the venerated image of the Virgin Mother. Mary, the Refuge of sinners, has conquered millions of souls, and caused them to be cleansed in the streams of the Blood that purchased them. The Mother of Jesus is truly Our Lady of Victories, because she is **OUR LADY OF THE PRECIOUS BLOOD**.

M. Dufriche Desgenettes—that other Curé d'Ars of the present century—died in the odour of sanctity, on the 25th of April, 1859. His mortal remains, at the earnest request of his parishioners and of his Eminence Cardinal Morlot, Archbishop of Paris, and with the special dispensation of Napoleon III., were interred at the foot of the altar, where, for thirty years, the devoted servant of Mary had so fervently prayed for the conversion and salvation of sinners.



During the vacation of 1838, M. Le Vavas seur went to Rennes, to treat explicitly with M. Libermann about the apostleship of the negroes. The meetings of the two holy friends, predestined to be the corner-stones of a new edifice, were long and frequent. For several days they earnestly conversed and fervently prayed together. M. Le Vavas seur, whom his ardent zeal for souls had prompted to undertake so distant a journey, was naturally all fire and flame to carry on the project at once. But M. Libermann, with his usual calmness, was far from favouring precipitation. Not seeing as yet, distinctly, the will and ways of God, he wished to advance cautiously and discreetly, and therefore gave the first overtures, at least apparently, rather timid and feeble encouragements, so that the result of the two friends' colloquies was by no means decisive. They could not as yet define even the mere outlines of their projected work. The plan still required to be matured in reflection and prayer, and to that effect M. Louis, with great kindness, wished them to spend some months in solitude and recollection at the house of the Eudists.

After his return to Paris, M. Le Vavas seur and his friends began to turn their attention, with particular confidence, towards Our Lady of Victories. M. Tisserand had previously conceived this happy idea, when giving his name to be inscribed on the register of the Archconfraternity. Without having spoken to M. Tisserand on this subject, M. Le Vavas seur had the same views and felt the same confidence in Notre Dame des Victoires.

The hearts of both throbbed with unspeakable delight, when, on the Feast of the Purification, 2nd February, 1839, they heard the Venerable M. Desgenettes recommending, for the first time, to the prayers of a vast assembly, the conversion and salvation of the negro race. It was remarked that the voice of the saintly parish priest assumed a more



than ordinary solemnity, when in touching accents he expressed how deeply moved he felt at the unhappy fate of millions of abandoned souls; and when he declared to the members of his Archconfraternity, that to procure their conversion was a noble undertaking, well worthy of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. M. Desgenettes wrote afterwards to the two seminarists, to thank them for having suggested to him so memorable an intention. From this period, Notre Dame des Victoires became the anchor of safety, the beacon and the rallying point of the new missionaries. The work was admirably begun.

Soon after M. Le Vasseur laid his whole plan before MM. Gallais and Pinault. The latter pointed to the creation of a new and special society for the conversion of the negroes. "This," he said, "is what God wishes to be done." This declaration was regarded as decisive, and was attributed to the prayers of the Archconfraternity. A few days later, M. Le Vasseur wrote to M. Libermann a remarkable letter, the greater part of which we cannot refrain from quoting:—



*"Praise be to Jesus and Mary!"*

"DEAREST BROTHER,—May the Spirit of our Lord be with you! M. Pinault presses me most urgently to write to you, concerning a very important affair which he believes to be in accordance with the designs of God. You have often heard me speak of the deplorable state of religion in Bourbon and the surrounding islands, as well as of the extreme abandonment in which the negroes, the freedmen, and the poor of these countries are left. The negroes especially, who form more than half the population, are in a state of ignorance, misery, and corruption, of which we cannot conceive an idea here. In the eyes of the

world, nothing is more base, more vile, or more miserable, and as long as there will not be found priests sufficiently animated with the spirit of our Lord, to stoop down, to mingle, and to become one with them, nobody will ever think of saving their souls. Again, as liberty, which they expect, will not change their moral misery, but on the contrary, increase it, the consequence is, that perhaps they will never come out of the state of degradation in which they are still plunged. To undertake the instruction and care of this part of our Lord's vineyard, is, as it were, to cast oneself on a bottomless sea of contempt, ignominy, contradictions, and difficulties, which hell will create, and which the Wisdom of God will permit. You see, therefore, what kind of men are required for such a work ; they should be filled with that true spirit of Jesus, which animated Blessed Peter Claver ; they should be missionaries disposed to live amidst crosses of every sort, both exterior and interior, ready to place themselves even below the poor blacks in poverty, exterior destitution, and abjection, to be the better able to preach to them our Lord crucified, and to show them what treasures of grace and glory lie hidden in their state of lowliness and misery before the eyes of men. As our Divine Lord stooped beneath all, that He might, as it were, acquire the right to preach humiliation ; so, also, to preach to those unhappy creatures, it is necessary to be lower than them in exterior poverty and contempt. You see, then, that this is the most sanctifying work which can be imagined. And it is such, that none can undertake it or persevere in it for a single day, unless he be animated with the most earnest desires of perfection and holiness. But where are such men to be found and formed ? It seems that our Lord prepares here in the seminary some souls for such a work. Without my action or

knowledge, He has inspired MM. de la Brunière, Senez, Tisserand, and others with nearly the same thoughts and desires. Two or three students from Issy might likewise join our ranks. M. Gallais, to whom I have spoken on the subject, also approves of it very much; he thinks, however, I ought not as yet mention the matter to any one but to M. de la Brunière. M. Pinault would wish that I should communicate my views to all. Should the vocations alluded to be real, it seems to me and to M. Pinault, that we could do nothing better than unite ourselves to you, in the manner you suggested during last vacation. We would go through our novitiate at Saint-Gabriel; we would adopt the constitutions of Father Eudes, with the modifications necessary to our work; we would form a separate part of your community and our missions out of France would be supplied by the subjects whom our Lord might send for us to your novitiate."

The rest of this letter contains several other projects concerning the work, and concludes in these terms: "Consider before God, what good there may be in all I say. Death would be a thousand times preferable to a desire or thought not in conformity with His divine will. You can easily see the difficulties of such an undertaking; but God bestows His rewards on account of difficulties. The whole question is to know whether it be His adorable will." Then in a postscript he says; "In your reply, dearest brother, tell us whatever our Lord will inspire you with, concerning this letter. I think M. Gallais will permit us to speak on this matter. Your opinion, clearly stated, might be a means whereby our Lord will determine the minds of several to enter into His designs"

The answer of M. Libermann deserves entire reproduction:—



*“ Praised be Jesus and Mary !*

*Rennes, 8th March, 1839.*

“ MY DEAREST BROTHER,—*Viriliter age, et confortetur cor tuum!* I hope that our Lord will realize the project with which He has inspired you for His greater glory. Follow it up with confidence and love towards our most adorable Lord Jesus. He has merciful designs for the salvation of those poor souls so long and still so much abandoned.

“ I advise you, therefore, my dearest brother, to undertake this great work, and to devote yourself seriously to carrying it out. Do not rely on yourself or on your own industry, do not try to persuade anyone, do not act precipitately ; but leave the work to the Master of the harvest ; it belongs to Him to select the labourers He wishes to employ.

“ Your chief occupation must now be to humble yourself very much before Him, considering yourself as a great obstacle to the designs of His mercy in behalf of these poor souls, who are so dear to Him. Be, however, animated with strong feelings of confidence and love towards Him, and act energetically. Be not discouraged by the obstacles that will be thrown in your path, nor by the reproaches that will be made to you, nor by the false judgments which may be passed on your conduct. In everything you do, you will be treated as a senseless, imprudent, and proud man ; a thousand other such things will be said of you, not only in your own country, but also in Paris. Even respectable men will disapprove of your doings, will censure you, will treat your project as the idea of a young man, as a folly, and will consider it as impossible ; for such are often the ways of the best inten-

tioned and the wisest of men. When they see apparently insurmountable difficulties in an undertaking, they despair of its execution as of an impossibility. But, dearest brother, do not allow yourself to be discouraged or retarded for a single instant. Even if the holiest and wisest are opposed to it, persevere in your project before the Lord;\* for those who do not feel an interior movement from God towards such a work, will regard it as impossible on account of the difficulties that are in its way. This is why, dearest brother, you must always remain hidden in our Lord in a great spirit of humiliation and love, and allow Him to act, rather than act yourself. Follow the movements He gives you with all sweetness, peace, and love, and with the most profound humility of your heart. In all the trials you may encounter, above all keep yourself in a spirit of patience, meekness, humility, and peace before God. Cherish the same sentiments towards those who, by raising difficulties, will be a cause of troubles to you.

“I have proposed the project to the superior; it gave him great joy; he told me he would receive you with much pleasure, and that he would feel very happy, if the poor congregation of Jesus and Mary could undertake a work so important and so agreeable to God. This would be a very considerable advantage for you. Moreover, to

\* In one of his letters M. Libermann furnishes us with an observation which the reader would, no doubt, have supplied. “*Do not mind even if pious persons blame you.* This must not be done through contempt, but with a great distrust in one’s self. We must examine before God what is His holy will in a question, and speak to our superiors if circumstances so permit. When we feel assured that we follow the maxims of the Gospel and that we do what the Lord demands from us, we need not fear the judgments even of the pious and prudent. Nevertheless, we must act towards them with meekness and humility.” (Letter of 5th March, 1837.)



secure success, it seems almost indispensable that a congregation should undertake such a work. If you were isolated in the world there would be no unity; self-will would soon make its appearance, and the work would not be solid. Besides this, there are many other reasons in favour of a society. It is also absolutely necessary for you to prepare yourselves for some years in solitude for so great a ministry. I am, therefore, like M. Pinault, very much in favour of community life.

“Should God direct you towards us, it would be to me a source of great consolation, and it would be a blessing for this poor congregation, so useless in France; it might at least procure glory to God elsewhere, and that on an extensive scale. Moreover, our spirit is truly apostolic; our constitutions are good; everything in them tends to form a missionary, according to the spirit of our Lord; they are perfectly suited to your project, and consequently, you need not change anything in order to carry out your plan.

“I advise you, therefore, not to trouble yourself as yet with the details of the rule to be followed. It is enough to have at present a general idea of it; later on, if you come to us, we will determine on the particular points according to the lights we shall receive from above. If God leads you to any other place, you will arrange it elsewhere. It would be dangerous to occupy yourself with it now; the time for this has not yet arrived. At present, endeavour to prepare yourself for so great a ministry by a life of peace, meekness, humility, divine love, and holiness, striving to render yourself more and more agreeable to our Lord, and more and more capable of being a faithful instrument in His hands.

“I do not know why M. Gallais thinks that nothing should be said of it; this is why I cannot say anything on



this point. I know very well that there should be no hurry in the works of God, and that God should be allowed to act rather than ourselves. Nevertheless, if there were no reason against it, there would be no harm in speaking of it, and even in certain circumstances it would be necessary to do so. But, as I tell you, M. Gallais has, most likely, motives which are unknown to me. If you could get M. Pinault to consider the matter with him, they both would come to a conclusion as to what should be done. If I were not afraid of damaging affairs, I would speak about it to our dearest M. de la Brunière; but I must leave it to God; I shall, however, say a few words on this matter to MM. Pinault and Gallais.

“Do not yet think of the patron or dedication of your work: leave that simply in the hands of Jesus and Mary. I would also be inclined towards the cross, which ought to be your portion.

“Farewell, dearest brother; may Jesus be your refuge, your hope, and your love!

“Yours entirely in the most holy love of Jesus and Mary.

“F. LIBERMANN, *Acolyte.*”

To these wise counsels M. Libermann added his prayers and those of his pious friends. “I recommend you,” he wrote to a director of a seminary, “a very important affair for the glory of God and the salvation of an innumerable multitude of souls. Offer yourself up to God generously to endure all the sorrows and humiliations, which He may wish to send you for the furtherance of this work. Do so in union with Jesus, and in that spirit of love for souls which consumed Him, whilst He hung on the tree of the cross.”

The future commenced to unveil itself; the abandoned

souls had excited the sympathy of a few generous hearts; a communication of thoughts and feelings as to the means of liberating and saving the poor negroes, had already established a mutual understanding among the predestined conquerors of the African tribes: no one, however, had up to this taken a formal resolution: the plan of operations was not yet matured. Meanwhile, the principal promoters of the undertaking poured forth their fervent prayers before the altar of our Lady of Victories; new recruits joined their ranks, and little by little was formed a compact battalion of devoted levites, who, like valiant warriors, only waited for their leader's word of command to throw themselves heart and soul into the work. But these heroes, so eager for the contest, had still, for a time, to moderate their noble ardour, although that period of suspense was as painful to them as is to the soldier the hour which precedes the deadly struggle on the field of battle. The moment marked out by Providence had not yet come, and their guide and commander, M. Libermann, who knew so well how to discover and to accomplish the will of the Lord, far from acting hurriedly, waited with great prudence and reserve till the decisive moment for action.

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## CHAPTER IV.

M. Libermann's Journey to Rome, Dec. 1839, Jan. 1840.



FROM the sanctuary of our Lady of Victories, where they had spent days and nights in fervent prayer, the friends of the negroes directed their hearts and looks towards Rome, the centre of true light and true life, to that infallible chair of Peter from which they were anxious to receive approbation and encouragement, as well as the assurance that their intentions were in conformity with the designs of God. They were on the point of being brought under the notice of the Holy See by diplomatic means. The government of Hayti, through its representative at Paris, took a marked interest in the projected work, and memorials to that effect were addressed to M. Boyer, president of the Haytian Republic. But as the views of the government of Hayti were more political than religious, it was thought better to give the preference to the negroes of Bourbon and the neighbouring islands, which for the moment offered a sufficiently wide field to the zeal of the new apostles.

In the meantime, the enterprise continued to be prayed for at Notre Dame des Victoires, and the directors of Saint-Sulpice seconded it more and more by their earnest encouragements. Moreover, the number of future missionaries increased very rapidly. The first promoters of the work were themselves astonished to see rallying round them fellow-students of the greatest promise, either by their distinguished talents, or their eminent piety, such as MM. Bonalgué; Luquet, de Brandt, de la Brunière, Bureau, Oudin, Papillon and many others. M. de la Brunière, who

was a most highly-gifted seminarist, seemed destined to occupy one day the first rank: his fortune and his name were but the lesser advantages which he brought to the rising society. M. Libermann humbly believed that he was himself the most worthless of all, and that he did nothing in the service of his Divine Master; and he considered as unmerited the high reputation which he enjoyed. His soul was, moreover, plunged in an ocean of fresh anxieties, which God, no doubt, permitted as a more immediate preparation for his last mission, since, as we have already said, the novitiate of St. Gabriel was not to be his final dwelling-place.

The following is the humble reply which, at that period, he addressed to a director of a seminary who had asked him for his advice: "Do you see, my good M. N——, I have a great name; but in real and strict truth I am a useless vessel in the Church of God. I assure you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus, Who knows better than I do the truth of what I say, that I am here a piece of worm-eaten wood, to which the fire takes only stealthily and with difficulty, and that gives neither heat nor light to anybody. I am, on this account, in the deepest affliction before God. I am like a paralytic who wishes to move but cannot. Do not, therefore, attempt to ask advice and counsel from me; for, would you like to ruin your seminary?"

"I am not wanting in desires; my desires are immense, but altogether fruitless and dead; and in the utter nothingness in which I am, the only thing left me is to prepare for death. Pray, however, for me; for I desire ardently to do some little thing for the holy love of our adorable Lord Jesus, and for the establishment of His reign in souls. But I cannot realise my wishes; my years pass away, death approaches, and yet there are so

many souls to be saved! Do not, then, amuse yourself by attempting to draw water from an empty cistern; but pray to our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the most holy Virgin, to take compassion on me in my troubles, and to have pity on me."

Having spent several months in interior agony at the foot of the cross, M. Libermann conceived the idea of retiring into solitude, there to live with God alone. "There," he afterwards said, "I would have lived on alms; I relied on Divine Providence, and I was fully assured that I would not die of hunger."

But, before taking any resolution, he wished to go to Paris, to consult his former directors. This was during the vacation of 1839. He humbly submitted his troubles and perplexities to the worthy sons of M. Olier, who had always possessed his confidence. God permitted, that he should not yet find the light of which he stood so much in need.

"I returned, however, somewhat consoled," he writes to M. Carbon, "by the thought that our Blessed Lord was at least served and glorified by others; but I felt deeply afflicted at being unable to do anything myself, and resolved to re-enter my tomb, and not to come out any more, if such were the holy will of God. I began to believe that our Lord wished to keep me there to prepare me for death, and I resolved to struggle no longer with the opposition which I experienced against my good desires, to leave everything entirely in the hands of God, and to be satisfied with preparing myself seriously for death."

But far different were the views of God on M. Libermann. He Who leadeth to the gates of death and leadeth back again, now only wished His servant to feel all the weight of his nothingness. He wished to call him from

a real death to a new life, and to raise him by a sort of glorious resurrection, which would enable him to work efficaciously for the salvation of a multitude of hitherto most abandoned souls. We shall soon see the mysterious ways which God was pleased to select for the accomplishment of His designs.

M. Libermann was always considered by his friends as their indispensable counsellor, and his opinion was prized above that of all others. The directors themselves referred to him. He was to be entrusted with the care of drawing up a plan of constitutions which was to be submitted to the approbation of the Holy See. It was apparently for this purpose that, towards the end of vacation, 1839, M. de la Brunière, who had now finished his theological studies, rejoined M. Libermann at Rennes, where he spent nearly two months at the house of the Eudists. Being a skilful observer, he was among the first to perceive that M. Libermann was not definitely settled down; that the institute of the Eudists agreed but imperfectly with the work of the negroes; and that there were many preliminary matters to be arranged by time, prayer, and mature reflection. M. Libermann always kept a strict reserve, less to retain freedom of action than to wait for a clear sign of the will of God. That sign he appears to have received on the feast of the holy apostles SS. Simon and Jude, 28th October, as we can see by the following letter which he addressed to M. Le Vavas seur.



*“ Praise be to Jesus and Mary !*

*“ Feast of SS. Simon and Jude, 1839.*

“ VERY DEAR BROTHER,—Good M. de la Brunière is altogether a negro: I rejoice at this with all my heart before our Lord and His most holy Mother. On last



evening he came to see me, to exhort me to offer up holy Communion for the poor dear blacks, on this morning. We have both done so, and God has given me some faint light which I do not wish as yet to communicate to you, as I prefer to allow this view to ripen before God, in order that, if it be pleasing to His divine bounty, that small spark may increase and become a brilliant light. Pray, and cause all our dear brothers to pray, for the thing is important, very important. We, too, shall continue to pray for the same intention. Always encourage the work of the poor negroes.

“During my leisure moments I shall reflect a little on the Constitutions. Pray also for this. I would have preferred to wait before thinking of them, until the affair would have been submitted to the Holy See. But MM. Gallais and Pinault are of opinion that I should apply myself to them, and I, too, see some utility in having them ready before the question is mooted at Rome. My plan, I think, will meet with difficulties; I shall, however, follow it, leaving to our Lord the care of removing every obstacle. M. de la Brunière encourages me, and is entirely of my opinion.

“I would like something solid, fervent, apostolical; all or nothing. There must be no weak souls in this congregation, which is to be all apostolical; but only fervent and generous souls, that give themselves entirely, and are ready to undertake everything, and suffer everything for the greater glory of our adorable Master. I believe that all those who seem called to give themselves to God in this holy work, are disposed to undergo everything, and will only experience an increase of spiritual joy when they see rules requiring a greater perfection, and well suited to maintain them in greater holiness and in stricter devotedness to the service of God. Encourage

them, and tell them to dispose themselves before God in order to be ready for every sacrifice, for death itself, even the death of the cross. It is on this condition only that we enter into the participation of the spirit and of the apostolical majesty of Jesus Christ, the sovereign Lord, the great model of apostles."

In this letter M. Libermann lays open the interior of his soul. One thing, however, he keeps hidden beneath a mysterious veil of silence. "*God,*" he says, "*has given him some faint light which, as yet, he does not wish to make known.*" What was this "*light,*" and this "*view?*" Up to that time, the humble director of the novitiate of the Eudists had been but a simple adviser of the future missionaries of the negroes. He had seen that this beautiful work of the apostolate of the negro race was in the designs of heaven; he ardently wished it for the greater glory of God, and the salvation of these abandoned souls; but hitherto he had not felt for it that clear and powerful attraction which is often an evident proof of the Divine will. It was on the Feast of the Apostles SS. Simon and Jude, after a fervent Communion, that for the first time the Lord spoke to his heart, and that his vocation began to appear before his mind. He already foresaw that the extraordinary ardour manifested at Saint-Sulpice for the apostolate of the blacks would soon cool down in many, and that the Lord had designed him, poor as he was, to become the founder of a new society of missionaries.

This gleam sufficed to show him, as if by a flash of lightning, a way traced out before him as far as the chair of the Vicar of Jesus Christ. But for the moment he opened his mind to M. Pinault alone, and it was only after having received the answer of this holy and devoted friend, that he resolutely entered on the path on which he

was to live and die. The first and not the least arduous task imposed on M. Libermann was his long and painful journey to Rome.

When, two years before, at his departure from Saint-Sulpice, he had to rend asunder the ties of a long and affectionate friendship, he did so with such peaceful resignation that we can scarcely find a trace of the sacrifice in the numerous letters which he wrote and received at that time. On leaving Rennes, he put an end to two years of anguish; and yet, his strength almost failed him at his departure. Let us here listen to M. Tisserand, whose testimony is the more precious, as he, in all probability, obtained his information from the venerable Libermann himself:—

“From the moment M. Libermann had decided to quit the society of the Eudists to join us, he made no delay in carrying out his design. He resolved to leave Rennes soon after the Feast of the Apostle St. Andrew, like whom he was attached to the cross of our Saviour; for he had never felt such excessive sorrow, being at the same time plunged in the most complete interior obscurity, and weighed down by an inexpressible anguish of heart and an awful dejection of soul. He already foresaw the evils of every kind which were to fall on him. That which especially contributed to plunge him in a state of dreadful anxiety, was the uncertainty of everything relative to a society for the conversion of the negroes; his regret to see it confided to such poor hands; the contempt he would have to bear from his former friends, who, as he knew, would loudly condemn him; the withdrawal from him of many of those who had first offered themselves for the work; his utter poverty, and the terrible malady of which he was not yet entirely cured. These, and many other similar considerations made him feel the pangs of a terrible agony. Finally, what

pierced his heart completely was the thought of the affliction he would by his departure cause M. Louis, the Superior of the Eudists, and all the members of that society. Although overwhelmed by such extreme anguish, without any interior light from God, he felt, nevertheless, that he should leave, that God wished it; but that view of God's will was so obscure, that feeling so weak, and everything in him so dry, that he found himself in an inexpressible embarrassment; he was like a man without feeling. God permitted so great a trial for the sanctification and advancement of our dear father. When a person has passed through the crucible of the most terrible temptations, he is afterwards the better disposed to be merciful to others, and his heart is fashioned after the resemblance of the Heart of Mary. For this favour he gave thanks to his protectress, when, peace being restored to his soul, he was permitted partly to discover the motive which God had in view when allowing his soul to be so violently disturbed." (*Memoir of M. Tisserand.*)

Peace was completely restored to him before a year had elapsed. Besides the reasons given above, this trial was the result of a more serious cause, which had obliged M. Libermann to consult his directors. But the latter failed to solve his difficulties. He was only to find light through the intercession of Mary in the chapel of Loretto.

Two days after having resolved on leaving, M. Libermann, to avoid a painful interview, wrote to M. Louis the following touching letter:—



“ Praise be to Jesus and Mary !

“ Rennes, 30th November, 1839.

“ MY VERY DEAR FATHER IN OUR LORD,—I come to prostrate myself at your feet, in the presence of our Lord Jesus

and His most holy Mother, to beseech you to pardon me for the great affliction which I shall cause you by what I am going to say in this letter. I confess in all truth and in all the sincerity of my soul, that my heart has been for more than a month rent asunder and plunged in the deepest affliction. But, what can I do? The love of Jesus above everything! Should it cost my life and a thousand lives, to me and to all those I hold dearest, and whom I respect most on this earth, everything must yield to His good pleasure, everything must be sacrificed for His love.

“ You perceive already, my reverend superior, what the question is about. I have consulted God, I have consulted His wisest servants, those most zealous for His glory, and all have unanimously decided that I should leave this poor congregation, which is, and will be truly dear to me all the days of my life. I have hesitated, I have examined for a long time, through the desire which I had of being in some way useful to this little society, and I have never found in myself nor anywhere else an affirmative answer. Oh! my dear and venerable Father, what will become of this poor wretched mortal when he shall be entirely abandoned by all men? ‘ Many tribulations remain unto me. Who shall free me from this hour?’ You know what I told you of this, last year, and about which I implore you to keep the strictest secrecy. For a time I shall enjoy some peace, on account of an occupation which will still engage me; but what will become of me afterwards? God alone knows this, and not men. I confess to you my misery and my poverty: this sight has sometimes reduced me to strange extremities; but my heart has never lost courage, through the grace of my Lord Jesus Christ, Who is my only strength, and my only hope. . . . My soul, weak, timid, and cowardly, has very often been cast down,

oppressed, and annihilated before Him at the sight of all the tribulations and all the heavy afflictions which I shall meet with in this life ; but the thought of Jesus, my strength and my support, fills me with inexpressible confidence. Then I console this poor afflicted soul of mine with the thought that this life will not be long ; that my sweetest Jesus, after having strengthened me by His goodness and mercy in this life, will in the end call me to Himself.

“ I say this to you, my dear Father, to show you that I do not leave the congregation in order to seek pleasures and honours ; you see that there remains to me only tribulations and contempt. But all this does not frighten me ; I do the will of God, and He will strengthen me amidst the numberless evils with which I am about to be overwhelmed. He knows well that I do not ask to be exempt from afflictions, crosses, humiliations, and tribulations ; but that I beg of Him the grace to support and strengthen me, and to preserve me in His love and divine holiness.

“ Now, I have only one favour to ask of you, my Father and venerable superior, and that is, not to endeavour to hinder me from accomplishing my purpose. Why should you wish to complete the destruction of this weak and miserable reed, which is already half broken ? The order is given on the part of God, and my resolution is taken ; your words would only tend to break my heart, and reduce me to the last extremity without changing my disposition. My resolution is taken, my sacrifice is made ; I am prepared to be afflicted, bruised, ground, trampled under foot by everybody, and annihilated in the presence of my God. Deign, therefore, my dearest Father, to bestow your blessing on my departure, and pray Jesus and Mary not to abandon this poor man. Oh ! yes, I hope they will not abandon me ; for they know that I have a slight love for them, that



I desire to love them much more, to cause others to love them, and to sacrifice my life and my whole existence for their holy love.

“ I have fixed my departure for next Monday ; this is important and necessary ; you know, my reverend superior, the weakness of my nerves ; I am afraid that I shall hardly be able to endure the extreme pain I feel, whenever I think of the grief I am about to cause all those who surround me, and whom I love with all my heart. May the good pleasure of my Lord Jesus be done ! . . .

“ Farewell, then, my dear good Father in Jesus and Mary, for life and for eternity. Once more, give your blessing to this poor man, who will be for life, in the charity of Jesus and Mary, your most unworthy son and servant,

“ F. LIBERMANN, *Acolyte.*”

We must here remark, that M. Libermann did not ask the Superior of the Eudists for permission to leave, but simply warned him of his departure, as in reality he was attached to the society of the Eudists by no other ties but those of zeal and devotedness.

M. Louis answered M. Libermann’s letter by telling him that his resolution was an illusion of the devil, and an effect of self-love. He sought to prevent his departure, in an interview in which he brought to bear all the reasons that his strong desire of keeping M. Libermann for a longer time could suggest ; but it was all to no purpose. The venerable servant of God could not be detained. He felt, as it were, irresistibly drawn away by an invisible force, which could only come from heaven. The letter and earnest entreaties of the excellent superior had finished the breaking of his heart. For fear of giving way to excessive grief, and of thus rendering himself incapable of travelling, he wished to make no further delay. His letter to M. Louis was written on the Feast of

St. Andrew. Three days after, on the Feast of St. Francis Xavier, he set out on his long and painful journey to Rome. At Paris he was encouraged in his resolution by M. Pinault, in whose society he found a slight solace for his soul, so deeply wounded by his recent departure from Rennes. But in Paris, too, he was to feel the weight of his cross. A person of eminent virtue, to whom he had confided his secret, censured most severely and treated as imprudent his intentions of going to Rome. From that moment the holy acolyte resolved to spread a veil of great discretion over every step he took, in order to guard against the hasty judgments of men, and to baffle the unceasing efforts of the spirit of evil.

On his way from Paris to Lyons he passed through Dijon, where dwelt a lady with whom he was for a long time in correspondence. She had been recommended to him, whilst he was still at Issy, on account of the sorrowful and exceptional state in which God had placed her soul. Her veneration for M. Libermann was so great that, according to her own testimony, she would write to him only on bended knees. This lady herself relates what passed in the touching interview which she had with her holy director. Her interesting account is more than sufficient to give us a vivid picture of the humble traveller, and to throw much light on the pitifulness of his position. "I saw him once," she says, "but without knowing him. After his last letter from Rennes, I believed, as I had been informed, that he was ill, and that he had returned to his family, when one day—it was, I think, in December, 1839—I was told that a young ecclesiastic was asking for me. As there was at that time in town a student who had left the seminary, I thought it was he; I did not ask him to enter, but went to speak to him at the door; I saw a young man dressed in a clean soutane, his head uncovered

and bent down, uttering some unintelligible words. He appeared so humble, so recollected, so gentle, so unhappy, that I felt entirely moved. I said to him, at the same time bringing him in: 'What do you ask, brother?' He answered in a voice so weak and so low that, not understanding him, I thought it was an alms he was seeking. I hastened immediately to get him something, which he took with great thankfulness, but always with his eyes cast down. I stayed some moments looking at him in astonishment; it seemed to me as if this poor seminarist was a near relation of mine, so much was I moved by his unhappy state. He himself appeared to reflect. After an instant he raised his eyes, and with an air of regret he looked at me; then a ray of joy beamed on his countenance; he was evidently desirous of speaking. But the emotion, which more and more penetrated me, seemed also to gain upon him a little; he inclined his head again and sighed; he then retired slowly, after casting a last look upon me. He appeared weak and ill. I had not even an idea as to who he could be; but I was certain, some days after, that it was M. Libermann: and also, a thing which was very painful to me, that it was his intention to make himself known; for he had said something to a servant which clearly designated him to me, and which she told me only some days afterwards. He either believed that I did not wish to receive him, or he changed his intention when seeing me; I do not know why. I never wrote to him nor he to me concerning this affair. Doubtless, God wished that both he and I should experience such a disappointment. I still feel it keenly to this day."

In the meantime he arrived at the foot of the mountain of Fourvières, at Lyons, a little before the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. It was on that very day, that the Archconfraternity of Notre Dame des Victoires com-

municated its privileges to the sanctuary of Fourvières, a double good fortune for the pilgrim, who hastened to climb up the holy mountain, there to lay his cares and intentions at the feet of his heavenly Mother.

In one of his morning visits to our Lady of Fourvières, he humbly solicited the honour of serving Mass—a favour refused him, with rebukes, which his dress and his appearance of a poor suffering traveller most likely brought upon him. But he was recompensed for this humiliation by partly recovering, at the feet of the miraculous Madonna, the serenity of his soul, which had been troubled ever since his departure from Rennes.

He devoted six days to prayer, passing many long hours before the altar of Mary. After this preparation he went, in fulfilment of a promise he had made to M. Louis, to consult two distinguished ecclesiastics regarding his intentions. Both approved of his departure from Rennes.

Having obtained this opinion, M. Libermann hastened to acquaint M. Louis of it in a letter, which he concludes with the following words :—

“I feel truly grieved for all the pain I am compelled to cause you and all your dear *confrères*, as also for the injury I do to the congregation, which, I assure you, shall always be very dear to me. But, my beloved superior, you see what great evils I shall have to encounter through my desire of serving God according to the perfection of His holy love, and according to His most adorable will. I thought I should on that account leave the congregation. Men distinguished for their piety and experience in spiritual matters told me the same thing. I thought I saw in this the Divine will. I follow it at the sacrifice of my welfare, of my peace, of my health, and, perhaps, even of my life. This being so, how could I have shrunk back from the affliction which

this separation causes me? It seems to me that my intentions and desires are pure, and for the greater glory of God. It is for this reason that I beg of you, my dear superior, to pardon me all the pain I cause you, and to allow me to remain always united to your dear society by a union of charity, prayers, and good works." During the three weeks M. Libermann remained at Lyons, he was most kindly treated in the family of the Abbé Ozanam, one of his former fellow-students at Saint-Sulpice.

We learn from a note written by the holy traveller's own hand that, "during his sojourn at Lyons, he thought it well to expose his plan to a superior of a religious community. The interview was brief and most disappointing. The good superior received him very coldly, and no sooner had he heard the purport of the project than he began to laugh heartily, gave him no answer, but immediately left the parlour. This and several other similar incidents contributed not a little to keep him on the cross, although the Blessed Virgin had restored to him his peace, and by God's goodness given him sufficient strength to continue his work, and to bear up, with a firm will, against all the contempt of men." The man of God was by no means astonished or scandalized by the reception he had received. He felt consoled in the thought, that he had not entered on his path inconsiderately or on a sudden. He could easily conceive that, however great might have been the sagacity and experience of the superior, it was difficult to make him understand, in a parlour interview, a subject so extraordinary, the result of long reflections and of many fervent prayers at the foot of the cross. It would have required a supernatural light to generate an instantaneous communication of ideas; but such a light depended on the free will of God alone. The servants of God sometimes appear to take their

gigantic resolutions suddenly ; in reality, they proceed with more mature deliberation than is generally given to human affairs. Henceforward, M. Libermann was resolved, before submitting his plan to anyone, to select more attentively the time, place, and persons ; to advance without taking a single incautious step beyond the circle traced by the finger of God ; and, above all, to secure his design with the seal of an inviolable discretion. These sentiments, with an increase of generosity, are expressed in the following letter :—



“ *Lyons, 12th December, 1839.*

“ MY VERY DEAR BROTHER AND SISTER,—You will be surprised to receive a letter dated from Lyons. There is, indeed, something astonishing in this, and I would not have expected it myself last year. Give your heart and soul to our Lord, and do not judge nor examine things according to the spirit of the world, otherwise you will be very much afflicted on my account. But if you see things in God, you will easily be in peace concerning me, and you will in the end enter into a true interior joy. I would like very much to tell you how matters stand ; but God does not wish me to do so ; I must, therefore, be silent, and you must be content to remain in a state of uncertainty.

“ I have left Rennes for ever. It is a great imprudence, not to say folly, according to all who judge like men of the world. I had there a certain prospect for the future ; I was sure of having a way of living, and even a kind of honourable position. But, woe to me, if I seek to be at ease on this earth, to live honoured and esteemed by men ! Dear friends, remember one thing : this earth shall pass away ; the life we lead lasts but an instant. When our flesh will be corrupted in the tomb, it will be perfectly



indifferent whether we have led an easy life or not. Our eternity will not be the happier on that account. . . .

“A Christian soul, a soul devoted to our Lord and to His glory alone, should reckon ease and uneasiness, honour and contempt, as being void and indifferent. Why should I wish to lead a comfortable life on this earth unless through self-love ?

“Let us surrender ourselves to the love of Jesus and not to the love of ourselves. If I am overwhelmed with every imaginable evil, during all the time I have to drag along my body on this earth of woes, what does that matter to me, provided I belong to God, and serve Him according to His holy love ? And to live this life of love, what state is more favourable than that of crosses, privations, pains, and all sorts of afflictions ?

“I have quitted Rennes. I have no longer on earth a single creature in whom I can confide. I have nothing ; I do not know what shall become of me, how I shall ever be able to live. I will lead a contemptible, forgotten, neglected life, a life lost according to the world ; I will have the disapproval of a great number of those who formerly loved and esteemed me ; I shall, perhaps, be treated as a proud and senseless man, be despised, and even persecuted. And who will console me on this earth ? Am I, then, a ruined man, unhappy for my whole life ? The flesh alone reasons in this manner . . .

“Dearest friends, remember that we have a Father in heaven, the great and most adorable Lord Jesus, and a most powerful and admirable Mother ; they never abandon those who give up their entire being for their love and glory.

“Do not, therefore, be afraid or wanting in confidence with regard to me ; but acknowledge that I am the happiest man in the world, because I possess in it but


God, but Jesus and Mary. I am already in heaven, although still living on earth. If it is the will of God that I should lead a hard and sorrowful life, so much the better! He will give me His strength and His love, and that is all I want. All my hope is in Jesus and Mary, and so it ought also to be with you.

“I have now said much ; still I have not come to the point ; this is precisely what I want. For, all that I can tell you at present is, that you ought to be in no way uneasy about me. Look on me as a man dead and buried. Pray God for the good of my soul and the accomplishment of His most holy will. I cannot now tell you what God demands of me. I will only say, that I shall follow that with which, in His divine goodness, He has been pleased to inspire me, and that I put my confidence in Him. I believe that the time to explain myself is not yet come ; be not displeased with me, I beseech you, through the love you bear our Lord and His most holy Mother. His will is that I be silent. Moreover, it is not in a letter that these things can be told. I will send you news later on : perhaps in a few days, perhaps not for a considerable time ; so be not uneasy if I delay in writing to you. Besides, I do not despair of seeing you within the next two years. I even believe that such will be the case. Let, therefore, your minds be at rest ; give yourselves more and more to God. Live in fervour and love as true children of Jesus and Mary, in whose charity I am entirely yours,

“ F. LIBERMANN, *Acolyte.*”

## CHAPTER V.

MM. Libermann and de la Brunière.—Their Journey to Rome,  
December, 1839, January, 1840.

HILST M. Libermann, on his way from Rennes to Rome, struggled hard against interior trials and exterior humiliations, combats of another but no less painful nature prevented one of his dearest auxiliaries from meeting him at Lyons, as they had agreed upon. Paul de la Brunière was about to separate from a family well deserving of a son's affection, without being able, any more than M. Libermann, to assign the real motive of his mysterious departure. He had been hitherto the delight and hope of his parents; he had gone with distinction through his theological course; he had taken the decisive step into the sanctuary by receiving the Order of Subdeaconship; and, as nephew of the Bishop of Mende, he could see, in all probability, a brilliant future laid open before him.

From his youth, Paul de la Brunière was animated with a true spirit of piety, and his soul was filled with a generosity that would not shrink from trials or sacrifice. The extraordinary ascendancy which he had naturally exercised around him in the seminary presaged as keen a mind for administration as his will was resolute to carry out his designs. The promoters of the future society for the conversion of the blacks did not ignore the noble qualities of the young subdeacon, whom even M. Libermann had humbly resolved to follow as a leader.

Was M. de la Brunière to frustrate the most legitimate

hopes of fond parents? Was he to give up the bright dreams of his youth to follow the fate and fortune of the unknown convert of Saverne? It is easy to conceive what must have been the perplexity of the young seminarist. His soul was inflamed with divine love and consumed with zeal for souls. Still, how painful did the sacrifice of his parents appear to him! He, no doubt, experienced in his interior the agonizing struggle that usually precedes separation from those whom we love best, and whose hearts are, as it were, entwined with our own. Of all sacrifices, that of parting from parents, friends, and home is, perhaps, the most crucifying to nature. The greatest saints felt heart-broken, as, with tearful eyes, they quitted their loving parents and friends.

Whatever it was to cost nature and nature's affections, M. de la Brunière was ready for every sacrifice. He knew that if parents have claims on the hearts of their children, the claims of God are greater still. Remembering the words of Him Who said: "He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me;" he, at length, after a three weeks' most painful combat, was able to assign a definite rendezvous, and to bid an affectionate farewell to his afflicted family. His future presented a gloomy and indistinct perspective; it was nothing less than the mysterious and confused aspect of the entire world, which he was about to traverse rapidly, like a beautiful yet almost imperceptible light that appears for a short time, and then vanishes in thick and distant darkness. Still the heroic seminarist nobly went his way, and, on the 31st December, the day previous to M. Libermann's arrival, he was kneeling in fervent prayer before the altar of Notre Dame de La Garde, at Marseilles.

Whilst awaiting his holy friend, M. de la Brunière had

time to recover from the depressing emotions of his departure. Unhappily, he had taken the rather too stoical resolution of hiding his trials within his heart, and of not even mentioning them to his brother, who was not less afflicted than himself. M. Libermann, on the contrary, like another Paul, related in all simplicity his many anxieties and tribulations, and by his frankness raised a corner of the veil which screened the many clouds that, since his departure from Rennes, had more and more gathered over his soul. This was to submit his companion, if not designedly, at least in the dispositions of Providence, to a trial for which he was not sufficiently prepared. M. de la Brunière, accustomed to venerate his friend as a saint, wondered why the master did not imitate the reserve of the disciple. He believed him to be, in a far higher degree than himself, above the emotions and troubles of men. It seemed to him that in a similar case, such would not have been the conduct of the saints. This plunged his soul into greater confusion; he lost the serene and boundless confidence which hitherto he had reposed in his friend; that prestige of sanctity which had dazzled his eyes gradually decreased and vanished away. We find these sentiments revealed in a letter which, in the name of both, he addressed to M. Luquet, and through him to all their friends. Under the appearance of indifference and of blind abandonment, he exaggerated the uncertainty and rashness of their situation so much, that M. Libermann thought it right to add a correction, to prevent the discouraging effect which the feelings of M. de la Brunière might have had on the minds of several. They were only about to begin their work, and already they had to apply to M. Pinault as their arbitrator. This is a first disagreement, a slight split which, little by little, will widen into a breach, and finally cause the separation of two souls,

whom God Himself seemed to have destined for a common labour in the same field. M. de la Brunière's letter runs as follows:—



*“ Praise be to Jesus and Mary!*

*“ Marseilles, Feast of the Circumcision, 1840.*

“VERY DEAR BROTHER,—M. le Vavas seur has, no doubt, informed you of the graces which our good Master has been pleased to bestow on His dear work. M. Libermann is one of ours. But we can well say that everything comes from God; for we did not even think of this.

“We are to-day at Marseilles, about to embark for Civita Vecchia on our way to Rome. We have passed nearly the entire morning at the feet of the Most Holy Virgin, in the chapel of Notre Dame de la Garde, from whom we expect all strength, all good desires, all sanctification. I have to tender her particular thanks for the manner in which she has drawn me away from my family, and in which she has removed all the obstacles that threatened to retard the affair.

“Where are we going now? And what are we going to do? God, who has conducted us thus far knows that, and we know nothing. We only know that it is His most holy will we should go to Rome, to the feet of the holy apostles, where, perhaps, He will communicate to us greater light. We know now, that we ought to sacrifice ourselves fully to Him, and that we should be submissive and resigned to the good pleasure of Him, for whose glory we ought to take every step. But He alone knows what He has decided for His glory, and whether these desires, which we believe come from Him, will be successful or not. Whatever may happen, let us hope that He will be greatly glorified, if it were only by the humiliation and contempt which will abundantly result to us from our undertaking.



“We still have only San-Domingo in view. At Rome, M. Libermann will occupy himself with the writing of the rules and constitutions, according to which we will live in the holy ministry. We will go as private missionaries, without being approved of as a congregation, but only with the sanction and mission of the Holy See. I say that we will do this, though something quite different may happen, which we do not now foresee.

“We are going to Rome, and we will wait for you there; let this be a secret among ourselves; I even ask you not to speak of it to M. Gallais, who is opposed to this. M. Libermann thinks, with reason, that it is almost necessary for you and M. Le Vasseur to come to Rome, in order that the four of us may be animated by one and the same spirit of abnegation and total death to self, necessary for the ministry which awaits us. The apostles were for a long time assembled before preaching our Lord in the various countries of the world. What then, should we do, poor miserable creatures, who ought to blush at the very name of apostles, being so far from possessing their spirit, their devotedness, and their abnegation? If we had our whole lifetime for going through our novitiate, we would still be but poor men.

“Tell M. Pinault, that M. Libermann has received the letter of M. Salier, who does not disapprove of the step he is taking, but advises him to go and consult, at Trent in Tyrol, a person for a long time favoured with extraordinary lights and graces. Ask M. Pinault if it is well to consult her; she is at a distance of fifty leagues from Rome.

“Tell M. Le Vasseur, also, that I shall write to him later on. I have spoken to M. Libermann about his difficulties with the Prefect Apostolic of Bourbon; he sees nothing to be done but to wait, in the hope that the will

of God may be manifested to us; if not, he thinks that it is necessary to submit to the authority of the Prefect Apostolic. He thinks that a journey to Rome might be a sufficient and sure means of delivering him from his embarrassment. M. Libermann, however, wishes that all this should be mentioned to M. Pinault, who is, as you know, our principal director.

“ I leave a small space for dear M. Libermann, who wishes to write to you. Keep a strict secrecy regarding all this, except with M. Pinault, without whom nothing is to be done. M. Libermann desires you to have an eye on M. Tisserand, and to ask him not to do precipitately anything that might be injurious. It is at Rome that everything must be decided and carried out.

“ Yours most faithfully, in the holy hearts of Jesus and Mary.

“ PAUL DE LA BRUNIÈRE.”

*P. S. from M. Libermann.*—“ I also must, indeed, send you a few words, my very dear brother. M. de la Brunière has told you almost all the important points. This dear brother speaks, as if everything were still uncertain and undetermined. That was not his intention; he meant to say that all is in the hands of our Lord and of His holy Mother, and that for us, we must blindly abandon ourselves to their guidance. It would, perhaps, be good if M. Le Vavas seur endeavoured to obtain from the Prefect Apostolic of his diocese permission to spend some time at the Propaganda in Rome, without precisely telling him the principal reason for so doing. Let him arrange that with M. Pinault.\* See with M. Le Vavas seur

\* The Prefect Apostolic of Bourbon was M. Poncelet, who, soon afterwards, of his own accord, gave M. Le Vavas seur full liberty of action.

if it is necessary to keep the secret about my new vocation from our other *confrères*, MM. Tisserand, Bureau, Oudin, and the rest. They might conceive some doubts, and perhaps act imprudently, if they were not recommended to keep it a secret. . . Speak of all this to M. Pinault, and do nothing without consulting him.”

The meeting of the four promoters at Rome, naturally reminds us of St. Ignatius leaving Paris with his four first companions. M. de la Brunière might have thought of this ; but, assuredly, no thought of ambitious imitation or vain display ever entered his mind. His virtue was higher and purer ; and far from being exposed to feelings of pride, he had rather to guard against a certain stoicism of too rigid a humility.

He had accepted this humble and difficult work as a providential means of escaping, by an obscure sacrifice, the chances of splendour and greatness which awaited him. If he was disturbed by the troubles of his travelling companion, it was because he feared that, at the decisive moment, he might find himself the head of the enterprise, and the point on which would centre the hopes of some, the contempt of others, the deception of all. M. Libermann necessarily added to his perplexities by the simple frankness of his humility. It was impossible for him, in their confidential moments, not to yield, in spite of himself, the highest place to his friend, who, on this account, was troubled more and more.

In these dispositions, they entered Rome on the Feast of the Epiphany. Soon after their arrival in the Holy City, M. Drach obtained for them an audience from his Holiness, Pope Gregory XVI. On this occasion took place a remarkable occurrence, which M. Drach immediately consigned to writing, and, years afterwards, related to the Very Rev. Father Schwindenhammer, in the following words: “ In furnishing notes concerning the life of our

dear Father Libermann of blessed memory, I forgot a remarkable fact which I discovered in the diary, wherein each evening I note down the chief incidents of the day.

“ On the 17th February, 1840, I presented to his Holiness, Gregory XVI., the Abbé Libermann, and his friend the Abbé de la Brunière. The Sovereign Pontiff laid his hand on the head of the Abbé Libermann, and leaned upon it with visible emotion. When the two ecclesiastics had retired, the Pope asked me, in a voice which betrayed his feelings, ‘ Who is he whose head I have touched ? ’ I gave His Holiness a brief history of the neophyte. The Pope then said these very words : ‘ *Sarà un Santo* ’—‘ *He will be a saint.* ’ (Rome, 10th August, 1855.)

M. Libermann himself has given an account of this audience in the following words addressed to his brother : “ I have had the satisfaction of seeing the Holy Father, through the intervention of M. Drach. His Holiness received me with admirable kindness, bade me persevere, and gave me his blessing. He has, moreover, given me a rosary and a medal, which he blessed. My audience was very short, because a Cardinal was waiting at the door to treat of important affairs ; it was but just that I should yield my place. You cannot conceive the great consolation one experiences on seeing the Vicar of our Lord on earth.”

The troubles and uncertainties of M. de la Brunière, far from diminishing, only increased at Rome. He came at length to persuade himself that, from Paris to Rome, he had followed but a vain illusion ; that he was tempting God, and that he ought to return to his former starting-point, confide his youth and future career to an ancient and tried work, withdraw as much as possible from all those who had known him, and expiate, in a hidden and distant apostolate, his youthful dreams of becoming a

founder. More than ever he felt revive within his soul his former desire, of devoting himself to the missions of China. On the other hand, even virtuous persons employed every means to draw him away from M. Libermann, who in a letter of the 7th July, 1840, thus expresses his sentiments on this point: "I have seen that men of God, desirous of procuring His glory, may sometimes act in a rather unaccountable manner, which it would be impossible to justify. But I was consoled by seeing clearly that they acted through a desire of God's glory, and I said to myself: 'If our Lord is pleased with their conduct, why should I be displeased?'"

In the midst of his troubles M. de la Brunière had recourse to Mary, the "Comfortress of the afflicted." He frequently visited, at Santa Maria Maggiore, the Madonna, which tradition declares to have been painted by St. Luke. One day, as he implored her with many tears, he thought he heard a gentle, yet powerful voice which confirmed him in his vocation to the foreign missions. From that moment he felt enlightened and fortified; he laid all before his director, who, after having prayed himself, advised him to respond to the divine call. A short time after, M. de la Brunière quitted his friend and Rome. We are not aware how the separation of the two pilgrims took place; we only know that, at the end of two months, M. Libermann remained at Rome in complete abandonment, feeble in health, and reduced to almost extreme poverty, without bread, without clothing, without a friend.

M. de la Brunière withdrew from Rome, traversed France rapidly, and hastened to Paris to beg admission at the Seminary of Foreign Missions. He was soon followed thither by M. Luquet; and other hopes, not less honourable, not less precious for the work of the blacks, vanished in consequence of these defections.

Let us follow M. de la Brunière to his last end, which he will reach but too quickly. After a short stay in the Seminary of Foreign Missions, he left for China, declaring at the same time, that he was not worthy to associate with M. Libermann. He arrived, in the course of the year 1842, at Manchooria, where he was received by Mgr. Verrolles, Bishop of Columbia. For a long time he was the only missionary of this holy prelate, and he consequently partook of all those dreadful sufferings, the account of which has often moved to tears the numerous assemblies, which the stirring words of Mgr. Verrolles afterwards attracted around him throughout France. But this was still too small a field for the generous missionary ; he conceived the design of evangelizing the country of the "*Tchang-Mao-Tze*," or "*long-haired Tartars*," whose hideous aspect is but an imperfect image of their ferocity.

Mgr. Verrolles knew too well how to appreciate the merits of the courageous apostle, not to found great hopes on him. Profiting of the faculty which he possessed of appointing a coadjutor, he fixed his eyes on M. de la Brunière, and, at his departure for Europe, left him superior of the mission. Being apprised of Mgr. Verrolles' intention, M. Libermann, who knew the austere humility of his former associate, wrote to him to combat his repugnance. This letter could not even be laid on the tomb of the missionary.

Foreseeing what was destined for him, M. de la Brunière insisted the more pressingly on obtaining permission to carry the glad tidings of Jesus Christ to the long-haired Tartars. The number of missionaries having increased, Mgr. Verrolles allowed him to undertake, with a guide, a journey of three months. The courageous missionary left Kai-Tcheou in May, 1845, advanced four hundred leagues towards the north, and arrived, at the



end of three months, on the banks of the Ousouri, where he thought he would find the tribe which he intended to evangelize; but only an immense desert stretched out before him. After having spent the winter on the banks of the river, at a temperature of 9° Fahrenheit, he sent back the neophyte who accompanied him, and resumed without a guide, his, until then, fruitless exploration. He embarked alone in a frail boat and followed the course of the River Ousouri. His guide lost sight of him, and for a long time all news of the apostle had ceased at this mysterious moment.

Three years afterwards, in 1848, Mgr. Verrolles, on his return from Europe, brought for M. de la Brunière the dignity of coadjutor and the title of Bishop of Tremita. Deeply grieved at not finding him, he caused two long excursions to be made to discover him. It was only in 1850 that it was known with some details that a missionary called *Pao* (this was the Chinese name of M. de la Brunière) had appeared, in 1845, among the *Ki-li-mi*, at Hou-Tong, the last village of the long-haired Tartars. As he was engaged in preparing his repast, in a little bay sheltered from the north wind, he was suddenly attacked by ten men, armed with bows and lances, who pierced him with several arrows, threw themselves on his boat, and struck him violently, until a last stroke fractured his skull, and he fell lifeless at their feet. One of the murderers related this tragedy, adding, that he had seen the martyr quietly sitting in his skiff, waiting for death, without defending himself, then dying without uttering a word or making a single movement.

After the death of their victim, the Tartars broke his teeth, tore out his eyes, and cruelly mutilated his corpse. His remains having been thrown on shore, were, after some days, carried away by the waters of the river. The

inhabitants pretend to have afterwards seen the stranger walking on the strand, and this apparition caused them great fear. It may be that a day will come, when, converted by the Blood of the Just One, they will joyfully commemorate his memory, and raise on their inhospitable shore an altar in honour of the new martyr, who now prays in heaven for those who loved him and for those who have crowned him.

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## CHAPTER VI.

M. Libermann's sojourn in Rome, 1840-1841.



ONE might be inclined to believe that nothing is impossible to a man who has learned to act with humility, perseverance, and confidence in God. In this lay hidden the strength of the venerable Libermann. For him it was as difficult to expect anything from himself, as not to hope for everything from the all-powerful liberality of his heavenly Father. In his greatest trials, his support and immovable anchor was his humility, which so strengthened his confidence in God, as even almost to defy impossibilities. This leading characteristic of his conduct we find plainly shown forth in an admirable letter, in which the holy servant of God alludes to the painful departure of M. de la Brunière:—"What! you give way to trouble and discouragement, because a man has abandoned you, a man who brought but talents, a name, and a fortune! What is all that? It is not after this manner that the works of God are accomplished. God does not wish them to be attributed to the power of men. He wills that we acknowledge therein His operation alone. We must advance, ever advance, and, when stopped on our path, we must remain at the base of the wall, wait till it falls, and then step over." (Letter from Rome, February, 1840.)

Six months afterwards, when he still saw almost insurmountable obstacles to the establishment of the religious society which he was destined to found, he wrote with full confidence, almost in the same terms as above: "The

difficulties to which you refer are great, and may or may not increase in future; but I do not understand how a man with the least atom of faith can put forward such objections. If only easy things should be undertaken, what would have become of the Church? St. Peter and St. John would have continued to fish in the lake of Tiberias, and St. Paul would never have left Jerusalem. I can easily conceive how a man who thinks himself something, and who relies on his own strength, may stop before an obstacle; but how can anyone be frightened by a difficulty, when he depends solely on our Adorable Master? We only stop when we reach the base of the wall; and there we wait with patience and confidence until an opening is effected; then we continue our march as if nothing had happened." (Letter of 17th August, 1840.)

The venerable servant of God, to use his own expression, "soon reached the base of the wall." Indeed, he met with so many obstacles and disappointments that, naturally speaking, he could entertain but little hope ever to find an issue and to "continue his march." But his trust was in God, and he was not to be deceived. Having arrived at Rome without recommendations, he was left, after the departure of M. de la Brunière, without either a counsel or a protector; and persons who were strangers to his life and aspirations were far from favouring his views. Some French ecclesiastics who had a slight idea of his intention, took care to point out its absurdity, and to indicate to him the right road to be followed; but despite their persistence, they always found him as insensible to their fears as he was unyielding to their advice. One of them who had to treat a very ordinary affair, carefully enumerated to him, day after day, the many visits he had assiduously and courteously paid in the hope of securing success; and, as those visits did not save him

from a complete failure, he consoled himself with predicting to M. Libermann—whom he called the imprudent solicitor—an incomparably greater certainty of ill-success. Another, who whilst a seminarist had frequently been the object of M. Libermann's kindness, appeared at first to enter very warmly into all his projects ; but he soon turned against him, and only made use of the confidence reposed in him to depreciate his benefactor in the eyes of two religious, who might have greatly assisted him, particularly one of them—his ordinary confessor.

Having been persuaded that a religious, a French penitentiary at St. Peter's, might use his influence in his favour, M. Libermann approached him as best he could, but only met with a mortifying reception. Emboldened by his souvenirs of Brittany, and by his acquaintance with the Eudists and their superior, M. Louis, he presented himself with more confidence to another priest, the Rev. Father Rosaven. The latter listened to him rather carelessly, and without going to the trouble of sufficiently understanding or judging the mission of his visitor, spoke to him with all the frankness of a Breton. He saw in the project a mere chimerical illusion, reprimanded M. Libermann for his temerity, and thought to render him good service by endeavouring to free him from his pretension to become a founder. To this interview we may, perhaps, trace back a few words which were afterwards repeated by the venerable servant of God : "Do you know what it is to found a religious order, being, as you are, in so wretched a condition ?" M. Libermann simply replied by asking what St. Ignatius possessed when he laid the foundations of his Institute. "He had only his bag and his discipline, and see how his society flourishes. Is not Providence the same to-day as it was then ? Depending upon it, I am rich enough."

Accustomed to rely chiefly on supernatural means, the venerable servant of God resolved to consult a priest who was then held in high repute of sanctity throughout the Pontifical States. He went to the holy man, spoke briefly of his intentions, and humbly asked for advice and prayers. This priest treated his visitor very coldly, listened with distraction, and, as soon as M. Libermann had finished, stood up, and without answering a single word, abruptly left him there. The humble founder was also advised to communicate his intention to a celebrated ecstática of Tyrol, who at that time engaged the attention of the whole Christian world. As he had not the means necessary to undertake so long a journey, he contented himself with writing to her a letter; but he never received an answer. He thus had recourse to every possible expedient suggested to him, without losing his tranquil hope, or expecting a deviation from the ordinary course of events.

At the beginning of March he was introduced to Mgr. Cadolini, secretary of the Propaganda, and late Archbishop of Spoleto. He did not dare to solicit a positive advice on a work as yet so undefined; much less did he call for a decision from the supreme authority. He simply expressed his desire to lay before the prelate a memoir for consultation. When depositing the document at the secretariate of the Propaganda, on the 11th of March, 1840, the memoirist counted so little on a favourable result, that he omitted giving his address. We quote a few extracts from this memoir:—

“My Lord, I have been in Rome for more than two months, intent on an enterprise which I believe would procure the glory of our Lord, and be very agreeable in His sight.

“We are several French ecclesiastics, who desire to undertake a most important mission. Having no ex-



perience in the things of God, we must needs have recourse to those who can make known His holy will and communicate His orders to us. For this reason we come to cast ourselves at the feet of your Excellency, as being the person who has received from God light and authority in this matter. We entreat you not to reject poor souls who stand so much in need of being enlightened, and whose most earnest desire is to know the Divine will and the means of carrying it out, for the greater glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. We promise your Excellency, with the assistance of grace, the greatest docility to all the orders you may give us. Be pleased, my Lord, to receive us with benevolence, and to permit us to open to you our hearts, that your Excellency may judge of our design, according to the lights of God. For this reason do I take the liberty of laying it before you in all its extent, endeavouring, however, to be as brief as possible."

M. Libermann then exposes the chief ends and circumstances of the work : that its general object is the salvation of the negroes, in particular those of San-Domingo and of Bourbon ; that the principal promoters of the work are two ecclesiastics, one a grandson of a former governor of San-Domingo, the other a native of Bourbon ; that both are certain of being favourably received in their respective islands ; that the memorialists are firmly resolved to make every sacrifice for the success of their design. With this view, they will live in community, and labour as missionaries under the authority of vicars or prefects apostolic, and under the obedience of a superior selected from amongst them. They will practise poverty, and bind themselves by vows revocable by the authority of the superior. They will thus prepare the elements of a future congregation, which they do not seek to establish

immediately. Their most earnest desire is to depend directly on Rome, to be sent as missionaries by the Holy See, and to remain under the jurisdiction of the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda.

“Being sent by the Sovereign Pontiff,” says the memoir, “we shall receive a much greater abundance of apostolic spirit, as it is to him that our Lord has confided His great treasure of that spirit for the entire church. Neither wishing nor daring to solicit the erection of a congregation, by reason of our incapacity to undertake so vast a project, it is absolutely necessary for us to be submitted to a superior power from which we shall receive our mission. How ardent should be our desire of being subject to the Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth !”

The memoir then puts forward the inconveniences that would result to the new missionaries if they were associated with any of the previously existing congregations, and modestly closes this delicate discussion by the following words : “However, should your Excellency decide that we ought to unite with one of these congregations, I am ready to employ every means in my power to effect this union, and I am convinced that our Lord will then assist us in overcoming all difficulties.”

Towards the end, the memoir exposes the state of the work with a scrupulous, nay, almost compromising exactness: they are eight or nine members, having as yet no house but only relying on the chance of an establishment in some episcopal town ; there is no priest amongst them ; three or four only have completed their theological studies and are of age to be ordained ; they could obtain the co-operation of several priests, in case his Excellency should desire the work to advance without delay. The greatest difficulty lies with the petitioner himself. He is thirty-five years of age, and has not been promoted to Holy Orders, owing

to a disease which, during nine years, has gradually decreased, and the recurrence of which has not been felt for the last two years. He would prefer, if it were no obstacle to his mission, to remain all his life in Minor Orders.

Eight days after the presentation of his memoir, M. Libermann returned to the secretariate of the Propaganda, and received from Mgr. Cadolini a reply which was far from favourable. He was told most explicitly that, before getting any reply to his proposal, or undertaking anything, he should be a priest. He had now to inform his friends of his, humanly-speaking, hopeless position. He concealed nothing, nor did he spare himself the most humiliating qualifications, no doubt attributing all his ill-success to his sins and unworthiness.

Whilst he was thus apparently repulsed at Rome, evil tongues were at work in France. We read in a note written by his own hand: "M. Libermann was accused of having come to Rome with the sole intention of deceiving the good faith of the Holy Father, that, despite his malady, he might be promoted to Holy Orders; and of remaining there so long through policy, in order to attain the object of his desire." (Memoir of M. Tisserand.)

To fill the bitter cup of his trials, God was pleased to deprive him also of that last support which is often the only consolation of a soul in distress—the encouragement of a confessor—a trial which St. Teresa declared to be the most painful of all. M. Libermann was compelled to struggle against unexpected objections, even in the Sacred Tribunal. Far from encouraging him, his confessor went so far as to forbid him to speak any further of his project. If the holy founder ultimately triumphed over this obstacle, he had no less, at the decisive moment, met with a cold and embarrassed reserve which, under cover of existing customs, paralyzed every effort that might have been

made in his behalf. But his confidence in God was unshaken. He knew that where men leave off there God commences, and he hoped the more firmly as all human hope seemed to have vanished. The glory of his God and the salvation of the most abandoned souls were his only aims: he was not to be daunted by difficulties. Many impediments obstructed his path; he heeded them not, for he was determined to wait patiently until the wall should disappear.

In the meantime, he sanctified the delay by meditations, good deeds, and the practice, to an heroic degree, of every virtue; prayer, ardent and continual; poverty, even unto the destitute state of mendicity; mortification of soul and body; charity in all the works accessible to his indigence; visits to hospitals and prisons; catechism to poor children, and other such holy actions.

Shortly after his arrival in Rome he repaired to the humble but decent house of M. Patriarca, in the *Vicolo del Pinaco*, where frequently some foreign ecclesiastics resided, during their stay in the Eternal City. As he asked for the humblest apartment, he was conducted to a little garret on the fourth and highest story, quite under the roof. This wretched attic was divided into two compartments, having no other ceiling but the tiles and the rafters, whose rapid inclination prevented the inmate from standing erect, except at the entrance. It was properly a lumber-room, where some peasants coming to sell their wares at Rome would occasionally pass the night. A few pigeons were its only constant visitors. M. Libermann was happy to accept of this comfortless loft, at a crown a month, on condition that he would allow one of the compartments to his neighbours the pigeons, and that he would furnish the other at his own expense. He chose the worse of the two, and furnished it with a chair,

a table, and a mattress laid on the pavement and covered with a single blanket. A stone was his pillow. His crucifix, with which he never parted, he placed upon the table, and on the wall he hung a picture of St. Francis of Assisium, no doubt to be reminded of his cell at the Seminary of Issy. He had no attendant but himself to dress his bed, to brush his clothes and shoes, and to keep his room in order. His food was simple and barely sufficient for his sustenance. After a light breakfast, he partook at mid-day of a single repast at the common table, contenting himself with the humble fare of the poor people who owned the house. A small quantity of bread usually sufficed for his supper.

But he paid greater attention to his soul, which was ever hungering after the bread of life, and ever panting after the refreshing streams of the Saviour's fountains. Every day, after a long morning's preparation, he received Holy Communion in one of the neighbouring churches. He usually paid his first visit to the Church of St. Augustine, as being the nearest to his dwelling, and particularly because it possessed the statue of a venerated Madonna, for whom he had a great devotion.

After a lengthened and fervent thanksgiving, he would ascend to his aërial retreat, where he spent the entire morning, writing, or with his inseparable "*vade-mecum*" in his hands, meditating on some text of the holy Gospel. A Bible, a prayer-book, and the "Imitation of Christ" completed the remainder of his library.

At about one o'clock, immediately after his almost sole repast, he would set out for his accustomed pilgrimages, generally alone, sometimes accompanied by ecclesiastics, with whom he would converse on pious subjects. The churches he visited oftenest and with special predilection were those of St. Peter at the Vatican, St. John

Lateran, St. John of the Latin Gate, and St. Andrew *delle Fratte*—the latter of which, in consequence of the recent miraculous conversion of M. Ratisbonne, had become a shrine dear to the heart of every converted Israelite.

At these holy sanctuaries he sought for light in his doubts, and for strength in his difficulties. "I immediately," he says, "visited one of my churches of devotion: *St. Maria Maggiore, Our Lady trans Tevere, the Madonna della Pace, and the Madonna del Parto, in the church of the Augustinians, and my difficulties would disappear.*" (Letter to M. Desgenettes.)

His letters from Rome enable us to follow him, almost step by step, through those pious pilgrimages of which the simple itinerary is one of the wonders of the Holy City. In default of his correspondence, the calendar would suffice to direct us in following him in his daily devotions. In the city of Peter, as in the heavenly Jerusalem, time and space are, as it were, concentrated and commingled in one point. As each dawn breaks on the seven hills, there appears a temple, a tomb, a luminous spot which is blended with the day, gives it its name, and clothes it with a festive brightness, that even surpasses the chaste splendour of the sun of Rome. There, the days are counted by the feasts, and the feasts take their names from the places, in proportion as, to borrow the words of the Psalmist, "the annual crown of divine goodness passes over the horizon," the city of the apostles and martyrs goes round the circle of her local solemnities, that glorious and blessed crown of the Roman year: the most perfect image on earth of the splendour, solemnity, and glory of heaven.

To visit those temples, to kneel on those tombs, to be illumined with those lights and graces, was no doubt one of the sweetest joys of the humble and holy pilgrim,



during his twelve months' sojourn in the Eternal City. Can we doubt that, on the feast of the two princes of the apostles, he was rapt in fervent prayer before the Confession of St. Peter's; that, ere the day was at its close, he descended to the Mamertine prison, to kiss the column of the apostles, and to drink of St. Peter's fountain? "I have," he writes to a friend, "executed all your holy commissions. I have prayed for you before the Confession of SS. Peter and Paul. Here the places of devotion are innumerable. This week, for instance, I have visited the prison wherein SS. Peter and Paul were detained previous to their death, and the house in which St. Paul was imprisoned during two years after his arrival from Jerusalem. The first is called the Mamertine prison; it is more than forty feet under ground. The second is not deep; it is the lower part of the house on the site of which was built a church in honour of the Holy Virgin (*Our Lady in Via lata*). In each of those prisons, there are fountains from which the holy apostles drew water to baptize those whom our Lord converted by their preaching. During the octave you may likewise visit St. Peter's *in Montorio*, where this apostle was crucified, and St. Peter's *in Vinculis*, where his chains are preserved. On St. Paul's day, I went to the great and magnificent church of this holy apostle. It is to be consecrated, in September, by the Pope himself, who fears he shall die before performing this ceremony. To enjoy this consolation, he has caused the work to be hastened, in order that the sanctuary may be completed by that time. On the same feast of St. Paul, I heard Mass where the holy apostle was beheaded, and where is still to be found the little pillar to which he was fastened to receive the fatal stroke. I drank of the three fountains, which, as tradition affirms, gushed up from the three places on

which the head of the great apostle fell, when rebounding three times from the earth. Within the same precinct there is another chapel, where is the prison in which St. Paul was detained for some hours, whilst waiting until everything was ready for his martyrdom. St. Zenon and more than twelve thousand martyrs were interred in the vault of this same chapel. Finally, at the altar of this oratory St. Bernard said Mass, and was favoured with a vision of the Blessed Virgin. You see by this specimen, how Rome is eminently the Holy City. By this, you may conceive a faint idea of the rest. I would never finish, were I to tell you everything." (Letter of 6th July, 1840.)

He visited the catacombs and the cemeteries of Rome, not with the searching eye of an archæologist, but with the lively faith of a saint. "I have prayed for you," he says, "at the Catacombs of St. Sebastian, the cemetery of St. Calixtus,\* which is for me a place of great devotion. Unhappily, I cannot go there often, as it is at the distance of a league or more from Rome, at least from my dwelling. Just imagine if it is worth visiting; they have exhumed from it the remains of a hundred and seventy four thousand martyrs! They still preserve there an ancient altar, on which the holy sacrifice was offered during the persecutions, and several chapels wherein the Christians assembled for prayer, assisted at the holy mysteries, and partook of the Eucharistic banquet. There, hiding from their persecutors, they passed days and nights, perhaps months and years. What must have been their fervour, whilst buried in those retreats! No wonder that on entering them we feel deeply moved, and that we would wish to stay there always!"

In a letter to his brother, M. Libermann speaks with

Such was the general opinion before the admirable discoveries recently made by M. de Rossi.

admiration of the principal Roman basilicas. That of St. Peter's particularly filled him with delight. "When speaking of St. Peter's," he wrote, "we can never say enough. The sentiment with which this great basilica inspires us, is that of the greatness of God. It reminds us of His magnificence in the midst of His angels and saints. On approaching the 'Confession of St. Peter,' we are penetrated with devotion towards the holy apostles Peter and Paul; and we are replenished with joy, when seeing how many of the great ones of the earth have exhausted their wealth and their genius, to adorn, with such splendour, the tombs of those two poor Jews, who were once so insignificant in the eyes of the world."

In another place the holy servant of God speaks with lively emotion of the Coliseum, and of the legions and chiefs of legions of martyrs, who came from Jerusalem, Antioch, and Ephesus, to shed their blood in this Amphitheatre, in testimony of the religion of Jesus Christ. Was not he likewise destined to be the leader of a legion, he, who before commencing his battles against sin and hell, had come to refresh and strengthen himself on this native soil of militant souls? It was in pagan Rome that, during the first days of Christianity, Christ's athletes achieved their noble exploits. It is from Christian Rome that their heroic successors set out, from age to age, to begin their gigantic and glorious careers. Thither the patriarchs of monastic orders, and the principal apostles of Christian nations, hasten from every land, for some days at least, to pitch their tents and standards near the trophies of the founders of the Church.\* It was only just that the Apostolate of the blacks and of the abandoned souls should have neither name, form, nor basis, before it would spring

\* "Occurrent tibi trophæa eorum qui Ecclesiam fundaverunt."—Euseb., "Hist. Eccles.," ii. 25.

up within the pale of St. Peter's, on that inexhaustible land trodden by Liguori, Gaspard del Buffalo, Paul of the Cross, Ignatius, Philip Neri, Francis of Paul, Francis of Assisi, Gualbertus, Romuald, Benedict, and a host of other illustrious founders. There, whilst breathing the atmosphere of those great souls, M. Libermann inhales the spirit of their holy lives; there he imbibes that strong devotion to Rome which he shall afterwards communicate in such abundance to all his disciples.

His devotions and pilgrimages were only relieved by his correspondence and the writing of his rules and commentaries, of which we shall soon speak at greater length. He also spent a part of his time in directing a few souls in the ways of perfection, amongst others a pious lady who had come to Rome about the same time as himself. "I shall never forget," says this lady, "the impression which his first appearance made on me. Though not knowing who he was, I divined that he could be no other than the person of whom my son had spoken to me. His humble exterior, his truthful and simple language, the angelical sweetness diffused over his whole countenance, soon made me appreciate the heavenly favours which God had bestowed on his beautiful soul. Since then I have seen him often, and amidst the trials which the Lord in His mercy has been pleased to send me, he constantly aided, encouraged, and consoled me. . . I always left him with the thought that I had just listened to a saint. This persuasion has since so much increased in my mind, that when ever I am plunged in some fresh sorrow, I ask him to pray to our Divine Master for me." The same lady informs us that he lived in great poverty, that often he had not sufficient means to pay the postage of the letters which he received from France on spiritual matters. "M. Patriarca," she continues,

“often said to me: ‘I am not rich, but it is a pleasure for me to advance him all that he requires, because his stay amongst us is a blessing to the family.’” Unless through necessity, the holy servant of God hardly ever made a visit, not even to the French ecclesiastics who were then at Rome; and rarely did he appear at *Saint-Louis des Français*. He visited almost exclusively his former catechist and friend, M. Drach, who was then librarian of the Propaganda, and who was always happy to interrupt his learned labours to receive his dear *protégé*.\*

\* M. Drach born himself of a Jewish rabbin, at Strasburg, 1791, converted at Paris in 1823, always took the liveliest interest in the venerable servant of God. As we have seen previously, it was he who, by his influence, obtained admission for M. Libermann first to the College Stanislaus, and then to the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice; and he always kept up most friendly relations with the holy convert of Saverne. M. Drach died at Rome, in the hospital *de Santo Spirito in Sassia*, on the 2nd of January, 1865, in the 76th year of his age. He was to his last breath devotedly attached to the Holy See, and a most punctual observer of God’s commandments and the Church’s precepts. This illustrious convert has left a great name in the world of letters by his many valuable works on the oriental languages. Whilst providing for the future of his two children—a daughter who never left him, and a son since parish priest in the archdiocese of Paris—he bequeathed to the Propaganda all the proceeds of his works. His will testifies to the liveliest confidence in God, and in the intercession of the Virgin Mary, towards whom he ever professed an unbounded devotion, and whom in this his last act he invokes in most tender and touching terms, as the daughter of the kings of Juda, as the Immaculate Virgin promised to his Fathers. He also renews in this document the Profession of faith of Pius IV., to proclaim to his death his undying attachment to the Catholic Church.

Broken down by long and laborious studies even more than by years, M. Drach spent the last months of his life amidst great sufferings, which a recent fall had very much increased. Feeling his end approaching, he wished to be carried to the hospital of *San Spirito*, that he might close his days in an asylum opened to the poor by Christian charity. The tender and affectionate cares lavished on



When, at the close of his well-spent day, M. Libermann regained his humble apartment, he was not always certain of finding the bread necessary for his simple repast. We have been assured that more than once he had to mix among the poor, to receive the soup which every evening was distributed at the doors of certain religious communities. He himself usually purchased in the evening the few provisions he absolutely required for the following day. He had entrusted his host with the little money he possessed, and never appeared to dispose of it himself. Was it because he had made a vow of poverty? This is a secret which was known only to God and his confessor. In reality he was often poor, even to utter destitution. The charity of his friends in France came now and then to his assistance. M. Pinault even went so far as to make a collection for him at the Seminary of the Foreign Missions. No one seems to have contributed more liberally than M. de la Brunière, who could never completely detach his sympathies from the noble enterprise of the friend he had left alone in the Eternal City.

M. Libermann spoke very little of himself, and still less of his wants; he avoided receiving any person into his apartment—no doubt, the better to hide his great poverty and mortification. The Abbé Ozanam, one of his friends of Saint-Sulpice, having penetrated into his

him by his daughter were unable to prevent him from carrying out a resolution suggested by feelings of profound humility. Great was his joy as they brought him to the hospital. Some hours after his arrival he peacefully breathed forth his soul to God, after calling on that Jesus, Whom a ray of science, combined with a ray of grace, had revealed unto him, whispering, in a voice all but extinguished by agony: "*Fili David, miserere nobis !*"

The Propaganda had hastened to provide for the wants of the invalid, took care to have Masses offered for the repose of his soul, and to have due honours paid to his mortal remains.



dismal cell, found him suffering from fever, stretched on a mattress, having only one blanket to cover him. Beside him stood a vessel of water, in which he moistened some crusts of bread, perhaps less to allay his thirst than to take some nourishment. The visitor was so struck by this sight, that thirty years afterwards it was as fresh before his mind as on the first day.

He spent a part of his evenings in the midst of the family of M. Patriarca. However great the fatigues of the day might have been, he was always cheerful, and his presence was sufficient to fill everyone with joy. He took his recreation with so much simplicity, that, in the absence of other company, he would play with a little infant in the cradle, or give to the other children some counsels which they have not forgotten. The good people of the house were never tired of hearing him speak of Rome, of France, and of the holy shrines which he had visited. The conversation was always interesting and edifying. He would often listen with the greatest gravity to the head of the family, relating some of his exploits under the empire, and tracing up his genealogy to the Roman Crusaders, the patricians Patriarca, whose names were read on the walls of the cloister of St. Gregory. M. Libermann listened the more readily to those inoffensive simplicities, as every evening his kind host consented to give half-an-hour's reading in one of the works of St. Liguori, an office which, apparently, he performed with great delight, as it afforded him an opportunity of giving his hearers excellent lessons on Italian and French pronunciation compared. Night prayer was then said in common, and about ten o'clock M. Libermann ascended to his upper story, to repose for a few hours under the eyes of God and His holy angels. He was repeatedly asked to take a more commodious apartment, but he

would not accept of the proposal. The only thing he consented to, was to use the antechamber of a French ecclesiastic, who resided in the same house, for the reception of the few visitors that came to see him. He was never heard complaining either of cold or of heat, although in winter he slept upon a hard bed, almost in the open air, and in summer, under a burning roof, in a real stove. Though he was subject to frequent and very violent headaches, and even to some nervous fits—the effects of his malady—he generously disregarded all his physical sufferings, and only thought of carrying out the work which had been confided to him. His strength was in God and in prayer. His poor pigeon-loft was for him successively a Thabor and a Gethsemani. The angels themselves must have listened with delight to his alternately mournful and joyous soliloquies, of which we fancy we hear the faint echo, as we read the admirable pages of his “Rules,” his “Glosses,” and his beautiful “Commentary on the Gospel of St. John.”

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## CHAPTER VII.

M. Libermann's sojourn in Rome (*continued*).—Writing of the Rules.—  
Difficulties and Success.—Pilgrimage to Loretto, 1840-1841.

**F**AR from desponding in the midst of his poverty, his sufferings, and the many obstacles which daily obstructed his path, the Venerable Libermann "possessed his soul in patience," and, his eye fixed on Jesus, viewed the future with ever-increasing serenity. If the work he wished to establish was in the designs of God, nothing could impede its realization; and the storms raised against it would only tend to fix it on a firmer basis, and manifest the more clearly the power and goodness of Him Whose almighty hand arranges all things. In his unlimited reliance on God alone, the holy acolyte looked on his future Institute as if already in full activity, and with that keen foresight found only in saints, he no doubt already pictured to himself the numerous disciples who should one day embrace his views, share his sympathies, and become in turn the devoted friends of the abandoned souls.

At a period when there was not the least prospect of success, when he knew not under what name the apostles of the negroes would be associated, when he did not even dare to solicit the establishment of a society, M. Libermann was already deeply concerned about the spiritual welfare of his yet unknown children, and he felt an irresistible desire of writing the rules. He foresaw that the missionaries of the blacks should live in communities; that they should adopt a manner of living suited to their

apostleship ; that they needed counsels for themselves ; in a word, that they should have a rule of their own. The holy rule is for a religious the standing and clear expression of the will of God ; the golden chain which connects all the members of a religious family ; the mystical ladder that reaches from a community to the throne of God, and is the straightest, shortest, and surest road to heaven. M. Libermann was convinced that the perfection of his disciples and the salvation of innumerable souls would depend on a good code of rules, and, therefore, he prayed most earnestly for the light necessary to carry out a work of such paramount importance. The writing of the rules was accompanied by very singular circumstances. His desire of commencing the work grew stronger and stronger ; but as often as he tried to begin, he was unable to write a single word. Though many ideas crowded on his mind, and though he usually wrote with great facility, he felt utterly powerless to give either shape or order to his thoughts. After several fruitless attempts, he determined on visiting the seven great basilicas and the principal sanctuaries of our Blessed Lady.

On his way home, the thought "*that he should consecrate his work to the Holy Heart of Mary,*" like a luminous ray flashed across his mind, and, in an instant, revealed to him a world of light, devotion, and confidence. Darkness and indecision had disappeared ; he had found the rallying point, and he perceived in one distinct glance the whole plan of the rules in all its extent and details. His soul overflowed with ineffable delight, and it was then that he traced these first lines that adorn the frontispiece of the rules of the new Institute, and that will ever remain one of its most cherished mottoes : "*All for the greater glory of our heavenly Father, in Jesus Christ, through the Divine Spirit, and in union with the Most Holy Heart of Mary.*"

M. Libermann had found the name of his society, and from that moment he experienced no difficulty in writing, classifying, and explaining the rules for the "*Missionaries of the Holy Heart of Mary.*" Regarding this point, we transcribe a few lines from notes which were revised by M. Libermann himself: "All difficulties vanished as soon as this penetrating thought had illumined his mind, and he yielded to the almost irresistible impulse of grace which, like a powerful inspiration, impelled him to consecrate his work to the Most Holy Heart of Mary. When contemplating this Heart, the sanctuary of every virtue, He felt at first inclined to invoke and honour it as the model of the apostolical life; and the more he meditated on the interior dispositions and sentiments of this Heart towards God, the more Mary favoured him with abundant lights, which until then he had not seen. It was, therefore, as if under the direction of the Heart of Mary that he wrote the rule as it exists at the present day. When it was finished, he perceived, for the first time, how Mary had herself taken care to arrange and connect it in a way of which he had never thought." After reading this passage, M. Libermann added, with his own hand, the following remark: "The order and connection are not perfect; they require serious revision; but the arrangement presented itself as if naturally, and, in truth, M. Libermann only perceived in the end, that it was much better than he had expected."

The holy founder divided his rules into four parts. The first has for object: The general idea of the congregation; its patrons and end; the special and ordinary occupations of the missionaries; the principal means necessary to work out the salvation of the abandoned souls; and some rules of conduct to be observed by the members.

The second part treats of the general constitution and

the spiritual state of the society ; of poverty, chastity, and obedience ; of community life and the rules that sustain that life ; of apostolical zeal, the virtues from which it springs, and the acts by which it is exercised.

The third part treats of the administration of the Institute in general ; of the superiors ; of the inferior functionaries ; of the counsels, correspondence, and relations with ecclesiastical superiors.

The fourth part treats exclusively of the novitiate: its end ; the conditions of admission ; the dispositions which ought to animate the novices ; their principal occupations ; the exercises of the novitiate ; of some rules concerning the good order and the spiritual advancement of the novices ; concerning their reception ; the departure of missionaries, and the temporal maintenance of the novitiate. He terminates his work by the following aspiration : "*May the peace and blessing of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary fill all those who will faithfully keep these rules !*"

Not only did the saintly founder write the "Rules," but he added to them what he called his "Great Commentary," as if he had before him a very ancient text, that could only be understood with the aid of a lengthened interpretation. He continued the writing of the Rules and of the "Great Commentary," during the whole summer of 1840. The latter work is lost. We were unable to ascertain whether M. Libermann destroyed it, or whether he put its substance into some of his subsequent writings. Simultaneously with these two works, the holy acolyte composed his "Commentary on the Gospel of St. John." By a mere glance over the manuscript, we perceive that he wrote each time almost without interruption. If he did not at once perfectly understand the meaning of the text, he would leave a blank space and explain the succeeding passage. He then returned to the



gaps, and nearly always filled them exactly. Rarely had he to place in the margin an addition or a correction, although he revised it most carefully. The first pages were written with a delight that disquieted him. He spoke of it to his confessor, and offered to burn what he had done. After reading it, the confessor expressly enjoined him to preserve it and to continue. This command alone saved so admirable a work, which, unhappily, remains unfinished.

The rules were nearly completed, and as yet every avenue of success seemed to be closed. Several of M. Libermann's associates were discouraged by the difficulties, and abandoned the project, whilst most of the others felt convinced that they were at a stand-still, and, so to say, lost in a labyrinth. Yielding on the one hand to advices coming from great authorities, partly even from Rome, and on the other, impatient to find an issue, the most zealous amongst them had almost relinquished the idea of forming a new and special Institute, and seriously thought of uniting the future missionaries to an already existing religious body. As M. Libermann could not alter this opinion unless at the risk of being severely censured, he humbly promised his most earnest co-operation with the project. For the choice to be made amongst the ancient societies, there was no room for hesitation: the Society of the Holy Ghost alone had as its special object the conversion of the negroes in the French colonies. In a memoir already alluded to, and which was sent from Rome, M. Libermann laid down the basis of a union that might still in some way preserve the substance of the work, such as it had been conceived. The former confessor of M. Frederic Le Vavas seur, the Venerable M. Warnet, had returned to France, exhausted by many years of apostolic labours. This missionary readily consented to introduce his young friend to M.

Fourdinier, then Superior of the Society of the Holy Ghost. The young creole seminarist accordingly presented himself at the seminary of the Holy Ghost, and proposed the plan of union.

The first impressions of M. Fourdinier were altogether unfavourable : he considered the whole as a fanciful project of youthful minds ; and it was with difficulty that he consented to speak again on the subject with M. Pinault.

But, as he was a man of zeal and of great spirit of faith, he seriously weighed M. Le Vavasseur's proposals, and he received M. Pinault with quite different dispositions. His attention was so struck by the primary object—the conversion of the blacks—that, in virtue of the powers he held from Rome and from the French Government, he spontaneously offered to cede to the infant congregation the whole colony of Cayenne, which, like San-Domingo and Bourbon, included a great number of negroes. He proposed to have one of the priests of the new society appointed as Prefect Apostolic. The latter would have as fellow-labourers his own *confrères*, who, at least for some time, would fill the office of parish priests and other ecclesiastical functions in the colony. They could form a special society and follow their own rules, but on the express condition of maintaining the titles and filling the vacancies of the ecclesiastical administration. He declared that they should pursue this course in all the colonies, where they could only labour with the title of administrators, and that the Government would not consent to receive independent missionaries or priests living in communities, and forming a distinct body from the remainder of the clergy. These offers, though generous, could not be accepted without injury to community life, and to the missionary spirit which was to animate the new apostles. The general aim of the Institute would be

paralyzed in this blending of the missionaries with the secular clergy; and thus all the rules drawn up by M. Libermann at Rome would be for the most part impracticable. To refuse these offers was to renounce all access to the French colonies; nevertheless this sacrifice was made. MM. Tisserand and Le Vasseur, the promoters of the work at Paris, now fixed their attention on the English colonies, and all negotiations with the Seminary of the Holy Ghost appeared to be at an end. It was at this critical juncture that, contrary to all expectations, a ray of hope beamed forth from Rome and another from Paris.

Timid and incomplete as were the first communications addressed to the Propaganda, they had not been unheeded: the first answer, though discouraging enough, had been given only with the intention of weighing the project with greater maturity. Human and superficial considerations, be they ever so plausible, will never hinder the wisdom of Rome from searching matters to their very bottom, and discovering at the proper time the Spirit of God, even when hidden beneath the most unfavourable appearances. While the poor stranger whose address was unknown at the offices of the Propaganda might have thought that he, under God, was the only one seriously occupied with his project, the Holy See took information at Paris through the Apostolic Internuncio, Mgr. Garibaldi. The results of this inquiry, made at the Seminary of Paris, and probably in other quarters, were, without a single exception, of the most favourable kind. The Sacred Congregation having received this report, His Eminence, Cardinal Frasoni, Prefect of the Propaganda, inquired for M. Libermann, and hearing that he was still in Rome, addressed to him the following letter:—

“ MOST HONOURED SIR,—The project which you have submitted to the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda, for the foundation of a society of missionaries destined to evangelize the negroes, especially those of the islands of Bourbon and San-Domingo, while it reflects the greatest honour on your zeal for the salvation of souls, has been considered very opportune for the propagation of the faith. Although the Sacred Congregation has resolved to examine this matter still more maturely, and to reserve its approbation for another time, yet, it thought well, in the meantime, to exhort you and your associates to persevere in your design, and to neglect nothing, each one in particular, to correspond with your vocation. The Sacred Congregation is confident that God, Who is most bountiful and all-powerful, will give you sufficient health to receive Holy Orders, and to devote yourself entirely with your fellow-labourers to the sacred ministry.

“ I beg of the Lord, that He may enrich you and your associates with all His gifts.

“ Given at Rome, in the Palace of the S. C. of the Propaganda, 16th June, 1840.

“ Yours very devotedly,

“ J. PH. CARDINAL FRANSONI,

“ *Prefect.*

“ *For the R. P. Secretary, J. B. PALMA.*”

M. Libermann's heart was filled with joy by the paternal encouragement which the Vicar of Jesus Christ deigned to address to him, through the Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda. He wrote at once to M. Le Vavas seur, and through him to all their associates, to pour into their souls the confidence with which his own was filled.

M. Libermann also hastened, in his own name and in that of his friends, to return thanks to the Prefect of the Propaganda, who received him most kindly, and gave him precious counsels for the execution of his project. His Eminence strongly advised him to find a bishop who would take the missionaries under his authority, until such time as the Holy See should think fit to approve of their society by a public decree. He added that, either through the authority of this protecting bishop, or by directly having recourse to the Holy See, M. Libermann ought to advance to Holy Orders.

At the moment His Eminence, the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda, insisted on having a bishop as protector, that patron, by an admirable coincidence, offered himself at Paris. A distinguished member of the English Benedictines, who had been for many years Prior of St. Edmund's College at Douay, had just been consecrated, at Rome, Bishop of Milève and Vicar-Apostolic of the island of Mauritius. Mgr. Allen Collier possessed the special confidence of His Holiness, Gregory XVI., and of His Eminence, Cardinal Fransoni; and, though still young, he was well deserving of such confidence and of the important mission entrusted to his care. He had under his jurisdiction a large population, including about 80,000 negroes, who, though for the most part baptized, were plunged in the grossest ignorance of the true religion. Mauritius was a field manifestly grown wild, and there were but five or six labourers to second the zeal of the new Vicar-Apostolic.

On his arrival at Paris, Mgr. Collier felt interiorly impelled to visit M. Garnier, the Superior-General of Saint-Sulpice. After admiring the order and discipline that reign in this famous seminary, he gave vent to his grief over the desolate state of his mission, and proposed to

send to Saint-Sulpice for their formation any students whom Providence might call to the evangelization of his vicariate. The thought of M. Le Vavas seur at once presented itself to the mind of M. Garnier, who, confounding for a moment the island of Bourbon with that of Mauritius, informed his lordship that, at that very moment, he had in the seminary a subject who was then on retreat, preparing for the diaconship, and, moreover, one most desirous of devoting himself to the spiritual welfare of the negroes. The prelate was delighted at this intelligence, and, but for the retreat, would have sent for him immediately; and, though M. Garnier's mistake was soon perceived, he insisted on seeing M. Le Vavas seur after the ordination, which took place on the 13th June. This interview coincides, almost day for day, with the audience which M. Libermann obtained at Rome from the Prefect of the Propaganda.

Mgr. Collier spoke to the new deacon with great kindness, and invited him to join the clergy of Mauritius. MM. Pinault and Gallais also visited the prelate. They acquainted his Lordship with the state of affairs at Paris, and the pending negotiations at Rome, and gave him, at the same time, a most gratifying testimony in favour of the promoters of the undertaking. Mgr. Collier took the greatest interest in the work, and from that first interview became its true protector. He promised to allow the missionaries to follow their own rule, and offered to provide them with a house near the college of the English Benedictines at Douay, where they might open a novitiate and prepare for the reception of Holy Orders. M. Le Vavas seur joyfully announced to M. Libermann the providential appearance of Mgr. Collier in the following terms:—





*“ Praise be to Jesus and Mary !*

“ MY DEAREST BROTHER,—I have truly good news to announce to you. How admirable is our Lord in His designs ! We busy ourselves much, and we believe we are doing something ; but He conducts His work as it should be conducted, and by means which no one expected.” . . . Towards the end of the letter he added : “ Our associates find, that by the aid of this good bishop all the difficulties are removed, and, in reality, there are none any longer. It seems to me that you should return as soon as possible to be promoted to Holy Orders.” (Letter of 25th June, 1840.) In truth, Mgr. Collier promised to incorporate M. Libermann into his vicariate, and to confer Holy Orders on him.

On receiving this joyful message, the humble acolyte returned fervent thanks to Jesus and Mary, but he considered that the moment for leaving Rome had not yet arrived, although nothing seemed to detain him there any longer. At the same time he continued, with renewed ardour, the writing of the rules, and his daily pilgrimages to the tombs of the holy apostles, where he imbibed that spirit of zeal and sacrifice for God and for souls, which he was to bequeath as a rich inheritance to the future society of the Holy Heart of Mary.

Whilst this news from France was being carried to Rome, the despatches of M. Libermann, transmitting the encouraging reply of the Prefect of the Propaganda, were on their way to Paris ; and whilst his friends in France could hardly contain their pious joy, the holy founder at Rome received this twofold consolation with his ordinary serenity, and with that discerning foresight which, in the time of peace, ever reminds the saints of impending war.

This is why, after giving an account of the favours conferred upon them at Rome, he writes as follows: "Pray much, for although matters seem to present a favourable aspect on all sides, I still expect to meet with many difficulties. Let us be always in the hands of God, in order to live only according to His most Holy Will, in love and simplicity of heart, and let us be ready to accept whatever He may prepare for us. Let us bless God for all the favours He bestows on us, and ask of Him the perseverance of those whom He sends amongst us." (Letter of 15th June, 1840.)

In the advantageous offers of Mgr. Collier, M. Libermann was struck by one thing in particular: for the first time, the work and the missionaries were accepted unconditionally. The Benedictine prelate manifested no desire of interfering with their rules, or of forcing, in any way, his advice upon them. In this he recognised a truly supernatural spirit, and he did not hesitate an instant to concur in all the views of the Vicar-Apostolic of Mauritius.

All difficulties had now seemingly disappeared; the rules and constitutions of the future society were completed; M. Libermann had overcome most of his exterior struggles, when he experienced within himself, and in the higher regions of his soul a kind of interior combat, which it will be difficult for us to follow in all its phases. Judging of it by facts remotely connected with it, by the authorities whom he consulted, and, above all, by his extreme reserve on this point, we cannot doubt that this struggle was most intense, and that this crisis may be numbered among the bitterest trials of his life. To throw some light on this painful state of his soul, we must return to the year 1831, when he received, on the Feast of the Priesthood of our Lord, the extraordinary favour which we

have related on the testimony of his directors. Selecting, as we have said, from the different explanations given him, the one best suited to his humility, he had persuaded himself that he was for ever excluded from the priesthood. But, as one of his directors remarks, he carefully avoided expressing this belief, lest he should act contrary to the holy will of God. His only sigh was after solitude, where he might live unknown to men and known only to God. *In nidulo meo moriar!*

This ardent desire for solitude was, however, of a more remote date. It had beset him years before, but especially at Rennes, when, at the head of a community of priests, he believed himself totally useless, nay, injurious to the salvation of souls. If he undertook the conversion of the blacks, it was because he felt that such was the express will of God, and because he feared that, by retiring into solitude, he would be guilty of the loss of so many abandoned souls. His fear of advancing to Holy Orders, and his desire for retirement suffice to explain the anxiety of his mind, both at Rennes and at Rome. This was the principal subject of his correspondence with his directors, and the cause of his long delay in informing his friends of his resolution to enter into their project. He was now called to solve the difficulty whether he should or should not enter the priesthood. The words of Mgr. Cadolini, who declared that, without being a priest, he could not be at the head of a society of priests, increased his former troubles. On the one hand he perceived the many obstacles which excluded him from Holy Orders; on the other he dreaded to retire into solitude through fear of frustrating the projected work. The thought which pursued M. Libermann, "that God did not wish him to be a priest" was founded on a reason, unknown to his companions, and not on the difficulties he had to undergo.

This reason was, beyond doubt, the mysterious vision of 1831. He alluded to it in a letter written long after the period which now engages our attention. Having given his opinion with regard to the sense to be attached to extraordinary graces, which he calls passive, he adds: "I tell you for my part, that, had I drawn a conclusion with regard to my state of life from the passive graces I received, I would not now be a priest; I believe, however, that I have not acted in opposition to the Divine will." The whole mystery is unveiled in a letter which the saintly acolyte wrote to one of his directors, a short time before leaving Rennes. After giving in this letter full scope to his humility, he continues as follows:—

"I have not forgotten what you told me of the vision of our Lord, which I had in 1831, and I have constantly said to all those who spoke to me of the priesthood, that I was not destined for so high a dignity; that it was not the will of God that I should reach such an end. Nevertheless, I was decided to advance if the Divine will manifested itself in an ordinary way, as, for instance, through obedience, but after having given my reasons for remaining as I am until now. I have based my conviction on what you then told me, that the vision with which God in His goodness has favoured me, does not precisely prove that I should not be a priest. I found reasons which showed that the vision was not absolutely decisive; but all these reasons and even your own words did not convince me. I was always persuaded, and I am so still, that I shall never be a priest, although I am decided to advance, provided that, in the ordinary course of events, the Divine will be manifested; but I feel certain that it will not happen. This is the answer I have often made to those who requested me to think of the priesthood, and who spoke of my obligation to

be obedient, if ever my superiors commanded me to advance. Besides, I never thought of this either as about to happen soon, or only after a remote period ; all this is purely hypothetical. If you think I should, were the occasion to present itself, resist the command of my superiors, and refuse to submit to the ordinary course of Providence, kindly let me know ; but I feel certain that such will never be the case." (Letter, 13th Nov., 1839.)

What had been for him, at his departure from Rennes, an improbable hypothesis, had now become a question of the highest importance. Ten years of reflection on the vision of 1831 had always led him to the same conclusion, that he was never to be a priest. Evidently he could only be disabused of this conviction, by the clear and peremptory decision made known to him through the ordinary medium of his directors, whom he consulted both at Rome and at Paris.

The answer from Paris was the same as before, that he should not hesitate to advance ; the one from Rome was as positive as that from Paris. In Rome, there was, however, a moment of hesitation. After receiving from his Eminence, Cardinal Frasoni, the letter of the 16th of June, M. Libermann had paid several visits to Mgr. Cadolini, Secretary of the Propaganda, who had insisted on the necessity of his receiving Holy Orders ; he had even been told, that if he knew no bishop who would consent to ordain him, the Propaganda would find one. His director was summoned before the Propaganda, on the invitation of M. Libermann, but, being a religious, he alleged his rule as a pretext for not appearing, and the proposals of the Propaganda were never again mentioned.

The good news from France removed all the barriers that might have impeded the exterior progress of the work, but they forcibly compelled M. Libermann to decide

the question of his becoming a priest. The moment of his greatest success was for him the most perplexing. He makes known his feelings and dispositions in the following words :—"As the Rev. P. V—— and Mr. P—— were not of his opinion, and explained altogether differently the principles upon which M. Libermann founded his conviction, that God did not wish him to be a priest, he took all the necessary steps to advance to the priesthood." At the same time, he was in perfect peace, when he saw all the difficulties, thinking that our Lord had wished to make use of him to begin the society of the most Holy Heart of Mary, and that some other would be charged to conduct it afterwards ; this is why he wished to retire into solitude, after having drawn up at least the greater part of its rules. Instead of entering on an active life, he would willingly have hidden himself in one of the numerous hermitages of Italy, which God seems to have hewn out with His own hands, in the hollow valleys and mountain gorges of the Apennines. One day, he even interrupted the writing of his constitutions, stood up, and regardless of the burning heat of August, directed his steps along the Appian Way, and advanced through the most solitary spot of the Roman Campagna, amidst ever-memorable ruins and the tombs of the illustrious dead. Passing through Albano, he doubtless visited *Santa-Maria della Rotundo*, and thence going beyond *Castel Gandolfo*, soon arrived at the little village of Aricia. Five years after, when returning to Rome, he took with delight the road to Aricia, and showed his fellow-traveller a hermitage, where he said he would have been happy to terminate his career. After this passing retreat, he stifled once more his perplexities, and returned to Rome to finish the constitutions, before setting out on his longer journey, to Loretto, which is at a distance of



about sixty leagues from the Eternal City. He felt convinced that in the house of Nazareth he would find strength and light for his future direction. Having finished his rules towards the end of autumn, he left Rome in November, 1840, on foot, half covered with clothes, which had not been renewed for a long time. His cloak was composed of many patches, without any regard to quality, shape, or colour, roughly kept together by means of pins and threads, which probably he himself had arranged as best he could. The following is the portrait, which, shortly before his departure, he traced of himself in a letter to one who, knowing him only through correspondence, had expressed a great desire of seeing him:—"You need not care so much about seeing me. Imagine, first of all, that I am a very poor man, both physically and morally. My outward appearance is so miserable, that several times during my travels I was taken for a malefactor, and on the point of being cast into prison. All in me and about me is common and repulsive."

His pilgrimage to Loretto was, no doubt, of all his journeys the richest in adventures. In many places, his visage, emaciated by sufferings and strongly marked by the Jewish type, did not fail to gain for him numerous railleries and insults. On one occasion some funny individual displayed his cleverness, by secretly ripping up all the old pieces which constituted the variegated tapestry of his mantle. He was obliged to sew them together in haste or to replace them by others still more incongruous. This floating mosaic could not fail, at his entrance into every village, to be saluted by the hooting cries of children. It seems that in more than one town the police had to interfere, and to add to the insults of the passers-by the trouble of exhibiting his papers, and the fear of passing for an ill-reputed vagabond. He was not more at his ease, whilst travelling alone through

the solitary valleys of Umbria. As he journeyed through the wild and steep defiles of Somma, which lead to Spoleto, and are the terror of travellers, he perceived, at no great distance from him, two men of suspicious appearance, who watched him attentively, and appeared to deliberate about the profit they might derive from so meagre a prey. The holy pilgrim, without being in the least disconcerted, courageously went up to them, and in a firm voice questioned them about the country, affecting as a man of business to keep up the conversation. One of them seemed to grow impatient, and already surveyed the surroundings, as if wishing to carry out their design, when a carriage approaching at full speed interrupted the colloquy and restored the poor traveller to his liberty. It was seldom, and only when taken by surprise, that the Venerable Libermann would give some details of this journey, of all the periods of his life, perhaps the most important, and the one which, on that account, he has left shrouded in the deepest mystery. If, during this pilgrimage, he had much to suffer, he was amply repaid by the happiness of kneeling on the hallowed spot where the Word was made Flesh, "*Hic Verbum Caro factum est.*" Should not a converted Jew especially rejoice, and thrill with delight in his inmost soul, at the sight of this house of Nazareth, which his ancestors, his tribe, his family, perhaps, had seen eighteen hundred years before? What grace, what power had brought together these two things?—his hands and the walls built at Nazareth, the lips of this poor converted Jew, so many times moistened with the Blood of the Lamb, and the door, the threshold, the altar, the *Santo Camino*, the angels' window, this entire palace, where still lives the Son of Abraham, the Son of David, the Son of Joseph and of Mary, the Son of God! What distances between all these things, and what depths of power and

mercy! If angels were required to carry this Holy House across seas and lands, after a lapse of thirteen centuries, was not he himself a temple of God, built up after eighteen hundred years, miraculously removed from the Jewish soil, transported over abysses, and brought by angels from prodigy to prodigy, even to his visit to the shrine of Our Lady of Loretto!

Such considerations, which would have sufficed to move his heart, the pilgrim could share with many others; but he, to borrow his own expressions from his regulations for the pilgrims to Our Lady of Chartres, came to treat at Nazareth of his own affairs and of those of his good Mother: he came to lay at her feet the work of her Immaculate Heart and his sacerdotal consecration. He came to ask her to unite these two things or to separate them for ever; to grant to others, more worthy than himself, the privilege of glorifying her maternal Heart by a new apostolate, or to dispel the shades which still obscured his path, and to strengthen the weakness which still damped his courage; finally, to explain the powerful attraction which seemed to call him to contemplation, to a life of retirement, where he would be alone with his God, with Jesus and Mary. The strength which he needed for the labours of his life was communicated to him in the workshop of St. Joseph, and the light which he required streamed upon him in abundance through the window of the Angel Gabriel.

He now felt assured that his difficulties would be removed, and that one day he would be a priest, empowered like the angels to transport the *Santa Casa* into whatever place he should choose to offer up the adorable sacrifice, and that, during all the days of his life, he could read on the altar-stone the inscription of Loretto: "HERE THE WORD IS MADE FLESH."

If this interior answer had not been such as to compel him to renounce in future his attraction for the better and happier part—that of Mary, the contemplative—it is probable that his history would have ended here, and that, instead of resuming his journey to Rome, he would have buried himself in one of those delightful solitudes of Umbria, which is so justly styled the Paradise of Italy. But, God and Mary had distinctly spoken to his heart, and he peacefully resumed his journey towards the Eternal City. The following incident, which some years afterwards the Venerable Libermann related to his scholastics, is the only souvenir we possess of the second part of his pilgrimage:—

One evening when, in the neighbourhood of Assisium, he had left the main road to visit the tomb of a saint who is held in great veneration in that district, he entered a village at a rather late hour. Cold, hungry, and weary, he went from house to house, asking for a night's lodging. But for him, too, there was no room to be found: every door was pitilessly closed against him. No way saddened by such treatment, the poor pilgrim quietly continued his road, when he perceived a dim light from an humble, solitary cottage. Here he was welcomed with great kindness, though its charitable inmates were in deep affliction. A little daughter suffering from acute pains seemed at the last extremity. The shrieks of the child were most piteous. Her afflicted parents were almost in despair, when the holy stranger, moved with compassion, said to them: "My good people, you do not know what to do; have confidence in God and in His saints. I have just come from the pilgrimage of 'the saint,' and I have brought with me the grains of a tree which grows quite near her tomb. Put some of these grains into a glass of water, and give it to your child to drink." "For eight

days," replied the father, "she has been unable to swallow the least thing, even water." However, in obedience to the advice, the good man, with a lively faith, hastened to present to the sufferer a glass of water thus prepared. "Leave it to me," said the servant of God: "You have faith; one drop is sufficient;" and dipping his finger in the water, he simply moistened the child's lips. At once the pain disappeared; the little patient slept soundly all night, and when, on the morrow, the saint set out on his journey, he left the child entirely restored and her parents filled with joy and gratitude.

On his return to Rome, the venerable servant of God found a letter, the contents of which exactly corresponded with the decision he had come to at Loretto. His brother, who had paid a visit to Mgr. de Ræss, the then recently-appointed coadjutor of Mgr. de Tréverne, Bishop of Strasburg, wrote to him as follows:—"His Lordship has asked a great deal of information about you, and all that concerns you, and on hearing that you are embarrassed about Holy Orders, he has expressed to me his willingness to ordain you here; and he told me that he would expect you as soon as possible to confer the subdeaconship upon you."

M. Libermann took a decisive advice from his principal director in France, who urged him to return immediately. He accordingly bade his last adieus, which were received with encouragement from everyone, even from those who at first seemed to be least favourable to his designs. Having entered Rome on the Feast of the Epiphany, 6th of January, 1840, he quitted it on the 7th of the same month, in the following year, with the firm determination of becoming a priest, and of devoting his life to God and to the salvation of souls through the future Society of the Holy Heart of Mary.

## CHAPTER VIII.

M. Libermann at the Seminary of Strasburg.—MM. Ignatius Schwindenhammer and James Désiré Laval, 1841.

**S**UCCESS seemed at last to smile on the work of the negroes. The Holy See encouraged and blessed the project; Mgr. Collier, a missionary bishop, offered a first field for the willing and all but ready labourers; and his lordship, the Coadjutor Bishop of Strasburg, had promised to impose his consecrating hands on him whom the Lord had chosen to be the leading spirit of so noble an enterprise. But the more certain appeared the chances of success, the busier was the spirit of evil in mounting new batteries against the venerable servant of God. The father of lies had recourse to misrepresentations and calumnies. Whilst M. Libermann was hopefully toiling over his road from Italy to France, Mgr. Ræss visited Paris, where he was assured by prejudiced persons that his *protégé* was an inconstant man, unable to remain for any time in any place, an intriguer who had gone to Rome with the intention of deceiving the Holy See, that he might be promoted to the priesthood. The sentiments of Mgr. Ræss were so much changed in consequence of these unfavourable reports, that he was no longer disposed to admit him to the seminary or to have anything to do with his ordination. To dispel the false accusations spread against him, but especially to protect the work of the negroes, whose interests were compromised by the prelate's refusal, M. Libermann wrote a brief memoir of justification, which sufficed to unmask the spirit of darkness, and to cause truth to triumph over



falsehood. Mgr. Ræss saw that all the reports had sprung from ignorance or malice; he became even kinder than before, and urgently pressed the servant of God to enter the seminary at once to prepare for the reception of Holy Orders.\*

After a short stay with his friends at Paris, M. Libermann repaired once more to his native province; and, on Ash Wednesday morning, February 24th, the humble convert of Saverne, who was destined to become the joy and pride of Alsace, passed peacefully and unperceived by the world-famed cathedral of Strasburg on his way to the great seminary. This institution nestles gracefully beneath the hallowed shadow of the grand old monument,

\* The Most Reverend Dr. Andrew Ræss, Lord Bishop of Strasburg, was born at Sigolsheim, Upper Alsace, on the 6th of April, 1794. He was nominated titular canon on the 25th of March, 1831; on the 5th of August, 1840, he was proposed by *Louis Philippe* as coadjutor bishop of Mgr. de Tréverne, with the right of future succession, and preconized by His Holiness Gregory XVI, *sub titulo Episcopi Rhodiopolis in partibus*, on the 14th of December of the same year. He was consecrated on the 14th of February, 1841, and succeeded Mgr. de Tréverne on the 27th of August, 1842. Mgr. Ræss, despite his eighty-six years, his unremitting labours, and his arduous studies, appears, in 1880, as fresh, vigorous, and unworn as he was twenty-five years ago, when the writer of these lines saw him for the first time. On beholding this illustrious prelate one could scarcely believe that, besides governing his diocese, which numbers over a million of Catholics, he found time to compose several remarkable works, and a great number of admirable pastorals, and to assist in his sacred duties his neighbour and friend, the Venerable *Mgr. Hermann von Vicari*, Archbishop of Freiburg (Baden), who died, in the 95th year of his age, on the 14th of April, 1868. The principal work of Mgr. Ræss contains ten volumes in octavo, and is entitled: "*Die Convertiten seit der Reformation nach ihrem Leben und aus ihren Schriften dargestellt.*" "*Ein wichtiges Werk, ein Quellenwerk für die neuere Kirchengeschichte, das durch die Grossartigkeit seiner Anlage und die Gründlichkeit seiner Ausführung alle bisherigen Leistungen auf diesem Gebiete weit überragt*" (Allgemeine Literarische Zeitung.)

by the side of which, though striking in its own vast proportions, it looks but a small, insignificant structure. It was a happy thought to shelter the sanctuary of learning and prayer, the dwelling of two hundred candidates for the priesthood, under that ancient temple, a master-work of Christian genius, whose spire, crown, and cross, lost in the sky, have their own eloquence, and forcibly invite the souls of the levites beneath to wing their flight even to the throne of the Most High.

On the day previous to M. Libermann's arrival, the amusements of the students, during their recreation hour, were an evident proof that some of the carnival drolleries had made their way even into the seminary. By a strange but altogether fortuitous coincidence, one of the seminarists, mounted on an improvised platform, had acted the Jewish rabbin with a success that won the loud applause of the whole assemblage.\* On hearing of this scene, M. Libermann was in no way scandalized or disedified; for he was never opposed to innocent amusements, especially when, as in this case, they are not in the least contrary to Christian charity.

On his appearance among the students, the humble acolyte struck everyone by his air of gentle and holy modesty. The manner in which, for the first time, he took his place in the study-hall was not unnoticed. The usual prayer having been recited, he quietly placed his crucifix on the desk before him, and began his work, as if he had been there for years; he appeared more in meditation than at study, so much so that the seminarists around him feared to make the least movement, lest they should disturb his attention and recollection. The study of theology, after an interruption of ten years, must have

\* Twenty-two years afterwards, this student, M. Bangratz gave up an important parish, and entered the society of the Holy Heart of Mary.

required from him no small amount of labour, especially in a seminary in which the impulse given by Dom Lienhart had by no means abated. But saints heed not difficulties; and where others fail they are crowned with success, because God strengthens and assists them. At the foot of the cross, M. Libermann studied with the same ardour at Strasburg as he had done at Saint-Sulpice. His masters and fellow-students soon discovered the accuracy of his keen theological judgment. "One day," says a seminarist, "M. Libermann was examined in class by our professor of Dogma. His answers, given with humility and modesty, were precise and correct, and were listened to by all with a most religious silence. The professor expressed his approbation in a tone of deference which he never employed with any of the other students."

During the first weeks of his stay in the Seminary of Strasburg, our saint remained well nigh isolated, striving, as at Saint-Sulpice, to pass unperceived under the cover of the ordinary but most punctual observance of the rule. Soon, however, a few fervent disciples flocked around him. Amongst the first who approached him was a student whose life was to be inseparably interwoven with his, and whom Providence designed to become one day his successor in the direction of the new society. M. Ignatius Schwindenhammer was then at the close of his theological studies. He was born at Ingersheim (Upper Alsace), on February 13th, 1818, and belonged to an honourable and eminently Catholic family. His virtue, first carefully cultivated in the school of the Marianites of Colmar, lost not its lustre amidst the perils of a University College, acquired fresh vigour through the good examples and serious studies of the lower and higher seminaries, and finally made him a model ecclesiastical student, the friend of a saint, and a zealous priest.

The intimate friendship which existed between M. Libermann and M. Schwindenhammer sprang up, so to say, at the foot of the cross, on Good Friday, 9th of April, 1841. The office of tenebræ, to which the gloom of a rainy day gave additional solemnity and impressiveness, was just ended, when, during the following recreation, both retired to a solitary gallery, no doubt to continue their meditation on the great mysteries of the day. After walking for some time, they finished by mingling their monologues for their mutual edification.

At that time there existed in the Seminary of Strasburg what is usually found in every community—a movement of fervour, a quiet coalition of students desirous of reviving certain more or less neglected rules and practices. M. Schwindenhammer was the leader of a group of fervent seminarists who had already witnessed their good and bad days; and he, more than any other, had felt the bitterness of disappointment. He opened his heart to M. Libermann, and asked his advice. The apostle of the “*Pious Meetings*” was ready to answer, and did so with such *à propos*, good sense, and precision, that he became henceforth the necessary counsellor of his friend. M. Libermann could easily have renewed his fruitful apostolate of Saint-Sulpice, had he prolonged his sojourn at Strasburg, and had he not imposed on himself the strictest reserve. He limited his action to a few conversations; he willingly communicated, especially to his most confidential friend, his “*Commentary on St. John*,” and some other little treatises which he had composed for his friends of Saint-Sulpice. His modest and saintly appearance, his good example, the charm which accompanied his every word and deed, spread a general edification, which was but the natural reflection of his holy and unostentatious life. The fervour of the saintly seminarist

was especially noticeable, when he was promoted to the subdeaconship and deaconship. He was ordained subdeacon during the ember days of Trinity (5th June, 1847), and deacon, on the Feast of the martyr St. Laurence (10th August). M. Schwindenhammer was by his side on both those occasions.

Meanwhile, by the interposition of MM. Gallais and Pinault, negotiations continued with Mgr. Collier, who had returned to Paris. It was agreed that M. Libermann should nominally belong to the Vicariate of Mauritius, although directing his new society; that the missionaries would be free to follow their own rule; that they should not be permanently entrusted with parishes, or other ecclesiastical offices incompatible with community life; that Mgr. Collier should provide for the support of the missionaries, and allow, moreover, to each priest a certain stipend, which was to enter the common fund of the institute.

Mgr. Collier, on the point of leaving Europe, expressed the desire that one of the members of the future society should accompany him to Mauritius, to commence at once the apostleship of the blacks. Among the aspirants to the holy work was a zealous parish priest of the diocese of Evreux, M. Laval, whom God had designed to become the first missionary and the Peter Claver of the Holy Heart of Mary. James Désiré Laval was born on the 18th September, 1803, at Croth, diocese of Evreux, Normandy. In his infancy he was consecrated to the Blessed Virgin by his pious mother, who only lived to guide the first steps of her son on the paths of virtue; she died in 1811. After an excellent literary course at the College Stanislaus, M. Laval studied medicine at Paris, under such princes of the therapeutic art as Récamier, Velpau, and Dupuytren. Having taken his degrees, he

successively practised his profession at St. André, and at Ivry-la-Bataille, in Normandy. In both places the young doctor endeared himself to everyone by his personal qualities, and won the esteem and confidence of all classes by his medical proficiency. He was particularly devoted to the poor, on whom he lavished his money no less than his cares. Viewing his noble profession in its true light, he was both a Christian and a doctor. Unlike many of his brother physicians, who arrogantly display their materialistic theories, he saw in man not a mere brute, but the king of creation, and he discovered beneath the human frame, stamped with infirmity, an immortal soul, created to the image of God, and redeemed by the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ. Uniting faith to science, and the priest to the doctor, he spared nothing to secure for his patients the consolations of religion, so as not to lose the soul where the body could not be saved. But though never indulging in the world's guilty pleasures, the young doctor was not a little given up to its vanities and amusements. He loved to appear with elegance at parties, and his dress and the furniture of his apartments displayed the greatest luxury. To a feverish ardour for frivolous enjoyment he added a great passion for horses. But God found a remedy even in the very disease, as appears from his last feat of horsemanship. One day, when returning home from a riding excursion, M. Laval very nearly shared the fate of his spirited horse, which was killed under him by falling from a precipice. In this event he recognized the hand of God, and resolved to devote to His service the remainder of his life, so wonderfully preserved. He soon afterwards left the world, and on the 15th June, 1835, entered the Seminary of Issy. Here he contracted a holy friendship with MM. Libermann, Le Vavasseur, and Tisserand, who as yet



knew not the designs of God in their regard. Midsummer vacation being over, he began his theological studies at Saint-Sulpice, where he remained during four years. As a seminarist, he edified his fellow-students by his simplicity, humility, piety, and scrupulous attention to the least prescription of the rules. After his ordination, he placed himself at the disposal of his bishop, who, in consideration of his age, experience, and virtue, entrusted him with the care of a parish, wherein he commenced his pastoral duties on the 2nd February, 1839. His life as a parish priest was simply admirable, and, in many respects, not unlike that of the *Curé d'Ars*. He spent whole days and nights prostrate on the cold pavement behind the altar of the parish church; slept little, and that only on the floor; and fasted almost continually. Zeal for the house of God and for souls consumed him. He thus treasured up graces and inured himself to the toils and sufferings which were to attend his future career.

God watched over His servant, and took care gradually to unfold His Divine Will by means of several messengers who successively came to him from Saint-Sulpice. The first was the Abbé Senez, who, wishing to see for himself all he had heard of the poor and mortified life of his friend, came to visit him during the vacation of 1839. On this occasion, M. Laval learned that MM. Le Vasseur and Tisserand were more than ever anxious to carry out the work of the blacks; that the project had been repeatedly recommended at Notre Dame des Victoires; and that MM. Gallais, Pinault, and Libermann concurred in the idea of establishing a special association of priests. The following year two other students of Saint-Sulpice informed him of M. Libermann's journey to Rome, of the encouragement received from the Propaganda, and of Mgr. Collier's protection of the future missionaries. On hearing these

tidings, M. Laval was filled with delight. His place was now fixed in the society of M. Libermann, and his heart only yearned after the apostleship of the forsaken negroes. To his parishioners, who endeavoured to dissuade him from his purpose, he gently replied: "I would not quit my poor little parish for another; if I quit it, it is only on account of the missions." Soon the voice of Jesus called him. He received a letter from his former director at Saint-Sulpice, asking him if he were disposed to accompany Mgr. Collier to Mauritius, as a member of the projected society for the conversion of the negroes. No news could have been more welcome or more in harmony with the ardent aspirations of his soul. Nevertheless, he wished to examine the matter with greater maturity, in the silence of a retreat which he made at Paris. This retreat finally decided his vocation for the blacks. The Bishop of Evreux, though regretting the loss of so holy a priest, consented, at the request of Mgr. Collier, to give him up to the abandoned negroes. When a member of his family touchingly reproached M. Laval for thus wishing to quit his friends and home, he calmly answered: "I do not renounce the affections of my family, but I place above all the good God, our common Father; He calls me, I must obey His voice. Besides, in heaven we shall all one day meet again, never more to be separated."

On the 19th of February, 1841, he left his parish, after a very fruitful apostolate, addressing a most affecting farewell to his parishioners, and distributing to the poor all he possessed in the parochial house. Grief filled the hearts of the people, for all felt that they were losing a zealous pastor, a tender father, and a saint. The journey of Mgr. Collier being delayed, M. Laval spent six weeks at Paris, evangelizing the poor in the parish of *St. Ambroise*, where M. Tisserand had accepted some ministry,

until the society of the Holy Heart of Mary would be definitely constituted.

From Paris, M. Laval wrote to M. Libermann a letter, which, says M. Tisserand, exhaled the sweet perfume of the deepest humility and of true apostolic zeal. The answer of the Venerable Founder has alone been preserved, and runs as follows:—"Kindly tell our dear M. Laval, that I rejoice with all my heart to have him as a brother. I would have been most happy to speak with him for some time. But, since our Lord arranges things so that I shall see him only in the other world, we will wait to embrace each other in the kingdom of our heavenly Father, to which I trust the divine mercy will one day admit us. He is truly blessed, to reap the fruits which our Lord reserves for all his dear brothers. Let him not be discouraged during this year that he must remain alone, or rather he will not be alone, for our Lord and the Most Holy Virgin will be with him. We will be all united to him by the bonds of charity, which the Divine Master shall be pleased to infuse into our souls; and I hope that this charity will be very ardent and will never be extinguished." Before setting out on his distant mission, M. Laval wished to consecrate his person and his future labours to the Immaculate Heart of Mary at Notre Dame des Victoires. Having passed the Lent at Paris, and Mgr. Collier being again delayed, he retired for a few weeks to the house of his uncle, the venerable parish priest of Tourville-la-Campagne, whilst awaiting his obedience.

This obedience was communicated to him in a manner which forcibly reminds us of the apostles, who, at the first call of their Divine Master, left all and followed Him, "*And immediately leaving their father and their nets, they followed Him.*" "It was about four o'clock in the morn-

ing, when a pupil of Saint-Sulpice, whom M. Gallais had despatched in all haste from Paris on the previous evening, arrived at Tourville-la-Campagne, entered directly the room where M. Laval reposed on a wretched pallet, and after having saluted him with the words: '*Benedicamus Domino*,' said to him: 'My dear brother, our Lord sends me to tell you that the hour of departure has arrived. You must leave at once, and be this evening on the *route* to London.' M. Laval answered: '*Deo Gratias*,' made the sign of the cross, dressed promptly, took his breviary and crucifix, and after a last adieu to his worthy uncle, set out for Paris, and thence for the capital of Great Britain." (*Annals of the Congregation.*)

A new disappointment awaited him in London; the vessel on which Mgr. Collier and his priests were to embark was not ready to sail. "May God be praised," wrote M. Laval, to his former director of Saint-Sulpice; "our Lord has not allowed us to leave at once, as our very worthy bishop had written to us. This good Master has wished that I should spend fifteen or sixteen days in this great city of London, of which I know no other street but that which leads to a very poor little chapel, attended by a good German priest, and frequented by poor, very pious, and very edifying Germans. There, every morning I have the happiness of spending four or five hours at the feet of the Divine Master, and offering up the holy sacrifice of the Mass. I return there in the evening at about six o'clock, and remain from two to three hours, begging of our Lord that He may send me His Holy Spirit on the great day of Pentecost, so that I, too, though poor and miserable, may carry His holy Name beyond the seas; that I may go and preach my Jesus to His dear blacks; that I may also cause to be blessed in that island the holy name of Mary, my most worthy and

good Mother. For how can I acknowledge all she has done for me? It is she who has chosen me from among so many others, a thousand times more worthy than I, to lead me beyond the seas, to the service of her poor dear negroes. Oh! yes, I hope that I shall cause her holy name to be blessed by these poor abandoned souls! Yes, I wish her holy name to be blessed in the island of Mauritius! I am, in a manner, an apprentice to the missionary life, for since my arrival in London, I am without any of my travelling effects, not having received the case despatched from Boulogne by M. Le Vavasseur, so that I have only the clothes which I wear. Mgr. Collier resides very far from us. I lodge at an inn, in a little cage under the tiles, where I am satisfied with a small quantity of bread and water, and a little meat. This is the apostolic life; but I feel happy, and I pray to God with all my heart."

His last letter, dated 1st June, was addressed to M. Libermann, his future superior. After some details of his life at London, he says:—"We are four priests sailing with Mgr. Collier, one Irish, one English, and two French. I understand from what his Lordship told me that this poor island is in a pitiable condition. . . After my arrival at Mauritius, I shall request Mgr. Collier to entrust me with the ministry of the blacks, and to confide to others the ministry of the whites; for this is, I think the end of our work. During my stay at Paris, M. Pinault kindly communicated to me all you had written concerning this; I shall strive to put everything faithfully into practice. I trust our Lord will bestow His blessings on our little services, and that He will deign to make use of a wretch like me to deliver so many unhappy souls from the slavery of the demon.

"I entreat you, my very dear brother, in the name of

our good Master, to send me, when you will be able, a priest for our work, that we may labour together. . . . With the assistance of our Divine Lord, I shall endeavour to hold out, but if we were two, we would be stronger. . . . I hope that our Lord will deign to bless the commencement of the poor little society, and send into it good and devoted labourers. I trust that Our Lady of the blacks will have pity on us, and intercede for the dear negroes with Jesus her Divine Son."

He concluded by beseeching the Lord to pour down His blessings on the Seminary of Strasburg, and especially on the ordination of M. Libermann. "In order," he said, "that everywhere and always God's holy name may be blessed and glorified; for all depends on the priests, as the priests depend on the seminaries."

Five days afterwards, the missionary set sail, and went to complete at the island of Mauritius the novitiate which he had commenced in the humble parish of Pinterville.\*

The new society had as yet nowhere fixed its tent. Awaiting the establishment of the first community, M. Tisserand, at the request of M. Desgenettes, joined the clergy of Notre Dame des Victoires as sub-director of the Archconfraternity. This gift, presented to the Holy Heart of Mary, was amply repaid by Our Lady of Amiens. One of the most devoted and most persevering co-operators in the work, the Abbé de Brandt, requested the Bishop of Amiens to allow the first house of the new Institute to be established in his diocese. Mgr. Mioland

\* It was only owing to extraordinary circumstances that Father Laval was thus exceptionally sent on the missions without having gone through a regular novitiate. "*Vie du serviteur de Dieu Jacques—Désiré-Laval, missionnaire de la Congrégation du Saint-Esprit et du Saint Cœur de Marie, par le R. P. Delaplace, de la même Congrégation.*"—*Séminaire du Saint Esprit, rue Lhomond, 30, Paris.*



consented, and for that purpose granted the loan of a country-house in the village of La Neuville, at a short distance from Amiens. This offer was gratefully accepted by M. Libermann. To his first kindness, the prelate added a new and signal favour, by promising to raise him to the priesthood at the next ordination.

“Who,” exclaims M. Tisserand, “would not here admire the ways of God, Who attains his ends in a manner gentle yet strong, and Who permits everything to prosper with those that seek in simplicity, and await in patience and submission the accomplishment of the divine will in their regard? And who would not recognize especially the truly salutary, and powerful influence of the Heart of Mary? For it was at the moment when the Archconfraternity, which had so often prayed for us, redoubled its ordinary supplication in favour of the poor abandoned blacks, that the Heart of our Mother was moved with pity towards us. The hour had come, when the cursed posterity of Cham was at last going to receive from the hands of the Refuge of Sinners, and Hope of those who are in despair, the missionaries whom her Heart was to depute to them, to announce to them the good tidings of salvation. Thus at once all obstacles, doubts, and anxieties disappeared. A bishop who did not know us, and with whom we had had no previous relation whatever, generously offered us his diocese as a retreat. Without ever having seen our father, the prelate engaged to ordain him at any time, invited us through our friend, M. De Brandt, to come without delay, and promised to be a father and protector to our poor little society.”



## Part IV.

M. LIBERMANN A PRIEST AND FOUNDER—FROM HIS  
ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD TO HIS  
DEATH, 1841-1852.

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### CHAPTER I.

M. Libermann's ordination and first Mass at Amiens ; and his second Mass at Notre Dame des Victoires—The cradle of the Congregation at La Neuville-lès-Amiens, 1841-1846.



CATHOLIC Alsace had for a few months possessed one of her noblest sons, one whose name she now cherishes as fondly, and honours as devoutly, as she honours and cherishes the memories of Pope Leo IX., of her Virgin patroness, St. Odile, or of those legions of saints, who, in every age, perfumed her plains, mountains, and valleys, with the sweet fragrance of their heavenly virtues. This blessed land exulted with delight, when on her soil the humble convert of Saverne took, after many years of bitter trials, his decisive step into the sanctuary, and when on the feast of the martyr-deacon, St. Stephen, her child of predilection in this century was being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Saints can never cease doing good. Like Jesus their divine model, they spread blessings wherever they pass. During the six months M. Libermann spent at Strasburg, he revived, as he had done at Saint-Sulpice and Issy, the

spirit of regularity, piety, and fervour among the seminarians, and sowed a precious seed of vocations, which produced an hundredfold and caused to spring up in after years, in almost every parish of the province, a host of missionaries and religious, whose heroism and self-sacrifice is now the pride of Alsace, as it is one of the purest joys of the Church.

The moment for action is nigh for M. Libermann. At Paris, the disciples await the arrival of their master, and the holy Bishop of Amiens is ready to mark him with the indelible and crowning character of the priesthood. A house is prepared to receive the germ of a new society of apostles, who, ere long, will overrun the entire world in search of abandoned souls, and in particular of the destitute children of Cham.

M. Libermann pays a visit to his brother, Samson, and spends a few days with his friend M. Schwindenhammer at Ingersheim; and then with the faith of Abraham, he quits his native province for another land, where he shall become the father of a numerous posterity.

From the banks of the Rhine to those of the Somme, he made but one halt, and that was at the feet of *Notre Dame des Victoires*, to consecrate anew his person and work to Mary, the Queen of Apostles and the Refuge of Sinners.

On his arrival at Amiens, he was kindly welcomed by his friend the Abbé Cacheleux, in whose house he received a generous hospitality during the retreat preparatory to his elevation to the priesthood. On Saturday, the 18th September, 1841, the ceremony which gave to the Church one of the holiest priests of our age, took place in the private chapel of the episcopal palace, with but one assistant, the Abbé de Brandt. Then, the new priest began a triduum of thanksgiving, which was not interrupted

either by his first visit to La Neuville, or by a long letter which he wrote to his brother a few hours after his ordination. Many believe that to be saints we must live in another world, and that we are forbidden to bestow a thought or affection on those nearest and dearest to us. Such is not the spirit of the Church, which, in certain provinces where faith has lost nought of its pristine vigour, delights in seeing parents, relatives, and friends gathering around the sacred altar, whereon a young priest offers up for the first time the spotless victim; and when the anointed of the Lord descends from the tabernacle, followed by legions of adoring angels, the Church does not prevent him from pouring out his joy into a mother's or father's heart. Such consolations were not afforded to the disinherited child of Saverne. But he thought of a brother who merited an almost filial gratitude: it was to him, to his sister-in-law, and their children that he addressed his first letter, signed with the new name which he had received for all eternity:—



*“ Misericordias Domini in æternum cantabo !*

*“ Amiens, 18th September, 1841.*

“VERY DEAR BROTHER AND SISTER,—I have to announce to you the great mercy and ineffable bounty of our Lord Jesus Christ towards an unworthy servant, who does not deserve even to pronounce His holy Name. I have been ordained priest this morning. God only knows what I have received on this great day! For it cannot be conceived either by man or angel. Do you all pray that it may be for His greater glory, for the salvation and sanctification of souls, and for the edification of the Church, that I have finally arrived at the priesthood. Beseech the

Lord, that He may sacrifice me to His glory; for it is to this that I must henceforward devote myself.

“I will say my first Mass on next Tuesday, at seven o'clock; unite yourselves in intention with me: I will offer you all to the Holy Trinity with the adorable sacrifice. On Saturday, at seven o'clock, I will offer up the holy sacrifice at *Notre Dame des Victoires*, on the altar of the archconfraternity. Unite yourselves in intention with me; you will all have your *memento*. Let us also think of our relatives, both those who are Christians and those who are still infidels. . .”

He also fixed a spiritual rendezvous for the following Sunday, in a chapel of the Blessed Virgin, and earnestly recommended them to communicate this news to a family of their friends. He then gives them a joyful account of his visit to La Neuville. “Some good nuns,” he says, “have given us a beautiful wooden statue of the Blessed Virgin, gilt and painted in natural colours, as also some candlesticks. They are at present engaged preparing the ornaments necessary for saying Mass. . . They have, moreover, kindly procured for us all the furniture, a part *gratis*, through charity, and a part bought at our own expense. In short, until now the good God favours us beyond all expectation in everything that concerns our temporal establishment. . . But whether in prosperity or adversity, we must place our whole confidence in His bounty. I was forgetting to tell you that we shall have a plot of ground for a kitchen-garden, and a little grove for our walks. The air is wholesome and good; I have now given you a sufficient amount of news, and I am in a hurry to conclude. Adieu! love our Lord and His most holy Mother with all your heart.

“Entirely yours, in their holy charity,

“F. LIBERMANN, *Priest.*”

Contrary to his custom, and although in a hurry, he adds a whole page of a postscript. He had forgotten in his letter the seven children of his brother. "I pray Pauline, Caroline, and Mary to have still some patience. I could not write to them at present ; I will do so at another time." Nevertheless, he says he will await their letters as was agreed upon. They are now old enough to write themselves, and not merely to add a few lines at the end of another letter ; they can no more than himself redeem their promise by a simple postscript. "I wish to receive letters from them, and make myself useful to their souls ; for they are extremely dear to me. . . . Let them not be afraid of disturbing or annoying me ; but let them write to me as often as they desire. I would be contented with whatever Eliza, Francis, and Henry might add to their father's and sisters' letters. Let them not fear, I will always love them. I promise Eliza that I will pray for her, and that I will offer the holy sacrifice to obtain for her the grace of overcoming her defects, and of learning to love sincerely the good God. As for Leo, if he is good, I will bring him very nice things. But he must be docile to his parents, and be obedient to his little god-mother and to Caroline.

"Adieu ! May the peace of our Lord be with you all. Amen !"

On the feast of the apostle St. Matthew, he ascended for the first time the altar of sacrifice. It was in a chapel of the Holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary, in the house of his benefactresses, the sisters of Louvencourt. His first priestly blessing fell on adopted orphans, images of the abandoned souls, which were now more than ever the portion of his inheritance. On the following Saturday, after a new thanksgiving of three days, he offered his second Mass on the altar of Notre Dame des Victoires,



assisted by M. Desgenettes, and surrounded by MM. Le Vavasseur, Tisserand, and Collin. This was the first community Mass of the Society of the Holy Heart of Mary, which thus sprung up where it was first conceived, before the altar and under the auspices of Our Lady of Victories. All were but "*one heart and one soul*," whilst, for the first time, perhaps, since the death of blessed Peter Claver, the Divine Blood, which taketh away the sins of the world, was exclusively offered up for the poor abandoned blacks of Africa. Shortly after this touching ceremony, the Abbé Duquesnay, now Bishop of Limoges, a former fellow-student and friend of the venerable Libermann, almost predicted, from the pulpit of Notre Dame des Victoires, the future history of the new missionary society. He spoke in the following words:—

“ Besides the numberless conversions of hardened sinners and obstinate heretics, there are, my brethren, other works still more admirable, for which we are indebted to the most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary. Scarcely two months have elapsed, since priests and levites surrounded this altar; one of them celebrated the holy mysteries, the others participated therein, all prayed with fervour, and it was easy to perceive, on beholding them thus united in the Heart of their Divine Mother, that they were animated by the same thought, that from their hearts arose the same prayer, and that they implored the same favour. Those priests, those levites consecrated themselves to a new apostolate—the painful and laborious apostolate of the negroes. The day of deliverance has at last arrived for this unhappy people, and again it is Mary who undertakes the noble task. She is about to send them the apostles of her Heart, missionaries who shall be called by the beautiful name of "*Priests of the most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary*." At this mo-

ment, those fervent apostles are preparing themselves in retreat. Already Rome encourages them, and promises them her support. Other priests, other levites shall come, and soon we shall read in our Catholic annals the wonderful accounts of their labours and conquests.

“Priests of the Heart of Mary, you shall live, you shall multiply, you shall become one of the glories of our holy Church. Because you have placed your apostleship under the patronage of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, it shall be blessed by God, beloved by men, enriched with those fruits of mercy and peace with which the most Holy and Immaculate Heart of your Divine Patroness abounds.”

In an humble sentiment of gratitude, the venerable founder, shortly after his ordination, addressed a charming little letter, half French, half Italian, to M. Patriarca. He was careful to tell this excellent man what had become of his former guest, and to appoint the day and hour when he would offer the holy sacrifice for the family of his benefactor. Nor did he forget his esteemed catechist, M. Drach, to whom he touchingly describes the happiness of offering the adorable sacrifice. “I have had the consolation of saying my first Mass on the Feast of St. Matthew; since that day of grace, I present myself every morning before the throne of the Most Holy Trinity, to pay the homage of the entire Church, to offer up in her name the most holy sacrifice, and to ask the graces and succours which she may require. What an intercessor! But I have the holy Victim with me, and with that Victim we are always heard. The happiness of offering up daily the holy sacrifice is very great: the soul is filled with delight. But on the other hand, also, if we reflect on ourselves and what passes within our souls, on our weakness and the many miseries which constantly overwhelm

us, we scarcely dare to remain prostrate before the altar steps. Yet we must ascend. I do so because it is necessary; but I confess to you, that I very often do it with trembling." Such were the sentiments of the humble servant of God; and yet, according to all who have seen him celebrating Mass, he appeared rather an angel than a man.

On the 27th of September, 1841, the novitiate was opened at the village of La Neuville; the congregation commenced with three members, two priests, the venerable Libermann and M. Frederick Le Vavasseur, and a subdeacon, M. Marcellin Collin. The dwelling which sheltered the three first missionaries of the Holy Heart of Mary was a faithful copy of the house of Nazareth. It was poverty itself. Still the kind nuns above mentioned had supplied what was most needful, so that the humble occupants thought their simple habitation only too richly furnished. One of them, especially, but for the prudent and gentle interference of the saintly founder, might have been carried too far by the spirit of his rigid poverty. "I remember," says the Rev. Father Collin in his deposition, "an incident which brings us to the origin of our society, and shows with what a spirit the servant of God was animated. On our arrival at La Neuville, one of us considered the different articles of furniture too beautiful: they were in painted wood; he would have liked them simply in white deal, and in the ardour of his zeal wished to throw them out through the window. But the servant of God interposed, saying that it was better not to come at once to such extremities, and to keep the furniture until it could be replaced. The venerable father and myself made use of it; our colleague slept on a table."

When taking possession of their humble shelter, the three friends of the negroes little suspected the obstacles

which the spirit of evil sought to throw in their path, to drive them not only from La Neuville but even from the diocese of Amiens. M. Libermann was scarcely a priest, when the bishop's palace was besieged by influential visitors, who declared that the prelate had been deceived; that he had ordained an adventurer of suspicious doctrines and of changeable disposition, who pursued at random every sort of good work, and covered with the sanctity of the priesthood a long series of intrigues which he had carried on at Rome, Paris, and Strasburg; in a word, that his Lordship had opened his diocese to a rash and dangerous enterprise which would spread scandal and confusion on all sides. M. de Brandt, the only friend of M. Libermann who might have contradicted such statements, was absent. Mgr. Mioland, being greatly perplexed, wrote to a director of Saint-Sulpice to obtain full information before taking a definite and prompt decision. Happily M. Mollevaut of Saint-Sulpice, on his way from Boulogne to Paris, chanced to pay a visit to the prelate, whom he found writing to M. Carbon, and who told him of his uneasiness regarding M. Libermann's ordination. "My Lord," replied M. Mollevaut, "it is the noblest deed of your life." And then, tracing the career of the new priest, his conversion, his works of zeal at Saint-Sulpice, Issy, Rennes, and Rome, he strongly recommended the enterprise as a true design of Almighty God. These words of M. Mollevaut produced their effect. Not only was the enemy foiled, but his first assault put the prelate on his guard against all future attempts.

The year 1841 passed away in total abandonment which might have been looked upon as a complete failure. The three founders, feebly aided by an old gardener, shared amongst themselves even the humblest offices of the community. The two following years, there were a few

arrivals ; yet, at the end of 1843, the missionaries, including F. Laval at Mauritius, only attained the number of twelve.\* This number, however, was nearly doubled from 1843 to the close of 1844.† As the community increased,

\* The twelve first members were : The venerable founder and Fathers Le Vasseur, Laval, Tisserand, Collin, Bessieux, Blampin, De Regnier, Roussel, Bouchet, Audebert, and Maurice.

† At this period arrived M. Ignatius Schwindenhammer, whose name shall become so prominent before the conclusion of these pages. When on the occasion of a journey to Paris, the Venerable Libermann urged M. Desgenettes to facilitate M. Tisserand's entrance into the novitiate at La Neuville, the holy *curé* said : "But who will replace him as subdirector of the archconfraternity?" "I have found a substitute," replied M. Libermann, "the Abbé Schwindenhammer, one of my friends in Alsace." MM. Libermann and Desgenettes, accordingly, wrote to the young abbé and to Mgr. Ræss. M. Schwindenhammer, who was not yet a priest, saw in this proposal a sign of the divine will, and Mgr. Ræss kindly consented to cede him, but only temporarily, to the archdiocese of Paris. On Monday, 15th August, Feast of the Assumption, 1842, the new subdirector solemnly celebrated his first Mass at Ingersheim, and, a few days after, he was kneeling before the altar of Notre Dame des Victoires, placing his labours under the powerful protection of his heavenly Mother. Shortly before his ordination he had lost his parents : his mother on the 5th of October, 1841 ; his father on the 21st of June, 1842. He had left at Ingersheim three brothers and two sisters :—Caroline, Margaret, Jerome, Edward, and Eugène. Caroline alone was elder than himself. After a year spent at Paris, he made a retreat under M. Libermann at La Neuville. Here his vocation was finally decided ; but before entering the novitiate, he wished to return to Alsace to settle the temporal affairs of his family. By a singular grace of God, all his brothers and sisters wished to follow his example. They, consequently, sold all their houses, fields, and vineyards, met once more on the tomb of their parents, bade an affectionate farewell to their relatives and friends, and towards the end of October, 1843, five of them took their seats in a *diligence*, and set out on their long journey to Paris. Edward alone remained in Alsace, to continue his humanities at the *Petit Séminaire of La Chapelle*. On their arrival in the capital, the five



the missionaries were not a little embarrassed for accommodation. On the arrival of a new-comer, one of the elder members would yield his room and bed, and sleep on the only table of the refectory. Should the table be occupied, a staircase would supply its place, and to ascend, it was not unfrequently necessary to step over its charitable occupant. This stratagem was first employed in favour of Father Lannurien; and he who thus yielded his place to the first Superior of the French Seminary at Rome was the future Mgr. Bessieux. Others slept on a mattress which was spread on the pavement of a corridor. There was at first but one inkstand, which was placed in the community-room; everyone came to draw ink from it, even the superior, who did not wish that it should be displaced on his account. For a long time, the breakfast consisted of a morsel of bread with beer; and the principal repast, of a small quantity of meat with some coarsely-prepared vegetables. So great was their poverty, that they lived almost exclusively on alms. The worthy Superioress of the Faubourg Noyon sent, from time to time, some provisions, such as eggs, butter, and fish, which the holy

youthful travellers hastened to the feet of Our Lady of Victories, and thence separated: the *Abbé Ignace* and *Eugène*, the youngest, to be the disciples of the Venerable Libermann; Jerome, to study philosophy at Issy; and the two sisters to enter a convent. Edward joined, in 1847, the Congregation of the Holy Redeemer, and has become a most distinguished follower of St. Alphonsus. The same year, 1847, Jerome followed Ignace and Eugène to La Neuville. In 1880, the four brothers—three priests and M. Eugène—are still alive. Caroline, a nun of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (Louvincourt), is well known at Amiens as Mother Mary of the Infant Jesus. Margaret, in religion Mother Mary of the Blessed Sacrament, lived as a saint, and, on the 21st of June, 1866, the anniversary of her virtuous father's death, winged her flight towards heaven, there to "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth."



founder received with humble acknowledgments of gratitude. They went themselves to buy provisions at the village or town, and to draw water from a neighbouring fountain. In after years, the good father loved to recall this circumstance to the minds of his children: "Formerly," he said, "when each one of us went to draw water from the fountain, we were called '*Brothers*;' but now that we go there no longer, we are respectfully saluted '*Reverend Fathers*.' Are we anything better on that account?"

Each one was in turn the servant of all the others, even in the office of cook. The most skilful at this employment was the superior himself, whose mind was so little disturbed, that whilst preparing the dinner of the community, he frequently gave direction to the novices. One of these improvised cooks imagined that he could prepare on Monday all the vegetables required for the whole week, and thus economize both time and fire: he accordingly boiled a fair quantity. He was soon convinced of his error, when, returning on the third day to his store-room, he found most of his vegetables quite musty and unfit for use. Another, who had commenced most fervently the contemplative life, meditated during an entire morning before the crucifix in the kitchen. At eleven o'clock the signal for conference gave him the alarm. He had not even the fire lighted. Immediately he hastened to inform the venerated Father, and candidly related what had happened. The good superior only smiled, and, without betraying the least emotion, took the notes which he had laid before him, postponed the conference, went to the kitchen, and set himself so actively to work, that at the regular hour everything was ready. Despite the great poverty of the community, the charitable superior had given orders to distribute to the poor all that remained on

the table after the repasts, without ever keeping anything in reserve.

Content with the daily bread, he had no care for the morrow. "I was one day setting out on a journey," relates one of his disciples, "and I asked him for the necessary expenses of the road—the sum of three francs. The good father opened his desk, which contained three francs and ten centimes. 'Here,' he said, 'are three francs for yourself, and ten centimes for the poor.'" Soon Divine Providence came to his aid to reward his confidence. A young ecclesiastic, possessed of some money, presented himself for the novitiate. "You come just in time," said the saintly founder, "we had not wherewith to buy bread." This aspirant was one day to become Mgr. Bessieux, second Vicar-Apostolic of the two Guineas. Poverty by no means diminished the spirit of absolute disinterestedness with which the venerable Father was animated. A student of Saint-Sulpice to whom he had rendered great services, and who possessed a considerable fortune, wished to hand him over, for the work of the blacks, a note of 10,000 francs (£400). But on his return to his native province, he was advised by his director to apply that sum to his own diocese, which stood much in need of pecuniary assistance. The student felt rather embarrassed when acquainting the venerable founder with this incident. M. Libermann hastened to reassure him: "Be no way disturbed concerning your note. You know that it was on your own entreaties that your proposal was accepted. Let us not think of it any more. You know how little I care about these things. May the peace of our Lord be with you! Write to me whenever you wish; it will always give me great pleasure."

So little was he troubled by this life of destitution, that he by no means concealed it from the aspirants to his

society. He thus wrote to one of them: "How good it is to be miserable, since such a state draws upon us the divine look of Jesus! Be not like those proud ones who wish to be something, and are disconsolate at seeing themselves so insignificant and so poor. It seems that they are grieved to be in this great dependence on our Lord, and to need His assistance at every moment. Yet we are infinitely happier in possessing nothing and in receiving everything, little by little, from the hand of Jesus, according to the measure of our wants. Let us greatly rejoice at being constantly obliged to present ourselves like mendicants before Him, and at being able to live according to the life of grace."

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## CHAPTER II.

The Venerable Founder the living rule of his Community, and the model of all religious virtues at La Neuville, 1841-1846.

**I**N the community of La Neuville, the venerable founder was for his disciples the perfect model of the zealous missionary and of the true religious. It was therefore natural that his words should sink deep into their hearts, and that he could command with authority. He possessed the peculiar gift of imparting a charm to all he taught or prescribed. Being essentially practical, and viewing everything in the supernatural light of faith, he aimed, above all, at the essence of perfection, and adapted the regulations of his religious family to the rule of life of a good priest, so that his missionaries, in whatever land they would be, might be enabled to sanctify each day of their apostolical career, as if it were spent within the pious seclusion of the novitiate. The little community of La Neuville was regulated by a kind of family rule, which was based on the Constitutions written at Rome, sanctioned by the confidence of the diocesan bishop, and authorized by the encouragement given to the work by the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda.

His first rule differed little from that of regulars who have no solemn vows ; or from that mitigated form which, for the last three centuries, directs, with scarcely any exceptions, all the modern congregations. M. Libermann could not adopt those means which in former ages have most powerfully contributed to the development of the religious life, namely, austere discipline, continual prayer,

and obedience, founded on the solemn vow which closely binds the members to the head, and the entire body to the Universal Church ; but he supplied those elements as much as the exigencies of the time and of his work required. In order the better to appreciate the difficulty of his task, and to value the depth of his prudence, we shall first cast a rapid glance on what constitutes the groundwork of the ancient monastic rules.

The Church, wishing Christian society to repose on stronger bases, gave birth to the religious orders—those faithful copies of herself, by means of which she exhibits to her children the true and easy practice of all virtues. In these monastic institutions are deposited three things, which in every age have constituted the strength of human society: the supreme authority of the father, military discipline, and sacerdotal prayer.

To establish the churches of the desert, she has truly given to their founders and spiritual leaders an authority similar to the ancient right of life or death, the paternal power in all its plenitude, but in the spiritual and supernatural order. This right, freely accepted by the sons, was so unreserved and absolute, that it was not even limited by the impossible. The mildest of these leaders asked: "*What must be done when impossible things are enjoined?*" The brother, in this case, must submit with gentleness. Should his modest remarks not be accepted, and if the thing commanded exceeds his strength, let him confide in God and obey." (Rule of St. Benedict, chap. lxviii.)

That which enabled the disciples to obey with such perfection proceeded from their being true ascetics, that is to say, workers and warriors, who strove to subject everything to the yoke of self-control, and who, though constantly remaining at their post, were ever engaged in military action. Their camp was the cloister; they found

in obedience arms truly noble and powerful, and their field of battle was one or several souls to convert and to sanctify.

Obedience and discipline were but imperfect helps to keep alive the supernatural spirit in all its vigour, when compared with the third means, far more efficacious and vivifying—the sacred office of the Church—that conventual, solemn, public prayer which was rarely interrupted, and in some places was kept up day and night. All the chords of the soul were ever strung, and, the breath of God unceasingly passing over them, the life of man was a perpetual hymn sent up to heaven. Is it not the divine power of this admirable prayer that explains the wonders of holiness, which in every age were the natural result of such continual communing with God?

As the gifts of God to His Church are without repentance, it follows that those powerful aids of supernatural life are not exclusively peculiar to the ancient orders, and that they are also to be found in the new religious institutes, which at intervals spring up within the pale of the Catholic Church. One cannot but admire the goodness of God, Who adapts His grace to human frailty, and makes it, so to speak, more individual in proportion as men experience greater difficulty in submitting their wills to the yoke of total obedience, by the strict observance of a rigid discipline, and by the chanting in common of the canonical office of the Church. That grace communicates to the soul of the religious a strong interior impulse, which supplies for the perpetual demands of the rule, of the continual sacrifices of a hard life, in a word, of that claustral regularity which may justly be called a silent and perpetual monitor. Hence the necessity, in the new religious societies, of bestowing greater care on individual direction, on particular examen, and on a greater



development of interior training. He who is called to the difficult mission of guiding souls must be at once well instructed and devoted, and must take upon himself all the authority and responsibility of a spiritual father. Hence, likewise, the necessity for the religious to acquit themselves, with special fervour, of the limited number of exercises enjoined by the rule, to bring to the performance of all their duties a thoroughly supernatural spirit, which alone can strongly bind together wills more inclined to independence than formerly, and consequently less disposed to submit with docility to the exigencies of community life.

Those sacrifices of obedience, of charity, of voluntary dependence, must needs continually and generously be offered, to supply for what is hardest and most repulsive in the rules of the ancient monastic institutions. Hence, perhaps, in this new order of things, the necessity of bestowing greater attention on the principle of abnegation, which has ever been the basis of all Christian and religious perfection. May this interior abnegation, this perpetual immolation of self, this adoration in spirit and in truth, compensate, in a manner not less agreeable to God, for that filial servitude, that complete holocaust, that powerful and uninterrupted psalmody of our fathers!

The new founder has strictly fulfilled these conditions: he has been a skilful director of souls, he caused to abound and superabound the spirit of faith or interior prayer, and the glorification of God by the sacrifice of the heart and the crucifixion of the soul. He insisted especially on the spirit of interior life, the spirit of sacrifice, and on the virtues of charity, zeal, and humility. From the beginning he was anxious to see the rule most strictly observed by all his children. Silence, study, prayer, meals, and recreation, had each their appointed time. The saintly founder wished every

action to have its vital spring in virtue, and to be influenced by the remembrance of the presence of God; and he was the first to carry his scrupulous fidelity to the rule, even to the minutest details. Whilst the community still consisted of its three first members, they usually took a walk together on every Wednesday evening. One day as M. Le Vasseur was unable to go, M. Collin requested the venerable father not to lose his time by accompanying one alone:—"I am director of novices," replied the good Father; "you are alone, yet I act with you as if there were twenty. Do not forget in future, that we must fulfil our duty as strictly towards a few as towards many."

No virtue was dearer to him than that of charity. From five in the morning until late at night, he was constantly at the disposal of everyone who, either within or outside the community, stood in need of his fatherly attention.

He assisted with special care those who were tempted and afflicted. Even when suffering from most violent headaches he would devote to them several consecutive hours. One day, after striving in vain to comfort one of those souls, he went, quite grieved and exhausted, and calling one of his novices, said to him: "Go and see if you cannot be more successful than I have been. O my God! why can I not comfort all the miserable?"

His kindness for scrupulous souls was often carried to heroism: "I made him some remarks," said the superioress of a community, "on the charity with which he received everybody, even persons who did not deserve, nay, who even abused his goodness." "Are then," said I to him, "a peccadillo and a mortal sin the same to you?" "Did not our Lord," he replied, "welcome everyone?"

"I often consulted Father Libermann," says another, "on account of my many interior troubles and tempta-

tions. He had told me to go to him whenever I would be tempted, either by night or by day. Peace returned to me as soon as I beheld the servant of God, and sometimes I did not even know why I had come to him. During four years that he was my director, he recommended me to say the *Memorare*, and to spend a few minutes in adoration afterwards. He supported and encouraged me by his direction, and divined so well the cause of my affliction and discouragement, that he often astonished me by the justness of his remarks." One was always sure of being understood by him; his counsels never failed to be to the purpose. Encouragement was the starting-point of his method of direction, and the end at which he aimed was the complete transformation of the old into the new man, our Lord Jesus Christ, the great pattern of the priest, the religious, and the apostle.

The patient director usually succeeded in liberating souls from temptations against their vocation. He peacefully listened to all the difficulties of his spiritual children. Should they return to him, ten or even a hundred times, he never refused admittance to anyone, never said it was fatiguing, nor evinced the least sign of impatience. He particularly recommended prayer, he prayed himself, and it frequently happened that, after a novena in honour of the Blessed Virgin, they returned entirely relieved and consoled. The venerable Libermann seemed even at times to read the secrets of hearts. "One day," says a young aspirant, "I felt oppressed by great interior pains, and I determined on not receiving Holy Communion on the following morning. I had not manifested my dispositions to him, but the servant of God, passing my door after night prayer, came in to see me, and told me not to mind the thoughts which tormented me, and to approach the

Holy Table without trouble. He could only know the interior state of my soul by a kind of supernatural light or by an inspiration of the Holy Ghost."

"More than once," writes a superioress, "I have admired his extreme charity and patience, and I would affirm that he practised these virtues to excess, if that were possible. I have seen him several times spend whole hours with poor abandoned souls who apparently did not deserve such attention. Nothing less than heroic charity was required, such as that of this good Father, who saw only souls dear to our Lord, and purchased at the price of all His Blood. We had in our establishment two children very seriously ill; the venerable father visited them often; he permitted one of them, a privileged little soul, to communicate several times a week, and as she could not remain long fasting, he sent one of his priests to give her Holy Communion very early in the morning. The other child was no less the object of his solicitude. I do not know if he could have carried farther the limits of his charity, during her illness and after her recovery." The cure of the latter child was looked upon as miraculous, and as due to the prayers of the Archconfraternity of the most Holy Heart of Mary, to which the servant of God had recommended her a few days previously. Our Blessed Lord and His Holy Mother, radiant with heavenly beauty, had appeared to her, and promised her that she would be cured on the following Saturday, but that until then she would still have much to suffer for the good of the orphanage.

M. Libermann would not depend on anyone for the care to be taken of the new-comers, towards whom he always evinced the most genial hospitality. A youth having arrived rather weary after his journey, the good father conducted him to the refectory, went himself to the kitchen, prepared a dinner, and himself attended the

stranger. Whilst his guest was taking his repast, he ordered a chamber to be prepared; but as this caused some delay, he conducted the young man to the room of his secretary. He took care to request the latter not to disturb, by a sudden visit, the sleep of the traveller.

Should his sufferings oblige him to keep his room, then especially did he receive everyone, and willingly engage in simple and recreative conversation, which he would intermingle with numerous pious and amusing anecdotes, "It was equal to a feast," writes an eye-witness, "to pay a visit to the dear invalid."

Except in case of illness, he was always present at the recreations, took an active part in all the conversations, listened attentively to all the questions addressed to him, and answered the least word, even when coming from the humblest at the extremity of the ranks by which he was surrounded. He avoided learned and too serious subjects, and rendered them, as it were, impossible, by a fixed plan of his own. "In recreation," he used to say, "we must refresh the mind without depressing the heart. We can spend it in a holy manner even when conversing on trifles." He knew at the same time how to divert and edify; he related his anecdotes with a modesty and an interest quite peculiar. They generally contained some ingenious and appropriate moral, which though not directly applied to anyone in particular, would surely find its way to the heart of those for whom it was intended. All his censures in public consisted of a gentle reproof, a mild word spoken to the purpose, or a simple glance, that would often suffice to draw attention to a motive of vanity or a personal preoccupation, which frequently had not been perceived even by the culprit himself: he acted as the bee which, when depositing its honey, but slightly touches with its sting. We have been assured that, in his most familiar conversations with those who lived in con-

tinual intercourse with him, he was never heard to utter one single word against charity.

Speaking of his indulgent charity, which never degenerated into weakness, Mgr. Luquet has related of him an incident which the pious prelate thought well worth preserving. "One of his children," he says, "finding, no doubt, that his desire to palliate the faults of others went rather far, thus spoke to him: 'After all, father, charity is not nonsense.' 'There you are mistaken,' replied the man of God, 'it is justice which is not so; but charity may be sometimes, or at least appear such'"—a reply worthy of St. Francis of Sales, to whom he has frequently been compared, on account of the gentle manner with which he conducted souls to God.

He always evinced a perfect evenness of soul, enhanced by an admirable meekness. He had studied Him who said: "*Learn from Me, because I am meek;*" . . . and, like this Divine Model, he was meek in words, meek in manners, meek and serene in troubles, and ever tranquil under persecutions. It seemed that in him nature had lost its frailty, and that he was free from our innate inclination to anger, impatience, and ill humour, or that sufferings had no effect upon him; and yet God tried him always and in everything: in his body by long sufferings, in his soul by contradictions and by the grief which the numerous and unexpected losses of his missionaries caused him.

We could relate many instances of his meekness and patience. "The venerable father," says one of his disciples, "having directed me to copy an official and rather pressing letter, I failed the first time through awkwardness; the good father simply and gently requested me to begin again; I failed a second, and a third time, yet, strange to say, he did not manifest the least im-



patience ; on the contrary, if I remember aright, he even mingled an air of kindness with his great patience."

His meekness and patience appear still more strikingly in the following incident. "A novice of *Notre Dame du Gard* begged for permission to conduct to the station of Picquigny his former director, who had come from Quimper to visit him. The venerable father having questioned him as to his skill in driving, the young religious declared himself an expert, saying that when at home it was he who drove. The novice and his friend accordingly started, but they were hardly two hundred paces from the house, when the unskilful driver dashed the vehicle against a car which he knew not how to avoid: they were overturned, and the axle and shafts were broken by the shock. Our traveller returned greatly humbled. 'What may be the amount of the damage?' said the venerable father to the poor novice, who most piteously presented himself before him. 'About two hundred francs,' replied the dismayed driver. 'Truly,' said the servant of God, with a graceful smile: 'this is well worth four hundred francs to you.' The unhappy novice never forgot the lesson, nor the words of his saintly father."

He was especially admirable in his relations with the brothers of his congregation, to whom he could never address a harsh or bitter word. He loved to be among them, and conversed with them as a father with his dearest children. As often as he went to their novitiate, he would give them one or two conferences, which were nearly always on charity. His most efficacious and most persuasive manner of instructing was to profit of a fact to give a lesson of kindness, patience, poverty, humility, and obedience.

"I was much edified," says Father Delaplace, "when one day the good father came to beg of me to take special

care of a young Irishman, who had recently entered the brothers' novitiate, of which I was then director, at *Notre Dame du Gard*; he recommended me to send the young man to Amiens, where he might confess to a priest who spoke English. 'The good brother,' he added, 'might lose courage at being deprived of this consolation.'" On his return from a journey, his first visit after that to the chapel was to the infirmary. It was touching to see him pay the most tender attentions to a brother who was threatened with consumption.

He would also send for the brother gardener, who was appointed to direct the work of the newly-arrived postulants, to inquire whether he treated them with sufficient attention and kindness, and whether he remembered how he was himself treated when in the same position. Whilst reading his breviary in the garden, if a brother happened to pass with a wheel-barrow, or carrying a load, he was frequently seen to interrupt his prayer, to open a door, prevent an accident, or give a word of advice. A brother, rather inexperienced, took great trouble, in his presence, to wax a floor, when the good father hastened to show him how he did himself whilst sacristan at Saint-Sulpice; and to complete the lesson, he joined practice to precept. On another occasion, whilst walking in a corridor, he took a broom from the hands of one, to show him the manner of using it well. For a long time he made his own bed, under the pretence that he had a method of his own. He often did so before the brother, to teach him at the same time order and humility.

His charity was the same on all occasions. The person to whom the Superioress of Noyon usually entrusted her kind messages relates the following anecdote. "One day," she says, "when I brought something to the poor missionaries, I met M. Libermann on the road. When

approaching me, he said: 'Quickly, Clemence, take my hat and breviary, that I may help this poor man to get his horse to the top of the hill.' It was a poor driver, whose overloaded cart was drawn by a very weak horse. M. Libermann set himself to push the wheel, and he succeeded, though not without great labour, in helping the good man out of his difficulty."

The venerable founder completed his virtuous examples by his instructions, especially by his subjects of meditation and the daily explanation of the rule. But although he was always ready to speak from the abundance of the heart on every spiritual subject, God permitted that he should sometimes experience the greatest difficulty in collecting a few thoughts which, three times a week, he had to propose for the meditation of the following day. It happened one day that he commenced twice and could not continue. "God," he said, "does not suggest anything to me." He then began for the third time, and gave a delightful meditation on the love of God for souls.

His comments on the Rule held the novices literally spell-bound, his conferences were so many admirable lectures on pastoral and ascetic theology. But here, too, humiliation attended him. It occasionally occurred that, in consequence of violent headaches, he would have to stop in the middle of a most interesting explanation. In such cases he would say:—"I cannot continue any longer," and then he would quietly retire. At other times he would simply fold up his manuscript, and conclude the exercise with so much peace, resignation, and humility, that the good effect produced was greater than if he had continued the conference.

The humility of the venerable father was the source of his obedience. He willingly obeyed the least of his children, for he felt greater delight in submission than in

authority. In the doctor's absence, the infirmarian exercised a sort of absolute power over him, which he on his part readily acknowledged. He carried his obedience to the doctors almost to excess. One of them having insisted on removing a lump which he had on his head, he chose for the operation the time of a walk, to avoid the protestations of the infirmarian. It was so painful that he could not help saying at the infirmarian's return: "It has been torn from me as a nail is extracted from a wall." Sometimes the infirmarian would give him altogether tasteless draughts, having forgotten to sweeten them. The good father always took them without making the least remark; he afterwards anticipated excuses by saying that he could not distinguish the difference by the taste. We transcribe from the notes of an eye-witness an incident which brings us back to the cradle of the society, and reflects honour not only on the saintly founder, but also on his mortified disciples:—

"It was at the time when there were as yet no brothers at La Neuville, and when the new and often improvised cooks were not well skilled in their function. One of them mistook a bottle of lamp oil for one of olive, and with it dressed the salad. I happened to be the first to partake of the mixture. No sooner had I tasted it, than I perceived the error. Though laughing, I pretended to be engaged with something else, in order to leave to others the task of correcting the cook's mistake. But what was my surprise, when I saw M. Bouchet eating with excellent appetite these lettuces, the mere odour of which filled me with disgust. A second did in like manner, then a third, and then M. Libermann; and all without showing any sign of surprise went on consuming their portion. At last it came to the turn of M. de Regnier, whom we all knew to be the essence of the most candid

frankness. No sooner had he tasted the first leaf than he exclaimed: 'It is lamp oil!' I immediately burst out laughing. Till then, I thought I was myself mistaken, not imagining how the others could be so mortified as not to perceive the error. 'That is then the reason of your laughing,' said M. Libermann; 'why did you not tell us?' 'Because,' I replied, 'you went at it with such appetite, that I would not think of warning you; for I fancied I was myself labouring under an illusion.'"

The holy founder was all charity and attention to others, and never heeded his own wants. His spirit of zeal and mortification was totally incompatible with a proper care of his health, which visibly declined from day to day. Soon he became so weak that his children, fearing to lose so good a father, assembled in council, and drew up a series of resolutions, which they respectfully presented to him in a document that breathes forth the most touching feelings of filial solicitude. It is the language of sons to a beloved father. They beg of him to bestow greater care on his health; to hear confessions, and see the religious in direction only at fixed moments; to reserve to himself two hours each day for the transaction of business; to take every night a sufficient amount of rest; and to be submissive in all that the first assistant might think useful for the improvement and preservation of a health, still so necessary to themselves and to the abandoned souls.

The document was dated: La Neuville-lès-Amiens, 6th August, 1845, and signed by MM. Tisserand, Schwindenhammer, Lossedat, Acker, Thévaux, and Bouchet, all missionaries of the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary.

As a last precaution, the council begged of the venerable founder to sign the following formula: "*The superior declares that he adheres to the decision of his children.*"

Before affixing his signature, the humble servant of God added these words: "*he will obey their commands as those of God: it is an obedience which every superior owes to his society,*" and then he signed,

FR. LIBERMANN, *Priest,*  
*Superior of the Congregation of the most*  
*Holy Heart of Mary.*

We can easily understand such ready obedience, when we recall to mind the humility of the holy servant of God, who always thought himself a useless instrument in the hands of his Divine Master. The venerable Libermann frequently declared, that he was unworthy and incapable of being at the head of his society: "How happy I would be," he said, "if I could bury myself in solitude! I hope I shall one day be dismissed as good for nothing, and that I shall thus have all I deserve, and all I desire." Despite his humility the saintly founder was admired, loved, and revered by all his children, as their living rule, the model of all religious virtues, as an affectionate father, and a great saint.

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## CHAPTER III.

Missions confided to the Infant Society : Mauritius, Bourbon, Hayti, Australia, and Guiana, 1841-1880.



FROM the narrow precincts of La Neuville, let us turn our eyes to the extensive and laborious field of the missions, which was for the venerable Libermann a copious source of tribulations and sufferings. The soul of the holy servant of God, with all its thoughts, desires, and affections, yearned after the missions, where he would willingly have spent his life in extending the kingdom of Jesus Christ. His mind was filled with legitimate pride, as he considered the vast amount of the labour done by the missionaries, whilst his heart dried up with grief as he gazed on the work left undone for want of apostles.

The field of the Catholic missions is wide ; the harvest rich and ripe ; the labourers ready and ardent, but, though many, still too few for the work. Countless souls remain to be converted and garnered into the granaries of eternal life ; abundant sheaves of pure corn are gathered in, every day, for the kingdom of heaven ; but, alas ! in the East and in the West, vast fields are left standing because the labourers are few. Is it not an appalling fact that nineteen centuries after the human race has been redeemed by a Divine Victim, three out of every four of the world's inhabitants ignore the very name of their Saviour ? Eight hundred millions of souls, ransomed by the Precious Blood, are still plunged in a dismal and deadly darkness, still hungering after the Living Bread that came down from heaven, and still panting after the life-giving streams of salvation.

The wail of these abandoned souls moved the apostolical heart of the venerable Libermann to its very depths, and those very depths were filled with sadness, as he thought of the cold indifference of the greater part of men, in sight of the utter destitution, moral as well as spiritual, of their fellow-creatures. Most men, in this age, are infected with two dreadful plagues: an insatiable thirst for gold, and a delirious craving for pleasures. To satisfy these earthly appetites, they are busy day and night; they heed neither their own nor their neighbours' immortal souls, those richest gems of God's creation; nor do they bestow a serious thought on the ineffable delights of heaven.

However, the fire of divine love is not extinguished; the charity of Christ Jesus still urgeth many; the flame of apostolic zeal burns still ardently within the breasts of thousands in every Catholic land. These seek neither gold nor silver, neither pleasures nor positions; they seek the treasures of heaven; they are anxious to extend the boundaries of God's kingdom on earth, and to enrich His heavenly kingdom with what is more precious than all the costliest jewels of this world—the immortal souls of their fellow-men. Like the great apostle of the gentiles, that admirable vessel of election, the missionaries cannot feel at rest, while, as St. Francis Xavier says, "*hell is being filled with the souls of the heathens.*"

The missionaries, filled with the spirit of Jesus, despise the fleeting joys and deceptive vanities of the world, and fix their gaze on heaven alone. They are the angels of the Most High, the lights which illumine those sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, the salt that preserves souls from the corruption of sin and eternal damnation. Now more numerous than ever, these brave and self-sacrificing warriors sally forth from every land to the

conquest of souls. They have heard the words which once resounded in the ears of the apostles: "Go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." For God and for souls, they forsake parents, home, friends, all; they sally forth under the guiding protection of Jesus and Mary, to carry the glad tidings of the Gospel to every nation of the earth. Zeal speeds them on; they traverse every sea; they land on every shore; they dwell in every clime. From the North to the South, from the rising to the setting of the sun, whether on the burning sands of Africa, or in the icy polar regions, whether searching for souls through the virgin forests of America, or hiding from their persecutors in the mountain caves of Japan, whether wandering through the unexplored provinces of China or the distant and desolate islands of the great Pacific, one thought animates them all—to plant the standard of the cross, to water the whole earth with the salutary streams of the Precious Blood, to give glory to God in the highest, and to communicate the peace of salvation to every child of man. Let others leave their homes and spend their lives in the bowels of the earth, to find that white and yellow clay called silver and gold, the missionaries, the truly wise men, look on all gold as on a little sand, and on silver as on common clay; they only seek for themselves and their fellow-creatures that one thing necessary, the salvation of souls. Their sole desire is to enkindle in every heart the fire which Jesus brought down from heaven, that it may burn away all that is displeasing to His Eternal Father, and change the souls of men into spotless holocausts of divine love.

Nor does the fire of zeal for souls inflame the hearts of men only; it also animates the souls of thousands of holy women. Every day, hundreds of timid virgins come

forth from castle and cottage, from town and country, to offer up unto God and to souls, their innocence, their youth, their love, and their life. The Catholic nun is to be met with in every region of the earth. She appears wherever the Gospel is preached, wherever the cross is planted, wherever the adorable Victim is immolated. Fearless she stands in the camp and on the battlefield, amid the crash of arms, amid the shrieks of the wounded and the dying, as well as amidst the roaring tempests of the deep. Like a heaven-sent messenger she is seen by the bed-side of the sick, encouraging, consoling, and aiding the poor sufferers. Like an angel she glides through the populous city, and penetrates with a smile into the most destitute garrets of the poor. We meet her in the hospital, in the prison cell, in the school-room, on the savage shore, as calm and loving as when rapt in prayer before the tabernacle of her Beloved. Everywhere, she is the faithful companion of Jesus and the devoted friend of abandoned souls, everywhere a prodigy of heroism, the astonishment of heretics and infidels, the brightest ornament of God's Church upon earth.

Through the zeal of the missionaries, the Church triumphs from ocean to ocean, and gradually the Daughter of the King spreads out her tents, to shelter the children who daily flock to her maternal bosom: the map of the world has become the chart of the pacific conquest of Jesus Christ. This, assuredly, is an age of apostles. Ought not the Catholic nations glory as much in the heroic legions of their missionaries\* as they glory in

\* Apostolic zeal seems, in this century, to have taken refuge not alone in the hearts of the missionaries; it pervades the entire body of the faithful. Never before did Christian charity display itself by more ingenious inventions than by the admirable *Association for the Propagation of the Faith*, the *Society of the Holy Childhood*, and the *Œuvre*

the brave battalions of their armies? And, if they so liberally assist the latter, why do they grant so little support to the former? Because the modern nations do not understand their true mission. Millions are squandered on expeditions, which are often as unjust as they are expensive. Nothing is spared to enlarge the territory of the nation; nothing is done to extend the empire of faith. Every attention is paid to the soldier, none or very little to the missionary.

Despite the general apathy of most modern governments, the missionaries are more zealous and more numerous than ever, and not the least generous will be the disciples of the venerable Libermann.

The island of Mauritius had received the first missionary of the Holy Heart of Mary a few days before the novitiate was opened at La Neuville. Father Laval landed on the

*Apostolique*—three noble conceptions which compensate, in some manner, for the culpable apathy and neglect of Catholic governments. In May, 1822, a French woman gathered around her a few generous friends, and with them began the Association for the Propagation of the Faith. An *Our Father* per day, a halfpenny per week, such were the conditions required from the members of the Association. The prayer was simple, the alms small. None could object to such obligations. Young and old, rich and poor, masters and servants wished to join the holy league. There were families in France where the child in the cradle, or the new-born babe was enrolled among the members. The Association soon spread over every diocese in France and the whole earth. The little mustard-seed grew into a gigantic tree that overshadows every nation. For more than half a century, the halfpennies of the poor have supported thousands of missionaries, and established flourishing Christian Churches in America, Australia, Asia, and Africa. Its annual budget now reaches over two hundred thousand pounds, which represents over two millions of subscribers, two millions of hearts beating with love for God and zeal for souls. Watch the rain falling; the drops so small in themselves, succeeding one another without ceasing, form streams that become mighty rivers, which



shores of Mauritius, on the 14th of September, Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, with that symbol of salvation with which he was to open heaven to many thousands of souls. When disembarking, he said to Mgr. Collier : "What a beautiful day, my Lord, to take possession of your vicariate! What a good omen for our labours! Crosses shall not be wanting to us, but it is with the cross that the Divine Master has redeemed the world."

The first grief that pierced the soul of Father Laval was the cold indifference of the population, at the arrival of the worthy Vicar-Apostolic and of the priests whom God sent to them. The "*Annals of the Mission*" relate that Mgr. Collier had to request a poor black merchant, who was selling his wares on the quay, to show them the road to the presbytery, and that no one evinced the least mark of sympathy or respect.

From the presbytery, Father Laval hastened to the enable the merchants to carry the riches of commerce from shore to shore, and to the extremities of the world. Thus it is that the little coins offered by so many thousands accumulate and become the means, not only of carrying the apostles of the Gospel to every land, but to transport millions of souls into the secure haven of God's eternal kingdom.

Divine Providence has given to the "Propagation of the Faith" two admirable sisters in the "*Society of the Holy Childhood*," and the "*Œuvre Apostolique*." The former was established in 1843, by Mgr. Forbin Janson, Bishop of Nancy, for the redemption, baptism, and Christian education of millions of little children, who are most inhumanly treated and cast away in China and other idolatrous countries. The object of the latter is to supply the missions with the various material objects necessary for divine worship. This association has in a few years done a vast amount of good. Should not every Christian join these holy leagues of alms and prayer, and strive to multiply the number of apostolical labourers, and to increase the actual revenue which, though immense at first sight, is, when compared to the requirements of the many missions, like a little water let fall on a burning furnace?



church, then the only one at Port Louis. Humbly prostrate before Jesus in the adorable Sacrament, he consecrated himself anew to the glory of his heavenly Father and the salvation of souls.

The natural charms of Mauritius had no attractions for him, and in vain would we look in his correspondence for a word of description of the island, reputed as the pearl of the Indian Ocean. But, if he heeded not the natural aspect of his new home, he was the more attentive to probe the moral and religious wounds of its cold, indifferent people, both whites and blacks. His letters are full of this subject.

From his arrival at Mauritius, he took every precaution to promote the interests of the blacks. He selected for his dwelling a little side-wing of the presbytery, where he lived in complete isolation. His room was a poor narrow cell, furnished with a small table, a chair, and a bed. And such a bed! A few boards of the old trunk he had brought from France, and of which he had made a kind of a crib fixed to the wall. Hence came the report, which for a long time circulated at Mauritius, "that Father Laval slept in a coffin." His clothes were always old and patched; his food was most frugal, consisting of a bowl of rice, boiled in milk, taken twice a day, at noon and at ten o'clock at night. This was for several years his only *régime*, until he was ordered by his superior to relax somewhat his rigorous life. Fasting, watching, and continual prayer, were the arms by which he wished to subdue the spirits of darkness, who held so many souls in subjection.

For several months he fulfilled with the other members of the clergy the duties of the parochial ministry of the town; but soon he was allowed by Mgr. Collier to devote himself exclusively to the apostolate of the negroes. In a letter, dated 22nd February, 1842, he described the pitiful

condition of the colony: "There exist here an incredible disorder and corruption. There is a mixture of Catholics, who have only the name, Protestants of all sects—Jews, Arabs, and Indians—all drawn hither by the desire of gain. The Indians form more than a third of the population. There are about 80,000 blacks, of whom, perhaps, more than half are not baptized, and those who are baptized behave not better than idolators: they are given up to all sorts of vices—particularly since they have been liberated from slavery. Very few are married, and almost all die without the sacraments. They are entirely ignorant even of the principal mysteries of our holy religion."

He began by bestowing his most assiduous care on the blacks of Port Louis, and did not wait until they came to him for the good tidings, which he was deputed to impart to them; but, mindful of the words of the master of the banquet, "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the feeble, and the blind, and the lame" (Luke, xiv. 21.), he ran everywhere after the stray sheep. Wherever he would meet the blacks, whether in the streets, near their huts, or at work, he would speak to them with such ravishing simplicity and kindness, that they would at once be at ease with him. He affectionately inquired into all that concerned themselves or their families. Soon, a few blacks, won over by his kindness, consented to come to his dwelling, and receive instructions from him. He treated them with such tender affection, that they, in their turn, brought their friends and acquaintances. He let them know that, at every hour, he was at the disposal of all who might come to be prepared for Baptism, First Communion, or Marriage, so that labourers, servants, and mothers of families, had no excuse to put forward for non-attendance. He first began by forming a little nucleus

of solid and fervent Christians, in the persons of three men and two women, who were baptized a few weeks after his arrival.

The number of his neophytes increased rapidly, but not too rapidly for the zeal of the ardent missionary, who unsparingly spent all his moments in promoting the interests of the negroes. All his time was devoted to them, as he carefully avoided visiting any white families, except when called to the bedside of the sick. Every morning at four o'clock, he assembled his dear blacks for prayers and Mass. He was in the church till nine, praying or catechising. He then received visitors till late in the afternoon, instructing continually, teaching them to make the sign of the cross, and to recite their prayers, in little groups of from three to six persons. After some private exercises of piety, he re-entered the church at seven, where he would find assembled from one hundred to two hundred blacks. He usually prolonged his familiar instructions on the catechism until ten. These meetings were preceded by pious hymns, and followed by night prayer, alternately repeated by the missionary and his flock. Friday evening was consecrated to the Way of the Cross; the neophytes were frequently overcome with emotion, and the missionary himself was easily moved to tears. On Sundays at noon, he said a special Mass for the blacks, taught them prayers, and addressed to them a familiar instruction on the mysteries, the commandments, or the sacraments.

Father Laval, by his zeal, kindness, and holiness, won so much the esteem and affection of the negroes, that they felt proud to belong to him. It was the same to them to be children of Father Laval and to be practical Catholics; and they emphatically declared that "in books

there could not be found mention of a saint as great as their Father Laval."

During the first few months, he had baptized about sixty blacks, administered the sacrament of Marriage to a good number, and gave First Communion to forty; but he laboured with patience and confidence: "God alone," he wrote to a friend, "can establish His reign, and all my poor and feeble efforts shall be useless, if I do not work with the assistance of the Divine Master. Here I can say with the holy apostle: 'Lord I have laboured the whole night without taking anything.' I do not, however, lose courage; with the aid of our Master, we shall, perhaps, some day make a good capture."

Father Laval commenced his apostolate in his poor cell, with only five Christians whom he had baptized. When his room became insufficient, he assembled his blacks in the sacristy of the cathedral. When the sacristy became crowded, he collected them at the entrance of the church; then, he led them to the nave; and, little by little, he filled the whole cathedral. Besides his ordinary ministry among the blacks, Mgr. Collier entrusted him with the chaplaincy of the prisons and hospitals, where his labours were as fruitful and consoling as among the negroes.

To bring about more rapidly the conversion of his dear blacks, Father Laval established, in the town and in the suburbs, a few centres for prayer and catechism, where the negroes of the surrounding streets would assemble. During his second year at Mauritius, there already existed a good number of those circles at Port Louis. He multiplied himself by means of catechists. Although for the most part unable to read, they repeated over and over again the few questions on the principal mysteries which they had been able to retain. Nothing

more was required to have the oratory assiduously frequented. The father visited each section from time to time, and, whenever he would appear in one, the oratory would be crowded, and all the doors and windows filled with people.

The catechists became most active auxiliaries in the propagation of the faith. In a short time Port Louis was too narrow a field for the zealous apostle. His institution of catechists allowed him to visit the country, the villages, and habitations where numerous families of blacks were gathered. He was usually accompanied on his apostolic excursions by his catechist, Emilien. Father Laval himself relates the conversion of this catechist in the following terms: "One evening, at the hour of catechism, I saw entering the chapel a man wearing a large cord at his cincture, and manifesting the greatest sentiments of penance. At this sight, I said to myself, "there is a man who will be able to render me great service." I took special care of him, and when I saw him on the good road, and well prepared, I said to him, "Emilien, follow God and follow me." These words penetrated the heart of the poor negro, and he became henceforward the inseparable assistant of the zealous missionary.

When first he approached these half-civilized savages, they took to flight. "Come to me, my children," he said to them, "I do not wish to do you harm, but on the contrary, I love you much; I am your friend, and it is for you that I have left my family and my country; I come to teach you to know the good God, to love Him, to become good and happy. I will often come to see you here, and if you are afraid of me, Emilien will speak to you in my place."

By such words he dispelled their fears and gained their confidence; the grace of God did the rest. In the

country, as in the town, he multiplied the places of the meetings. He always went on foot, and never accepted nourishment in any house; he was content with a morsel of dry bread which he carried with him, and like the valiant soldiers of Gideon, he allayed his thirst by the side of a running stream.

During five years he laboured alone, when the English government, which till then had tolerated only Father Laval, authorized some of his *confrères* to come to his assistance. They found him surrounded by thousands of faithful, of whom hundreds communicated on all the great feasts of the year. The large church of Port Louis, which could contain two thousand persons, was filled three times each Sunday. The religious movement was so extensive, that in a few years over fifty chapels or churches were built in the town, and throughout the whole island, by the zealous exertions of Father Laval. This religious movement was soon communicated to the white population—thanks especially to the zeal of the Abbé Mazuy, the disciple and friend of the apostle of the blacks.

We cannot here speak of all the difficulties, sufferings, mortifications, heroic virtues of Father Laval, nor relate the miracles, conversions, and good works achieved by this worthy son of Libermann. Suffice to say that he was a saint, and that the souls he saved and sent to heaven are numbered by thousands.

When, on the feast of his model, Blessed Peter Claver (9th September, 1864), this new apostle of the negroes, rich in virtues and merits, and surrounded by the aureola of universal veneration, went to his eternal reward, the souls of ten thousand negroes, whom he had instructed, awaited him in heaven, whilst his spiritual children on earth were five times that number. Since his holy death, numerous favours, attributed to his intercession, confirm more and more the opinion that was entertained of his



sanctity. Such was the life of the first spiritual son of the venerable Libermann, and the first missionary of his society. His place at Mauritius is now filled by his *confrères*, the inheritors of his abnegation, of his charity and zeal for God and for souls.

Justly could Mgr. Collier, two years after the death of this zealous apostle, give vent to his gratitude in the following terms: "Many times I have had reason to bless Divine Providence for having given to Mauritius this admirable missionary, for the edification of the clergy and of the faithful, and especially for the salvation of the poor blacks, of whom God had predestined him to be the apostle and father. Even now (December, 1866), I cannot think of him without feeling compelled to express my liveliest gratitude to God, for having deigned to make the time of my episcopacy at Mauritius coincide with the epoch during which, in His mercy, He had determined to work out the salvation of so many souls, and to shed so many blessings on the diocese."

On the 16th February, 1842, Rev. Father Frederick Le Vavasseur sailed from Brest, and in the middle of July arrived at Bourbon, his native island, to establish the second mission of the Congregation. The negroes of Bourbon were still slaves; but thanks to some zealous members and former pupils of the Society of the Holy Ghost, Fathers Warnet, Monet, and Lefer, and to the intelligent co-operation of several rich slave-owners, their religious condition had been greatly ameliorated in later years. The Government of Lewis Philip, carried on by the movement which was to give rise to the revolution of 1848, and to bring about the liberation of the negro slaves in the French colonies, had at last understood the necessity of preparing them, by religious instruction, to enjoy their free rights, and, thereby, avoid the fatal consequences which followed the abolition of slavery at

Mauritius. It had established a large factory which employed thousands of labourers, called the king's blacks, on whom it had made religious instruction obligatory. The Abbé Monet, who has his place marked out in the closing pages of this history, took especially a prominent part in all the measures in favour of the blacks.

On the property of his own family, at Saint-Suzanne, Rev. Father Le Vavasseur found a *Catechism School* for blacks, taught by his brother-in law, and another established at the extremity of the parish. He could thus, from the first day of his arrival, manifest all his devotedness to those poor people, many of whom had served him during his infancy. He announced to them, that he came to repay them in a most excellent manner for what they had done for him, that he would be their father, and that he brought to them all sorts of spiritual and eternal blessings.

A few months after his arrival, the zealous apostle had established a mission sufficiently flourishing to require new auxiliaries. The holy founder sent him Fathers Collin and Blampin, who, as the mission increased, were followed by other fathers and brothers. It was in a great measure owing to their exertions and influence, that the liberation of the blacks at Bourbon has not been, as elsewhere, attended with disorder, fire, and bloodshed. The peaceful manner in which the change was effected is an eloquent triumph of religion, which by infusing into the hearts of the negroes the balm of Christian charity, had stifled all feelings of revenge, all desire of reprisal on their former masters.

A new religious era commenced. From all sides the negroes flocked around the missionaries and priests, to ask for instruction, and to receive the sacraments. The venerable founder seconded this movement by his

letters, and by his counsels to the missionaries. He encouraged especially Father Le Vasseur in his noble project of instituting for Bourbon and Mauritius the Congregation of the "*Daughters of Mary*," who have since lent such powerful assistance to the zealous efforts of the missionaries.

Numbering but three, the Fathers had, in a few years, brought about many conversions, built several churches and chapels, and endowed the colony with an industrial school for training up the blacks in habits of order, morality, and Christian virtues; and, to the present day, the disciples of the venerable Libermann watch with solicitude, both at Bourbon and Mauritius, over the interests of the abandoned souls, as well as over the education of the higher classes.

A mission less consoling at its outset was that of Hayti, which, in consequence of negotiations between the Holy See and President Boyer, was entrusted, through the mediation of Mgr. Rosati, to the Rev. Father Tisserand. He left France towards the end of 1843, but circumstances compelled him to wait at Martinique for a favourable moment to reach his destination. Here he was suspected by the Vice-Prefect of being the agent of a vile system of espionage, and compelled to betake himself to the English colony of St. Lucia. In this island his ministry was just beginning to be blessed, when a letter from a relative informed him, that the moment for landing at Hayti had arrived. This moment was merely an interruption in the civil war: President Boyer had been expelled and replaced by General Hérard. Amid conflagrations and earthquakes, two armies stood in opposition; the fury of the creoles was excited; and this awful anarchy was but a faint image of the confusion which existed in faith and morals.

The meek and humble missionary gently puts his foot

on that trembling earth, and at once gains the confidence of the new president, who holds with him several conferences regarding the religious regeneration of Hayti. He is allowed to teach catechism, to open schools, and to call to his aid his brother missionaries. Honest magistrates, headed by the minister of public worship, M. Ferry, enter into a league against a corrupt clergy. General Hérard places unlimited confidence in M. Tisserand, and commissions him to write to the Holy Father, in order to reopen the interrupted negotiations.

Father Lossedat soon afterwards brought the answer of His Holiness, Gregory XVI. ; it was a Brief appointing M. Tisserand Prefect-Apostolic and representative of the Holy See at Hayti. With Father Lossedat arrived a former secretary of Mgr. Rosati, M. Cessens, a priest of doubtful morals and suspected faith, who had already deceived Father Libermann during a short stay at La Neuville. This priest soon became the implacable enemy of the missionaries, and plotted their expulsion with considerable skill.

Father Tisserand accepted through obedience the dignity conferred on him, and his title was officially recognized by the civil authorities ; but, suffering from the malignant fevers of those countries, and being resolved to surround himself by worthy assistants, he delayed entering on his function till he would return from a voyage to Europe.

During his absence, anonymous and perfidious articles were published against him in the Haytian newspapers ; calumnious reports were likewise circulated against the civil authorities ; and ministerial changes set aside those who were most religious in their convictions. The secret agent of all these intrigues seems to have been no other than M. Cessens, the recent guest of the venerable Father Libermann.

Father Tisserand returned to Hayti with five priests, three of whom were his *confrères*. He was soon to be followed by other missionaries, priests, and brothers, for the direction of primary schools and seminaries. However, the spirit of the Haytian Government was completely changed; the new ministers, imbued with the principles of Jansenism, and of a so-called liberalism, set little value on the projects of the Prefect-Apostolic; and, from the outset, manifested the most hostile dispositions. They wished him to submit to unacceptable conditions such as these: that the State is, and should be supreme in spiritual as well as in temporal matters, particularly at a period and in a country disturbed by frequent revolutions; that such had been the privileges of Hayti before its separation from France; and that it was necessary to preserve, in all their integrity, the principles of the Gallican Church.

The Prefect-Apostolic had to choose between his duty and a betrayal of his trust. He did his duty, broke off resolutely, and, eighteen days after his arrival, set out for Europe with all his companions. The venerable Libermann felt this disappointment the more keenly, as it was unexpected, and as he had built great hopes on the good religious people of Hayti. In them he had intended to show to Europe what the negro race would be, when instructed by the maxims of the Gospel, and enlightened by the faith of Jesus Christ.

The saintly founder humbly adored the inscrutable judgments of God; but he by no means considered the mission of Hayti abandoned for ever. "I fear for a mission," he used to say, "where everything seems to prosper from the beginning, and whose origin is not marked with the sign of the cross, sufferings, and martyrdom." Every one of his missions will be marked with the sign of the cross; but he trusted in the mercy of God.

His hopes in the case of Hayti were not frustrated. Years afterwards, in 1860, his sons appear once more on the same land. By their means an ecclesiastical hierarchy was canonically established, and, despite constant political convulsions, the church of Hayti has already yielded an abundant harvest. Some of the labourers, in particular Fathers Pascal and Chenay, have gone to their reward, leaving after them no ordinary fame of zeal and holiness. For twenty years, many of their *confrères* have followed in their footsteps; and many, in 1880, still continue, both in the professor's chair, and in the sacred ministry, to promote the religious and scientific regeneration of Hayti.

The apostles of the Holy Heart of Mary had with regret left the Haytian shores. The African missions, as we shall soon see, were merely recovering from their dreadful disasters, when, in 1845, Mgr. Brady, who had recently been appointed Bishop of Perth in Australia, came to ask M. Libermann for fellow-labourers for his distant diocese. In compliance with this prelate's request, and with the express desire of the Cardinal-Prefect of the Propaganda, the venerable founder accepted the mission. In September, 1845, Fathers Thévaux, Thiersé, Bouchet, and two coadjutor brothers, full of zeal, left London to devote their lives to a mission where, according to apparently reliable information, there were two million savages in a state of utter religious destitution. This mission, too, was to be a source of grief to the venerable Libermann. After a long voyage of over three months, Father Bouchet died at Perth, on the 24th of January, 1846, at the age of twenty-five.\* The survivors overran the whole district,

\* Before leaving London, on the 24th September, 1845, Feast of Our Lady of Mercy, this young missionary already had a presentiment of his approaching death. On that day, he said to his *confrères*, "that



and found, to their great surprise, that instead of two millions of souls there were hardly a few hundred savages, who were dispersed over a vast tract of country. As true disciples of Him Who went far into the wilderness to save even one stray sheep, the missionaries generously settled down in so destitute a region. Their house and chapel were two wretched wooden huts, which they had themselves hastily constructed in a forest. Their congregation on Sundays and festivals numbered about a dozen poor persons who had to come from great distances. Money, food, and even the wine required for the Holy Sacrifice began to fail; and soon they felt all the effects of poverty, hunger, and destitution. Their clothes being worn out, the missionaries were compelled to make soutanes of the few linen sheets they had brought from France.

The venerable Libermann shed tears of emotion on hearing of the privations and sufferings of his children; and Rome having been informed of the sad state of things, the Cardinal-Prefect of the Propaganda informed the saintly founder, that under such circumstances he might dispose of his missionaries for another mission. It was then that Fathers Thévaux and Thiersé were sent to Mauritius, where both became most active auxiliaries and true disciples of Father Laval.

Some years later, the venerable Libermann, at the request of the Abbé Dossat, Prefect-Apostolic, undertook the difficult mission of Guiana, which was likewise to bear the seal of the cross. Three months after the arrival of the missionaries, the malignant fevers of Cayenne carried off Father Thoulouze, the superior of the mission. This

he would reach Australia, but only to die a few days after his arrival." He also foretold the chief incidents and trials that awaited them on their mission.

afflicting intelligence was a new sword for the heart of the good father: "I am crucified," he exclaimed; "yes, I am crucified! But I do not complain; provided it turns to the profit of souls, and the good God be glorified!" And, indeed, the good God was glorified, and the souls benefited at Cayenne. Mgr. Dossat administered the prefecture of Guiana until the day of his death, 29th August, 1868. He was succeeded by the Rev. Father Hervé, a worthy son of the venerable Libermann. The present Prefect-Apostolic of French Guiana is the Right Reverend Monsignor Emonet, a member of the Society of the Holy Ghost and the Holy Heart of Mary.

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## CHAPTER IV.

The Missions of Africa to the year 1880.



THE continent of Africa constitutes nearly one-fourth of the land surface of the globe; it is little short of 5,000 miles in length, and at its greatest breadth it measures well nigh a similar distance. With a superficial area of twelve millions of square miles, it is equal to more than three times the extent of Europe and is two-thirds that of Asia. The estimates of its population, as made by approximation upon the accounts given by travellers and explorers, vary from one hundred to two hundred millions of souls. The African missions took too great a place in the life, and too large a share in the affections of the venerable Libermann, not to occupy our special attention.

From a very remote period, Africa recalls to the Church none but mournful memories. When reviewing the five centuries of struggle which were required to plant the cross in a few places; the rapidity with which flourishing Christian communities disappeared amidst unheard-of catastrophes; the ruins heaped up everywhere; the innumerable scourges with which heathenism afflicted those nations, and which civilization only increased by all the miseries of slavery and impiety, we feel inclined to believe that this unhappy continent is not yet freed from the imprecations of the prophets against the land of Mesraim, and that it is still that prison of the desert, wherein, as we

read in the Book of Tobias, God directed the archangel Raphael to shut up the spirit of darkness.\*

During fifteen centuries no mention is made of any of those zealous apostles who followed all the routes of the old navigators; we read of none of those Irish missionaries who have traversed every sea, and landed on every shore. Little historical information can be obtained about the Western coast of Africa. It appears, however, that at an early period the Normans opened different stations in these parts, but that the Gospel was not announced before the arrival of the Portuguese, in the fifteenth century. History relates that the Franciscans and Dominicans accompanied the Portuguese and Spaniards, wherever these nations discovered new countries; and that many churches were erected in the sixteenth century along the African coast. We even read of a bishopric at Congo, of a metropolitan see, and a dynasty of Catholic kings.†

\* Ever since the paternal anathema was uttered against Chanaan, the effects of the mysterious malediction upon him and his dusky descendants have awakened the wonder and curiosity of mankind. Never was a prophecy more literally fulfilled. For over four thousand years the sons of Cham have been "the servants of servants," and their country the classic land of oppression and slavery; while the ineffaceable black complexion, which distinguishes them from all other peoples, constantly attests that they are a race apart, and confirms, by an irrefutable ethnological and historical fact, the divine chastisement decreed against them. The black colour of the negroes is inexplicable to science, and it will never be proved that Noah had two sons white, and one black; nor will it be shown *how* or *when* the black colour became the distinctive feature of the African tribes. (See two interesting and solid articles on Africa, *Dublin Review*, January, 1879, by Mgr. H. Vaughan, Bishop of Salford; and the *Monitor*, October, 1879, "The Dark Continent.")

† The first navigators who appear to have visited the Western coast of Africa were the mariners of Dieppe. Sailing from

All the Christian conquests were swept away by a civil war, and by an invasion of savage tribes who descended from the mountains of the interior. In 1547, four Jesuits vainly endeavoured to raise the ruins of this desolate mission. Forty years afterwards, a new attempt was made, at the request of a king who had kept the faith, and with the powerful aid of Philip II., King of Spain. Later on, the Society of Jesus returned to this mission, and at different periods the French Capuchins joined the Spanish Franciscans to strengthen the remnant of the former missionaries.

The first details supplied by history concerning those missions are found in the account of a voyage which two Norman Capuchins, Fathers Alexis de Saint Lo and Bernardin Renouard, addressed from Rufisque to their superior. Having left Dieppe on the 11th October, 1635,

Normandy, they directed their course to the Canaries, and landed, in 1364, at Rufisque, which they named "The Bay of France." A century later, the Portuguese, who had discovered St. Thomas in 1405, and Congo some time after, ascended the river Senegal, seized on the French stations, and behaved very cruelly to the blacks. The latter, tired of their oppressors, appealed, in 1545, to the Dutch, who, having expelled the Portuguese, built the celebrated fort of Nassau (*Gorée*). In 1617, Biram, King of Cape Verde, surrendered the island of *Gorée* to the Dutch, who remained its masters until 1677, when the French admiral, D'Estrées, took possession of *Gorée*, Rufisque, Portudal, and Joal. The English became masters of the country in 1758, and it was only in 1779 that the French succeeded in expelling them. During the great Revolution, France once more lost this colony, at the same time that she was deprived of her dependencies in America. The English again occupied *Gorée* in 1800, Rufisque, Joal, &c., in 1802, and St. Louis in 1809. By the treaty of 1814, these colonies were restored to France; but it was not until 1817 that she regained possession of them. The trading settlements of Assenie, the great Bassam, and Gaboon, were subsequently added to the French possessions on the African coast.

they landed on the 3rd November at Rufisque, and were heartily welcomed by both Europeans and negroes. In this seaport, which was a rendezvous for men of all creeds and nations, as also at Portudal and Joal, these zealous religious spent nine months preaching the Gospel. From other letters (1641), we learn that God so visibly blessed their labours, as to enable them even to work miracles. But persecution soon began. The Dutch seized the converted territory, poisoned one of the monks, and expelled the others. In 1646, twelve Capuchins from Andalusia arrived in the Portuguese possessions, but the annoyances they received from the Government forced them to retire and preach the Gospel in other lands: only three of them reached Sierra Leone, where they laboured until their death. About the year 1673, the Propaganda once more entrusted the mission to the Capuchin Fathers, who were soon forced to leave again. In 1674, Father Gondislavo, a Dominican, recommenced the work of evangelization; but after a few years the mission was once more abandoned.

The missions on the Eastern coast of Africa were still less successful. There, despite the repeated efforts of the Augustinians, the Discalced Carmelites, the Jesuits, and the Vincentians, desolation increased, until it reigned supreme, in consequence of the fanaticism of the Dutch and the conquests of the English.

If success has not crowned more visibly the efforts of the zealous apostles who have hitherto laid down their lives for the salvation of the Africans, they have at least set a noble example to future generations; and, no doubt, sown a seed which, in the proper season, will yield an abundant harvest. We may assign as a principal cause of their want of success the inhuman practice of slave trade, which took away, each year, the negroes by hundreds of



thousands, often from the very tribes evangelized by the missionaries. Fourteen millions of human beings have not disappeared from those unhappy shores without exasperating the natives, and attaching an indelible odium to the name of the religion which the pirates were supposed to profess. To this unnatural traffic it is unnecessary to add the scandalous picture of European morality, the covetousness and ambition of Christian nations, which have but too often betrayed their mission in the colonies. Under such circumstances, not only were the missionaries unable to establish a native clergy, but they could not even maintain a Christian population. Unhappily the cross, in the eyes of several Christian Governments, seemed to be a mere weapon of conquest, and their ambition once satisfied, the rights of the Church were violated, and the spiritual jurisdiction wantonly sacrificed to temporal dominion.

For centuries the descendants of Cham and Japhet—“*dealers in ebony,*” as they pleasantly but cruelly called themselves—unceasingly plied their nefarious traffic, inhumanly deporting thousands of unhappy negroes, while the African deserts were strewn with corpses, and the wretched natives debased below the level of brutes. Most maritime nations engaged by treaty in a commerce, which Gregory XVI., in accordance with the humanizing traditions of the Roman court, whose glorious privilege it was to have abolished slavery in mediæval Europe, stigmatized as “the opprobrium of the Christian name.” The Encyclical of this holy Pontiff is conceived in the same spirit that dictated the anathemas launched by Alexander III., Leo III., Paul III., and their successors, and the energetic protestations of our Catholic missionaries.

At the beginning of the present century, Africa was but

ruin, desolation, ignorance, and barbarism. About the year 1819, a holy bishop, visiting the mission of Angola, drew of it the following picture: "I have seen it and have grown sad; I have shed tears, because I have found all there, so to speak, without a leader, without light, without the cross. Everything is wanting; priests are wanting, because there are no means of instructing them, and those that are there are totally ignorant; churches are wanting, for they are all destroyed or appear to be so. Religion is almost extinguished."\* Such at least was at that time the condition of the Portuguese colonies.

In 1822, the heroic Mother Javouhey, in her turn, traversed these desolate shores, St. Louis, Gorée, Dakar, Joal, St. Mary of Gambia, Sierra-Leone. . . . She was not frightened by ruins, after having, in the face of the demolishers of Cluny, founded a congregation, which has outnumbered the most prolific swarms that have ever in past centuries filled the hallowed cloisters of this great abbey. She was indefatigable; everywhere building schools, establishing hospitals, opening catechism classes, and distributing her daughters wherever she could find a spot to pitch her tents. The zealous foundress of the Sisters of St. Joseph longed with all her heart for a society of missionary priests, and she even wrote these prophetic words: "We shall wait till the Lord will mark with His seal him whom He destines for this great enterprise." But what could a woman do, left alone to her powerless efforts? French Senegambia presented even a more sorrowful picture than the ruins of Angola.

\* "*Illam aspexi, mærorem concepi, lacrymas effudi, quia omnia, si fas est dicere, sine duce, sine luce, sine cruce inveni. Omnia desunt; desunt sacerdotes, ob defectum illos instruendi, et qui existunt, sunt omnino ignari; desunt Ecclesiæ, quia omnes vel dirutæ sunt vel quasi dirutæ apparent. Religio est pene extincta.*" (*Relatio ad S. C. de Prop. fide.*)

It numbered only two or three priests, barely sufficient for the few Europeans established in the colony. These priests were under the jurisdiction of a Prefect-Apostolic, whom the civil authority seemed to watch as a suspected subaltern. Some governors affected to confound all religious denominations by pretending to concentrate in themselves both religious and civil authority. Nay, several showed themselves more favourable to Islamism than to the faith of their native land, by erecting sumptuous mosques, by bestowing on a Marabout the honour of bearing an episcopal crozier, and by tolerating the public mimicry of our most sacred ceremonies.

In those vast countries, Divine Providence had stored up immense treasures for Catholic France, and should justly expect from the Eldest Daughter of the Church a persevering apostolate, and the extension of a generous protection over the missionaries. An ordinary spirit of patriotism would have sufficed to inspire so wise a policy. Unhappily, few administrations understood so exalted a mission; and, as a consequence of this want of religious zeal and political prudence, we no longer see the islands of Réunion, Mauritius, and Madagascar, adorned with those cherished names by which the French sailors, with a legitimate pride, loved to salute them as "The Isle of Bourbon," "The Isle of France," and "New France."

There remained the part of the coast subject to England, or to the blacks who had emigrated from America. Providence made use of the activity shown on this point by heresy, to inflame new apostles with the desire of hastening to these unhappy countries. In less than fifty years, the different evangelical societies established along the coast over fifty institutions, the principal of which were at Sierra-Leone and Liberia, a twofold asylum, opened, the former by England, and the latter by America,

for emancipated negroes. Sierra-Leone rapidly attained a population of 40,000 souls, and Liberia double that number, by gathering together blacks belonging to nearly all the African tribes. These were great centres, whence Protestantism might easily spread along the coast, and penetrate into the interior of Africa.

In 1847, there were in Sierra-Leone twenty-four houses of worship, belonging to nineteen different sects; sixty Protestant ministers disposed of £200,000 annually for a propagandism as active as it was sterile. "They do," says Mgr. Truffet, in a letter addressed to the Bishop of Savoy, "They do all that man can do; they have fine houses, artificial lawns, mercantile establishments, and even Bible readers, but God only can make Christians."

In 1833, Mgr. England, Bishop of Charleston, urgently drew the attention of the Propaganda to the activity of heresy in these parts. The Council of Baltimore seconded that zealous appeal, and in 1840, sent M. Barron, then Vicar-General of Philadelphia, to an American colony established at Cape Palmas. After labouring for some time on the coasts of Africa, M. Barron repaired to Rome, to give an account of his labours and of his hopes. Being appointed Vicar-Apostolic of the two Guineas, and having received episcopal consecration, he returned to his mission, where he arrived in January, 1842, with an Irish priest, the Rev. John Kelly, and a catechist.

Passing through Paris in 1843, Mgr. Barron visited Our Lady of Victories, nearly at the same moment that the venerable founder exposed to M. Desgenettes what he called his critical situation: Hayti, Mauritius, and Bourbon, appeared all at once to be shut against his missionaries. "I still remember," he wrote afterwards to M. Desgenettes, "that I descended with you the steps of Our Lady of Victories, and I said to you: 'Father, we

are greatly embarrassed:’ ‘How is that?’ you replied: ‘We have no land:’ ‘What!’ you asked, ‘have you no money?’ ‘Oh! no, the Blessed Virgin never permits me to be in want of that; but we do not know where to go; all the doors are closed against us.’ You tried to console me. I did not want that; for notwithstanding the kind of distress in which I found myself, with eager missionaries, who might have been discouraged by so lengthened a delay, I felt in my heart a peace and an assurance, the cause of which I could in no way discover. I remember well having told you, at the corner of your fireplace, that I was certain we would soon have a mission, that I was too quiet, and could not explain such tranquillity, except by the presentiment that the Heart of Mary was preparing a mission for us, and that this good Mother kept me in repose in the meantime. I left Paris that very day. On the day following, Mgr. Barron, Vicar-Apostolic of the two Guineas, came to present his homage to Mary, at the altar of her most Immaculate Heart, and to speak to you of his immense vicariate, and of his want of priests. . . . It was only after ascending the holy altar, that the thought came to you of speaking to Mgr. Barron about us. And on the morrow, on my arriving at La Neuville, I had to leave again for Paris to bring to a termination an affair which Mary had already begun for us.” Such was for the new congregation the origin of the important missions of Africa.

After several conferences with Mgr. Garibaldi, the representative of the Holy See, with the Vicar-Apostolic, and the minister of the admiralty, definitive arrangements were concluded and approved of by the Congregation of the Propaganda. The departure of seven missionaries was resolved upon, under the most advantageous conditions, and with all the precautions capable of insuring

success. "The zeal of M. Libermann," says a person who took part in all the preparations for the departure, "was only equalled by his prudence and watchfulness to employ every means, according to God, in order to ensure success. He often sent me to gather the most detailed information concerning the state of the negroes, and he spoke to me on the African missions with an exactness which showed that he had studied these matters thoroughly, and that he had them continually present to his mind. He knew to a wonderful degree how to moderate all natural impulse, in order to reflect and wait for God's own time."

The fathers of the Holy Heart of Mary, who first had the honour of being selected for the African Missions, were : Fathers Bessieux, Francis Bouchet, Roussel, Maurice, de Régnier, Audebert, and P. Laval. Most of these were former students of Saint-Sulpice, like their *confrères*, who already laboured in the missions of Bourbon and Mauritius.

Before leaving the community, they solemnly consecrated their persons and labours to our Blessed Lord, and to the most Holy Heart of Mary—a custom which has since been preserved in the institute. The venerable father addressed to the young missionaries a few words of exhortation, which, like so many fiery darts, penetrated their souls, and inflamed them with zeal, generosity, and confidence.

All felt very deeply the separation from a father whom they tenderly loved, and whom almost all were never again to see on this earth. The venerable father wished to accompany them himself as far as Paris, there to offer them once more to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, before the altar of Our Lady of Victories. The missionaries then left for Bordeaux, where they were to embark, whilst their



saintly father returned to La Neuville with a new aspirant, for whom he had gone to Issy. Another had arrived during his absence. Such was, for the moment, with the addition of a young negro, the whole *personnel* of the novitiate.

The seven missionaries were joined by three zealous youths, who had begged as a favour to accompany them. These first missionary brothers were: John Fabé, Gregory, and Andrew. After a pilgrimage to *Notre Dame de Verdélais*, the ten apostles embarked at Bordeaux, on the 13th of September, 1843.

On the 10th October, they arrived at the island of Gorée, which they left on the 26th of the same month, and landed at Cape Palmas on the 30th of November.

As the hostile dispositions of the native tribes prevented them from reaching the several posts they were to occupy, they remained together for some time at the place of their landing, one of the most unhealthful spots on the whole coast. They inaugurated their apostolate on the Feast of St. Francis Xavier (3rd December), by a solemn procession, during which they chanted the psalms, *Exurgat Deus*, and the *Magnificat*. The Rev. Father Bessieux preached, by means of an interpreter, in a village, to a crowd of astonished blacks, whilst, not far off, a sacrifice was being offered to the demon.

It was absolutely necessary to learn the language of the natives. All, therefore, zealously applied themselves to the study of the "*Grebo tongue*," in which they were instructed by Davis, the king's brother.

During the first fortnight, no one felt the effects of the climate. But, though the holy founder had, with all the care in his power, sent a good store of provisions, their food was far from being sufficient. They lived on rice, to which they added some black coffee in the morning, and

at noon, a small quantity of dried meal, or salt fish with some indigenous roots called *patates*.

Brother John Fabé was the first attacked by fever, on the 14th of December; Brother Andrew on the 15th; on the 17th, Father Maurice and Brother Gregory; on the 20th, Father Bessieux; on the 21st, Fathers de Régnier and Audebert. On Saturday, 30th, Father de Régnier expired, at the age of thirty-six, after having received the last sacraments, happy to offer up his life for the conversion of infidel Africa. He bequeathed to Father Bessieux a relic of our Lord's Holy Robe—his only treasure. A little before he died, he wrote to the venerable Father Libermann these last lines, which reached La Neuville along with the news of his death:—"Tell my friends that I am happy to have left all for our Divine Master. If I had still to do what I have done, I would do it a thousand times for the love of Jesus and Mary. I admire the mercy of God in our regard; I would not exchange my lot for all the goods of the world. Do not be discouraged, my dearest father. When all will be lost, then Mary will show herself, and everything shall be set aright again:—*'Sive vivimus, sive morimur, Domini sumus et Mariæ.'*—*'Whether we live or die, we belong to our Lord and to Mary.'*"

Two letters, in immediate succession, were despatched from La Neuville with instructions which might have saved the survivors; but neither of them reached its destination. Left to their inexperience, the missionaries were rapidly carried off like a defenceless prey. At the moment Father de Régnier breathed his last, nearly all his companions were ill of fever. On the day following, an Irish brother, who had previously come with Mgr. Barron, suddenly fell dead of sun-stroke. A few days after, brain-fever carried off Father Roussel, who died on the 23rd January, 1844, aged 29 years.

When Mgr. Barron arrived amongst them, after having settled the affairs of the mission in Europe, he found them almost entirely restored, and ready to repair to the post assigned them. But the dispositions of the inhabitants had changed in the meantime; some colonists, by their murderous and incendiary proceedings, had exasperated the blacks, who were resolved to exterminate the whites. The Vicar-Apostolic and the missionaries had to withdraw precipitately, until the storm would subside, and to seek, meanwhile, another field for the exercise of their apostolic zeal.

Under the guidance of Mgr. Barron, Fathers Laval and Maurice set out for the trading stations of Assenie, where Father P. Laval was carried off before he had completed his twenty-seventh year (July 13th, 1844). His fellow-priest, Father Maurice, with brothers Fabé and Andrew, returned to France, in the same vessel as Mgr. Barron. Fathers Audebert and Bouchet were sent to the Great Bassam. The first died there at the age of thirty-one (July 6th, 1844); and Father Bouchet died at sea, off Capé Lahous, on the 28th of May, 1844, aged twenty-seven years.

Only one letter, a long expected one, arrived from Mgr. Barron, announcing two more losses to the afflicted superior, describing the desperate state of the survivors, the breaking up of the mission, and the prelate's resolution to tender his resignation to the Holy See, and to return to America.\*

\* Letter of Mgr. Barron, 7th August, 1844: "Mgr. Barron, seeing the mission dispersed, went to Rome, obtained a dispensation from his burden, and returned to the United States, where he refused several times to accept the charge of a diocese, preferring to devote himself to the work of the mission—first at Philadelphia, then at St. Louis (Missouri), and lastly in Florida. He was in Savannah, when the yellow fever broke out (1853). Exhausted by the fatigue he underwent in carrying everywhere the consolations of religion, he fell

This letter of Mgr. Barron arrived at La Neuville at the very moment the venerable father was about to open the annual retreat. He should naturally consider the first mission utterly ruined. Although grieved to the heart, he was compelled, during an entire week, to taste alone the bitter chalice of affliction, and it was only after the retreat that he was enabled to share his sorrow with his children. His resignation was as admirable as his grief was intense: "The evil is very great," he wrote; "but I hope that from it will proceed the salvation of this vast country; and if God demands that we all perish for His glory, we must prostrate ourselves before Him, and allow Him to act: we do not work for ourselves, we do not live for ourselves, but for Him alone."

As yet, the venerable father only knew of the deaths of Fathers de Régnier and Roussel. On learning those first trials, he immediately wrote to his children letters full of paternal tenderness. "I confess to you," he said, "that my heart is pierced with a double sword; my soul is deeply affected, whenever I think of you: We consider you as real confessors, and I hope you will share the reward of the martyrs. I cannot express to you what I feel within my soul. My affection for you all has increased an hundredfold. I grieve for your sufferings, and yet, I bless God for having been pleased to send them to you. I feel compassion for you, but I rejoice in your afflictions. I am sad and overwhelmed, and yet my heart is filled with joy and peace. I pray to God for you, and give Him thanks for whatever befalls you. As for you, be good and faithful in the love of God. Love one another,

sick. A hurricane having burst on the house in which he was, the roof was carried away, and the dying prelate exposed to the fury of the elements. Transported to the house of a pious Catholic, he soon after expired, at the age of fifty-three."

preserve the peace and union of the Lord among you. God's blessings will follow your crosses." (Letter, 24th July, 1844.)

The saintly founder was not to be discouraged. The forsaken blacks became dearer to him, in proportion to the price he had paid for them. "O unfortunate Guinea!" he exclaims, a few months afterwards, "I feel as if it all lay upon my heart! The miseries of these poor souls oppress and overwhelm me. Shall we abandon them? Never! That cannot be; I am more hopeful than ever. Probably there are in these vast regions more than fifty million souls, who have never heard the good tidings which our Saviour brought upon earth. It appears to me that our good Master commits them to our care. Will these millions of souls be abandoned till the end of the world? Impossible, I would die of grief. I am persuaded that the Lord made us send victims to those countries, to draw down His blessings upon them. In that disaster, I see the design of Providence. All precautions taken were useless. . . This blow, far from discouraging our *confrères*, has only inflamed the ardour of their zeal.

"All begged to be sent to Guinea; several have insisted most earnestly. I was obliged to forbid them to torment me any longer. The mission of Guinea is undoubtedly the most difficult. Still, we must make every effort to save these immense regions. I have the greatest hopes in this respect. I will never give up the project of succouring those millions of souls, so sadly deserted, even if the well-grounded hopes which I entertain at present were to be frustrated. Pray for poor Guinea. I had a foreboding of these misfortunes, and even felt almost certain that they would happen; for eight or ten months I had no rest, day or night; I could not get Guinea out of my mind." (Letter of 28th December, 1844.)



The venerable founder thought that all his African missionaries had succumbed, when, in a letter to the Central Council of the "Propagation of the Faith," he wrote the following words:—"Never did I feel so deep a sorrow as that occasioned by the death of my brethren, on whom I had founded such great hopes. I can say, however, that I am far more concerned for the annual loss of the millions of souls that inhabit those countries. . . . Our Lord did not require of our missionaries the labours of the apostles; but He wished to give them a share in His sorrowful passion. I hope our merciful Jesus will add to their sacrifice a small participation in the merits of His own. They were victims sent to Guinea for the salvation of that vast country. They have been immolated to the glory of God. May His holy Name be blessed and His justice appeased! May the reign of mercy now begin!" (Letter, 1st October, 1844.)

The reign of mercy had already commenced: Father Bessieux and Brother Gregory had survived, and had both taken their departure for Gaboon. After having remained for some time under a miserable shed, they took up their abode in a little wooden hut, which barely protected them from the drenching rain and burning sun. Cut off from all communication with Europe, they were also reckoned amongst the dead: during eighteen months their names were inscribed in the mortuary list, and their souls recommended to the prayers of the Society.

After six days' stay at Gaboon, the Rev. Father Bessieux wrote on the 2nd June, 1845: "God forbid, reverend father, that we should abandon unfortunate Africa! If we are destined to succour forsaken souls, here surely is our place. To withdraw after the first disappointment would be, in my opinion, to fail in our duty to God, in what we owe to these unhappy people, and in



what our vocation obliges us to do; it would be equal to acknowledging ourselves vanquished by the degradation of these very blacks, whom we have adopted as our friends." The good missionary drew a melancholy picture of the surrounding population, and concluded by saying he had baptized thirty-two children during the month of Mary.

The soul of Father Bessieux was far from being at rest; for he found himself at war with three methodist ministers, who had the advantage of disposing yearly of £17,000, a part of which sum they employed in exciting the blacks to rise and expel the missionary and all the French. This struggle lasted two years, at the end of which the three ministers were themselves compelled to retire.

This courageous missionary was the same who, after having been providentially appointed superior of his *confrères*, was destined to become the first bishop of a new African church.

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## CHAPTER V.

The Missions of Africa (*continued*).

**T**HE more difficulties increased, the greater became the confidence of the venerable founder, the more extensive his plans, and the higher his aspirations. The first trial was hardly over, when he set out to visit the warmest and most healthful localities of the South of France, in search of a good site for a vast missionary establishment. His intention was to found, at the same time, a house of acclimation for Africans, a place of retreat for invalid missionaries, and a school wherein the blacks would receive a complete education. Here some of the negroes would be initiated in all the arts of civilization, or would develop their vocations for the priesthood and the apostolic life. It was during this journey, that M. Libermann became acquainted with the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of Castres. The venerable Mother Superioress, Mme. de Villeneuve, took up the work of the negroes with that devotedness which characterized her too short career, and engaged to furnish to the African missions those admirable sisters, who have been ever since, at Dakar, Gambia, and Gaboon, zealous and most useful auxiliaries to the missionaries.

Unable to go himself to Rome to promote the interests of his dear and forsaken missions, M. Libermann deputed his colleague and confidant, the Rev. Father Ignatius Schwindenhammer, who there met Mgr. Barron, and then only learned that one of his *confrères* was still alive on the coast of Nigritia. The resignation of the Vicar-Apostolic

being accepted, the Propaganda resolved to entrust the administration of this mission to the society which had paid so dearly for the first fruits of its apostolate. Besides the right acquired by so many sacrifices, it was easy for the Rev. Father Ignatius to show that a Congregation could alone successfully continue the work already commenced. For what means were there to replace the missionaries struck down by death or sickness? How could proper assistance be rendered to the mission itself? How could the convalescents be provided with a house of retreat in their own country, except with the aid of a society, having at its disposal ready and devoted subjects, and whose mother-house is always open to them? The danger to which one is exposed in a country with manners so different, with public scandals so frequent, and with a climate that acts so powerfully on all the faculties, prove even more forcibly the necessity of regular and community life.

Moreover, how could isolated secular priests suffice for the long and arduous labour which is indispensable to learn the numerous languages of the various African tribes? Finally, how obviate in so difficult a mission, the inconveniences resulting from inevitable and frequent changes of superiors, and withal, keep up traditions in the administration, unless by means of a religious body whose members would be all animated by the same spirit, and guided by the same views, in which the Superior-General could communicate to the new superiors a thorough knowledge of past experience, and thus avoid modifications, which want of information and personal ideas might be calculated to introduce.

The plan of an institute for negroes was likewise submitted to the approval of the Sacred Congregation, which bestowed the highest eulogy on the authors of this generous project: "It seems to me," said M. Libermann, "that the

work thus conceived, being essentially apostolic, and founded for all the tribes of the negro race, could nowhere be better situated than under the eyes of the Vicar of Jesus Christ, who is entrusted with the solicitude of the Holy Universal Church, and who possesses the plenitude of apostolic power for the entire world. To place such a work in any particular diocese would be, so to say, to encroach upon the rights of the one Supreme Pontiff, established by Jesus Christ for the government of the whole Church. Moreover, if it were placed within the territory of any particular nation, it would be subjected to the caprices of every government, and the foundation would be incessantly impeded in carrying out the desired object, whilst at Rome it will follow a sure and uniform course."

It was subsequent to this journey of the Rev. Father Ignatius to Rome, that the affairs of Hayti were decided, and the Rev. Father Tisserand appointed Prefect-Apostolic. This missionary assuredly drank to the dregs the bitter cup of trials and disappointment. The soul of Father Tisserand, naturally so peaceful, was thrown from tempest to tempest, or rather, to use his own language, "from miracle to miracle," through Saint-Sulpice, La Trappe, Our Lady of Victories, La Neuville, and the mission of Hayti, which had been the dream of his life. That dream, with all his hopes, had vanished before the unreasonable pretensions of the Haytian government, when, in March, 1844, he returned to Europe, where a serious illness reduced him to the last extremity.

The following year he was appointed Prefect-Apostolic of Guinea. Anxious to precede his *confères*, who had received the same obedience, he took another road, and embarked on the steam-packet, "Papin." On the 6th December, a violent storm drove the vessel on a sand-

bank, in sight of the coast of Mogador. The following is the account of an eye-witness:—

“The wind lashed the furious sea against one side of the vessel. It became dangerous to stay on the deck, which was continually swept by the billows. It was eleven o’clock at night. The passengers, one hundred and fifty in number, overcome by the awful thought of perishing in the waves, assembled in the interior of the vessel. Father Tisserand had, by his kindness, won the esteem and affection of everyone. His countenance, on which an unruffled peace was mingled with a somewhat austere melancholy, veiled the energy with which he was gifted. Amidst the roaring waves, which in an instant might change the abyss into a tomb, he boldly took the command of the battered vessel to save the souls of his fellow-travelers, as it seemed impossible to save their bodies. He strengthened himself by a short prayer, the deep recollectedness of which struck all the passengers. Then he rose to speak: in the name of all, he invoked Mary the ‘Star of the Sea;’ he conjured them to think of the Lord Jesus, Who in a moment was to be their Judge; and he urged them to prepare, as he did, to appear before His tribunal.

“All, or nearly all, humbled themselves before God, and asked and received absolution ‘*in articulo mortis.*’ ‘That missionary,’ says a sailor who survived the disaster, ‘that voice, that gesture, had something of the inspired about them? We remembered that we were Christians, and we wished to die as such;’ and he added, weeping: ‘what would we have done without him?’ Among the passengers, there was a poor despairing Jew, who was crying that he did not wish to die in such a manner. All at once, choked with sobs, he throws himself into the arms of Father Tisserand, and implores him to save him.

‘Alas! my friend,’ said the missionary, ‘I can do nothing against the tempest, either for your life or my own. And before God, I can do nothing for your soul, as you are not a Christian.’ ‘But if I receive Baptism, do you promise that God will pardon my sins, and receive me into His mercy?’ ‘Oh! I do promise it to you,’ said the missionary. ‘God will grant you mercy through the merits of Jesus Christ, His Son, Who died for all, for the Jew as for the Gentile, provided you believe in Him and be baptized.’ The Jew fell on his knees, declaring that he wished to believe and hope as the missionary believed and hoped.”

The witness who related this scene presented the water to the missionary, who gave the neophyte the name of the patron of the day, St. Nicholas. Soon after, the waves penetrated the interior of the vessel, the terrified passengers rushed on deck, when an impetuous surf swept into the abyss the missionary, the neophyte, and seventy-five passengers.

The venerable founder learned the intelligence of this new misfortune through the public papers, on New-year’s day, 1846. He gathered all his strength to write the following lines to the missionary’s mother and friends, whom this blow had struck as severely as himself: “I do not write to acquaint you of the sorrowful event which overwhelms us with grief. You have, no doubt, heard of it, and your hearts are plunged in profound desolation. I would endeavour to console you, if I were not myself in the most heart-rending affliction. I suffer the three-fold grief of having lost an intimate friend, who was dear to my heart, and a zealous fellow-labourer; of leaving an important mission, deprived of him on whom I had founded the fairest hopes; and of seeing a family for which I cherish the greatest attachment, plunged in sadness and desolation; and I can afford no solace to



your sorrow. Our loss is very great, and what can we say? God gave us this dear friend; He has taken him away from us. Blessed be His holy Name!

“Let us prostrate ourselves in His holy presence and say to Him: Lord! what Thou dost is well done. We would have been happy to possess for some time longer this well-beloved child of Thy Holy Mother. We would have wished to enjoy the consolation of seeing him labouring for many more years for Thy glory. But our designs were not Thine. Thou art our Master, and we are Thy poor servants. Thou hast been pleased to destroy our most cherished hopes, and to rend our hearts with the deepest sorrow. We submit to Thy adorable will, we adore what we cannot understand, and we make this sacrifice from the fulness of our souls.

“If we are in need of support, let us have recourse to the Virgin Mary. She knows that she guided all the steps of this faithful and dear child of her Heart. We are therefore confident that, if she led him to undertake this disastrous voyage, it was to open sooner to him the gates of the heavenly mansions. We should not grieve for him; he now possesses what he so ardently desired, and he leaves us here in this world of sufferings and afflictions. But let us be consoled; our time will also come, and we shall have the happiness of meeting him again in glory.” (Letter to Mme. Tisserand, 1st January, 1846.)

At the same time that the wreck of the “Papin” was announced, the congregation received into the novitiate a most promising subject, who appeared as if sent by God to make up for the loss of M. Tisserand. The Abbé Truffet had relinquished, at a mature age, his position as professor of Rhetoric at the College of Pont-de-Beauvoisin, with the intention of entering the Seminary of Foreign

Missions in Paris. He changed his resolution before the altar of Our Lady of Victories, and entered the humble novitiate of La Neuville. The piety of the new novice was equal to his learning. Being pressed one day to give an account of what a friend called the strangeness of his vocation, he replied : " When God has spoken, man must only kneel down and adore."

M. Libermann founded the greatest hopes on M. Truffet, with whom he thought to raise the missions of Africa from their ruins. Full of courage, he resolved to make a new appeal to the episcopacy and to the Holy See, and, in consequence of this resolution, undertook, during the year 1846, a series of painful journeys, which terminated at Rome. He visited in succession Strasburg, Besançon, St. Dié, St. Claude, Lyons, Clermont, Le Puy, Annecy, Chambéry, and other towns. Everywhere his work was received with sympathy, and even with enthusiasm. On the evening of the 28th June, he entered Rome once more, to participate in the solemnities of the Feast of SS. Peter and Paul.

The venerable founder was accompanied on his journey by Father Blampin, a member of his religious family. This missionary, after having for three years preached to the negroes of Bourbon, found himself greatly exhausted. His superior ordered him to take care of his health, and refused him permission to sing at Solemn Benediction, on the day of the First Communion of some poor negroes. Father Blampin, however, forgetting that obedience was better than sacrifice, went to the choir to direct the music, when suddenly his voice failed. No medical treatment was able to bring about the slightest improvement, and soon, being quite useless on the mission, he had to return to Europe, where, for two years, every remedy proved a complete failure. In the month of November, 1846,

being in Rome, he accompanied Mgr. Pompalier to the *Trinita dei Monti*, where he met the venerable Mother Makrena Lecziniscawska, who had been banished from Poland by the Russians. This pious nun induced Father Blampin to begin a novena to the *Mater Admirabilis*.

On the following Saturday, 6th November, Mother Makrena, seeing that he was as bad as on the first day, asked him to accompany her to the *Mater Admirabilis*. She then requested him to say, "Jesus;" Father Blampin made a vain effort. "Say Jesus, I tell you," continued Mother Makrena. Father Blampin wrote on a slate "*impossible*." "Say Jesus, Mary, Joseph, I tell you again," urged Mother Makrena. Father Blampin, making a new effort to speak, was at once perfectly cured. Obedience made him recover what disobedience had caused him to lose. He pronounced aloud the sacred names of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. The joyous peals of the convent bell soon brought the religious with their pupils to the feet of *Mater Admirabilis*, where Father Blampin recited aloud the Litany of Loretto, and joined in chanting the *Te Deum*. Next day he was able to say the last Mass of the novena without the least effort. A few days later, he was presented to his Holiness, Pius IX., who authorized the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in the modest sanctuary of the *Mater Admirabilis*. The little slate, which Father Blampin had used as a medium of conversation, was the first *ex-voto* suspended at the altar of our Admirable Mother. To discharge a debt of gratitude, the venerable Libermann came some time after to offer up the Holy Sacrifice before the Madonna, who had so miraculously restored one of his zealous missionaries to his society and to the abandoned souls.

The following touching incident is connected with the marvellous cure of Father Blampin. When the holy founder

was on the point of setting out for Rome, a brother of his Order said to him : " Ah ! my Reverend Father, allow Father Blampin to go to Rome; the Blessed Virgin waits for him, to deliver him from his infirmity." The holy servant of God attached but little importance to the good brother's suggestion. After having obtained so signal a favour, Father Blampin addressed to Father Libermann a brief account of the miracle. On hearing it read publicly in the community, the brother who had foretold the intentions of Mary felt so deeply moved, that the holy superior could not but remember his prophecy, and admire the simplicity of his faith and confidence.

During his stay in Rome, M. Libermann submitted to the examination of the Propaganda a long and remarkable memoir, in defence of the African missions. In this document he examines thoroughly the objections brought forward against those missions, and, without hiding or lessening difficulties, proposes the means of overcoming them. According to him, the all-important point is, to act, from the very outset, on a general and well-determined plan, and to pursue its execution with patience and perseverance. The end of this plan should be the formation of a complete Christian Society, which would give to these nations all that they require, not only faith and every supernatural advantage, but also agriculture, arts, trade, and schools, so that this young church might have not merely scattered neophytes, isolated churches, and a few wandering missionaries, but might draw upon its own resources, furnish its own catechists, priests, and bishops, and finally, advance side by side with the Christian churches of Europe.

This proposal involved the question, then warmly discussed, of a native clergy. The plan when applied to Nigritia, whose climate is so terrible to Europeans, could

hardly be contradicted, especially if its realization was strongly supported by a great missionary establishment at Rome, and by the experienced guidance of a religious institute, which would direct and control every effort that would be made, to bring about the conversion of this unhappy country. The wise founder never viewed this thesis in any other light.

The result of this journey to Rome was the erection of a new Vicariate Apostolic, comprising the two Guineas and Senegambia, and extending along the coast, for a distance of 1,200 leagues without any limits in the interior. M. Truffet was raised to the episcopal dignity, with the title of Bishop of Gallipoli *in partibus infidelium*. His consecration took place on the 25th January, 1847, in that same church of *Notre Dame des Victoires* where he had been called to the apostolate of the blacks. But the consecration of the new prelate seemed to be less for earth than for heaven: he merely appeared for a few days to his infant African church, which he had saluted with these beautiful words: "We are not about to establish in Africa the power of Italy, France, or any other country of Europe, but solely the holy Roman Church, apart from all nationality and all human systems. With the grace of God, we will divest ourselves of all that is simply European, and retain only the thoughts of the church, which are those of God."

When asking an association of prayers from the bishops of Savoy, his native province, Mgr. Truffet wrote as follows: "God has given the negro race to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, in order that this abandoned people may receive the effusion of the apostolic treasures, which, at Pentecost, have been deposited in the Heart of the Mother of Jesus. Mahometanism, which denied the divinity of the Son, should receive from the mother the



first blow of destruction. Cape Verde is the extreme point to which Islamism has extended in the West; it is there that it shall commence its retrograde movement towards Arabia, which shall become its tomb, as it was its cradle."

Animated with such fervent dispositions, the bishop of the blacks arrived in his vicariate. Relying too much on the vigour of his constitution, he thought to live solely on the light nourishment of the natives, and in his fatal illusion he had well-nigh drawn all the missionaries into the same path of ruin and death, when at the end of six months, he was carried off, on the 23rd of November, 1847, by a pernicious fever, which lasted only three days.

On receiving this news, the venerable father wrote to his children in Africa. "All that I can say, all that I can do, is to bow my head, to prostrate, to humble myself before our God of mercy and majesty, and to say to Him, that all He does is well done. He has been pleased to take this victim, He has done well, and my heart rejoices, not because He has taken him away—this pierces my soul with sorrow—but because He has done all that He wished to do. I am perfectly convinced that His designs in so doing are designs of mercy and not of justice." (Letter of 15th January, 1848.)

He also wrote to Eliman, King of Dakar, to Soliman, nephew of that prince, and to all the chiefs of the blacks, who, though still pagans, bewailed the death of the Bishop of Guinea :

"Salvation and benediction of God, the Father and Giver of all creatures !

"My heart has been broken with sorrow, not alone because I have lost in the good bishop a very dear friend, but especially because you no longer possess him who



loved you all so tenderly, who loved all the black men. I wish you could see the afflictions of my heart, for my heart is yours, my heart belongs to the Africans !”

And further on, he continues : “ Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the God of the Christians, the God of the whole universe, the most loving Saviour of all men, is beautiful, great, powerful, amiable, glorious, and merciful. He is filled with love for all men, He loves all men equally ; blacks, as well as whites, are all His most beloved brothers. If they are good and pious, they will, after this sorrowful and troublesome life, enjoy happiness without measure in His immense temple of glory which is heaven. I am the servant of Jesus Christ ; He wishes that I should love all men as He loves them ; but He inspires me with a love much more ardent and tender for his dear brothers the black men.” (Letter, 31st January, 1848.)

In announcing the death of Mgr. Truffet to the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda, M. Libermann immediately proposed a successor, and at the same time asked the nomination of a coadjutor with the right of succession. Far from losing courage, we can see that, had not the revolution of February broken out a short time after these events, he would have endeavoured by still more extensive plans to extend his influence over all the European colonies. He even wrote to this effect to Cardinal Wiseman, and he had been long before in correspondence with a zealous Irish priest, Reverend Father Hand, who founded (1842) near Dublin the admirable seminary of All-Hallows, for the formation of priests for the English colonies.

The African mission, amidst all its disasters, had at last found its head in Mgr. Bessieux, who from the beginning had supported the weight of a most laborious apostolate. Mgr. Kobès, one of his *confrères*, was appointed his co-

adjutor. These two prelates were destined to lay more firmly than ever the foundations of the African church.

Up to the present year, 1880, the sons of the venerable Libermann have established numerous and important missions on the Western, Eastern, and Southern coasts of Africa. The missionaries can now be numbered by hundreds, and the souls regenerated and saved by thousands. Amidst apparently insurmountable difficulties, the venerable Libermann never lost courage; for his confidence was in God, and he knew the necessity of sacrifice, particularly in works that wage an open war against Satan and the passions of men. Africa had been for centuries the stronghold of Lucifer. Armed with the cross, the holy founder was certain to dislodge the spirit of evil, and he was resolved never to desist. The disciples have imitated the heroic perseverance of their master, and the Lord has blessed their labours. After the first severe trials, God deigned to preserve during many years some of the chief superiors of the two great Missions of Senegambia and Gaboon: Mgr. Kobès lived until 1872, and Mgr. Bessieux until 1876. Mgr. Duret, who succeeded the former prelate, died in 1875, after having spent nearly thirty years on the African Missions, and was replaced by Mgr. Duboin; whilst a venerable missionary, Mgr. Le Berre, now continues the work of the saintly Mgr. Bessieux.

During forty years a great number of missionaries of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost and the Holy Heart of Mary, both priests and brothers, have fearlessly succeeded each other on the African soil. Many have nobly breathed their last on this field of honour; others have gloriously fought till their exhausted strength compelled them to return to Europe, in order that having recruited themselves, they might re-enter the battle-field with renewed vigour. From day to day the soldiers of Christ increase

in number; the work of conquest proceeds; and thousands of abandoned souls are being wrenched from the deadly grasp of the spirit of evil.

At the present day, the extensive missions of Sierra Leone, for a long time confided to Father Gommen-ger, are entrusted to Father Blanchet; those of Congo, Cimbabesia, and the Central Cape in Southern Africa, to Father Duparquet; whilst those of Zanguebar, on the Eastern coast of Africa, Zanzibar, Bagamoyo, and Mhonda in Ussigua, have been for many years under the active direction of Father Horner, the well-known Liberator of the African slaves. Nothing could exceed the zeal which this valiant missionary has displayed in redeeming the unhappy negroes exposed for sale like cattle in the public markets of Zanzibar. "How heart-rending for a missionary, and how sad for a Christian," exclaims this worthy disciple of Libermann, "to think that for two pounds one could purchase from slavery a child of six or seven years, and that often larger sums are spent upon frivolous and dangerous objects!"

With Mahometanism and Protestantism along the coasts, Feticism and Cannibalism in the interior, and idolatry everywhere, the spirit of perdition has for centuries reigned supreme over the dark continent. But now, the eyes of the Christian world are at last fixed on this most desolate portion of the globe. A spiritual crusade is being organized for its conquest. Hundreds of combatants—where thousands would be needed—advance from all sides, vigorous and fearless. True disciples of Jesus, noble soldiers of the cross, armed with the power of God Himself, covered with the buckler of faith, consumed with the burning zeal of apostles, they carry out the divine mandate: "*Euntes, docete omnes gentes!*"—"Go teach ye all nations!"

Africa is to this age what the Holy Land was to the

ages of Christian chivalry. Now, as then, the noblest of Europe's children, inflamed with a holy ardour, generously leave home and kindred to face disease and death, in order to bring the glad tidings of redemption to destitute savages, who never heard the sweet names of Jesus and Mary. The hour of Africa's regeneration seems to have struck at last. The venerable Libermann, like another Peter the Hermit, has louder than any other raised the cry of liberty in favour of the captive negroes. His voice echoed throughout every region in Christendom, and everywhere stirred up the sympathies and enthusiasm of the chosen modern knights ; and since that man of God has first sounded the call to arms : *Dieu le veut !* many a heroic phalanx, and many a noble leader have come forth from every land and joined the sacred cause, not to measure swords with the Moslem scimitar, not to free the material city that was once stiled the daughter of Sion, but to defeat the enemy of mankind, and to rescue innumerable souls from an odious and infernal bondage.\*

\* Besides the Congregation of the venerable Libermann, several other societies have recently been founded especially for the evangelization of the negroes : 1st. *The Society of the African Missions*, founded in 1856, by Mgr. de Marion Brésillac, at Lyons ; these missionaries are at Dahomey, Porto Novo, and along the Slave Coast ; 2nd. *The Institute for the Missions of Nigritia*, founded at Verona, by Mgr. Comboni, in 1867. In 1872, the same prelate established another Institute for sisters, called the "*Pious Mothers of Nigritia*;" 3rd. The Society of Missionaries, founded by Mgr. de Lavigerie, Archbishop of Algiers, for the conversion of the Arabs of Algerian Sahara, and for Central Africa ; 4th. St. Joseph's Foreign Missionary Society of the Sacred Heart, founded at Mill-Hill, near London, in 1870, by the Very Rev. Dr. Herbert Vaughan, at present Bishop of Salford. The Missionaries of St. Joseph bind themselves by vow to be "the Fathers and servants of the blacks, and to undertake no other work that might withdraw them from this special mission." In 1871, they began their apostolic labours among the negroes of America, with a view of after-

Catholic Europe, unable to supply priests for the whole of Africa, must do as Palestine did: send out apostles and missionaries, until they have established everywhere a native clergy. This is one of the chief reasons for placing bishops over the vicariates, as the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda has expressly declared. Africa must be converted by the Africans. The conversion of so vast a continent will be a work of centuries. For many generations to come, European priests will be needed as

wards pursuing their conquests amongst the abandoned souls of Africa. 5th. An Institute of black sisters, called the "*Daughters of the Holy Heart of Mary*," founded at Dakar by Mgr. Kobès. They already form several communities, and in union with the "*Daughters of Mary of Bourbon*, the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, and the Sisters of St. Joseph, render immense service to the cause of religion in Africa, especially in the missions confided to the disciples of the venerable Libermann.

Several other religious bodies, the Capuchins, Friars Minor, Franciscans, Jesuits, Vincentians, Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Christian Brothers, the Brothers of Plœrmel &c., and a goodly number of secular priests, labour with great zeal in the various parts of Africa. We find the sons of St. Francis at Morocco, the Jesuits at Annobon, Corisco, Fernando Po, Madagascar, in the islands of Nossi-bé, St. Mary, Mayotta, and Bourbon, as well as inland up the Zambesi; the Oblates of Mary at the Cape and Port Natal; the Franciscans and Vincentians in Tunis and Tripolis; the Capuchins in the Seychelles islands and amongst the Gallas; the Vincentians in Abyssinia; in Egypt the Friars Minor of the Observance, and others. "The harvest indeed is great," but for so great a task, "the labourers are still few." How many, for the acquisition of perishable goods, leave home and relations; but, how few are willing to leave friends and country for gaining to God immortal souls, "bought with a great price" (1 Cor. vi. 20). Few, alas! think that the poor blacks, too, "are redeemed not with corruptible things, as gold and silver, but with the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, as of a Lamb unspotted and undefiled" (Peter, i. 18, 19). "Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that He send forth labourers into His harvest" (Matt. ix. 37, 38).



pioneers of the Christian Church throughout Africa ; and for centuries they will be required to guide and sustain it, even after many natives shall have entered the ranks of the priesthood. God has, no doubt, most merciful designs upon the hitherto desolate children of Cham. The Africans may be a thousand years behind our modern civilization, but in less than a thousand years, Africa may become as civilized, and perhaps more Catholic, than Europe or America . . . when Ethiopia will at last lift up her head, and clasp her hands, and bow down, and be converted.

Every Christian should strive to be an apostle, and to aid by his alms and prayers the generous missionaries who spend their lives and fortune to bring about so consoling a change. May the vocations for the African missions increase from year to year, and may those noble-hearted heroes succeed in soon gladdening the Church, by bringing to her pale the many millions of souls, which Jesus, her Divine Spouse, has so lovingly purchased at the infinite price of His most Precious Blood!

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## CHAPTER VI.

Development of the new Society in France, 1841-1848.



THE great difficulties experienced by the sons of the venerable Libermann during their first years on the missions, far from drying up the source of vocations for the apostleship of the negroes, increased it, on the contrary, to such a degree, that the society of the Holy Heart of Mary, whilst lavishing on distant shores the sweat and life of her missionaries, was enabled to take deeper root and to extend on the soil of France from which it sprang. Numerous young men of great promise begged to join the sacred phalanx. It was urgent to find means and room to form them to the religious and apostolic life. The mother-house was enlarged, completely altered, but soon found insufficient for the ever-increasing number; still, La Neuville was too dear to the hearts of all, not to be preserved at any cost. Two new wings, rather expensive for the infant institute, were added to the old building. These constructions were likewise too narrow to afford accommodation to the new-comers, who, especially since the institution of the "COADJUTOR BROTHERS," had almost doubled the number of the new religious family.

In 1844 was established the "House of the Holy Heart of Mary" at Noyon, in the suburbs of Amiens. Another branch-house was founded at Bordeaux, at the request of M. Germainville, the well-known apostle of the soldiers, who, with his characteristic earnestness, en-

treated that his dear friends of the barracks, and the poor working-men of France should be looked upon with the same eye as the forsaken blacks of Africa.

In the community of Amiens, the young priests awaiting their appointment to the missions, those who had returned to France to recruit their health, as also the members who aided the superior in the administration of the Society and the direction of the novitiate, found an ampler means than at La Neuville to keep alive within their souls the fire and flame of the apostolic spirit. Here, as at Bordeaux, the missionaries were in charge of the soldiers, who every evening found a hall open to receive them, a teacher to instruct, and a catechist to evangelize them.

The Fathers also regularly taught catechism every Sunday to the little Savoyards. Their instruction was followed by a frugal repast, which the venerable founder loved to honour by his presence, and to enliven by his fatherly exhortations. Besides the missions which they preached in the different parishes of the diocese, they directed in the town an orphanage, the community of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, and the association of the Holy Family. The venerable founder went three times a week to give instructions to the young pupils of the agricultural school of Saint Fuscien-aux-Bois.

As many among the aspirants, who at this period begged to be admitted into the Society, had not gone through their theological studies—what until then had only been a rare exception—a house was requisite for their formation, previous to their admission into the novitiate. Divine Providence supplied this want.

Near Amiens was situate an ancient abbey, founded, in 1137, by Gérard, or Guermond, Lord of Amiens, and Vidame of Picquigny. According to a reliable tradition,

St. Bernard himself conducted thither the monks of his Order. The Cistercians remained in peaceful possession of *Notre Dame du Gard*, till the great French Revolution. They had just spent their last treasures in restoring the buildings, when they were driven from their hallowed retreat; and the monastery, with its monumental church, was demolished.

It was only in 1815 that the monks of La Trappe reappeared on the ruins of their cherished abode. Dom Germain, a former pupil of the Seminary of the Holy Ghost, was elected abbot in 1818: it was he who rebuilt the church and restored the monastery.

The revolution of 1830, after having sacked St. Acheul, suspended its devastation before the Abbey of Gard, and did not disturb its holy inmates. M. Libermann, when a seminarist, visited this pious solitude during his vacation of 1835, and expressed his feelings in the following lines: "I am at present at Amiens. On yesterday, I visited 'La Trappe.' Truly, I do not know how one can have courage to amuse oneself, after seeing those admirable men immolating themselves for the love of God, by such rigorous and such uninterrupted penances. . . . The love of God has no vacation; let us always love Him, but let us always love Him alone." Little did the poor acolyte then think that eleven years afterwards he would be at the head of this ancient monastery, the father of a new generation of religious and apostles.

The revolution of 1830, and the cholera of 1832, had stopped at the threshold of the venerable abbey; but modern progress boldly penetrated into its hallowed precincts. A railway line was constructed through the middle of the demesne, and thus the silence and peace of the austere Cistercian cloister were necessarily disturbed. The Trappists abandoned the abbey, and retired

to *Sept Fonds*, in the diocese of Moulins, carrying with them the sweet consolation that religion still kept watch over the tombs of their fathers.

It was on the Feast of "All Souls," 1846, that the missionaries of the Holy Heart of Mary took possession of this celebrated abbey. After the divine office, during which their minds were filled with the recollections of seven centuries, a new era was solemnly inaugurated by the chant of the hymn *Veni Creator*. St. Bernard's anthem, *Salve Regina*, followed, as if to signify that the universal protectress of the Cistercian churches would still remain in her own dwelling, and continue to be, as she had been for the Cistercians, the Queen and Mother of mercy, the life, delight, and hope of the children of her Immaculate Heart.

The acquisition of *Notre Dame du Gard* enabled the venerable Libermann to establish the "SENIOR SCHOLASTICATE," for the religious and ecclesiastical training of the students in philosophy and theology; and the novitiate of the "COADJUTOR BROTHERS:" two foundations which are the life-springs of the institute. The reverend Father Schwindenhammer was appointed superior of the new community, whilst the holy founder retained the direction of the novitiate of the fathers at La Neuville, and then at the house of the Holy Heart of Mary, Amiens.\*

The spirit of fervour of the Cistercians, whom the vener-

\* In the society of the venerable Libermann, the novitiate crowns the religious and ecclesiastical formation of the subjects. During their theological studies, they are usually promoted to the minor orders, or even to the subdeaconship and deaconship. In the novitiate they are raised to the priesthood, which renders them worthy victims for the religious profession, and ready labourers for the missions.

able Libermann called "*an order of angels*," revived; and, their virtues bloomed anew beneath the hallowed cloisters of the ancient abbey. Soon *Notre Dame du Gard*, with its priests, brothers, and scholastics, presented the imposing aspect of a numerous and flourishing institution. It was a blessed abode of peace, happiness, and piety; but the usual joy and devotion seemed increased in every heart when, from time to time, the venerable founder would make his appearance with his novices, to spend a few hours in the midst of his children. Then, especially, was reflected on every countenance the leading maxim of the first Christians, which has been since adopted as the distinctive motto of the society: *Cor unum et anima una*.

This spirit of union of hearts and minds existed, in an admirable degree, among the scholastics: "Our good young men," wrote the venerable father, "are full of fervour and contentment; the rule is very well kept amongst them; we have never a reproach to make them; they are pious and studious; and, in recreation, they are cheerful, open-hearted, and perfectly united. The chapel is very devotion-inspiring, and the ceremonies are performed in a most edifying manner."

The holy founder neglected no opportunity to instil into the minds of his children the most entire devotion to the Holy See, and the most filial submission to the august and infallible lieutenant of Jesus Christ. He wished the theological teaching, both dogmatic and moral, to be derived from the purest sources; and his constant solicitude was to see the scholastics, novices, and fathers possessing a thorough knowledge of ecclesiastical history, canon law, the Gregorian or plain chant, the rubrics, and the sacred ceremonies of the Church.\*

\* One of the venerable Libermann's disciples, the Rev. Father Léon Le Vasseur, has won a world-wide renown by his many solid



M. Libermann seemed to have longed for the hour when he could establish, on a broader and firmer basis, the other portion of his religious edifice—the institution of the “COADJUTOR BROTHERS.” The brothers increased and multiplied within the holy precincts of Gard, and by their humility, docility, and holiness greatly rejoiced the heart of the good father. It is with them he spent his sweetest recreation hours. He took particular care to impress on their minds the virtues adapted to their holy vocation, and to that effect he composed for them special rules, a few extracts of which will sufficiently show what were his views regarding that edifying, useful, and blessed portion of his religious family :—

“The brothers are received into the service of God as members of the congregation, for the purpose of assisting the missionaries in their apostolic labours, by rendering them the services they stand in need of, to enable them to be more exclusively devoted to the discharge of their sacred duties” (chap. i., art. 1). “The brothers should consider themselves as children of the Holy Heart of Mary, and as members of the family ; they ought, however, look upon themselves as the most humble in the house of God, and should honour in the missionaries the person of Jesus Christ Himself” (art. 3). “In order that the brothers, like the missionary priests, be irrevocably bound to the service of God, they shall not be sent to the missions before having taken the three perpetual vows of *Poverty*, *Chastity*, and *Obedience*, which they will take at the end of the novitiate” (art. 5). “As soon as a brother has taken the vows, he is a member of the

works on the Roman Liturgy. No liturgical writer has laboured more zealously, or more successfully, to bring back into every diocese of France, and other countries, strict exactness and uniformity in the various parts of divine worship.



Congregation, which, from that moment, shall consider him as a child of the family, and treat him as such for the remainder of his life. He shall have a share in all the prayers and good works of the Congregation; and after his death he shall be entitled to its spiritual treasures and holy sacrifices" (art. 9). "The brothers shall see the will of God in that of the superior who commands them, and shall deem themselves most happy to obey the Divine will" (chap. iv., art. 5). "They shall obey, even should they foresee that great inconveniences or difficulties might arise from the thing commanded" (art. 7). "They shall not imitate those cowardly and lukewarm persons who are afflicted and ill-humoured, when they have not, or are deprived of what could please the senses; but they shall live simply, and rejoice in having an occasion of sacrificing to God the comforts of this short life" (chap. v., art. 11). "They shall, however, take a prudent and reasonable care of their health, which belongs to God, and must be employed for His glory" (art. 12). "When on the missions, they shall cherish for the natives a tender and affectionate love; they shall pray unceasingly for their salvation, and be ready to sacrifice everything for the spiritual welfare of these poor souls" (chap. viii., art. 8). "They shall be on their guard lest this meekness and charity degenerate into weakness; for, as a general rule, the blacks should see that kindness shown to them is the result of duty, and of the interest taken in their behalf; and, that firmness in correcting their faults springs likewise from love of them" (art. 12).

"They shall not be contented with benefiting these poor souls as regards their eternal life. They shall also endeavour to communicate to them all the useful knowledge which they themselves have acquired, thus to render this life more comfortable, by stimulating them to work,

by helping them to promote their temporal well-being, and by accustoming them, little by little, to a more civilized manner of living" (art. 15).

*“Conclusion.”*—“The brothers who will strive to observe the holy precepts contained in this Rule, will be recognised by the Mother of God as the children of her Heart. They may be certain that they will secure their sanctification, that their life will be a life of peace and bliss in this world, and that they will contribute to the salvation of a great number of souls. They may appear with confidence before their Sovereign Judge; they will be happy to hear those words so full of consolation: Come, ye blessed of My Father, come and possess the kingdom prepared for you from all eternity; you have been faithful in the little that has been confided to you, enter now into the joy and happiness of your Master, and of My Holy Mother. Amen.”

The wise founder set so great a value on this portion of his institute, that, from the very beginning, he confided its direction to one who could best animate it with his own spirit. Father Ignatius Schwindenhammer was the first novice-master of the brothers, and it was he who infused into them that spirit of fervour and regularity which has since produced such consoling results in the various communities of the society.

The community, having recovered from the shocks it experienced owing to the many losses sustained in the African missions, was now favoured with a few years of comparative and fruitful tranquillity, which, after a painful birth, are always necessary to the growth, even of the strongest foundations.

But other labours and trials commenced at the moment when the saintly founder, after six years of heroic struggles, might have imagined that his sufferings were at

an end. Not the least difficult of his cares had been to keep perfectly united the wills of all; to animate them with the same obedience, the same spirit of devotedness, despite all doubts, disappointments, and some inevitable defections. But nothing could disturb the resignation of the holy founder. Had he retained his children longer around him, and prolonged to its farthest limits the novitiate of his first disciples, contradictions would still have assailed him, even in his own religious family.

But it was not in his power to allow his children the full time of probation. Pressing and absolute wants on the missions tore them hastily from his paternal solicitude. Scarcely were they assembled when it became necessary to disperse them; and scarcely were they separated, when unexpected difficulties, disappointments, trials, disasters, and the evil genius of the negroes—which with a certain terror he calls the “*Demon of Guinea*”—caused to spring up painful disagreements, if not among the members around him, at least among some others.

And why should we be more astonished at this than he himself? Even the most united and most fervent communities have not always been entirely free from those passing difficulties, which are the unavoidable result of the relations of man with man. We can never forget the words of a venerable old man, who had long experience in the midst of a solidly constituted society: “If two angels were to live together, according to the conditions of men, twenty-four hours would not pass without contradictions.”

We shall mention but one example of such difficulties, in order to have occasion to quote an admirable letter of the servant of God, which will afford consolation to all those who may have to pass through similar trials. Among the first members called by God to the congrega-

tion, there was one concerning whom the judicious superior had never for a moment entertained the least shadow of doubt. A short novitiate had been sufficient to manifest clearly the will of God regarding his religious vocation.

Nevertheless, from the very day of his consecration, a kind of secret reserve rose up like a wall between the soul of that missionary and the soul of his superior, to whom God had destined him to be closely united. Absence in a distant mission, the effects of a burning climate, the fatigues of the apostolate, separated him more and more from his superior. At the end of four years a further union seemed no longer possible. The admission of a subject, not well fitted for the position to which he was sent, furnished a specious pretext for an outburst which left little hope of his perseverance. This trial came on M. Libermann just at the period when only mournful tidings arrived from Africa. It was then that the sorrow-stricken father wrote the following letter, wherein affliction and resignation are mingled with the tender love and burning zeal of a true servant of God :—



“MY DEAR CONFRÈRE,—I feel compelled to reply immediately to your letter, in which you speak to me of M. B——, and of your sending him back to me. I approve of what you have done. It is I who am guilty of having admitted this subject; I must bear all the consequences. But you have rent my soul by your sentiments of discouragement, and the misconceptions under which you labour. Your letter shows me your great dejection and your extreme anxiety concerning the future state of the Congregation. I do not reproach you for thus plunging me into new afflictions. I consider your words

as a sword in the hands of God, to tear my soul to pieces. He overwhelms me with the weight of this work of affliction and patience; and, in addition, He wishes that the strongest, those who are better than myself, should strike me, instead of assisting my weakness. May His Holy Name be blessed, provided that His poor work be forwarded! I see it progresses; and it will progress more and more.

“Take care, my dear brother, you are not aware of the designs which God has regarding you. You see only what is before you; you do not see the intentions of Providence. Neither do I see them; but I perceive serious unfaithfulness in this thought, if it be wilfully entertained. If, after you have abandoned this work of God, I lose courage, and forsake it like you, how shall we stand before our Sovereign Judge? Yet, against one reason which you have, I could advance a hundred; I who am overwhelmed with the charge of superior; I who have on me all the responsibility of the work; I who receive the most violent shocks of all the afflictions and trials which Divine Providence is pleased to send to this work; all the troubles which crowd on me from the missions already undertaken, and the missions to be undertaken or to be abandoned; all the cares connected with the direction of the novitiate, the studies, and the different houses of the missionaries; order to be established, the rules to be perfected, and a foundation to be laid on a solid basis. I am here alone, with only one companion who is really able to assist me in establishing and preserving perfect regularity, in keeping up correspondence and treating with various persons, in properly selecting subjects, and in doing a multitude of other things which are to me a source of cares and preoccupation. From the moment God placed me at the head of this work, I have never had one



instant of peace and consolation, for my soul is, as it were, blunted with regard to all that might be pleasing or consoling, whilst, on the other hand, it is extremely sensible to sorrow: and the Divine Bounty has not spared me in that respect. Imagine what a pain, what a weight it must be, not to have an instant in the day to think of the salvation of my soul; and, nevertheless, as you know, my most ardent and continual desires tend to retreat and solitude. Although I feel the greatest horror to be in relation with the world, a repugnance which sometimes seems to me almost insupportable, still, I must be there; and though I feel the greatest difficulty in conversing with men, yet I must do so continually. I am obliged to give instructions, from morning till evening, though the simplest subject of meditation disturbs me three hours before the time for giving it has arrived. Everything in me seems to be opposed to my remaining any longer in this state. All the inclinations of nature and of grace are opposed to that state. It would seem as if there were not a fibre in my body, nor a movement in my soul, which does not incline me towards solitude.

“Yet I would consider it a crime even to entertain that thought. God binds me to this work, so crucifying, but withal so dear to my heart; I am well aware that, in order to obey His Almighty will which retains me, I must sacrifice my peace, my consolation, my happiness, and, what is infinitely more, the spiritual progress of my soul, for which I shall henceforward be unable to do anything. This I bewail bitterly; I ask pardon of God for my grief and my tears, and I submit with all the energy of my soul to the Divine will, which presses and chains me down so rigorously. I think I may say with truth, that my soul has never made the least effort to slacken the chains which the Divine will lays upon me. It is better for me to be



the last in the kingdom of our Heavenly Father, and to go there with submission to His holy will for the salvation of so many abandoned souls, than to be in the first ranks by leaving the path which that adorable will has traced out for me.”

Besides the above, he had to write two similar letters, and, in spite of his repugnance and tears, to negotiate with a stranger the conditions on which his *confrère* would be admitted into another society. This happened at the moment when the death of M. Tisserand, first Prefect-Apostolic of Guinea, had already broken the heart of the afflicted father. After this death, no greater sacrifice could be asked from the struggling Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary. Still the holy founder is resigned; he concludes the correspondence by this sorrowful ultimatum:—

“I would act against my conscience, were I to consent to what you ask of me. If you leave without my consent, I shall not be guilty. Instead of greater perfection, as you now imagine, you may find uneasiness, troubles, anxieties of mind, and perhaps discouragement. Do you think that I endeavour to frighten you? God forbid! Do not imagine that I try to retain you by every means; I shall not do so. My act of resignation is made. I have been pained, and I am well aware that I have not been pained for the last time. I do not ask you to remain, but I do not give my consent to your leaving. The only thing I ask from you is: ‘*Quod facis, fac citius.*’ (Forgive me if I make use of this sentence; I assure you that I have no intention whatever of making an unpleasant allusion.) Take a decision, and let me know the result.”


God seemed only to have waited for the despatch of this letter to withdraw the bitter chalice. It was crossed by another letter, and several others followed in rapid suc-

cession, announcing that the temptation had entirely disappeared. "I firmly believe," said the missionary, "that M. Tisserand, on entering heaven, has obtained my deliverance. . . . I now cherish for you the tenderest love, and feel animated with a spirit of total submission to you. I feel that I am but one heart, one soul with you. . . . It is an affection of faith which did not exist before."

The temptation, which had lasted four years, had entirely disappeared, and, soon afterwards, the missionary was recalled to France to share the solicitude of the founder. This was at the moment when all the forces of the congregation should be concentrated, in order to attempt, on a new field of action, one of the most difficult undertakings recorded in the history of religious institutes.

## CHAPTER VII.

The Society of the Holy Ghost from its foundation to its dispersion,  
1703-1793.

IKE our Blessed Saviour the saints have nearly always their precursors, but especially those of them who are called to enrich the Church with new religious Societies. The works of Divine Providence are not unfrequently preceded by a long preparation, during which God seems, as it were, to make a trial of His designs. Thus, from old hermitages, often founded by some unknown anchorite, have sprung into existence flourishing monasteries, which in after times became bright centres of learning and civilization.

Were we to trace the origin of an ancient abbey, we could not accomplish our task without seeming to have recourse to those charming legends, which, like a mysterious halo, usually surround the infancy of such foundations. But here we have to treat of a comparatively recent institute, established in the capital of France, a society which, during the last century, seemed to have been instituted as the basis of the work for the conversion of the negro race. At its origin we find the man, whose principal features, character, and existence, clearly foreshadowed the life and mission of the venerable Father Libermann.

Claude Francis Poulard Desplaces\* was born at Rennes, on the 27th of February, 1679, of an honourable family,

\* Archives of the Seminary of the Holy Ghost. Life of M. Desplaces, by M. Bouic. *Gallia christiana*, t. vii. col. 1042. Autograph treatises of M. Desplaces.

which had fallen into rather straitened circumstances of fortune. He was the only son and only hope of his father, who destined him for the bar, trusting that he would one day better the position of his family, and walk in the footsteps of his godfather, M. de Mainbœuf, then president of the parliament at Rennes. Claude's first thesis prognosticated a brilliant future. The success which attended his studies threatened, for a while, to carry him into the ways of the world, when, during a retreat, the hand of God stopped his course, and dispelled all the dreams of his parents. By the light of Divine grace, the youth remembered that, for the first seven years of his childhood, he had been clothed with the white habit of Our Lady, to whom his pious mother had consecrated him. He recalled to mind the seven subsequent years of graces which he had spent under the vigorous, yet paternal discipline of the Society of Jesus. He meditated on the various occasions on which his life had been saved from the greatest dangers. We have before us, written by his own hand, the reflections he made during this retreat. The following is his fundamental resolution: "I must, so to speak, change my nature. I must throw off the old Adam, and put on Jesus Christ. Henceforward, my Divine Saviour! I must be entirely Thine, or else, I have only to sign my own reprobation. Thou wishest, O my God! that I should be a man; but Thou wishest me to be one according to Thine own Heart. I understand what Thou demandest from me, and I am most willing to grant what Thou askest."

M. Desplaces was, however, as yet, far from perceiving the designs of God upon him, when he gave up his worldly projects to embrace the ecclesiastical state. Having obtained the consent of his parents, he went to

continue his studies at the college of *Louis-le-Grand*, at Paris. Though feeble and sickly, the young student mortified himself to such an extent, that his director was obliged to check his ardour. The fervent youth deprived himself even of what he strictly required, that he might succour the most destitute of the poor. He bestowed his first care on the little *Savoyards*, and afterwards on the poorest of the students. To the former he gave whatever he had; the latter he placed in communities and charitable institutions; and he contrived to share with some others the moderate repast which was served him at the college. Soon he gathered three or four table-mates, whom he supported by asking alms in town, and demanding the remnants of the meals at the gates of various educational institutions.

To provide his *protégés* with a shelter, he rented a house in the *Rue-des-Cordiers*, at the very door of the Sorbonne. He furnished it, and became himself housekeeper, attendant, commissioner, and bursar, all to all. His humility was so great, that he cleaned the shoes of twelve of the poorest amongst his fellow-students. His ardent piety at this time is exhaled from the glowing notes which he wrote during a retreat. He contrasts his former fervour with his present state, which he considers as a relaxed one: "What," he exclaims, "were formerly my thoughts and desires? What my way of living and my ordinary occupations? I could only think of God; my greatest grief was not to think of Him always; I only desired to love Him; and to gain His love, I would have renounced the most lawful attachments of life. I wished to see myself one day bereft of everything, living only on alms, after having given all away, and of all temporal things to retain none save my health, which I wished to devote entirely to God in the labour of the missions, too happy if, after having

inflamed the whole world with the love of God, I could shed the last drop of my blood for Him Whose favours were almost unceasingly before my mind. I was never tired speaking of His blessings. I found too few persons to whom I could relate them. I only derived pleasure from those conversations in which God was not forgotten. I scrupulously reproached myself for having remained silent when an occasion had presented itself to speak of Him. Those who spoke on other topics were intolerable to me. A considerable portion of my time was spent before the Blessed Sacrament, where I passed most of my recreations. For the greater part of the day I was engaged in prayer, even when going through the streets; and I was troubled the moment I perceived I had lost the presence of Him Whom alone I endeavoured to love. I saw few persons, and I loved solitude. With many tears, I deplored my blind infidelities. Blushing through shame, and filled with terror at myself, I remained plunged in the most humble sentiments. I despised myself, and made this contempt visible to those with whom I came into contact, by frequently humbling myself before them. This virtue drew down on me many of God's blessings. I sensibly felt them, particularly when in presence of the most adorable Sacrament of the altar. Although I had the happiness of communicating often, I did not do so as often as I desired. So great was my eagerness for this Sacred Bread, that when partaking of it, I could not restrain the torrents of my tears. . . . If in those days I felt so deeply grieved at my little fidelity, what affliction should I not experience to-day, when I see my present deplorable state of tepidity?"

At the time of this retreat (1705), he did not as yet see clearly what God demanded from him. He called his work "The Institution of the poor Students," without



precisely knowing or examining what was to be its future destiny. "All I attempted at first," he says, "was to maintain quietly and noiselessly four or five pupils." He did not even know what would become of himself. He was but a simple cleric, at the most an acolyte, when he had already gathered nearly seventy students around him; he was not yet a priest, when he drew up the regulations which, for a century and a half, were followed in the Seminary of the Holy Ghost. Such was the humble origin of a noble institution, which, in the middle of the present century, was to enter, under the leadership of a new founder, the second and more glorious phase of its existence.

In the regulations of M. Desplaces we notice, among other things, "That the principal Feast of the Institute is 'Pentecost,' and the Patronal Feast, 'The Immaculate Conception : ' the first to obtain from the Holy Ghost the fire of divine love, the second to obtain, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, angelic purity." "Only those students shall be received, who cannot support themselves elsewhere." "All without exception shall perform the duties of the house, each in his turn for a week." "They are recommended blind obedience to the orders of their superiors." "They shall elevate their hearts to God as often as possible in the course of the day; to remind them of this, one shall be appointed to repeat from time to time the words: *Sursum corda.*"\* "Only philosophy and theology shall be studied, and authors, even appertaining to these matters, should not be read without consulting the superior." "They shall make it their duty to

\*It is still a pious custom at the Seminary of the Holy Ghost, that when the clock strikes during recreation hours, a student utters in a loud voice, *Sursum corda!* At these words all conversation ceases, and amid a solemn silence, everyone communes for a while with his God.

adhere, on all points of doctrine, to the decisions of the Church, to which they shall be entirely submissive." "They are not allowed to take out degrees, so that they may continue to live the obscure and hidden life in which they are brought up."

The chief object of the institute, according to the tenor of the rules, and the intentions of the founder, was to form disinterested, learned, and zealous priests and missionaries, ready to evangelize the poor and infidels, and to fill the humblest and most laborious positions, for which priests cannot be found but with difficulty.\*

The number of poor students had considerably increased, when, on the 17th December, 1707, M. Desplaces was ordained priest by the Bishop of Meaux. The future appeared then secured; for nearly two years all went on successfully, when in the space of four days, an attack of pleurisy reduced the young founder to the last extremity. All Paris seemed in emotion. Persons of the highest rank came to visit him. In the midst of this general affliction, surrounded by his dear students, he received the last Sacraments of the Church, and on the 12th October, 1709, at the early age of thirty, breathed forth his soul into the hands of his Creator.

His successor, M. Garnier, only lived to bring the youthful society through the severe winter of 1709. He died in March, 1710, owing, perhaps, to an excess of sufferings and privations. Twice orphans in a short period, the poor seminarists had to pass through a great

\* "*Pro fine habet in ecclesiasticæ disciplinæ zelo, et amore virtutum, Obedientiæ præsertim et Paupertatis, sodales educare, qui sint in manu Superiorum parati ad omnia : ubicumquæ pauperibus et etiam infidelibus evangelizare, munia ecclesiastica infima ac laboriosa magis, pro quibus ministri difficillimè reperiuntur, non modò suscipere, sed etiam toto corde amare, ac præ cæteris eligere.*" (Regulæ, Pars I. cap. ii. art. i.)

crisis, which is clearly revealed by their choice of a third Superior, M. Bouic, then a simple deacon, whom they had known only for four months. After these first trials, God bestowed on the rising institution a twofold blessing, doubtless to give it a sign of His special protection, and a pledge of a long and glorious future. Two superiors M. Louis Bouic, who died in 1760, and M. Francis Becquet, both eminent men, conducted the Society of the Holy Ghost from 1710 to 1788. There is yet another noble feature which characterizes the history of these seventy-eight years, namely, that at a period of decadence, when everything in France languished and withered beneath the baneful influence of false doctrines, the Society of the Holy Ghost not only remained untarnished, but even constantly stood its ground against the bitterest attacks of Jansenism. The disciples of Jansenius could not forgive the seminary for the purity of its faith, its friendly relations with the Society of Jesus, its fidelity to the true doctrines, or its being dedicated to the Holy Ghost, under the patronage of the Immaculate Conception.

In 1723, on the occasion of a bequest made to the Seminary of the Holy Ghost by one of the clergy of St. Médard, there began an era of violent persecutions which lasted for eleven years. The seminary had as opponents, almost simultaneously, the relatives of the testator, who were urged on by the Jansenists, the Churchwardens of St. Médard, which was one of the centres of the Sect, the whole Parliament, the chamber of accounts, the University of Paris, and even Cardinal de Noailles, who brought all his capricious subterfuges to bear upon the question.

To put an end to such a scandal, it required all the authority of Cardinal de Fleury; and no less than three

letters patent, in which the minister, in the king's name, pronounced the highest eulogium on the seminary, and declared that to place it under the royal protection was only to carry into execution a design which death prevented Louis XIV. from effecting. (Letters, May 2nd, 1726; December 17th, 1726; July 17th, 1727.)

This storm was followed by forty years of peace, during which period the interior organization was strengthened by the rules of the directors, who formed themselves into a community in 1734: These rules were approved of by Mgr. de Vintimille, Archbishop of Paris, on the 2nd January of the same year. Their groundwork is based on the essential obligations of the religious life, *Poverty*, *Chastity*, and *Obedience*; and their whole spirit may be summed up in the following maxim: "The members shall strive to acquire total self-denial, especially by perfect obedience in every respect, in action, judgment, and will."\*

Regularity was firmly established amongst the students. It was, no doubt, greatly favoured by the splendid building erected in the *Rue des Postes*,† on a spacious plot of ground, where they had providentially discovered a quarry that furnished nearly all the materials necessary for its construction. Besides the many good works which they effected at Paris, the fathers of the Congregation were entrusted by two eminent prelates, Cardinal de Bissy and Charles de Drosménil, with the direction of the great seminaries of Meaux and Verdun.‡ Distinguished pupils spread throughout the whole of France, modestly discharging the humblest duties as curates and parish priests, particularly in country

\* Omnes seipsos ex toto corde abnegare studeant, præcipuè per obedientiam, quæ omni ex parte perfecta sit, in executione, intellectu, et voluntate. (*Regula*, Pars. II. cap. iii. art. i.)

† Now "*Rue Lhomond*."

‡ *Gallia christiana*, tom. viii. col. 1663.

districts ; as chaplains of religious communities, or carrying their zeal as missionaries to most of the French colonies, and even to the distant missions of China. In 1765, the minister of the Navy applied to the seminary for experienced priests for the French emigrants in North America. Mgr. Dosquet, Bishop of Quebec, made a donation of an annual rent of 3,000 francs (£120), in consideration of the services which had been, and were still rendered in his diocese, by the priests formed in the Seminary of the Holy Ghost. In 1776, the missions of Cayenne and French Guiana were offered to the society by M. de Sartines.

Thus were realized the wishes of the founders, when they wrote in the rules, "that the members of the institute should be ready to fly to the assistance of the rural posts, to relieve the poor, the sick in the hospitals, and to carry the light of faith to idolatrous nations." Perhaps it is the disciples of M. Desplaces who converted and baptized the first blacks in the French settlements, and opened the way for their zealous successors, the disciples of the venerable Father Libermann.

We regret we cannot describe at greater length the career of those zealous missionaries of the Holy Ghost, and relate the deeds, as interesting as they are edifying, of men, whose names would well deserve to be handed down to future ages as those of the first saints and apostles of nations. We can barely mention the nephew of M. Becquet, M. Blandin, Vicar Apostolic in Tonquin ; Mgr. Pottier, bishop of Agathopolis, in China ; MM. Bertout and De Glicourt.\*

\* MM. Bertout and De Glicourt, on their voyage to the Antilles, were stranded near Cape Blanc, fell into the hands of the Moors, were led captives through the Sahara, sold as slaves in Senegal, expelled



We owe, however, more than a passing notice to Father Caris, *the poor priest* who for many years reminded Paris of Bernard, *the poor priest* of the preceding age. Peter Caris, the first assistant of M. Bouic, was procurator of the house for upwards of forty years, and until death he humbly fulfilled his arduous duties with the generous devotedness of a saint. One day, his stock of provisions being exhausted, he sorrowfully passed through the streets of Paris, when a well-to-do gentleman, who was shaving, remarked, by means of his looking-glass, the dejected appearance of the good priest. Struck by his sad and holy countenance, he ordered his servant to invite the passer-by to enter for a few moments. After apologizing for what he termed his indiscreet curiosity, he requested the stranger to tell him frankly the cause of his affliction. The poverty-stricken bursar replied: "I am Caris, the poor priest, I have to feed *eighty* children, and I have but one ounce of bread to give them. It is to look for alms that I am wandering through Paris." He explained with the same simplicity the nature of the Seminary of the Holy Ghost. He had not finished speaking, when his unknown interlocutor thrust into his hand the sum of one hundred pistoles, or a thousand francs.

Another day, having started early on one of his adventurous expeditions, a servant emptying a vessel through a window, poured all its contents on the poor wanderer's head. The master, who was at once informed of the disagreeable occurrence, hastened to apologize, in order to prevent the consequences, which, according to the police by the English, seized by a French pirate, and finally enabled to return to their own country. Both soon after left once more their native land on a French squadron, which, under the skilful direction of one of them, took again possession of Senegal.



regulations, might have been the result of such an accident. Good Father Caris set about excusing the awkward servant with so much gentle calmness, that the master, amazed at his generosity, could not refrain from being generous himself: "I might have been condemned to pay a fine," he said, "I may as well pay it to you," and he gave him five hundred francs.

Let us cite a last anecdote, which brings us back to the most interesting period of olden times. In a year of great distress, the creditors refused to furnish any further supplies. Everything was wanting. In vain does Father Caris, during the entire morning, pass from house to house. He returns for the particular examen, but without bringing anything. He goes to the refectory with all the students, but has nothing to place before them. The *Benedicite* is said as usual, and is immediately followed by grace; they then place themselves in ranks, and go to the chapel to adore the Blessed Sacrament for a few moments. This visit was not over, when abundant provisions arrived. Father Caris was truly a holy priest, of whom it was justly said, in his epitaph, "*that he had ever lived for God and for his neighbour, never for himself.*"

The memorable works and the amount of good effected for nearly a century by the society of the Holy Ghost, did not save the seminary from the Vandalism of 1793. Father Duflos was then its fifth superior. Of the seventy members whom the Revolution found at the seminary, he had at least the consolation of counting some martyrs at the Carmes and elsewhere, and of not seeing a single one stain his soul by impious oaths, or by the crime of apostasy. He could even, although blind and infirm, remain in the seminary, until his death in 1803, at the advanced age of eighty-two.

The edifice of a century is destroyed, its stones are scattered, its inmates are dispersed, A silence of death

reigns throughout France. The withering blast of infidelity has swept over that fair land which is now strewn with the ruins of her temples, and the bones of her martyrs. France, once styled "the first kingdom of the world, after that of heaven," is swayed by a few monsters in human form, and deluged with the blood of her noblest children. The "Eldest daughter of the Church" is clad in mourning: her altars are desecrated, her churches consumed by fire or profaned, her worthiest sons and daughters groan in exile all over the earth. It is a period of anarchy and horror. The cannonades at Toulon and Lyons, the drownings at Nantes, the guillotine everywhere, pursue night and day the work of violence and destruction. Might has conquered right; all that is human, lawful, and sacred, is banished from the shores of France. A handful of Neros think, in their blind presumption, to restore paganism and to set up the goddess of reason against the God of the Christians. But the reign of unbelief will not last for ever. After the storm and the night, Jesus will appear and show, that whilst He seems asleep, His Heart watcheth. He will command, and, in an instant, the wicked who blasphemed that "*there is no God,*" will be carried off like chaff before the wind. The joyful peals of ten thousand bells announce from hill to hill the triumph of Christ and His Church; the faithful issue forth from the catacombs, and divine worship is restored; the grand old basilicas, so long shrouded in sombre silence, re-echo with the impressive accents of a solemn *Te Deum*. Catholic France will revive, and ten years of demolition will be followed by an age of reconstruction. Then the religious societies, like Jesus and His Church, will rise from the humiliation of the tomb, full of life, light, and glory. Then the disciples of the venerable Desplaces will collect the scattered fragments, and rebuild a structure of which the Lord had Himself laid the foundation.

## CHAPTER VIII.

The Society of the Holy Ghost, from its restoration, 1805, to the year 1848.

**D**URING the great revolution, the seminary of the Holy Ghost had been sold and turned into a factory, and as early as 1794, the first Normal School was established in a portion of the building. It was in one of its halls, which still exists, that the celebrated Laharpe gave, almost during the "REIGN OF TERROR," his first lectures on literature, and pronounced his famous and courageous opening speech, which was one of the first signs of the triumph of truth and morality, in a land too long oppressed by an impious and infamous minority of cruel tyrants.

There was amongst the fathers of the Holy Ghost one, whose energy had only been strengthened by continual trials and sufferings; this was M. Bertout, who, as soon as the revolutionary tempest had subsided, devoted himself with a noble ardour to the restoration of his society, which was then without shelter and without a head. It is he who, by his great influence, is said to have determined Pius VII. to point out to the Imperial Government the necessity of re-establishing the Seminaries of the Holy Ghost, Saint Lazarus, and the Foreign Missions. The decree of restoration was issued by the Emperor, on the 22nd March, 1805, but was capriciously withdrawn in 1809.

No sooner had Louis XVIII. ascended the throne of his ancestors, than M. Bertout renewed his efforts with an

activity which age and difficulties had rather increased than diminished. It would be both painful and difficult to follow the venerable old man, step by step, during the many years he struggled against the incapacity and ill-will of an administration, which seemed to be in perpetual conspiracy against both Church and State. It was, as it were, by stealth that, in 1823, M. Bertout was authorized to repurchase his seminary. But even after he had succeeded by his prudence and zeal in securing the rights of his congregation, in restoring to France and to the Church an admirable institution, and in filling his seminary with apostles, who brought back to the colonies the consolations of religion, there were found, after 1830, statesmen, unwise enough to consider that the Seminary of the Holy Ghost was not useful to France, and answered but imperfectly the purpose for which it was intended. The subsidies which hitherto had been granted were withdrawn—a circumstance which did not deter the noble-hearted M. Bertout from continuing unaided the formation of the colonial clergy. We meet, however, in M. Bertout's relations with the ministers and other statesmen, circumstances and documents which reveal a true appreciation of what French policy always should be. We mention with special delight some letters of M. Portal, who constantly professed that France, in her colonies and exterior relations, should be eminently Catholic. M. Portal's views regarding the Seminary of the Holy Ghost are admirably set forth in the following letter to the Duke de Broglie:—

“This establishment,” he says, “was the basis of all the improvements which I intended to introduce into the colonies. It was my duty to think of ameliorating the condition of the slaves, and, at the same time, to avoid all unreasonable claims and violent opposition on their part. Now, religion, and such religion as only

good priests can teach, was the sole means on which I believed it possible to rely. . . . I wanted not only good priests, but priests brought up especially for the colonial missions. And the house of M. Bertout is still the only one in France which is directed towards this end and with this spirit.

“I have just mentioned Father Bertout, and I must say, that my knowledge of his character, together with what I learned later on of the sentiments and talents of the priests around him, added greatly to my hopes of success. This seminary, with its special destination, enabled me to remove one of the greatest existing difficulties—that of sending priests to the colonies, where there are neither archbishops nor bishops, who can recall, instruct, ordain, or appoint them. . . . Nevertheless, a spiritual power is necessary to give them mission and jurisdiction; and before the Pope had given the necessary authorization to Father Bertout, the power had each time to be obtained directly from Rome.\*

“I feel convinced that it would be a great mistake to suppress the institution of the Holy Ghost, and one which would be productive of the bitterest fruits. At all times a similar resolution would have appeared to me contrary to the principles and duties of the Government; and at present it will have the inconvenience of furnishing an occasion for the most odious calumnies. It will be said, you may be certain, that, whilst the press, the tribunes, and the principles of our Government threaten the social

\* For a considerable period Father Bertout was honoured with such confidence, that the Prefect of the Propaganda transmitted him blank documents empowering him to insert the name of the person he might think suitable. Towards the end of his career the humble superior himself asked that these powers should be reserved to the Nunciature; similar confidence was placed in his successors.



condition of the colonies, those colonies are purposely deprived of the only establishment which can render less dangerous the changes which have become inevitable in the situation of the slaves, and in the rights of the coloured population." (Letter, 8th August, 1830.)

Despite these observations, the Government took advantage of the cholera to deny M. Bertout's title as owner, and to transform the seminary into a military hospital. The good superior was quite willing to receive the surplus of soldiers from the hospitals, but on a written promise, that after the epidemic the seminary should be evacuated. The Government rewarded his generosity by not even allowing him to remain in his own house. This last trial completely shattered the strength of the venerable old man, who, like his predecessor, saw himself dispossessed of his own dwelling, almost at the hour of death. But, knowing, as he did, that he had laboured for God alone, he constantly exhibited an unalterable peace of mind. During his sickness he scarcely ever spoke of his sufferings, and never uttered a complaint. "No sign of impatience ever ruffled his features; no cloud ever darkened his frank and open countenance. He preserved to the last his presence of mind, and those simple and affectionate manners which so much endeared him to his friends. After having, with the liveliest sentiments of piety, received the last sacraments several times, he departed this life on December 10th, 1832." M. Bertout had nobly fought the good fight. He had laboured and suffered for his religious family with the filial affection of a truly devoted son. He had sown in tears; his younger brothers were destined to reap in joy the fruit of his persevering labours.

The wrong-doings of an unwise government had thus placed the Society of the Holy Ghost in a critical and unmerited situation, at least until nobler counsels should



prevail in the civil administration. It required time and patience to bring back the Government to the right path.

M. Fourdinier, the relative, godson, and successor of Father Bertout, had to enter upon long and most painful negotiations to obtain justice. He recovered the seminary in virtue of a decree of 6th June, 1835, passed under the intelligent and loyal administration of Baron de Mackau and General Maison. A few years after, the grants were re-established by Admiral Duperré, who accompanied this act of wise policy by many other generous and excellent measures for the benefit of the colonies. A grant of £16,000 was voted for the execution of this project, concerning which the minister wrote as follows to M. Fourdinier, on the 25th of February, 1840:—

“The Seminary of the Holy Ghost is at present the only institution which, by its end, is enabled to form and provide for the colonies ecclesiastics, commendable, not only by solid studies and pure morals, but also by a marked vocation, by a zeal carefully enlightened on the special administration of the countries in which they have to exercise their holy ministry, and, in fine, by the unity of the doctrine which they have all to profess. To you then, Reverend Sir, is committed the choice and general direction of the priests, called to work in the laborious and delicate mission for the conversion of the blacks in the colonies.”

The grant of £16,000 was destined for the erection of chapels in the different colonies, £2,000 were assigned to the colonial Seminary, and £6,000 set apart for increasing the clergy of Martinique, Guadaloupe, Bourbon, and French Guiana. It was decreed that the priests, eighty in number, should be immediately raised to one hundred and twenty-six, and that each year they should be gradually increased in the same proportion. The minister

of the Admiralty came to an understanding with his colleague, the minister of public worship, for the purpose of centring on this important operation the solicitude of the whole episcopacy of France. Relative to this we cite some passages which reflect great honour on the French Government. They are extracted from the ministerial communication, dated 22nd November, and addressed to M. Fourdinier by Admiral Duperré:—

“The object of the apostleship, which the new priests destined for the colonies are called to exercise, is of a nature not less calculated to arouse evangelical zeal, than is the work of the conversion of the savage tribes, which was always undertaken with so much ardour and abnegation by the French missionaries. There is, at this moment, to be brought over to Christianity, to pure morals, and to regular religious habits, a population of 500,000 souls, subject to French rule, whose conversion is of the highest importance and the greatest interest to humanity, to civilization, and to the future prosperity of the colonies. To you, Reverend Sir, it belongs, by your exhortations or by the letters you address to the bishops of France, by articles inserted to that effect in the periodicals and religious publications, or by any other means you may judge best, to make known the merit and attraction of so noble a mission, and to induce priests animated by the spirit of the Gospel to undertake it with entire devotion.”

In concluding, he says: “I cannot but confide to your experienced and enlightened zeal the important care of procuring, with the shortest delay, ecclesiastics for our colonies, who, by their apostolic works and example, may be able to concur efficaciously in a successful solution of the great question regarding the abolition of slavery in the French colonies.”

For fifty years the future of the seminary never presented itself under a more promising aspect. Yet, if at this period, a new institution had not come to its assistance, the work of a hundred and fifty years might have entirely disappeared. Vocations to the secular priesthood were then few, those to religious congregations still fewer. During several years, the Seminary, left to its scanty resources, had kept but a small number of pupils. Yet M. Fourdinier did all in his power to comply with the pressing demands of the Government. Missionaries, either from the seminary or from other places, left for the colonies in great numbers, after a probation, necessarily limited, and in some cases sadly deficient. A few scandals were inevitable, and though they could be imputed neither to the colonial clergy nor to the Seminary of the Holy Ghost, the latter saw its devotedness overlooked, and its future threatened with sterility.

Another evil was that, whilst filling up the gaps in the ranks of the colonial clergy, the Congregation had necessarily weakened its own strength. According to the regulations of the Society of the Holy Ghost, no member could be received, unless he had read a course of three years' theology, and had spent two years' probation at the Seminary. Now, on one hand, urgent necessities did not permit the superiors to retain a subject for so long a period; on the other hand, both M. Bertout, who had seen the beauty of the ancient temple, and M. Fourdinier shrank from shaking the basis of their institute by changing the conditions of admission.

M. Fourdinier felt this situation so vividly, that about the year 1836, he seems to have made an attempt to rally, under the name of "*Spiritains*," all the priests of the colonies, for the purpose of forming a vast congregation, which should have for its end the restoration and main-

tenance of regularity and zeal amongst the colonial clergy. He explains this plan to the Archbishop of Lyons, in a letter in which he informs His Grace of the failure of his attempt:—

“I thought some years ago to associate with us the priests of the colonies, who might be so inclined, and who after a certain period of probation might be found worthy, and to send out only our own members. The Government desired the accomplishment of my project, and the Sacred Propaganda also gave it its entire approval. But I met opposition on the part of the Prefects Apostolic, and of a great number of priests. I was obliged to put off the execution of my design without, however, abandoning it altogether.” (Letter, 30th February, 1844.)

The time he wrote this letter appeared to him more favourable; there were four Prefects Apostolic to be changed or replaced; he required, as he said, but four zealous and pious priests who would understand his views. His efforts, however, were useless. Not only was he unable to carry out this plan; he even saw contested his power of addressing counsels to the missionaries, of receiving their complaints, and demanding, if necessary, their recall—a right which naturally arose from the charge confided to him by the Holy See, of presenting the Government with the priests necessary for the colonies.

Reduced to centre all his hopes in the colonial seminary, M. Fourdinier now spared no means which might contribute to the spiritual and intellectual progress of the students. He introduced amongst them, in 1835, the Way of the Cross, and, in 1840, the Archconfraternity of Our Lady of Victories. Although in a weak state of health, he was always the first at every exercise of piety. Loved by the seminarists, because he loved them with paternal tenderness, he wished that none should have

any trouble, anxiety, or difficulty, without confiding it to him, in order to obtain advice and consolation. M. Fourdinier was called to his reward on the 5th of January, 1845.\*

His death caused a great void. His colleagues, but few in number, and only sufficient to fulfil their special functions, resolved to remain humbly at their posts, and to place at their head a devoted friend, M. Leguay, Vicar-General of the diocese of Perpignan, of which he was likely to be one day the chief pastor. They had learned to know him during six years which he had spent at the seminary, and whilst he was charged with the spiritual direction of a religious community in Paris.

M. Leguay zealously continued the work of his predecessors, and brought the society more and more under the immediate jurisdiction of the sacred Congregation of the Propaganda. We cannot but admire how the views of M. Leguay correspond with those of the venerable Libermann. One would think he copied this saintly founder, when he traced the following lines:—"The Society of the Holy Ghost has for its sole end the glory of God and the conversion of the blacks; for groundwork, devotedness, disinterestedness, and the communion of prayers and good works."

Elsewhere he writes: "The superior of, this society is the representative of the Propaganda, treats with the French Government, and has full power over the clergy of the colonies. . . . The society is entirely dependent on the Holy See, and receives its orders through the Sacred Propaganda, with whose sanction it undertakes and directs all its missions. Before consulting the Sacred Congregation it can change nothing in its rules, which shall re-

\* Notice of M. Fourdinier, p. 4.



main intact, even in places subject to the jurisdiction of the ordinaries. Its members form two distinct categories, the one places in common both their spiritual and temporal goods, the other their spiritual goods only. The Congregation can only be dissolved by a decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda."

The revolution of 1848 broke out and ruined the plans and prospects of M. Leguay. The kindness of the preceding government towards the Society of the Holy Ghost was changed into bitter hostility against the Fathers of the seminary, who were unjustly accused of being opposed to the abolition of slavery. Surrounded by insurmountable difficulties, M. Leguay resigned his office on the 28th of February, 1848, and retired to the Abbey of Aiguebelle, where he died, 27th February, 1865.

Before his departure he had pointed out the person destined by Providence to be his successor, and he was assured that his choice would be ratified. This was M. Monet the friend and protector of the blacks of Bourbon, whence, through the persecution of the whites, he had been expelled by order of the governor. To this zealous apostle, the Reverend Father Gaultier, the confidential friend of the resigning Superior, was sent to offer the general administration of the Society, and the highest official position that can be held with regard to the colonial clergy.

At such a moment of political reaction, M. Monet needed no ordinary courage to accept the responsibility of a large establishment, situated in the centre of the capital, and in a quarter most exposed to disturbance; the direction of a seminary which was threatened with utter destruction; in fine, an administration which was connected with all the colonies, when the abolition of slavery,



abruptly decreed, might have raised the most violent storms, even against the clergy. He courageously accepted this difficult position ; but though this choice was regarded with satisfaction by the provisional government, it did not, however, entirely disarm its rigours. A decree of the 6th October, suppressed almost half the grant hitherto allocated to the Seminary of the Holy Ghost.

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## CHAPTER IX.

The Congregations of the Holy Ghost and of the Holy Heart of Mary united in one. The venerable Libermann first Superior-General, 1848-1852.



SINCE M. Monet had learned to know the disciples of the venerable Libermann, in the island of Bourbon, he never ceased to keep up with them most affectionate relations. He admired and cherished the end of their mission, and he frequently expressed the desire of joining their institute. He was no sooner superior of the Order of the Holy Ghost, than the thought of uniting it with the Society of the Holy Heart of Mary impressed itself very forcibly on his mind. The venerable Libermann entertained the same project. He considered this union in accordance with the designs of God for His greater glory and the salvation of souls. As early as 1845, he declared, in a letter, that he was ready to bear all the crosses and endure all the sufferings, which the realization of such a plan might bring upon him. To combine two societies into one was a delicate and difficult undertaking, which to many seemed nothing less than an impossibility. The congregation of the Holy Ghost counted, in 1848, but a few members, mostly all men of great ability, missionaries such as Father Loewenbruck, theologians such as Father Gaultier, writers such as Father Warnet. They could justly glory in the noble memories of their ancient and respected society, and they beheld, beyond the enclosure of the Seminary of the Holy Ghost, all the colonial clergy attentive to their doings. The family of the venerable Libermann was composed of many young and devoted

missionaries, linked together by seven years of common observance, and regarding, with good reason, as an earnest of their future, not only their number and the eminent qualities of their chief, but also the sufferings of their brothers, who had generously laid down their lives for the conversion of the abandoned negro race.

Some friends who could not remain silent spectators of what they thought "a hazardous change," reproached the members of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost with sacrificing their time-honoured history to a recent enterprise that might soon eclipse them and efface their very name; they endeavoured to persuade the missionaries of the Holy Heart of Mary that they compromised a glorious future, by uniting to a society surrounded with many dangers, and that they would have to share in the disappointments and misfortunes attendant on the clergy of the colonies. But the views of God differed from those of men. The project was warmly encouraged by the Nuncio of his Holiness Pius IX. In May, 1848, Father Loewenbruck, who had lately successfully negotiated, at Rome, the approval of the rules, was sent to *Notre Dame du Gard*, to fix the bases of the union. An agreement was come to, on the Feast of Pentecost, and on the 25th of June following, the venerable Libermann wrote out the project of conditions, according to which the two societies might unite without detriment to either, and without destroying or changing their respective destination.

These conditions, subscribed to by both parties on the 28th August, were as follows: "That the Congregation should bear the title of the Holy Ghost and the Holy Heart of Mary; that the rules of the Holy Ghost, having been approved of by the Propaganda, should be preserved; that poverty should be maintained according to the constitutions of the missionaries of the Holy Heart of Mary;

that the second order, recently established, should be for the moment suspended; that statutes should be made afterwards on points not foreseen by the approved rules." This project was favourably received by the Propaganda, which, by a decree of the 26th September, 1848, sanctioned the union of the two societies into one institute, bearing the title of "*The Congregation of the Holy Ghost and the Holy Heart of Mary.*" By this union, the Society of the Holy Ghost was considerably increased, and that of the Holy Heart of Mary inherited the twofold approbation of Rome and of the French Government, as well as the privileges hitherto enjoyed by the former institute. From the union of the two Congregations there arose a society full of life and vigour, whose members, like the warriors of an army suddenly formed by the junction of two legions, were filled with fresh ardour, and enabled, by their combined forces, to attack or repulse their common enemy. Thus likewise, as from two placid streams, which commingle their pure and liquid currents, is formed a mighty river that imparts charms, fertility, and abundance to many territories, from the union of the two institutes sprang up a society which has since spread countless blessings over the most barren regions of the earth.

The two superiors, having no other motive than the glory of God and the salvation of the abandoned negroes, showed on this occasion, a spirit of sacrifice, humility, and disinterestedness, as admirable in the eyes of men as it must have been delightful in the sight of God. M. Monet, the Superior of the Society of the Holy Ghost, resigned, and Father Libermann was unanimously elected First Superior-General. The former had only accepted his office through devotedness, and on the express condition of being at liberty to resume his missionary career, as soon as he would be no longer necessary to the society which had

elected him. Of a strong will, and an energy powerfully aided by herculean physical powers and stature, he sighed after the labours of the missions, and he specially turned his looks towards the island of Madagascar, which he had formerly attempted to evangelize.

By a singular coincidence, the venerable Father Libermann received, shortly after his appointment, a letter from the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda, requesting him to designate a priest whom he should think worthy of being appointed Vicar-Apostolic of Madagascar. In his answer, dated July 3rd, 1848, he named M. Monet, who was accepted, and raised to the episcopal dignity. God, who was pleased with the generous desires of the holy prelate, merely allowed him to cross the seas, and to bring him almost in sight of his mission; he died at Mayotta, six hours after disembarking, 1st December, 1849, without setting foot on the island of Madagascar, no doubt to land on better and more peaceful shores. The mortal remains of the first Vicar-Apostolic of Madagascar have since been honourably interred in the island of Bourbon, by Mgr. Desprez, Bishop of St. Denis, in a church built and handed over by that prelate to the disciples of the venerable Libermann. As soon as his election was confirmed by the supreme authority, the saintly founder devoted himself entirely to the fulfilment of the arduous duties imposed upon him. He first went to Rome to seek for light and strength, and returned with full powers to draw up constitutions, as a supplement and commentary of the rules, and as a directory for the organization, discipline, and spiritual guidance of the society. He accordingly composed a code of constitutions substantially the same as those of La Neuville. This code was promulgated towards the end of 1848. The venerable Libermann considered these constitutions as

temporary, wishing them to be ripened by experience and gradually improved and completed, so as to become one day, with the sanction of the Holy See, the definitive legislation of the society. But the venerable servant of God, knowing that religious societies are governed by the rules of conscience and the spirit of faith, rather than by codes of laws, relied above all on the merciful assistance of Divine Providence. Assisted by grace and guided by his profound wisdom, his exquisite tact, and his condescending gentleness, the “*man of God*” soon triumphed over all obstacles, and union of hearts followed closely on the union of the two congregations.\* A venerable society was being gradually revived and invigorated by a new one, as an ancient tree, on which a youthful shoot is ingrafted, regains its pristine strength, and produces anew flowers and fruit in abundance.

Beneath the protecting shade of this reviving tree revived likewise the colonial seminary, which was the special object of the new superior’s attention and solicitude. He wished, first, clearly to define its true object. Some of his predecessors, as we have seen, had intended to change the seminary into a novitiate, and to send to the colonies none but members of the Society of the Holy Ghost. The venerable Libermann, on the contrary, considered that the seminarists should be at liberty to enter the ranks of the colonial clergy, either as secular or religious priests, while the novitiate of *Notre Dame du Gard* was open to those

\* *Superiors of the Society of the Holy Ghost*:—M. Desplaces, 1703-1709; M. Garnier, 1709-1710; M. Bouic, 1710-1760; M. Becquet, 1760-1788; M. Duflos, 1788-1803; M. Bertout, 1805-1832; M. Fourdinier, 1832-1845; M. Leguay, 1845-1848; M. Monet, 1848.

*Superiors-General of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost and the Holy Heart of Mary*:—The venerable Francis Mary Paul Libermann, 1848-1852; The Very Reverend Ignatius Schwindenhammer, 1852, whom God preserve!



who might choose the latter part. The new superior-general was most anxious to secure the material interests, and to promote the moral reformation of the seminary ; the first by repairing the buildings and by having restored the pecuniary grants that had been recently withdrawn by the Republican Government ; the latter by his energy, his zeal, his patience, and his unalterable kindness. Yet, despite his extreme gentleness, he was obliged, to his great regret, to expel a certain number of seminarists who were determined to oppose his reforms. This opposition party was headed by a former director, who pretended to have nothing more at heart than the spirit of fervour and discipline in the seminary. This blinded man put the patience of the holy founder to a great test, and he continued his attacks with even greater obstinacy, after he had consented to retire from the seminary on most honourable terms. He persisted in coming to the seminary at all hours, to excite his partisans more and more, and to foment dangerous outbreaks among the students. Two parties were formed, and already began to defy each other, when God Himself almost visibly interposed. On a winter's morning, the importunate visitor was in such haste to ring the door-bell, that, slipping on the ice, he fell under the wheel of a carriage which was passing at full speed. He lived only a few hours, during which he expressed sorrow for his conduct, and received the Sacraments of the Church. The venerable superior, who was at *Notre Dame du Gard* when the accident occurred, felt only one regret, that of not having been able to add a last mark of friendship and reconciliation to all his former kindnesses. From that moment there began for the seminary an era of peace and fervour, which has made it one of the most useful and most edifying institutions of France.

The union of the two societies was followed by another trial, which caused no small amount of suffering to the holy servant of God. The ancient constitutions placed the Congregation of the Holy Ghost under the immediate jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Paris. A year before the union in 1847, the constitutions were examined and approved of at Rome; and according to their tenor, the Archbishop only retained the ordinary jurisdiction, whilst the society was subjected to the Holy See, like that of the Lazarists and other similar Congregations. A terrible storm arose, when, immediately after the union, the venerable Libermann informed Mgr. Sibour of this change. The grief of the saintly founder was so intense, that he was heard lovingly complaining to his Divine Master: "Is it possible, my God," he said, "that I should be at variance with my bishop, for whose authority Thou inspirest me with so much submission, respect, and love! He wishes that I should belong to him, but such is not the will of Rome. I must then resist my bishop; how hard this is! My God, do Thou help me!" It was only in 1854 that this difficulty was finally settled at Rome to the satisfaction of both parties.

Overwhelmed by his many sufferings, the health of the holy superior, naturally feeble, completely gave way, and, in 1849, he fell seriously ill at Bayeux, whilst he was visiting, in the interests of his society, several dioceses of the North and of Normandy. As soon as he had regained a little strength he resumed, with the greatest zeal, a project, which was to have immense and consoling results for the French colonies, namely, the erection of bishoprics in the islands of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Bourbon. He was determined to solve a most difficult problem, one which had baffled all the efforts of his predecessors—the constitution of the colonial clergy. The

problem, which could only be solved by the establishment of the episcopal hierarchy, was the only means that was never resorted to by the superiors of the Holy Ghost ; no doubt because they despaired of ever overcoming, on this head, the resistance of the Government. The encroaching tendency of the civil power on the spiritual had, indeed, been a great obstacle to the progress of religion in the colonies. The venerable Libermann himself was not free from fears, when, on the 3rd of November, 1849, he wrote as follows to his Eminence Cardinal Fransoni: "Of all the evils which afflict the Church in the French colonies, the abuse of power on the part of the governors appears to me to be the greatest. Ecclesiastical authority is weakened, paralyzed, and degraded. The priests are considered as mere government officials, and the influence of evil authority over them is all powerful. The *Ordinance* which obliges ecclesiastical superiors to give to the temporal power an account of the conduct of their clergy, needs no comment, as it carries its spirit within itself."

In a lengthened memorandum addressed to the minister of worship, the zealous founder enumerates the reasons which demand the prompt erection of bishoprics ; and he insists on the following : 1. The exceptional situation in which the clergy will always be placed in the midst of populations and customs, so different from those of the mother country ; 2. the state of the population, which, on account of the abolition of slavery, was at that time divided into two camps, between which only one power could effectually interpose, namely, religion—but religion appearing in all its grandeur and prestige ; 3. the interest even of the civil power, which is honoured and strengthened by its liberality to the Church.

Those communications secured for him the confidence of the Government to such a degree, that all the

correspondence with Rome was transmitted to him, with the request, that he should answer all the objections of the Holy See. A cardinal, replying to the proposals of the Government, relative to these bishoprics, made three objections: the want of a Cathedral and Chapter, the endowment of a second Vicar-General, and the establishment of a Seminary in each diocese.

To these objections the venerable Libermann answered that Algiers, America, and even Ireland possess titular bishops, without having Canons bound to capitular duties, that France is almost the only country where there are in each diocese two titular Vicars-General; that one Vicar-General would be sufficient for the projected dioceses; that the Seminary of the Holy Ghost could be considered as the diocesan seminary for the colonial bishoprics, as the College of Maynooth is like an episcopal seminary for the whole of Ireland.

M. Libermann found a powerful auxiliary in the skilful and influential minister, M. de Falloux. The project of the colonial bishoprics, commenced by this eminent statesman, was actively pursued and happily terminated under MM. de Parieu and de Tracy, ministers of public worship and the navy. An incident remarkable in those times was, that a committee, composed of members as widely different in their political as in their religious views, deliberated on and voted peacefully for the creation of the colonial bishoprics. The committee was presided over by Mgr. Parisis, the great Bishop of Langres, and M. Libermann was officially invited to assist at its meetings.

This committee met at the ministry of the navy, and continued, during nearly eighteen months, the laborious examination of this important matter. The president had found a vast field for displaying his experience and profound knowledge of ecclesiastical legislation; whilst the

humble superior had to present a series of memoirs and observations, which greatly contributed to settle in a satisfactory manner all that concerned the authority and the powers of the bishops, the honour and order of precedence due to their rank, the liberty required for their pastorals, their judgments and censures, their residence, their admission into the governor's privy council, the expenses of their installation and translation, the small and great seminaries, the synods and assemblies of the clergy, the Vicars-General, and many other questions connected with the administration of a diocese.

On Christmas Day, 1849, the venerable Libermann had the consolation of writing the following words to the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda : " My endeavours, and still more those of the Bishop of Langres, for the welfare of the colonies, have been crowned with unexpected success. The two ministers have shown excellent dispositions, and even zeal, for bringing the affairs of this country to a termination advantageous to the interests of the Church. It has been decided that the colonial seminary shall have sixty pupils maintained at the expense of the Government. The erection of three bishoprics has also been finally agreed upon. In order to settle without delay, and in conformity with the observations of the Holy See, the question of the bishoprics of the colonies, the minister of the navy formed a committee, to which I have been invited, and which was presided over by the Bishop of Langres. We have met with the best dispositions on the part of all the members of the committee. It was decided that the colonial bishops should enjoy the full powers granted in spiritual matters by the laws of the Church ; that in all things they should be on a level with the bishops of France, especially in their relations with the Government. According to the request of the Holy See, a grant is made



for the stipend of two Vicars-General. It was also resolved that the Seminary of the Holy Ghost should be maintained by the Government, as *the* seminary of the colonies."

On the 27th September, 1850, the three bishoprics were canonically established in the islands of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Bourbon; and the city of Bordeaux, by reason of its frequent relations with the colonies, was designated as their Metropolitan See. To the venerable Libermann was entrusted the care of selecting and proposing the ecclesiastics for the government of the new dioceses. The prelates preconized in the consistory of December 8th, 1850, were, for Basse-Terre (Guadeloupe), Mgr. La Carrière for; Fort-de-France (Martinique), Mgr. Le Herpeur; and for St. Denis (Bourbon), Mgr. Desprez.

It would be impossible to give an account of all the labours, visits, correspondence, and memoirs of every description, which the realization of this project cost the zealous founder. "During several months," he pleasantly wrote afterwards, "I have lived the life of a galley-slave, but it was necessary to take a little trouble for these poor colonies." The erection of these three bishoprics was not effected without convincing the committee, the ministry, the apostolic nunciature, the Propaganda, in a word, the highest dignitaries of Church and state, that the humble superior was not only a holy priest, but also a man of excellent counsels, and a consummate administrator.

To complete his labours for the spiritual welfare of the colonies, he composed a lengthened memoir, with a view to enlightening the new prelates on the state of the mission, confided to their pastoral solicitude. We may judge of the extent and importance of this memoir by the preface which exposes its whole plan:—

"My Lords, chosen by the will and mercy of God to



be the first pastors of new flocks, hitherto unknown to you, you will, I am sure, be pleased to have a notion as exact as possible of the numerous sheep which the Sovereign Pastor confides to your care. I thought it my duty to give your Lordships every information possible, and I feel happy to fulfil this duty.

“I shall first endeavour to give you an exact idea of the colonial populations, and describe, as accurately as possible, their character, their virtues, their vices, their good and evil propensities. I will speak secondly of the good which the priests are called upon to effect in these countries, and of the difficulties which have hitherto paralyzed the work of the apostolate. . . I shall then take the liberty of laying before you the views with which it may please God to inspire me, for the advancement of His glory, and the salvation of the souls entrusted to your charge. . .”

The servant of God saw that the hour of Divine mercy had arrived for the colonies, now that the priests were free in their action, that the blacks were liberated, that the whites themselves were better disposed, and that, consequently, it was the moment for the clergy to fulfil with zeal the sacred duties of their vocation.

“In order that the priest may obtain more complete success in his holy enterprise, three principal points ought to be constantly before his mind in the exercise of his ministry among the blacks. He must be penetrated with this thought, that religious instruction and the direction of souls in the way of salvation is the only object of his zeal; that he ought to continually encourage these poor people, and excite them by every means to labour, so as to inspire them with the spirit of Christian society. Every priest is ordained exclusively for the salvation of souls. Sometimes, however, there are to be found in the colonies priests who, in the direction of the blacks, allow

themselves to be guided by human views, and who wish to make men of them before forming them to be Christians. This is a great mistake; the negroes will become men only by faith and the practice of the Christian virtues. . . .

“Although the priest ought not to have any other aim than the salvation of souls and their advancement in the Christian life, he must not confine his solicitude to their religious instruction. He is charged with the education of a people that has just been born; he is the father of that people; he alone has the power as well as the duty of giving the negroes the Christian and social form which they must one day possess; he alone can teach them virtues, public and private, moral and religious. The work is great but easy; its success is certain if the priest carries it out with devotedness, zeal, and prudence. He has to do with children, but with children who are good and docile. He must be to them a true pastor, in imitation of Jesus Christ the Sovereign Pastor.”

In the extension of the episcopate to the French colonies, the venerable superior saw, above all, a development of that supernatural life, which, proceeding from God, descends from the Chief of the Church, to spread itself even to the fringes of Aaron's mantle.

Before leaving France, the first pastors of the colonies addressed a circular letter to the French Bishops, to inform them of the wants of their distant dioceses. We find in this document a public eulogy of the venerable Libermann and of the Seminary of the Holy Ghost. “Its direction is confided to *a man of God*, M. Libermann, who, by the efforts of his zeal, has powerfully contributed to the erection of the colonial Sees. This seminary offers all the guarantees which can be desired, regarding discipline, science, and regularity. The pupils whom you shall send

there, will find in the venerable priests who are devoted to their instruction, all the tenderness of fathers for their children.”

In the midst of all his occupations, the venerable founder did not for a moment lose sight of the missionaries of his own religious family. His correspondence proves, that from Paris, as from La Neuville, he was ever active in directing them, ever attentive to their wants, ever ingenious in aiding them with his prudent and fatherly advice. Unable to direct each in particular, he composed for all his *Instructions to the Missionaries*, which, based on long experience, are practically adapted to the daily life of the religious missionary. He shows, in particular, how the religious and community life, whilst greatly favouring personal sanctification, is a powerful means of conversion and perfection of the souls of others. Nothing is more touching than the words in which the humble father begins these admirable instructions to his children :—

“MY WELL-BELOVED CONFRÈRES :—For a long time I have cherished in my heart an ardent desire of addressing to you some instructions which may contribute to the consolation of your souls ; help you on in the path of holy perfection, on which, by the grace and mercy of God, you are striving to advance ; and afford you an easier means of preserving the spirit of the Congregation among you. I am ashamed, greatly ashamed, I who do nothing, to speak of perfection to you, to you who sacrifice yourselves unceasingly for the glory of God and the salvation of souls ; I whom the Divine Master finds unworthy of participating in His glorious sufferings, to speak thus to you, whose life is one of continual suffering. But, dear brothers, do not despise the words of your miserable father, because God was not pleased to bestow on him as abundant a share of sufferings as He has bestowed on you. You know

that God diversifies His gifts according to the various designs of His mercy, and always according to His divine wisdom, in order to obtain the end which He has in view for the sanctification of His creatures. He has designed you from all eternity as victims to be immolated for the salvation of the most miserable and corrupted souls, which have been in the power of the demon since the beginning of the world; and for this purpose He favours you with superabundant sufferings, thereby wishing to raise you to a great degree of love and sanctity. It is necessary that His victims should be holy, after the example of, and in union with, the great Victim of universal propitiation.

“ Thus, although sometimes overwhelmed by sadness, still I superabound with joy at the thought of your sorrows and afflictions; because I know that the life of this world is but an empty shadow, a dream which passes, and that you hold it in no great estimation. I feel most keenly how immense is the happiness of a soul which suffers for the glory of God, of a soul sanctified by holy sufferings. If I have not been thought worthy of this grace which is above all graces, I have at least obtained that of fully rejoicing in seeing you loaded with favours, which seem to be granted only to the dearest and most privileged servants of God.

“ If it has not pleased God to grant me this inappreciable grace, of sharing the sufferings of His well-beloved Son, because He did not wish to make of me a victim for the forsaken souls, He has given me the peace of directing in His path the servants whom He has chosen for this end, and whom He wishes thus to sanctify for the salvation of these poor souls. Considering the order of grace in this world, I am more than you, and you ought to hear my voice as that of God. For it is He Who speaks

through me ; His divine grace is with me ; it animates my words, and always for the same end, for your sanctification, and that of the souls for whose salvation He immolates you. When we shall have the happiness of being admitted into the order of glory, things will change. There you will be more than I, because you have at present the happiness of sharing the sufferings of Jesus Christ, the source and principle of your election and of our sanctification. In this manner will His Divine word be accomplished : *The last shall be first and the first shall be last.*”

If the holy founder was unable to follow his children beyond the seas, his zeal was never idle and his charity never wearied inflaming all those who came within his reach. On his arrival at Paris, he found among the clergy many of his former friends of Saint Sulpice. Their holy relations were resumed, and from a common thought of sacerdotal fervour sprang up the idea of an ecclesiastical conference, which was placed under the patronage of St. John the Evangelist, and was composed of priests desirous of assisting one another in the accomplishment of their duties, by prayer, spiritual conversations, and the practice of the rules of the sacerdotal life.

The meetings were fixed for every Tuesday, at the Seminary of the Holy Ghost. At the first, held on the 3rd of January, 1849, there assisted, under the presidency of the venerable Libermann, MM. de Conny, de Geslin, de Ségur, Caron, de Girardin, Gay, Gibert, Castan, and the Reverend Father Lannurien. Their number was gradually increased by the admission of MM. Ratisbonne, Duquesnay, Jourdan, d'Andigné, de Valois, Dumas, &c. The names of many among this noble crown of priests have since become illustrious in the Church of France.

Each meeting was commenced by prayer and the reading of the minutes of the preceding session. The subject



of the conference was then freely discussed, each one expressing with simplicity whatever God suggested to him. The president concluded by giving the subject for the next reunion, and all separated after invoking on their resolutions the blessings of Mary, St. John the Evangelist, St. Joseph, and the Holy Apostles. The conferences continued from week to week, as may be seen by the minutes of the meetings. The venerable Libermann was the soul of the reunions where, despite his humility, he astonished all by his great supernatural tact, and his deep knowledge of the true science of the saints. In the course of one year they passed in review all the principal duties of the sacerdotal life, and touched upon nearly all the most practical questions of pastoral divinity, which, if developed according to the spirit of the meetings, would form one of the best books that could be presented to the clergy.

The venerable Libermann and his sons directed likewise several religious communities, in particular that of the Sisters of St. Joseph, an admirable institute founded by the Reverend Mother Javouhey, who, till her holy death, had the greatest veneration for our saint and the society entrusted to his care. Madame Bonnault D'Houet, the noble foundress of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, ceased not to express her gratitude for the counsels and encouragements she received from the venerable Libermann, when she had to struggle through her many initial difficulties. His advices were to her sure guides for the prudent and supernatural direction of her religious family.

In 1851, M. Le Prévost, founder of the Brothers of St. Vincent de Paul, when about to establish at Paris an institution for the education of the orphans of the working classes, hastened to consult the venerable Libermann: "Go on gently and fearlessly," said the latter, "a faithful servant must be in the hands of God, like a well-tempered



instrument which wears itself out to the handle in the hands of the workman." "We never left him," says M. Le Prévost, "without carrying away some new light on the spiritual life, without especially being penetrated by a more lively desire of consecrating ourselves, soul and body, to the service of God in works of zeal and charity." The venerable Libermann likewise welcomed and encouraged the little Sisters of the Poor, on their arrival at Paris, aided them liberally by his alms, and sent them his priests to act as chaplains in their community. He never ceased to bestow the most assiduous care on the "*Œuvre de la sainte Famille*," which, in these revolutionary times, rendered immense service to one of the most ill-reputed quarters; and contributed not a little to the perfect tranquillity which reigned there amidst the disturbances of the French capital. The "*man of God*" had become like the centre where many *zélateurs* of good works came to seek for light and support. Despite his many occupations and the fatigue which his kindness entailed upon him, he would never refuse admittance to any one. "For who knows," he said, "if it is not God Who sends me these souls?"

The Seminary of the Holy Ghost was, in the centre of Paris, a focus of charity and apostolic zeal, and a shelter constantly open to every class of abandoned souls—to soldiers, apprentices, workmen, orphans, in a word, to all who stood in need of spiritual or corporal assistance. Each one was certain of being always kindly received by the tender father and his charitable disciples. A few years sufficed for the holy servant of God to make his influence sensibly felt among the large population of the *Latin quarter*, to instil the apostolic spirit into the hearts of many distinguished ecclesiastics, to revive an ancient society, to organize several important missions, to solve the difficult problem of the colonial clergy, to labour most

actively to reorganize the chaplaincy of the French army and navy, and to transform the Seminary of the Holy Ghost into a school of solid piety and true orthodoxy. The seminary became, little by little, the rendezvous of an *élite* of learned men, who have since become illustrious, either by their virtues, by the positions they occupied, or by the many admirable works with which they enriched Catholic literature. "Yet," says Mgr. Freppel, "nothing was more remote from the mind of the venerable Libermann than the desire of playing any part whatsoever in the affairs of the Church. But God, Who delights in exalting the humble, was pleased to honour His servant in proportion to his humility. Around him gathered that indefatigable writer who has had the merit of restoring the true principles of history, by proving that the Catholic Church is the beginning and end of the movement of all ages,\* that illustrious cardinal† who, despite the still prevailing jansenistic severities, secured complete triumph for the wise teachings of the greatest moral theologian of modern times;‡ that learned Benedictine, who before assuming the purple shed such new lustre on the glories of French learning;§ that canonist, as humble as he was learned, whose numerous writings have redressed so many errors."|| . . . Under the discreet guidance of the venerable Libermann, the Seminary of the Holy Ghost

\* The Abbé Rohrbacher, author of the "History of the Catholic Church," 29 vols., in 8vo.

† His Eminence Cardinal Gousset, Archbishop of Reims, author of a well-known dogmatic and moral theology, and of numerous other remarkable works.

‡ St. Alphonsus of Liguori.

§ His Eminence Cardinal J. B. Pitra, author of many learned works, and in particular of the first French Life of the venerable Libermann.


|| The Abbé Dominic Bouix, perhaps the most celebrated canonist of this century.

became in France, with the Abbey of Solesmes,\* one of the principal centres of the pure teaching of Rome. "Rome," says His Eminence, Cardinal Pitra, "is the centre around which the world must needs gravitate, or it shall fall into confusion and dissolution. Why do all, whom the name of Rome captivates and enchants, ardently desire to draw near, and to bring all within the luminous and vivifying sphere of this universal gravitation? Because Rome is the centre of the Supernatural Kingdom established on earth by the Lord Jesus; the royal and pontifical city which possesses, and dispenses to the entire world, the treasures of the Supreme King and Pontiff; the source of the graces of the apostolate; the fountain of Siloe, which springs forth from the temple, and silently carries the stream of sacerdotal graces to the extreme confines of the desert. The more we love the city of Peter, the more we drink in copious draughts from the impetuous river which irrigates and gladdens it, from the vivifying waters which the new Moses causes to gush unceasingly from the rock which is Christ. Out of the city of Peter, there is neither priesthood nor apostolate. Who then could be a priest or an apostle, and not love Rome more and more? Love of Rome was assuredly the passion of the venerable Libermann as it is our passion. He hungered and thirsted after supernatural life. His whole soul yearned after the centre of the Catholic Communion, after the common Father of the faithful, who alone can preside over the permanent banquet of souls." The venerable Libermann wished to eat the pure bread of the eternal word, and to drink the unsullied waters of eternal life, which flow in crystal streams from the rock of Peter alone; he loved to live a supernatural life through and in Him Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

\* A Benedictine abbey, founded by the celebrated Dom Prosper Guéranger.

## CHAPTER X.

The venerable Libermann as a director of souls. His letters and other writings.

S the amazed astronomer, during a cloudless night, feels unable to number, describe, or admire every one of the thousands of stars which glitter in the far heavens, and must needs confine his observations to the principal ones, and a few of the lesser orbs only ; so, when standing in the sight of the many graces, virtues, and holy deeds, which form the brilliant horizon of a saint, the biographer is compelled to fix his gaze on what is most striking, and to gather into somewhat confused yet sparkling groups the numberless beauties which adorn the life of a good and faithful servant of God. Thus have we glanced in amazement at a vast horizon, and have we traced but the outlines of the many excellences, graces, and holy deeds of the venerable Libermann, whose secondary and more humble occupations would by themselves form the subject of an interesting volume. We have considered the struggling child of Saverne, the fervent neophyte, the sorrow-stricken and saintly seminarist, the consummate master of novices, the zealous founder and reformer of religious societies. We shall now endeavour to cast our view deeper into his soul, to penetrate the spirit that animated him as a spiritual director, and to search out the leading thoughts of his doctrine, as expressed in his letters and other spiritual writings. It was admitted by all who knew him that the venerable Libermann was a master eminently versed in the difficult science

of the interior life, and the direction of souls, which is justly called "*the art of all arts.*"\* His first care was to consider attentively the degree of mental prayer practised by the persons he directed; he then studied the trials which usually assail souls during the first period of their spiritual life. "I think," he says, "that in the beginning God adapts Himself to our weakness, and communicates Himself to us in a sensible manner, namely, to our imagination, and to the other intellectual and interior senses, and that He first draws us to Himself by means of considerations." This is the ordinary method of mental prayer or simple meditation. "When God has once purified our senses, and freed us from the sting of sensations and pleasures, and when He has filled our soul with fervour, with a desire of sanctification, with detachment from self and from all things, then He withdraws, little by little, into our interior, moves away from the senses, and acts, so to say, more purely, by operating through faith, which He communicates to our inner and merely spiritual faculties. This faith is always accompanied by charity; but the whole action remains insensible, and operates only in the most interior and spiritual part of our soul. It appears to me that the most critical and decisive moment for a soul is, when God separates her from the senses; then the soul believes herself lost, because she no longer feels the sentiment of her union with God, and she thinks that she is unfaithful and that God abandons her. In this state, she runs great danger of falling into discouragement, anxieties, scruples, and numberless other evils. If she is truly detached, she surmounts all her pains and difficulties, and enters upon a true, interior, and contemplative life. If she is not detached, if she seeks her own self, she

\* *Ars artium regimen animarum.* S. Greg. M., *Reg. pastor. offic. c. i.*

draws back, little by little, and becomes sometimes more imperfect and more sinful than she was before." (Letter of April, 1842.)

At the moment this initial trial takes place, all the faculties of the soul are contracted and concentrated in an effort more or less painful, which is always alarming, and deserving of particular attention on the part of the spiritual director. The least dangerous case is, when the crisis extends over the entire surface of the soul, and appears to attack, with more or less violence, all her faculties at the same time, in order to cause universal confusion. If that concentration is confined to one point only, develops only one kind of temptation, and attacks in preference one ardent passion, the danger becomes much more serious. It is never more so than when that one point is *pride*. The most highly gifted souls, the firmest vocations, may sink into this abyss. However, what the venerable Libermann says on these mystical phenomena, after more than twenty years of observation, suffices to pacify and console those whom God leads through such interior paths. "I have seen," he writes to a novice "many young men in these crises which were more or less violent: it is a state of trial through which God causes to pass many souls which He wishes to employ in His service, for the purpose of fixing and attaching them irrevocably to Himself. Not a single one of those in whom the trial has extended over several points, without concentrating itself on one of the most dangerous passions, not a single one has abandoned the service of God; all have derived considerable profit from the temptation. Among the few I have seen, in whom the trial has fixed on one principal passion as its centre and starting-point, only one has not corresponded with divine grace, and has been unfaithful to his vocation. So certain is it that those trials are generally sent for the sanctification of souls."



Speaking elsewhere of the temptation of pride, which is the most serious case, he writes: "I have once seen, about fifteen years ago, a youth of a proud disposition submitted to this trial. I confess that I was in extreme anxiety on his account, because I had not then enough of experience in the things of God. That young man has come out victorious from this trial. He has become an excellent priest, who perseveres in piety and fervour; he has attained to a great degree of humility, although he has always been placed in situations favourable to pride." (Letter of 4th May, 1851.)

The most painful moment for a soul thus tried is when the crisis, extending to all its powers or concentrating on one point, is, as it were, going to explode, in order to dilate itself. This is precisely the hour of deliverance, which is often betrayed by an exterior expansion, and by a kind of confusion of the senses, which is often closely followed by one of the two alternatives: "If during this period of effervescence, sensible grace remains, then the spiritual delights are immense, and the excesses of piety and mortification are very great, as was witnessed in many saints. If, on the contrary, God, during that time, withdraws His sensible grace, then the soul, separated from creatures, finds herself in a vacuum, and falls into a state of extreme weariness."\*

For both those states the saintly director recommends two remedies: an interior one, which consists in remaining humbly and patiently prostrate before God, and in giving Him liberty to act in our regard, according to His good pleasure; an exterior one, which consists in exterior

\* We have seen previously that the venerable Libermann passed through both these states, and that he experienced in succession the rapturous delights of Thabor and the agonizing sorrows of Calvary. (See page 77 *et seq.*)

occupations, distraction, manual labour, and recreations suited to the state of each. "Be faithful," he writes to one who was for eighteen months in this trial, "be faithful, not by changing the hard and afflicting sensations which you experience—this is not in your power; but by bearing them in peace, patience, and submission to the good pleasure of God. Be punctual in the exercises of your rules; and although it seems to you interiorly that you discharge them badly, be not discouraged, but leave all in the hands of God and Mary, and keep yourself in peace. God is with you, I am certain, and you are with God; let that be sufficient for you. Be before Him as the earth before the labourer; he turns it, turns it again, breaks it, and works it in every manner: the earth in no way prevents him. Act likewise before God, Who forms you at this moment: He shall thereby destroy all the bad weeds, and dispose you for true virtue. Happy child of God, if you endure for the love of Him, and with an humble and docile submission, the state in which He places and supports you!" (Letter of 16th June, 1850.)

In truth, it often happens that, after having assumed in this trial power and authority over the senses, the "*happy child of God*" is called to mental prayer of affection, or even to contemplation. "It appears to me," writes the venerable father to a director of Saint-Sulpice, whom he consults on his method of direction, "that the most important thing is to let God do His work, and to follow His operations, to endeavour to dispose souls in such a manner as to cause them to be faithful to His divine action; that is to say, they should allow Him to act freely, and not oppose His operation by hesitation, imperfections, or too much personal activity. This is the reason why I usually adopted the following method: When I saw a soul apparently destined to a great height of perfection (and

there are many), I began to give her a great idea of Christian perfection, in order that . . . seeing its sublimity and beauty, and urged on by grace, she might conceive a violent desire to arrive at a state so beautiful and so admirable. I then endeavoured, as much as God enabled me, to show her perfection in all its extent and completeness. It generally took some time before I could descend to particulars, and give to that soul a practical direction suitable to her state.

“When once I had access to a soul, and our Lord gave me to know her interior, I saw her difficulties, and I directed the attack accordingly. I strove to free her from too much activity, troubles, and anxiety, and to keep her in a state of repose, that she might be ever in the presence of God and follow more easily all His movements. This peace, little by little, disposed her for interior life, and always led her to detachment and contemplation. I insisted much on total interior abnegation, and I dwelt continually on this latter virtue. I even pointed it out as the foundation of peace, so that souls were ever occupied in renouncing and purifying themselves. I believed that this was particularly the case with beginners, and that for a long time. I never spoke to them of mental prayer; I know not whether I did well in so doing: my conviction was, that it was unnecessary—that since they sought to be interior and renounced, God would perfect in them the spirit of mental prayer; and that, since they constantly aimed at peace and interior sweetness, moderation, and gravity of spirit, they would not fail to know and follow Him in His inspirations. When they spoke to me about it, I sounded their interior dispositions and their method of mental prayer. What I deemed defective, I endeavoured to rectify; but I allowed them to continue. And it seems to me that, gradually, they were brought by

contemplation to the pure prayer of simple faith and union with God. I often wondered, as they unveiled to me things of a purely contemplative nature which passed within their souls, although I had never spoken to them a single word to lead them into that state. I told them to continue in the same way . . . without explaining the nature of this species of mental prayer.

“Later on, when they were no longer able to meditate by means of considerations (for until then, they still had recourse to them, and that frequently, except when God too manifestly prevented them from doing so), and when they felt a disgust for considerations, and I saw no longer any fruit accruing from them, I exhorted them to remain simply in the presence of God, in a pure spirit of faith.”

We have just surveyed the path of a soul to God, as far as contemplative prayer. We must, however, observe that the venerable Libermann meant in no way to lay down a road that should be followed exclusively and rigorously by all. “I have had occasion,” he says, “to ascertain that fixed and detailed theories on mental prayer are often inexact, and more detrimental than useful. It is true, the grace of God adapts itself to our nature, and that, consequently, there is a general way, and that there are certain rules suited to whatever is common to the various conditions of each. But coming to details, we are mistaken, if we intend to lay down positive and absolutely determined rules; for there are not ten souls alike. The degrees of mental prayer are extremely diversified. There are beautiful plans which we trace out on paper; they are elegantly arranged, and apparently just and reasonable, as long as they are not tried; but, in reality, these plans are not always exact.” (Letter of May 4th, 1851.)

The venerable Libermann distinguishes, however, like

all ascetic writers, three principal stages of mental prayer, which a soul, after overcoming the first trials, may successively pass through, namely, meditation, affective prayer, and contemplation.\*

Whence comes it that, whilst a mere acolyte, the venerable Libermann already felt himself impelled to direct all kinds of persons in the ways of perfection and holiness; that he knew how to give to each one counsels suited to his state; that he saw at a glance the dispositions and wants of souls; that he knew how to correct their errors, encourage their efforts, point out to them the way, and assign the exact height to which God wished them to ascend? Whence comes it that he appeared even then a consummate spiritual director? To answer these questions, we must look up to the Holy Spirit Himself, Who had infused into his soul an interior light which enabled him to read hearts, and to follow in the innermost recesses of souls the manifold and wonderful movements of divine grace. The souls of others were unfolded to him, because his own interior was like a book constantly open before his eyes; because, by supernatural light from above, he had observed in his own soul the many mysteries of the interior life. These remarks naturally spring up in the minds of all who read his letters and other writings. In every page is revealed his deep supernatural spirit, his total detachment from all creatures, and his perfect union with Jesus, living in him. His interior life, his acting constantly in the

\* The holy servant of God wrote admirable treatises on "The Interior Life," on "Mental Prayer," and "Affective Mental Prayer;" but as these subjects are rather abstruse for ordinary readers, we abstain from examining them. We merely say that he treated those difficult points as a profound theologian, as a sound ascetic, in a word, as a saint who only describes the paths which he has trodden himself.

presence and under the influence of Jesus, was the treasure whence he derived his knowledge, his prudence, and that supernatural unction, which is diffused throughout his writings.

Unable to analyze all the works which proceeded from the pen of the saintly founder, we shall merely glance over his spiritual letters, which have caused delight and consolation to all those whose good fortune it was to peruse them.\* The spirit of God was evidently with His servant,

\* Besides his many spiritual letters, his Rules and Constitutions, the venerable Libermann has left the following writings the titles of which we subjoin in chronological order :—

1833-1836:—1, "Notes for Issy;" 2, "For the Issyans of good will;" 3, "Receptions of the new-comers;" 4, "Subjects to be spoken of on to-morrow;" "Why these meetings?" "Thoughts on various subjects:" Abnegation, Union of the soul with God, Ascension, Pentecost, Ordination, Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, the spirit of our Lord and the spirit of the world, Feast of SS. Peter and Paul, Feast of the Priesthood of our Lord,<sup>5</sup> on the interior life of our Lord, on St. Joseph, on devotion to the Blessed Virgin, on the Sacred Heart, Month of Mary, Christmas, Summary of Wednesday's conversations. 1837-1838:—5, "Regulations for the Sacristans of Loretto, of the Sacred Heart and of St. John, of the large chapel; for vacation; for distant pilgrimages, in particular to our Lady of Chartres;" 6, "Memoirs on the three last years of M. Francis Liévain, deacon." 1838-1840:—7, "Instructions on Meditation;" 8, "on Affective Mental Prayer;" 9, "on the Interior Life;" 10, "on the Prayer, 'O *Jesus vivens in Maria.*'" 1840:—11, "Commentary on the Gospel of St. John;" 12, "Provisory Rule for the Missionaries of the Holy Heart of Mary;" 13, "His Glosses on the Rules" (lost). 1841-1847:—14, "His thoughts on Superiority;" 15, "Retreats for Ordinations" (1842); 16, "Various Spiritual Instructions during the year;" 17, "Instructions on the Spiritual Life;" 18, "On Humility and Pride;" 19, "Rules for the Brothers of his Society;" 20, "Memoirs to the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda." 1848-1852:—21, "Memoir addressed to their Lordships, the bishops of Guadaloupe, Martinique, and Bourbon;" 22, "Instructions to the Missionaries." Whilst read-



who answered the doubts and difficulties of each with an *à propos*, a simplicity, and depth of discernment that are scarcely found in mere human prudence. Thus, he writes to one tempted by vain glory :—

“As to vanity, it is a troublesome fly, which we must send away without being disturbed : we must bear its importunity with great peace before God, and accept it as a cross. . . . As to what concerns the esteem and affection of men, it is not deserving of a thought. I come from a neighbour’s house, his little dog has shown me many marks of affection and has caressed me much ; I neither deem myself better nor happier on that account : we ought to do the same with men.”

“You tell me,” he says to another, “of the difficulty you sometimes experience to speak of God. This ought not to disturb you ; if you have nothing to say, say nothing. A great maxim, which we must never relinquish, consists in acting in all things according to the sole pleasure of God, and in doing nothing except by the movement of the grace of God, Who is within us.” To one who feared to devote himself to his fellow-men, lest he should lose his recollection, he writes : “Strive to be all to all, and to act towards each one according to his wants. Do not remain shut up within yourself, either on account of your timidity or through fear of losing the spirit of recollection. The recollection which you lose by your intercourse with men merely exists in the imagination and the senses ; but you do not lose the true recollection of the charity of God. Charity does not cause the loss of charity : this means,

ing with respectful amazement over the numerous autograph writings of the venerable servant of God, we could not refrain from having the desire to see all his works soon published, and take their place by the side of the works of St. Francis de Sales, or St. Alphonsus de Liguori.

that the charity which you exercise towards men shall not cause you to lose charity towards God. Charity is, on the contrary, increased and perfected. When a man has attained full and complete detachment from all self-love, exterior things do not disturb him; he converses with men, he does exteriorly all that others do; he plays, laughs, speaks with his brothers, takes his walks, and enjoys all the amusements of vacation without being troubled in the least. Wholly united to God, he is indifferent to everything, and does all in God and for God."

To a seminarist, who complained of being unable, whilst at recreation, to keep himself in the holy presence of God, he gives the following advice: "During recreation, as well as everywhere else, our heart must be filled with a joyful peace. The true presence of God consists in fixing on Him alone all our desires and affections; and if we thus love Him with all our desires, all our affections, we shall never lose His holy presence; we shall live before Him, even when we do not think of Him. A man who continually perseveres in the sole desire of being agreeable to God in all things, and of never finding his entire satisfaction in any creature, is always in mental prayer, even when his mind is obliged to occupy itself with objects which do not directly tend to God, such as study and recreation. I believe that this is the interpretation of the words of St. Luke, '*that we ought always to pray and not to faint.*'"

A lady of the world, whom he directed, related to him with great emotion a humiliation which she had received from some person. "But," he quietly replied, "has not our Lord been more humbled when, in Holy Communion, He descended into your heart this morning?" "One day," relates another lady, "when I complained of a person who frequently caused me pain, he pleasantly said:

“Consider her as a stick which God uses to chastise you : no one gets angry with a stick.”

He reminded his disciples by the example of Jesus and Mary that the apostolate of suffering is infinitely more precious than that of preaching and other works for the salvation of souls. “Behold,” he says, “how much the Immaculate Heart of Mary suffered for the salvation of the world! Mary did not go out to preach the gospel of her Son, but she suffered in her Heart : such was her only apostolate. Yet, was it not greater than that of all the apostles? And Jesus Himself, Who left to His apostles works and success incomparably greater than His own, especially wished to suffer for the salvation of the world, and for this end He died. You see, therefore, that the true apostolate consists in sufferings. . . .” “If you understood,” he wrote to his missionaries, “the value of patience among apostolical virtues, you would strain every energy of your soul to acquire this treasure. If you know how to wait in holy patience, you are certain of success, of a solid and lasting success. Be assured that whatever is taken by storm is neither solid nor lasting. The ivy of Jonas sprang up in one night and withered the next.\* Plants which grow rapidly acquire little development and are quickly destroyed ; trees whose growth is slow become great and vigorous, and last for ages.”

To each one he pointed out the narrow path which he should follow in order to walk in the footsteps of Jesus ; but he wished all to carry with a cheerful heart the light burden and the sweet yoke of the Lord. “As a spiritual director,” says Mgr. Freppel, “the venerable Libermann possessed in a high degree that searching gaze which penetrates into the very depths of souls, weighs their state, discerns their obstacles and dispositions, and foresees their wants ; that wise, discreet, and prudent reserve which ab-

\* Jonas, iv. 6.

stains from all natural constraint on consciences, and gives full scope to the divine action; that condescension towards the weak, in leading them on their spiritual progress gently and by degrees, without too many efforts or struggles; that firmness, in fine, which can deal heavy blows to rebellious nature, and cast it into the arms of God, subdued and transformed. All those qualities were, in him, not so much the gift of nature as the fruit of that grace whose light penetrated his intelligence, and communicated to him a science superior to all human science—the science of the saints.”

The venerable Libermann possessed a particular tact to discern in a soul the spirit of God, and the spirit of darkness, even if the latter would transform himself into an angel of light; he likewise discovered in an instant, what proceeded from nature and what was the effect of grace; and with the keen insight of a saint pointed out the due proportions of the human and divine elements in any thought, word, desire, or action.

The Lord entrusts every saint with a special mission. Some He destines to teach the ignorant, others to explain the Scriptures, to unfold the truths of religion, to illustrate the mysteries and to enlighten even the learned; to these He grants the gift of converting sinners, to those that of strengthening the weak and retaining the just on the path of perseverance; to a few He confides the charge of guiding the more perfect souls, and leading them higher and higher on the mountain of perfection, through the rugged paths of total self-denial, that lead to the ineffable contemplation of and loving union with Jesus. This latter was assuredly the particular mission of the venerable Libermann, whose Christian life was spent in forming and leading perfect souls: seminarists, religious men and women, as well those who lead a contemplative life as

those who devote themselves on the active field of the missions.

The supernatural science of the venerable servant of God is admirably embodied in his spiritual letters, wherein he reduces perfection to its simplest expression. Those letters are not less remarkable for their great unity of thought, than for their variety of details and personal application. Many turn almost exclusively on the precept of our Blessed Lord: "Learn of me because I am meek and humble of Heart." To all he proposed humility as the end; and to nearly all he recommended, as the means of acquiring this virtue, peace of mind and of heart, interior and exterior modesty, distrust in self, confidence in God, and a great spirit of abnegation. This he calls to establish the kingdom of God within us, to bring peace from on high, to place our soul in heaven beforehand, to die to ourselves, and to live for Jesus, in God, and for God. To a seminarist he writes in the following terms: "The infallible means of being in continual mental prayer, is to possess one's soul in peace before our Lord. Be attentive to this saying: *to possess one's soul in peace*; it was employed by our Divine Master Himself. Your soul must always be closed up within herself, or rather in Jesus abiding in her, not as if fastened up by an iron bolt, but by a sweet repose in Jesus, Who holds her in His arms. There should be no violent effort to restrain her, but peace and quietness, an interior, becoming, measured, and tranquil action which dilates the soul."

We cannot read over a hundred letters, written within a few months on the above subject, without being astonished at the fecundity and infinite variety, which this skilful director displays in his godly counsels to everyone.

All his letters begin with a pious wish, or a salutation

after the manner of St. Paul, often with a text from the Holy Scriptures ; the remainder follows without interruption, without distinction of paragraph, margin, or page ; and there seldom remains space for a postscript. In vain would we look for some news, for a souvenir of the moment, or an allusion to persons or time. Several are circulars addressed to his friends who continued in the seminary the apostleship of the "pious meetings." A letter from M. Libermann was an event amongst them. They disputed for the leaves, and sometimes for the pieces. Copies, collections, and extracts were made, which crossed the seas, to console and strengthen the missionaries to the farthest extremities of the earth. Many, especially those treating of Christian, religious, and sacerdotal perfection, were carefully collected and edited in lithographic copies, for the special use of the members of his-institute. Some of these volumes having been communicated to other persons, it happened with the copies as with the original letters, *they disputed for the leaves, and sometimes for the pieces.*

Yielding to pressing solicitations from all quarters, his disciples have recently published two volumes of those admirable letters, which never fail to produce most salutary effects on all who read them.\* "Among the servants of God, for whom I cherish a special devotion," writes a Dominican Father, "the venerable Libermann holds one of the first places. This devotion sprang up within me,

\* *Lettres Spirituelles du Vénérable Libermann.* 2 vols. in 8vo, xiv. 688-679 pages. Paris, Librairie Poussielgue Frères. Rue Cassette, 27. Many other letters have been collected to this day, and we have reason to believe that others are still to be found. Many were lost. A director of a seminary wrote that he had received from the venerable Libermann over sixty letters of direction, but unhappily they all perished in a general destruction of his correspondence.



whilst reading his life, and it increased whilst perusing his letters. Few readings have done me as much good as these letters. I found in them the high strengthening doctrine of M. Olier, with all the unction and simplicity of St. Bonaventure." A mistress of novices, shortly before her death, wrote the following lines: "One thing of which I have never spoken to you, is the good which the letters of the venerable father have produced in the novitiate, whilst it was under my charge. They have chiefly aided me in the interior formation of souls. When once the novices acquired a taste for them they would not read anything else. All the copies were constantly being read; and frequently the letters happened to depict exactly the interior, and all the dispositions of the novices." A nun, a member of an educational institute, writes to her director: "Father Libermann's letters, in which I make my private lectures, have greatly sustained me. He insists so much on the peace and interior calm, with which we ought to act in everything, that one cannot help cherishing his counsels. How forcibly he shows that all is there for a soul that wishes to belong entirely to God: I may well say that, for my part, I am deeply indebted to him." "The more I read your holy founder," says another of the same institute, "the more I like him. To me the name of the venerable Libermann is synonymous with renouncement, abnegation, calm, peace, abandonment, union with our Lord, in a word, with the idea of a state wherein the soul has succeeded in crushing our wicked nature, and in securing the triumph of the life of faith."

The direction of souls by renouncement and peace, such as it appears in the letters of the servant of God, seems to have been well characterized elsewhere, by these words: "It is like a bar of iron surrounded with velvet, which means

solid and smooth at the same time." Were it not for the high idea which was universally entertained of the holiness and virtue of the venerable Libermann, his letters would not have been so religiously preserved by the persons to whom they were addressed. Some of them were obtained with considerable difficulty, and in several cases not without very strict reserve, as to the ownership of those precious relics. A missionary of America, a friend and fellow-student of the servant of God at Saint-Sulpice, wrote as follows: "As to the letters of your venerated Father Libermann, I have only one. This letter is a real treasure to me, it has been a guide to me for twenty-two years; and whenever I read it, after all that time, I always find it as new, as interesting, and as useful as at the beginning." (Letter of 3rd February, 1853.)

"Here are those letters!" exclaims a worthy ecclesiastic, when transmitting to the Reverend Father Delaplace the letters which he had received from the venerable Libermann, "but, it must be understood, my dear Father, that I only confide them to you as a sacred deposit, of which I claim the ownership. I have piously preserved them. I have often read them as a meditation and spiritual lecture; they have always done me good, and caused me to inhale the strong breath of holiness which animated our pious *confrère*, and which he knew so well how to communicate to all who approached him." (Letter of March 7th, 1870.)

The letters of the venerable Libermann could only have proceeded from a mind illumined by the light of the Holy Spirit. Prudence, wisdom, sweetness, and firmness, are admirably blended in every page, even in those which he wrote almost immediately after his conver-

sion, and during the twelve years he remained in minor orders.\*

As a conclusion to the preceding remarks, we religiously transcribe some passages of an admirable letter, written on the 22nd of January, 1874, by His Eminence, Cardinal Donnet, Archbishop of Bordeaux, to the Superior-General of the Congregation.

“MY VERY REVEREND SUPERIOR-GENERAL,—I have read the ‘Letters of the Reverend Father Libermann.’ They are the work of a saint very advanced in spirituality; with all my heart, then, I shall tell you the impression produced in me by this reading:—The Reverend Father Libermann depicts himself in his writings. He unveils to us a beautiful soul entirely united to God, and desirous above all to bring after him all those to whom he addresses himself. From the first pages, we already hear him say to a friend: ‘*God alone, my dearest, God alone, and nothing else.*’ This axiom returns

\* In a Pastoral Letter, dated 21st February, 1877, His Eminence Cardinal Guibert, Archbishop of Paris, at the special request of the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, invited the faithful of his diocese to transmit to him all the writings of the venerable servants of God, Francis Mary Paul Libermann, and sister Mary Teresa of Saint Augustine, a Carmelite nun of Saint-Denis, daughter of Louis XV., known in the world by the name of Madame Louise de France, who died a saint, on the 25th September, 1787. “By writings are meant not only the books and other printed papers, of which these servants of God are the authors, but all the manuscripts, letters, and notes, of whatever nature they may be, whether written by themselves or collected by others. His Eminence Cardinal Guibert made the same request regarding the writings of Mother Magdalen Sophia Barat, who was the foundress of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, and died in the odour of sanctity, on the 25th of May, 1865. Madame Barat was declared venerable on the 5th of July, 1879. Her Life was published in French by the Abbé Baunard, and in English, by Lady Georgiana Fullerton.

unceasingly under his pen; twice he explains the precept of Jesus Christ: *Thou shalt love the Lord, &c.* Elsewhere he says: '*Let your life, your existence, be all in Him, and through Him;*' and he concludes, '*If you should live in yourself, and through yourself, I would prefer to see you dead.*' To love God, to see Him loved by his brethren is the most ardent, the only desire of his heart. . . . When writing to his brother and sister-in-law, he traces the duties of parents: '*They shall hold towards their children the office of priest, missionary, and guardian angel in order to lead them to a happy death.*'

X "Most of his letters are written to seminarists, or to young priests. They are full of godly counsels for vocations, for interior troubles, and for those who apply themselves to studies, which he wishes to see sanctified by union with God. '*Study,*' he says, '*but seek the light of your soul in God.*' . . . One he teaches to meditate, another to compose his homilies, this one to amend the suspicious dispositions of his nature, that other to know his vocation.

"His letters are real treatises on spiritual devotion, the principles of which may be summed up in the following points:—1, to live for God; 2, to preserve one's soul in peace; 3, to watch over one's heart, that no natural affection may creep in. '*To live for God, and on that account, not to confine oneself to a few exterior practices of piety; not to be satisfied with being a saint of a few exterior devotions, who is content with offering to the Blessed Virgin some poetical prayers, in which he says nice things.*' He requires, first, a profound humility; he unceasingly returns to this, and does not spare his friends on this point: *total self-denial* in the things of this world, and not only in exterior objects, but the soul must quit herself, after having given up creatures. Then, if she entrusts herself to God, she shall arrive at peace;

*'The soul must avoid all feeling of complacency at the sight of the good which she pretends to see, or of sadness at the sight of the evil which she perceives within herself?'* As he remarks, both complacency and sadness often proceed from pride. *'Abandon yourselves to the hands of God, and bear your miseries as long as it shall seem good to Him.'* Yes, but he adds immediately; *'Only employ the true means of getting rid of them.'*"

Those are the leading principles, which, like golden threads, run likewise through every line of his other writings; and which give them that firmness, charm, and sterling value, which will place the venerable Libermann amongst the best ascetic writers.

The works of the holy servant of God cannot be read without great profit, especially by persons already advanced in the paths of spiritual life. All will be compelled to admire this beautiful soul, and they shall feel themselves lifted up towards God by his words, so simple, yet so full of divine love. In these writings, which are an invaluable treasure for his religious family, his disciples especially will find the true spirit which ought to animate them in their works for the greater glory of God, and the salvation of the most abandoned souls.

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## CHAPTER XI.

The Venerable Libermann's last illness and death, 1852.

**B**LESSED is the man who is found without blemish, and who hath not gone after gold, nor put his trust in money nor in treasures! Who is he, and we will praise him? for he hath done wonderful things in his life."\* May we not answer this question addressed to us by the Holy Ghost by saying: This blessed and unblemished one is the venerable Francis Mary Paul Libermann, who never sought the fading treasures of this earth, but constantly strove to please his God and to benefit his fellow-men; a saint, who "being made perfect in a short space," by his many labours and admirable virtues, "fulfilled a long time."†

From the moment of his conversion, the holy servant of God advanced heavenward, like a giant, with a firm and unflinching step, so as to regain the time lost, whilst he was plunged in the sleep of Jewish infidelity. His reason, once illumined by the light of faith, was never darkened by the least doubt regarding the Christian dogma; his soul, once cleansed in the waters of Baptism, was never stained by sin; his heart, once inflamed with the fire of divine love, never suffered a decrease in the intensity of its ardour. His Christian career was that described by the Holy Ghost: "The path of the just is as a shining light, which goeth forward and increaseth even to perfect day."‡ The path of the venerable Libermann

\* Eccles. xxx. 8, 9.

† Wisd. iv. 13.

‡ Prov. iv. 18.



was thickly strewn with difficulties: sickness, humiliations, and the bitterest of sorrows. Still he went on, struggling, yet, all the while, like Jesus, his Divine Model and Master, "doing all things well," and "going about doing good." He suffered like a martyr, fought like a hero, laboured like an apostle, lived like a saint. Every day he gave himself into the hands of his God, with the greatest docility and holy indifference, "as the piece of wood lying on the way." He received talents, but he hid them not; he turned them to profit, and, like the good and faithful servant, doubled them by his industry; he received graces, but, far from neglecting them, he made them produce an hundredfold. In truth might he have said with the apostle St. Paul: "By the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace in me hath not been void."\* In a few years he sowed the seed of every virtue in the souls of thousands of levites, religious, priests, and apostles in particular; he endowed the Church with a religious society, established many houses and missions, promoted the erection of three vicariates apostolic, and of three bishoprics, sent his missionaries to the most desolate regions of the earth, and peopled heaven with his disciples, and the souls saved by their apostolic labours. The Lord "had filled His servant with the spirit of wisdom and understanding, clothed him with the glorious robe of the priesthood, and opened his mouth in the middle of the Church."† The humble convert of Saverne, though, like another Jeremias, unable to speak, accepted his mission; he preached unceasingly, by his words, deeds, and writings; he was vigilant and laborious in all things, doing the work of an evangelist, fulfilling the sacred ministry; he kept the faith, nobly fought the good fight,

\* 1 Cor. xv. 10.

† Eccles. xv. 5.

and, like St. Martin of Tours, he was willing to labour and fight still longer. But the time of his dissolution was at hand; he was ripe for heaven; the crown of justice and glory was won and ready.\* However, to fill up the measure of his merits, the Lord was pleased to make His servant pass through the crucible of a long sickness, the powerful effects of which he had felt for many years. The holy founder, who was prepared to drink the bitter chalice to its very dregs, seems to have known long beforehand the time of his death, as we can learn from the following deposition of one of his disciples: "Having heard that our venerable superior had announced that he would not live long, yet long enough for his work, I asked him if what I had heard was true: 'Provided,' he replied, 'I live for ten years, I ask no more, and I feel certain that it will be so.' 'Have you had any revelation to that effect?' 'I have felt something like an interior voice, which gave me this assurance.'" This conversation took place about the year 1842. What the holy founder predicted in 1842 is soon to be accomplished. On the 3rd of December, 1851, he visits Notre Dame du Gard, where he is seized by the malady that shall lead him to the tomb. In this community he edified everyone by his admirable peace and resignation. Rather than disturb the person who attended him, he would suffer the greatest inconveniences. "It is nothing," he used to say; "I offered it to the good God." He was anxious that the brother in charge of him should not, on his account, be absent from any exercise prescribed by the holy rule. Whatever he received, he only thought too good for him. One day the Scholastic Infirmarian proposed to give him a licorice draught to quench his burning thirst, saying that this was the medicine of

\* 2 Tim. iv. 2-9.

the poor. "*Oh yes!*" he said, "*give me the drink of the poor. . . I shall feel happy to take the drink of the poor.*"

After the Christmas Festivals, the venerable Libermann had recovered sufficient strength to proceed to Paris, there to sanctify by his last sufferings and holy death the Mother-House of his religious family. On entering his room, he said to the Brother Infirmarian: "*I am going to bed, I do not know when I shall rise again, I do not feel well.*" Then addressing the Reverend Father Le Vasseur, he said: "*It is your business, my dear, to take care of me.*" From that moment he was most anxious not to follow his own will in anything, but to obey unto death, after the example of his Divine Master

About the end of January, 1852, the most alarming symptoms appeared. Dr. Libermann, as soon as he was informed of the gravity of his brother's illness, hastened from Strasburg to Paris. The Reverend Father Schwindenhammer, Superior of Notre Dame du Gard, came likewise to join his *confrères* at the Mother-House, that he might follow more closely the various phases of the disease, which threatened a life so deservedly dear to all. At his departure from Gard, Father Schwindenhammer had enjoined the community to keep up a continual adoration before the Blessed Sacrament.

The letters, which he had the happy thought of writing to his children of Gard, permit us to assist in spirit, even to the last moment, at the bedside of the dying saint.\* "*It is only an hour since I arrived in Paris; I now hasten to give you all the news of our dear invalid. As it was announced to us on yesterday by the Reverend Father Le Vasseur, he has this morning received Extreme Unction*

\* Eight letters written at the bedside of the holy invalid, by the Reverend Father Ignatius Schwindenhammer. These letters were afterwards lithographed and sent to all the houses of the society.

and the Holy Viaticum. Since then he is a little better. On yesterday his brother had given up all hope, but to-day he has recovered some little confidence. Although there is real danger, his case, even humanly speaking, is not hopeless.

“Pray, pray, pray much; continue the adoration, day and night, until I write to the contrary, even though studies and health should be a little neglected. We ought to make every sacrifice, to obtain the preservation of our Father, if we be found worthy of so great a favour. Oh! if you could see how calm and serene our good Father is, and how submissive to the holy will of God! I have just asked him what I should say for him to his dear children of Gard: ‘*Tell them,*’ he replied, ‘*to pray to the good God, to place their confidence in God alone, readily to bow down before His holy will, whatever it may be; say that I do not forget them, and that I shall never forget them.*’ Tears flow from my eyes while I am writing these lines.”

On the following day, no favourable symptom afforded the least ray of hope, and the doctor considered his state very alarming. The invalid could hardly speak, and the deep yellow hue visible on his features was a proof of the overflowing of the liver, the seat of the malady. Tranquil, though wasted, and suffering from a violent thirst, he only found some repose in a moment of uneasy slumber, which announced the rapid decline of his strength. It was necessary to be prepared for the worst issue. His two colleagues, in whom he placed his greatest confidence, had already begged him in the name of the dearest interests of the Congregation, to make known his intentions regarding the choice of his successor. Standing on each side of the bed, they had humbly contended, as it were, with each other, both wishing to decline the burden of superiority. This struggle of humi-

lity deeply moved the venerable Father, who, after reflecting for a considerable time before God, consented to bequeath to his children a last token of his fatherly love and solicitude. Turning to the Reverend Father Schwindenhammer, he said: "*I think it is you who must sacrifice yourself.*"

On the morning of the following day, the designated successor went to our Lady of Victories, to offer his own person in exchange for the life of his dying Father. Soon after he wrote in these terms: "The news which I am going to give you to-day affords little consolation. Our good Father is becoming perceptibly weaker and weaker. He can scarcely speak in an undertone; he is nearly always in a state of half slumber; he is always very calm, peaceful, and resigned; every one seems to lose the little hope which was hitherto entertained. We cannot conceal from ourselves the painful truth, that nothing short of a miracle can bring about his recovery. Let us ask this miracle. It is not, I think, presumption on our part; we are justified in making such a request, since, to advance, we have still too much need of our good Father. Let us therefore redouble our prayers at the feet of *Notre Dame du Gard*. It is on the prayers of the community of Gard that I most confidently rely. Let each one offer himself as a victim instead of our beloved Father. I have this morning made the offering of my person to *Notre Dame des Victoires*, and did so with the utmost willingness; but more than one would be required as an adequate compensation for our holy superior."

Amongst the numerous visitors who continually succeeded one another, and who considered it a signal favour to approach the bed of suffering, M. Desgenettes came daily, with feelings of ever-increasing emotion. On the 30th January, drawing near to the bed of the saintly

patient, and bending over his wasted frame, he repeated to him the text of the apostle : “ *Bonum certamen certavi, cursum consummavi.*” At these words, a joyful smile flitted across the pale and languid features of the holy invalid ; a soft, kind look beamed thanks from his sunken eyes, whilst, with an effort, he affectionately pressed the friendly hand of the good old *Curé*. The Reverend Father de Ravignan, accompanied by M. Augustin Cochin, also came to visit him : “ Come with me,” said the great pulpit orator to the latter ; “ let us go and see how saints die.”

That same day, the Reverend Father Superior of Gard was compelled to write a very sad letter, far sadder than any of the preceding ones.



*30th January, 3 o'clock, p.m.*

“ MY WELL-BELOVED CONFRÈRES,— Alas ! the news I have to transmit to-day is far from encouraging : our beloved Father seems to be dying little by little. He can now scarcely make himself understood when speaking. This morning, at six o'clock, finding himself worse, he requested the prayers of the dying to be recited. I said them aloud in the presence of the whole community. The good Father told me that he had followed them throughout. He felt somewhat better afterwards, but it is an improvement on which we cannot rely. He is ever an admirable picture of resignation, peace, and submissiveness ; he neither asks to live nor refuses to die. He truly presents a vivid illustration of the saying : ‘ As man liveth, so shall he die.’ He is himself even to the last moment, always the same simplicity ; there is nothing singular, nothing striking in his manner of suffering : in this he is the same as he ever was in all his actions. When he suffers, he acknowledges it with simplicity. He



has endured a real martyrdom this entire forenoon, and he repeatedly exclaimed : ‘ *Humanly speaking, it is insupportable.*’ He is no wise changed, only a little thinner than usual. . . an inexpressible smile ever hangs upon his lips ; his eyes, always pretty clear, are now and then fixed on the crucifix, which is placed at the foot of his bed, along with the images of the Blessed Virgin and of St. Joseph. This morning, after I had recited the prayers for the dying, he gave his blessing to the whole Congregation, and to the students of the seminary assembled in his room. I then asked of him a special blessing for their Lordships, Bishops Bessieux and Kobès, and for Guinea. He gave it with great tenderness, holding the crucifix in his hand ; tears flowed from every eye. I also asked him if, in case the Blessed Virgin should call him to herself, he would wish to repose in the midst of his children of Notre Dame du Gard. ‘ *Yes,*’ he answered, ‘ *I would like it very much.*’ You see from the news I give you, that in all probability there is no further hope ; a real miracle is necessary ; on this point we can no longer deceive ourselves. Nevertheless, even now, we indulge more or less in hope, and I, in particular, always cherish some confidence. In his present feeble state, we cannot count on a single hour. Redouble, therefore, your prayers, more and more.”

This letter reached Gard on the 31st of January, at nine in the morning. Fathers Delaplace and Emonet at once proposed to make a last effort, by a pilgrimage to the house of La Neuville, which was situated at a distance of fourteen miles. The whole community set out on foot, although the weather was extremely severe. They prayed long and fervently in that chapel where the saintly founder and his first associates had so often implored, in favour of the negroes, the divine mercy of Jesus, and the powerful assistance of Mary. Before their eyes hung a picture

which represented our Lady opening her Maternal Heart to the forsaken decendants of Cham. Each one begged to be a holocaust, instead of their well-beloved Father; a ray of confidence beamed in every eye and cheered up every heart.

This hope seemed well-nigh confirmed when, on the following day, these lines were read from the Reverend Father Schwindenhammer:—"In my letter of yesterday I gave you to understand that the Reverend Father Superior would not pass the night; we were mistaken in our presentiment. Our good Father is still alive." Alas! the remainder of the letter dispelled all hope, and spread sorrow and sadness on every countenance. "He may still pass the coming night. His life, which hangs upon a thread, so great is his weakness, seems to be prolonged, as if to purify him entirely by the excessive sufferings he has to endure. He has merely enough of consciousness left to feel his pains. From time to time they draw from him, and, as it were, in spite of him, such sighs as:—'*O, my God! . . . Oh! how I suffer! . . . What a martyrdom!*' . . . and such other words; but never the slightest expression of weakness or impatience. . . I shall now tell you what occurred since my last letter, and what was for all a subject of the greatest joy and edification. On yesterday evening, about half-past six o'clock, after he had awakened from a slight slumber, I asked him, in presence of Father Lanurien and Brother Mary, how he felt—'*I suffer much,*' he answered.—'You offer up all your sufferings to the good God for your children, do you not?'—'*Yes . . .*' he replied, '*to the good God . . . for you . . . for all . . . for you all*' . . .—'And for Guinea also?' I added.—'*Oh! yes . . . for Guinea . . . for Guinea . . . and especially Dakar. . . Mgr. Kobès . . . Poor Guinea! . . . Poor Guinea!*' . . . he added, four or five times in succession.

“The Reverend Father Lannurien then said to him: ‘And for us, also, Father Superior, that we may be good religious?’—‘*Yes . . . yes . . . good religious . . . good religious*’ . . .—I then went on to ask him: ‘What do you recommend to us for being good religious?’—At these words he reflects for a moment; he then makes an effort to speak, and utters in broken words:—‘*To be fervent . . . fervent . . . always fervent . . . and, above all, Charity . . . charity . . . charity above all . . . charity in Jesus Christ . . . charity through Jesus Christ . . . charity in the name of Jesus Christ . . . Fervour . . . Charity . . . Union in Jesus Christ!*’—After pronouncing with difficulty these words, he opens his eyes, and seems to ask if we are all there. ‘*Remain with me,*’ he adds. The Reverend Father Lannurien answers: ‘We shall always stay with you.’ At these words he looks affectionately at Father Lannurien, and says, ‘*Yes, my dear.*’

“At nine o’clock in the evening, 31st of January, after the seminarists have retired to rest, all the members of the congregation present in the Mother-House assemble in his room. Father Le Vavas seur tells him that all his children are around him, anxious to receive his last instructions. He then recollects himself, opens his eyes, and looking around from side to side, says with great efforts to make himself understood:—‘*I see you for the last time . . . for the last time . . . I am happy to see you . . .*’—Then, after a moment of silence, he continues in a voice scarcely audible:—‘*Sacrifice yourselves for Jesus . . . for Jesus alone . . . with Jesus . . . with Jesus alone . . . Sacrifice yourselves with Mary . . . with Mary . . . God is all . . . Man is nothing . . . The Spirit of Sacrifice . . . Zeal for the glory of God . . . the salvation of souls.*’ He goes on repeating these same words, mingling them with that of *charity*. He ceases from exhaustion, saying, ‘*I can say no more.*’ I exhort him, how-

ever, to pronounce again the holy names of JESUS, MARY, JOSEPH, and he immediately begins to say: '*Jesus! . . . Mary! . . . Joseph!*' . . . He exerts himself to repeat them, and continues thus for a considerable time, saying over and over again *Jesus! . . . Mary! . . . Joseph! . . .*, until he can no longer pronounce them. He then endeavours, of his own accord, to raise his arm, and he blesses us all several times. I then asked him, at the request of Father Chevalier, who was then very ill, a special blessing for that father, and for the success of the native clergy of Africa.\*

"Precious lessons for us! Let us endeavour to impress them deeply upon our hearts."

With the first day of February came the slow but painful symptoms of a last agony. His eyes began to grow dim; his ear could catch a sound only with the greatest difficulty; nothing less than all the sweetness of the names of JESUS, MARY, JOSEPH, and the cry of Calvary: MY GOD! MY GOD! could unlock those lips, already dry and shrivelled. About three o'clock, the Superior of Gard declared that, without a miracle, he would not see the morrow's feast. "If he continues to breathe until seven o'clock in the evening, I intend going to the office of the Archconfraternity, and instantly beg for him this favour. I am anxious to be there, even at the risk of not being at hand to assist our beloved Father. I will ask the miracle for the glory of the Holy Heart of Mary. If such be not the will of God, I shall at least offer up the sufferings, the pains, and the death of our venerable Superior, to draw down upon ourselves and our labours the blessings of heaven."

\* Father Chevalier, a member of the Congregation, had, on account of ill-health, returned from the African missions; he died a few days after receiving this blessing of his venerable father.

That evening, accordingly, the directors, the seminarists, and a great number of the holy invalid's friends were assembled in the Church of Our Lady of Victories. After the usual recommendations, the venerable M. Desgenettes delivered in substance the following words:—

“MY BELOVED BRETHREN,—The joy of our beautiful Feast has been, for me, mingled with sadness. One of my friends, a saint, is in his agony for the last three days; it is the Reverend Father Libermann. God makes him suffer to expiate the sins of men; his life has been one of continual suffering. God brought him from afar, to make of him a victim of expiation. He converted him from Judaism, in a manner altogether providential, to make him the founder and first superior of a society which bears the name of the ‘Holy Ghost and the Immaculate Heart of Mary’—that Heart which, during his life, he loved so tenderly. He selected this title because he had a great love for the Archconfraternity, and wished to devote himself to the salvation of the most abandoned souls. For three days already he has lingered between life and death. The doctors are at a loss to understand how it is possible for him to bear up, for such a length of time, against so many sufferings. Although he seems to have lost the use of his faculties, his soul is animated with sentiments of faith and piety, always united to God, but in a way that you, my brethren, would perhaps be unable to understand, in that way in which the saints are, and remain united to Him. God seems to prolong his cruel agony, that he may still participate in your prayers. We dare not demand his recovery, lest we deprive him of the reward which awaits him. We shall, however, implore the Divine mercy upon him, for the greatest saints are wretched before God, and stand more or less in need of being purified. Let us, then, pray for him at this moment; he



will pray for us when he shall be in heaven. I repeat, my dear brethren, in him I lose '*a friend and a model.*' "

The morrow came, and after three days passed between life and death, the key was found to the secret of that long agony. To the three days of Calvary succeeded the joyful Feast of the Purification of Our Lady, and of the Presentation of the Infant Jesus in the temple.

Let us here resume the depositions of eye-witnesses :— At a quarter past three in the afternoon, the Reverend Father Superior of Gard wrote the following lines, in sight of the dying founder :—“ Our very dear Father was almost unconscious, apparently without seeing or hearing anything. He continued in this state till about two o'clock this afternoon. All at once he wakens up, opens his eyes, casts them around on every side, seeming to recognise what he sees. A crucifix is presented to him, he looks at it, and contemplates it with eagerness, mingled with pain and sweetness. A few pious words are pronounced for him, such as '*Jesus, Mary, Joseph;*' '*In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum;*' '*Monstra te esse matrem;*' and other similar aspirations addressed to Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and his Guardian Angel. He appears to understand, for at each word his eyes light up with increasing brightness. At one time he turns them on the crucifix, again he raises them towards heaven, with that inexpressible look which characterized him in his moments of fervent and earnest prayer. But when I held before him an image of Mary, with the Infant Jesus in her arms, oh! it was then his eyes glowed with vivid animation! His countenance, worn by suffering and the approach of death, assumed an ineffable expression of love and tenderness, whilst one would have fancied luminous rays beaming forth from his features. He appeared to listen to some one speaking to him, and to hear a celestial harmony which plunged his soul into



a delightful ecstasy. He made an effort to raise his head from the pillow, and by certain movements of his hands indicated that he was desirous of seizing the image, to press it to his heart. The upper part of his body seemed to spring forward, as it were, to unite with his good Mother. Oh, how beautiful it was! These different feelings produced in him a kind of fictitious strength, a species of animation, which might be taken for a real ecstatic transport... Further details at a later time... This letter must be at the post at four o'clock, and it is already almost a quarter to four. The breathing is diminishing, he is dying away. . . In five or six minutes all shall be consummated. Our good Father will be in heaven; the Blessed Virgin will conduct him thither, as she conducted on this day the Infant Jesus to the Temple. They are beginning the *Magnificat* in the chapel... he shall expire before it is finished."

Another eye-witness, the illustrious Abbé Rohrbacher, who resided at the seminary, furnishes us with the following testimony:—"His death, precious in the sight of the Lord, took place on the 2nd of February, Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, whilst the community, assembled in the choir for the Vespers of the day, were singing the words, quite distinctly heard in the room of the dying founder, *Et exaltavit humiles*. We were ourselves witness of it, being at that very moment at the foot of the bed."\*

A saint had quitted this earth, and from his humble cell to his heavenly throne there was but a step. His voice was already mingled with the celestial harmonies, when his afflicted but resigned disciples, standing around his lifeless remains, repeated with the choir the *Gloria*

\* *Histoire Universelle de l'Eglise*, t. xxviii, 2nd edition, p. 671.

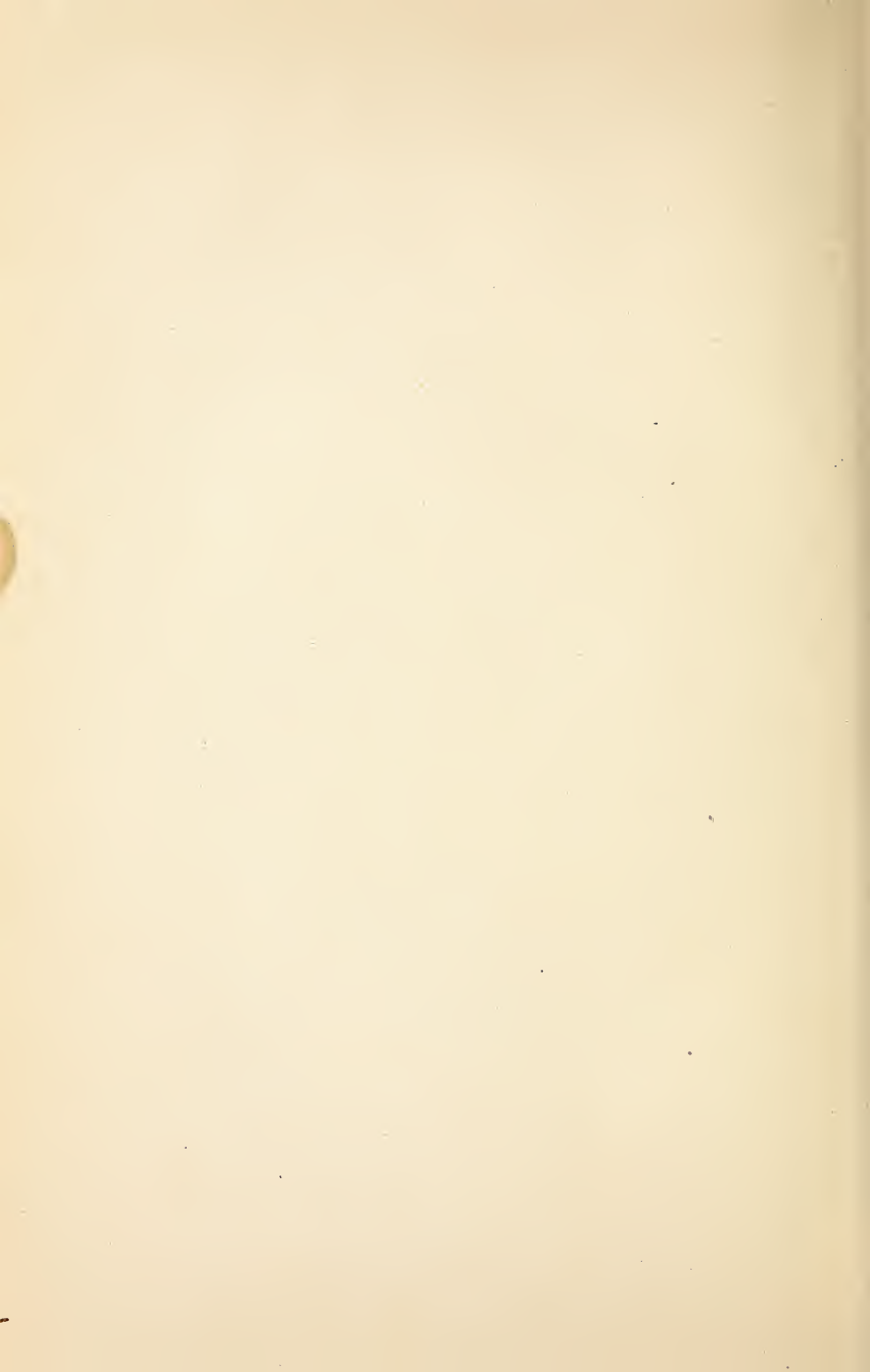
LA CHARITE SURTOUT... L'UNION EN JESUS-CHRIST  
 FERVENTS. TOUJOURS FERVENTS.

L'ESPRIT DE SACRIFICE  
 ZELE POUR LA GLOIRE DE DIEU... LE SALUT DES AMES

Gravé par F. Buisson  
 Direction d'après nature  
 par J. G. de Sijpey-Prion

†  
*François Adhemar  
 Prêtre, Fondateur de la Congrégation  
 de la S. et Innocente pour le Salut  
 et premier Supérieur de l'Espirit et du Sacrement. Mort  
 le 20 Mars, le jour de la Purification de  
 la S. Vierge, âgé de 89 ans. 1832.*

ET EXALTAVIT HUMILES



*Patri* of Mary's holy canticle. The Very Reverend Father Schwindenhammer announced the sad intelligence to his children of Notre Dame du Gard, on the 2nd February, at 7 o'clock, P.M. :—



“MY WELL-BELOVED CONFRÈRES.—‘*Consummatum est!*’ the sacrifice is consummated! Our well-beloved Father is no more! . . . We are orphans, and orphans still young! Oh! what great need we had of the light and direction of our dear superior and founder! My God, fiat! . . . fiat! . . . how much we prayed to Thee! how many souls invoked Thee with fervour! Thou hast, no doubt, taken him, only to place him in Thy paradise! Once more, O God, mayest Thou be for ever blessed, fiat! . . . fiat! . . . Amen.

“Oh, yes, beloved confrères, if you have any tears, let them flow; but let us not weep over our father, he is in heaven; let us weep rather over ourselves, ourselves, poor orphans! Our venerable Father died, as I have given you to expect, whilst they were singing in the chapel the ‘*Magnificat*’ of the Vespers for the Feast of the Purification, at the verse, *Deposuit potentes de sede, et exaltavit humiles*. The Reverend Father Le Vavasasseur afterwards closed his eyes during the *Gloria Patri*. Let us love to notice this circumstance: he died during the *Magnificat*, at the Vespers for the Feast of the Purification, and on a Monday, the day consecrated to the Holy Ghost, thus uniting more closely the two branches that constitute our society, as well as the two devotions which should be the object of our special worship. . . .”

No sooner had the saintly founder breathed his last, than the directors and students eagerly sought to secure some relic of the departed saint. Some took away from his

desk the pens he had made use of ; others cut off locks of his hair, or piously contended for a portion of his linen and habiliments.

His death created a profound sensation, not only among the clergy of Paris, but even in the higher circles of the civil administration, and wherever the servant of God had been known. The heads of the different departments of "Worship," of "Home Affairs," and of the "Navy," hastened to address to the Congregation the highest expressions of sympathy, and from every part of France, as well as from foreign countries, letters of condolence poured in for a long time in rapid succession.

There flocked into the room of death a crowd of devout and recollected visitors, who seemed to approach an altar rather than a bier. One of them, the Abbé de Ségur, obtained as a favour permission to draw a rapid sketch, which, besides being a most faithful portrait, preserves in the features of the dead something of his last ecstasy.

The venerable founder had expressed a wish to repose within the enclosure of Notre Dame du Gard. In conformity with this desire, his children considered it a religious duty to convey him thither, after having celebrated a funeral service in the Seminary of the Holy Ghost. M. Desgenettes officiated at the solemn High Mass, pronounced the absolution, and recited the last prayers which preceded the departure of the funeral cortège. Two of his disciples, the Reverend Fathers Schwindenhammer and Le Vasseur, who had scarcely ever left his pillow during his long agony, accompanied his remains to Notre Dame du Gard, where they arrived on Monday evening, at 8 o'clock. All the members of the novitiate knelt in prayer around the bier during that night, the last he was to pass still visible in some manner in their midst.

The last obsequies took place on the following morning (10th February, 1852), at eleven o'clock, in the midst of tears and regrets, mingled with the hope that his memory would flourish above his tomb. The mortal remains of the great servant of God were treasured up in an humble vault, hewn out at the foot of the cemetery cross, and surmounted by a modest monument.

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## Part V.

THE VIRTUES AND DEVOTIONS OF THE VENERABLE  
LIBERMANN, HISTORY OF HIS SOCIETY TO  
THE YEAR 1880.

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### CHAPTER I.

The Virtues and Devotions of the Venerable Libermann. His  
Theological Virtues.

**T**HE good and faithful servant has entered the Lord's "tabernacles after which his soul had anxiously longed and fainted;"\* he has received the reward promised to those who forsake all things for the glory of Jesus and the salvation of souls. He now wears the peerless garb of the elect; his brow is encircled with the unfading crown of glory; he holds the palm of victory in his hand; and he stands in grateful adoration before the throne of the Lamb that was slain.† The humble one is truly exalted, and why? It is not on account of the powerful grace which led him from the night of Jewish infidelity to the bright pale of the Christian Church; not on account of his vocation to be a priest, a founder, and a superior; but, because he lived a life of innocence; because he did all his actions uncommonly well; because he made use of the graces he received, to advance daily in the practice of every virtue; be-

\* Ps. lxxx. 2-3

† Apoc. v. and vi.

cause, by his life of holiness, he was a delight to God, and "a spectacle to the world, and to angels, and to men."\* The humble servant of God is now exalted in heaven, because of his admirable virtues on earth. His whole Christian career was an unbroken tissue of holy deeds. His was the life of a seminarist, studious, pious, and edifying; of a priest, a founder, and superior, gentle, affable, and affectionate; of a religious, regular, pious, and fervent; of a saint, constantly walking before his heavenly Father, and ever occupied in "laying up treasures in heaven, where neither the rust nor the moth doth consume, and where thieves do not break through, nor steal."†

The virtues are the quintessence of a saint's life, the perfume of his thoughts, words, and actions, the cause of his merits before God, and the object of admiration and imitation before men. To treat the important subject of the virtues of the venerable Libermann, we shall draw most of our information from a very valuable and authentic source, namely, the depositions of sworn witnesses, in particular that of the Reverend Father Delaplace, who, with the fondness of a devoted son, watched and studied, during several years, every word and deed of his revered Father. With such guides, we shall cast a cursory glance at the theological, cardinal, and religious virtues as practised by our saint, and conclude by a brief survey of his principal devotions, so as to propose him as a striking model for all Christians and in particular for priests and religious.

If Jacob Libermann sprang from the old, wild, and withered olive-tree of the Jewish stock, he nevertheless possessed excellent qualities by his very nature; but he received true life and vigour, after he had been "grafted

\* I Cor. iv. 9.

† S. Matt. vi. 20.

into the good olive-tree"\* of the Church of Jesus Christ. Then his natural endowments were spiritualized in the pure Christian atmosphere, which he has embalmed with the fragrance of his virtues and holy example.

✓ From his first step into the Christian horizon, the convert of Saverne kept the lamp of faith ever ardently burning in his soul, and advanced by its guidance more than by the feeble glimmer of his reason. The light of faith directed all his steps, and made him see the interests of God in all things. Faith was the moving spring of his actions, the root of his virtues, the basis of his holiness, the power which made him a truly spiritual man, whose mind and heart were fixed on Him in Whom he lived, moved, and had being.† He constantly walked before "Him Who filleth heaven and earth,"‡ Who knoweth all things, and seeth all things, and Whom we meet whithersoever we direct our steps.§ Whether engaged in pressing occupations, alone in his room, or travelling, he was ever united to his Divine Master. On his journeys, he would speak of the things of God, say his beads, read his breviary, or enter some spiritual thoughts in a note-book, which he always carried with him. His whole life was one continual prayer. "Whilst one day," says Father Lannurien, "our saintly Father dictated to me a few ideas for an instruction, I thoughtlessly interrupted him several times: 'If,' he said, 'you interrupt my meditation, I can say no more,' showing by these words that it was the spirit of God that spoke through him."

As a true interior man, he blessed God in everything, whether prosperous or calamitous; and before undertaking anything, he would first consult the Lord in humble

\* Rom. xi. 24.

† Acts, xvii. 28.

‡ Jerm. xxiii. 24.

§ Ps. cxxxviii. 7-11.

and fervent prayer, and then peacefully abandon the result to His adorable will. He saw everything in the light of faith, weighed everything in a supernatural balance, and measured all things according to the rules and maxims of the Gospel. To him the universe appeared as the vast domain of God, the Church as the spouse of Jesus and the mother of souls, the successor of Peter as the Lord's infallible lieutenant, who, with the assistance of the Holy Ghost, and under the auspices of Mary, the "*Star of the Sea*," safely steers his boat through the waves of time to the shores of eternity. To him worldly honours appeared as fleeting phantoms, earthly riches as vile dust and moving sand, sensual pleasures as empty, deceptive dreams. He was, in the words of St. Paul, the just man who liveth of faith, whose every life-breath proceedeth from faith and tendeth solely to the greater glory of Jesus and Mary. He viewed everything from the all-commanding heights of faith, and so constantly did he act through spiritual motives, that it was almost impossible to discover in him a mere natural or human act. All his conduct, his words, his actions, his very appearance detached the souls of others from earth, and lifted them up towards heaven. As an aromatic plant wherever it is placed ceases not to diffuse its fragrance, to embalm the air, and impregnate the surrounding objects with its perfume, even so, this true man of God ceased not to exhale the fragrance of the spirit of faith, wherever he appeared, and to cause all who approached him to feel the strengthening effects of a supernatural atmosphere.

The virtue of hope was not less admirable in the holy servant of God than that of faith, upon which it was firmly based. The venerable Libermann seemed deeply penetrated by two leading thoughts—that of his extreme poverty, misery, and nothingness, and that of

the infinite power, goodness, and mercy of God. His sole trust was in God. When cursed by his father on earth, he lifted up his eyes towards his heavenly Father, and blessings in abundance streamed upon him, in reward for his filial confidence. To his Father in heaven he looked for subsistence during the period of his studies, and he was not left wanting. In Him he found, like Jesus his Divine Pattern, strength in his weaknesses, consolation in his afflictions, and support in his continual trials and sufferings. Like Jesus sweating Blood in the garden, did the sorrowful acolyte implore his heavenly Father, when, exhausted and fainting, he sank beneath the dreadful attacks of epilepsy; to Him he applied for aid when huge obstacles threatened to impede or ruin the work which he was destined to establish. He, too, drank the bitter chalice to its very dregs; but he, too, saw his efforts crowned with success, and his humiliations changed into triumphs. His trust was in God, when, during several years, he struggled with the initial difficulties of his foundation; when premature death carried off his worthiest and dearest disciples; and when, later on, he had to cope with unexpected opposition to the providential union of two societies. The Lord constantly rewarded the confidence of His servant: the sickness of epilepsy disappeared; the portals of the sanctuary were thrown open, the new priest ascended the altar; the novitiate, like another cenacle of apostles, was established, new heroes promptly arrived to fill up the gaps left by those who nobly fell on the field of battle; and the holy founder was enabled to bring about the union of the two societies in a manner as admirable and as successful, as ever has been heard of in the annals of religious institutes.

The venerable Libermann's confidence in God was peaceful, universal, and truly filial. In August, 1842, a

few months after the foundation of the society, he wrote as follows: "We number at present five in the novitiate, and before the end of the month we expect five others. We live on peacefully in our retreat, and we advance quietly and noiselessly. I do nothing special to attract subjects, but I wait till the Master of the vineyard will send us some. I do not send away those who come with the marks of the Divine will; but I refuse those whom I believe God does not wish to be with us. My great maxim is, that I am not entrusted with a business of my own, but with a work of God. I am only a poor little servant in the house of the Father of the family; I wait in peace in this small corner of His holy House wherein He has placed me, until He deigns to send me work and labourers for the work."

He relied likewise on Providence for the temporal needs of the community. The year 1847 was a trying one, and there was every reason to fear that the funds would fail, and that it would be impossible to receive and support the ever-increasing number of new-comers. His courage never slackened for an instant. Writing at that time to his missionaries, he said: "Only myself and the finances remain behind. I think, however, that I am far more backward than the finances. The dearth of this year, and the necessity of augmenting the furniture of the community have occasioned considerable expense. Our good Mother shall support her own house. I depend on Providence, and I feel certain that I shall not be confounded." And in truth, Jesus and Mary always assisted him. Every day the holy servant of God might have exclaimed with the royal Prophet: "With expectation I have waited for the Lord, and the Lord was attentive to me."\*

It was especially in the spiritual order that the confi-

\* Ps. xxxix. 1.



dence of our saint was absolute and admirable. He knew that in the supernatural sphere we are utterly powerless, and he advanced on the path of virtue with the peaceful simplicity and truthful candour of a child under the guidance of a beloved mother. He earnestly recommended everyone to avoid that natural preoccupation of mind, which spiritual writers designate by the name of *Contention*. In one of his last instructions at *Notre Dame du Gard*, when speaking on the means of advancing in holiness, he said: "Contention, which is always bad, consists in striving to acquire a virtue, a supernatural good, by mere natural efforts. The soul imagines she is doing what is right; but when her attempts prove ineffectual, she falls more and more into troubles: she exhausts herself in fruitless endeavours, which only plunge her into deeper darkness. We can never be sufficiently convinced that, by ourselves, we are quite powerless in the supernatural order, that we cannot even perform the least act of true humility. Instead of straining our mind by useless exertions, we ought to rely solely on the Divine goodness and mercy. God, an infinitely kind Father, is most anxious to pour down His blessings on the souls of His children, who, alas! but too often blindly and heedlessly wander away from so loving and liberal a Master."

What the venerable founder taught others he practised himself, knowing well that especially in the spiritual order it is necessary to remember the words of St. Paul: "*Non volentis, neque currentis, sed miserentis est Dei.*"—"It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy."\* The venerable Libermann, this other Francis de Sales, was naturally more inclined towards the loving and bending mercy of God than

\* Rom. ix. 16.

towards His rigorous and inflexible justice; and he omitted no opportunity to instil into every heart the sweet honey of Divine confidence. He often said that fear and narrowness of heart are most injurious to souls, and he recommended his disciples to impress the poor with feelings of the most unreserved confidence in the immense mercy of our heavenly Father, and the infinite merits of our Lord Jesus. What confidence may not each one derive from this single thought: The Son of God shed His Precious Blood for me! The holy founder said that the theologians, with all their science, were far from knowing all the secrets of the merciful goodness of God. Nevertheless, he did not encourage presumption, spiritual sloth, or that kind of quietism with which too many easy-going souls willingly accommodate themselves. He wished the souls he directed to work earnestly, as if all depended on themselves, and to trust in God as if their sanctification depended entirely on Divine grace. To practise virtue, to be recollected in our prayers, to despise creatures, and to please God, we must labour ourselves. God is not bound to work miracles, to compel us to advance on the road of perfection. He endowed us with free will, He gives us His grace; He showed us the way and gave us the example. If we wish to proceed and succeed, we must work, and work unceasingly. When we study the life of constant mortification and total self-denial of the venerable Libermann, we are led to believe that he considered the acquisition of perfection rather the effect of our industry, than that of Divine grace. There was perhaps no saint who demanded more attention and care, more generosity and spirit of sacrifice, than is required by the venerable Libermann, either to obtain the grace of God, or to correspond with it with fidelity and constancy. He had received extraordinary lights on the

mutual relations of Divine grace and the souls of men, and he directed himself and others in accordance with these lights. His writings teem with admirable passages on this subject ; but nothing could be at the same time simpler and deeper than his doctrine on "sanctity," in his instructions to the missionaries. We, too, fear not, like the Reverend Father Delaplace, to call the venerable Libermann "*the practical doctor of Divine grace.*"

The faith of our saint was ardent, his hope was firmly based, and his charity never ceased to increase in intensity. Whilst the baptismal waters imparted to his soul grace, life, and beauty, the Holy Ghost enkindled in his heart a fire that was not to be extinguished, but to become gradually a glowing furnace of Divine love. Soon after his conversion he ascended into the highest regions of affective prayer. His heart seemed to melt before the spirit of God ; his aspirations were like the sighs of a seraph ; his eyes were changed into fountains of burning tears ; and his entire being was permeated with ineffable spiritual delight, so that for several years, he was, as it were, absorbed in the adorable Majesty of God. His ardent love was even reflected on his exterior, especially when he knelt as in ecstasy before the hidden God of the tabernacle. His only delight was to be united to Jesus ; his only fear to be separated from Him.

Charity is the effect of Divine grace in a soul, the link that connects her with God, or rather the heavenly fire which consumes and transforms her into Him Who is all charity: *Deus caritas est.* Charity is faith alive, faith in action, faith accompanied by sanctifying grace which is the life of the soul, as the soul is the life of the body. The charity of the venerable Libermann was that of a loving, filial, and most intimate union with God, that total transformation into Jesus Christ which made St. Paul

exclaim: "*Vivo autem, jam non ego: vivit vero in me Christus*"—"And I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me."\*

Jesus had established His dwelling in the soul of our saint, who lovingly followed all the movements and desires of his heavenly Guest. The spirit of Jesus filled all his faculties, and animated all his acts, both interior and exterior. The following words, which the venerable Father Pinault spoke before a great number of students, prove how perfectly the venerable Libermann must have portrayed the perfect image of total transformation into Jesus Christ: "A pure intention of doing all in Jesus Christ explains why some souls advance in so short a time. M. Libermann, for instance, enjoying but feeble health, which obedience compelled him to take care of, did nothing extraordinary, whilst here at Issy; he practised no special fast or abstinence, nor any particular austerity. How is it that he reached so high? Because he possessed the secret of performing the most common actions in a most uncommon manner, that is, he did all his actions in the spirit of our Lord. All in him was so well regulated that God each moment could say of him: "This is my well-beloved son; this is his gait, these are his words, these his actions; there is nothing human in this man; all is immolated through My Son to My glory. When he was sick, it required no great spiritual acumen to perceive that it was not he who suffered: he merely seemed to lend his body to our Blessed Lord to suffer in Him."

So ardent was the love of the venerable Libermann, that he almost died with grief at the sight of the indifference and ingratitude of men towards Jesus. How willingly he would have laid all human hearts at the feet of his Divine Master! "O, my Jesus!" he wrote to a young

\* Gal. ii. 20.

deacon, "why do not our hearts melt with grief, when we consider how little Thou art loved by men, and how wretched and slothful are even those who pretend to have a slight love for Thee, and to be mindful of Thy grace and glory. My dear friend, *non est qui faciat bonum ; non est usque ad unum*. For some time past, this thought saddens and overpowers me. O my God! what shall become of us, if things shall go on in such a way? Why do we live on earth, unless we live for Thee and in Thee alone?" Love of God was the moving spring of his life, and the sole motive of all his undertakings for God and for souls.

Love for our neighbour is to our love for God what the flame is to the fire. As fire naturally produces flame, so love for God naturally produces zeal or love for our neighbour. "If we have true love," says St. John, "let us show it in our works." "The love of God," says St. Gregory, "is never idle; if it exists, it effects great things, and when it does not operate, it is a sign that it does not exist." Again, St. Augustine says: "He who has no zeal loves not:" "*Qui non zelat non amat.*"

In the venerable Libermann, the ardour of his zeal for souls was proportionate to the intensity of his love for God. This love betrayed itself on all occasions by the sweetest perfumes of Christian charity, namely, by patience, meekness, and kindness—kindness in particular, that purest blossom of Divine love, that perfection of charity which charms the social relations of men, manifested itself in its thousand lovely shades, rendered every intercourse with our saint agreeable and delightful, and made the communities he directed blissful abodes of peace and happiness. "Never," says Father Delaplace, "have I met a man who appeared to reproduce more strikingly the goodness, meekness, and patience of Jesus Christ, as also his tender love for men. His gait, his



manner, his voice, the expression of his countenance, his whole appearance breathed forth these virtues. He was never seen doing an uncharitable or unkind act; nor was he ever noticed omitting voluntarily the occasion of performing an act of charity. All who approached him were ravished by his charity; and, even to-day, when his name is mentioned, the first picture, which at once presents itself to our mind, is his air ever calm and recollected, his angelical sweetness and gentleness, his truly ineffable charity."

All his life he shared our blessed Lord's peculiar tenderness for the poor, the lowly, the ignorant, the sick, the afflicted, the tempted, the sinners. He was always and everywhere the friend of the poor, and this predilection was noticed at Saint-Sulpice, Rome, Amiens, and Paris. On his journeys he went as often as possible on foot to save travelling expenses, and to give more liberally to the poor. For some time he paid the pension of two orphan girls, and secretly provided for all their wants. He did the same for several young men who were unable to meet the expenses of their clerical education, or of young ladies whom poverty would otherwise hinder from entering religious communities. As long as he had any thing, he distributed alms; and when his means were not able to meet the exigencies of his charity, he would have recourse to the charity of others, either by asking directly or by his letters of recommendation. But when he gave alms, "his left hand knew not what his right hand did; his gifts were bestowed in secret and seen only by his heavenly Father." He also carefully avoided all that might have humbled those he assisted: he appeared rather to accomplish a duty than to do a good work; and more than once he thanked the objects of his charity for



having afforded him an occasion to do an action that is pleasing to our Blessed Lord.

If the venerable Libermann was ever ready to relieve the bodily wants of his fellow-men, he was likewise all zeal to alleviate their spiritual necessities. He listened to the sorrowful, wept with the afflicted, and sympathized with all that were in sufferings. He was himself obliged to admit, that few grieved or scrupulous souls ever left him without being consoled and restored to the enjoyment of peace. "With the venerable father," said a person whom he directed, "troubles existed no longer; he removed them, as it were, with his hand, or rather he caused all crosses and trials to appear light, sweet, and amiable."

Nothing could equal the saint's charity and kindness towards his disciples. He never lost sight of the least of them, was attentive to all their wants, and never ceased to be to each one a truly devoted and affectionate father, a tender and compassionate friend, and a sure guide on the road to heaven. No virtue was dearer to his heart than that of charity. Charity was the frequent theme of his instructions, particularly of his conferences to the novices. He repeatedly declared that as long as union of minds would reign among his disciples, his "little society" would be blessed by God and do wonders before men; but that it would become useless, if ever it were to lose the spirit of charity. Having heard one day that a somewhat uncharitable discussion had taken place during recreation, he poured forth his grief that same evening at conference, with such feeling, and, despite his usual meekness, referred to the occurrence with such force and severity, that, according to the expression of an eyewitness, "all present were terrified."

Our Holy Redeemer, on the eve of His death, said to His disciples: "Abide in My love." "Love one another as I

have loved you. By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another ;” and lifting up His divine eyes to heaven the Man-God prayed : “ that all may be one, as Thou, Father in Me, and I in Thee ; that they may be one in Us !” Thus also, the venerable Libermann, whose soul was consumed with love for God, and whose heart was shaped after the Heart of the true Samaritan and the Good Shepherd, wished the heavenly virtue of charity to be the distinctive mark of his children, when, with his dying lips, he bequeathed to them that last sublime legacy. “ Sacrifice yourselves for Jesus . . . for Jesus alone . . . with Jesus . . . with Mary . . . zeal for the glory of God . . . the salvation of souls . . . above all, charity . . . charity . . . charity above all . . . charity in Jesus Christ . . . charity through Jesus Christ . . . charity in the name of Jesus Christ . . . charity . . . union in Jesus Christ !”

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## CHAPTER II.

The Virtues and Devotions of the venerable Libermann (*continued*).  
His Cardinal and Religious Virtues.



**F**AITH, Hope, and Charity, these three great fountains of the spiritual life, flowed on unceasingly in the soul of the venerable Libermann, and formed copious and graceful streams which delighted the heavens and fertilized the earth. From their deep and translucent currents, wherein were admirably commingled the abundant floods of God's graces, and the many free and willing acts of a saint, there arose incessantly a bright and gentle dew, whose myriads of crystal drops were carefully treasured up by the angels, to sparkle one day like so many diamonds in the imperishable crown of blessed Francis Mary Paul Libermann. These precious gems were the saint's innumerable acts of the theological virtues and the priceless merits he acquired by his ever ardent faith, his firm hope, and his burning charity.

There also sprang up in the soul of the holy servant of God four other sources of merits, namely, the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude. His supernatural prudence was so universally admitted, that persons of all classes would apply to him for advice and readily abide by his decisions. He was in this world like a great and bright light that illumined numbers, and directed many in the ways God wished them to follow. His prudence was not that of a man who relies

on his own wisdom, but the supernatural prudence of a saint who relies on God, without, however, neglecting human means and precautions. His prudence was solidly based on, and harmoniously regulated by the lights of his reason and those of his faith: it was a happy comingling of the natural with the supernatural, of the human with the divine. The way he judged, acted, and succeeded at Saint-Sulpice, Rennes, Rome, Strasburg, Amiens, and Paris, affords ample proofs of his extraordinary prudence, as well in the management of temporal affairs as in the still more difficult guidance of souls. It is evident that he was illumined by a light that is not of this world, and that he truly was that *Spiritual man* who judgeth all things. The following are a few of his maxims, which show at once the accuracy of his judgment, and the deep, penetrating keenness of his prudence:—"Know how in all things to wait for the moment designed by Divine Providence." "Never act hastily or impatiently, when you meet with obstacles, but wait peacefully till these obstacles be removed; and if they cannot be removed, step over them, or turn around them." "Without ever flattering the passions of men, do not act too directly or precipitately against their prejudices. Know how to bear them calmly and patiently, until you are enabled to turn those very prejudices to the glory of God and the salvation of souls." "Never take a resolution, or perform an action, when under the influence of any passion, such as anger, susceptibility, or jealousy." "Advance on your path, surrounded by a supernatural atmosphere created by your spirit of the presence of God." "In all your undertakings seek to know the will of God, by praying fervently and consulting those who are able to enlighten you." "Strive in all things to think, judge, speak, and act according to God and not according to

yourself, and you will always be resigned to whatever may happen to you."

His prudence was particularly striking in his relations with souls, as a spiritual director. Before giving an advice to a soul, he would first study most attentively her qualities and dispositions; then search to find out the designs of God upon her; and, finally, weigh with great care her degree of strength and generosity. It was only when he knew a soul thoroughly, when he saw distinctly all the hidden springs of her inclinations, and held, so to speak, the reins of her passions in his hands, that he began to stimulate her to cast off little by little all earthly affections, and to make her advance on the road of perfection and holiness. But, even then, he would urge her on gently and cautiously, "with weight and measure," directing each soul according to her nature and temperament, giving to each the food her state required, imparting light to one, strength to another, consoling the one, reproving the other, and frequently combining all those means, according to persons and circumstances. Towards some he displayed an indulgence that might have astonished many who are unskilled in the treatment of souls; whilst towards others he evinced, without, however, departing from his usual mildness, a severity against the least imperfections, or natural attachments, which might have caused him to be accused of too great rigour. Such was especially his conduct towards privileged souls destined for great things, but which, through want of generosity, or on account of a few little unworthy affections, might easily have frustrated the designs of God upon them, spent their lives in trifles, forfeited countless graces, and failed to reach a high degree of sanctity.

Far different was his method with the feeble ones, with

sinners. Towards those he would act with the affectionate tenderness of the Father of the prodigal, with the lovingness and zeal of the Good Shepherd, Who joyfully carried back the stray sheep on His shoulders, as a true disciple of Him Who "broke not the bruised reed, nor extinguished the smoking flax."\* Like Jesus, he was anxious to make "the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the dead rise, the lepers to be cleansed, and the Gospel to be preached to poor abandoned souls."† Like Jesus, he was careful to revive in the hearts of sinners the least smouldering spark of faith, and to strengthen the thinnest thread that might draw them from the abyss of crime, despair, and damnation.

The prudence of the venerable Libermann was not that false one of the cunning children of the world, which is often influenced and blinded by the prejudices of the flesh, self-interest, or the countless fancies of the imagination; but that calm, spiritual, god-like prudence of a saint, who derives counsel and light from the infinite wisdom of God.

The virtue of justice was likewise most deeply rooted in the candid soul of our saint. Knowing that he belonged to God by many titles, he constantly paid to Him the homage due to his Divine Majesty, by leading a life of faith, innocence, love, and adoration; and by endeavouring to lead as many souls as he could to the feet of their Creator, their Redeemer, and their Sanctifier. If he was just towards God, he was also just towards men. Nothing could equal his gratitude for favours received. He never forgot the kindness of M. Drach, the charity of the ladies who provided for his support whilst he was at Saint-Stanislaus and Saint-Sulpice, the devotedness and self-sacrifice of his professors, the frank hospitality of M.

\* Matt. xii. 20.

† Matt. xi. 5.



Patriarca, nor the saintly affection of M. Desgenettes. He evinced his justice towards God by his innocence and love, and his justice towards men by his unalterable kindness, his undying gratitude for favours received, and his ardent zeal for the spiritual welfare of all.

It was remarked, that when buying his own victuals at Rome, he never bargained with any merchant, convinced, as he said, "that honest people have a right to earn their living." In the house of M. Patriarca, he had frequently to fulfil the office of arbiter, to settle little disputes with strangers, and his decisions always resulted in establishing peace. Such confidence was placed in him at Amiens, that when the community van happened to pass by the custom house, the officials would say: "It is M. Libermann's van; let it pass on." Should he have the least thing to declare, he would never fail to do so. The saint was just, and, therefore, he rendered to God the things that are God's and to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's;\* and he constantly treated every one as every one would wish to be treated by others.

The virtue of temperance proceeds from that of justice as naturally as water runs from an overflowing fountain. It is because he dealt with God and men in accordance with the rules of justice, that our saint used all exterior things in accordance with the rules of temperance. "I know not," says Father Delaplace, "whether there existed many souls more detached from earthly things and more moderate in the permitted and necessary use of creatures. He produced on all the effect of a man who was no longer of this world. His senses, with all their appetites, seemed to be perfectly submitted to the spirit, as the spirit was submitted to God. . . He also seemed to have a manner

\* Matt. xxii. 21.

of his own to take his repasts, a manner so modest, and, if I may use the expression, so spiritual, that it could scarcely be perceived ; but, it was easily noticeable, that frequently, after he had served out to all the others, and commenced to eat last, he was the first to finish." He was never heard making the least remark on what was served at table, whether it was well or ill prepared. He was particularly anxious always to follow the ordinary *régime* of the community. One day he gently reproved the brother cook, who, knowing the feeble state of the saintly father's health, had endeavoured to treat him somewhat better than the others : "Well, brother," he said, "it seems that you wish to send me to purgatory." "How, Reverend Father?" replied the culprit. "By giving me," said the good superior, "select milk with cream at breakfast. I heard so, my dear brother ; you must not do this again." For a long time he slept on a single straw mattress, and when, later on, the brother in charge of his room added a second and softer one, he soon found that his good superior carefully laid it aside every night, and continued to gratify his great love for austerities.

Detachment from creatures and total self-denial seemed to be the constant aim and delight of the venerable servant of God. Hence he never sought for mere natural satisfactions, such as games, walks, or excursions, which even pious persons may legitimately enjoy. His visits were few and of short duration, and never without a real motive of necessity or utility ; and then, though he knew how to enliven the conversation with a charming gaiety, he never failed to edify everyone by his angel-like modesty, by his unalterable kindness, and that earnest, though simple and joyful appearance, which always accompanies the words and actions of the saints.

Holy Job is universally looked upon as the picture of

patience and fortitude. His physical and interior trials were many and severe ; yet he offended not his God. In a similar manner, the convert of Saverne had to struggle long and hard against every species of suffering ; still he always pleased his Lord. All powerful in Him from Whom he derived strength, he shrank not before the difficult mission and painful work imposed upon him, and, despite many apparently insurmountable obstacles, he never lost courage. "I do not remember," he writes, "to have ever felt a moment's discouragement. It seems to me, that as soon as I see difficulties and sufferings, the Divine Bounty gives me fresh strength and courage. It appears that I am created for tortures and trials. Yet, my heart is full of joy and hope ; and, if I am unable to run, I drag myself to the combat. Never fear on my account ; God is my strength, and nothing on earth frightens me." Such confidence and courage are easily explained by the ardent zeal that animated him. His will was to do the will of God, and, to accomplish it, he heeded not difficulties, but went on straight to the end, without looking either to the right or to the left. When abandoned by M. de la Brunière, and threatened to be abandoned by another whose assistance was still more necessary to him, he suffered much, but continued not the less zealously to pursue the carrying out of the work entrusted to him. When his missionaries died in numbers on the African coasts, he never for a moment thought of abandoning the war he had declared against the tyrannical demons of Africa. If he had to struggle against exterior difficulties, he required no less fortitude to surmount interior trials, and to practise every virtue in a heroic degree. But he knew that the kingdom of God suffereth violence, that the persevering ones only receive the prize, that it required courage and generosity to renounce oneself,

to carry the cross, and to follow Jesus; and, therefore, with indomitable energy, he advanced from trial to trial, from sacrifice to sacrifice, ever fully resolved to proceed and persevere unto the end, even though all his steps should be stained with blood, like those of his Divine Master on His way to the hill of Calvary.

“Were I asked,” wrote a pious and highly gifted religious, “to give an idea of what an angel might be, I should not seek to paint in glowing colours the blessed inhabitants of the heavenly kingdom, nor to create some imaginary being in whom might be found all that is good, pure, and amiable. No! far from soaring above the stars to find some beautiful spirit, or exploring the hidden depths of creative imagination for a fair fanciful being, I would confine myself to earth, and point out, as the ideal of all that is good, beautiful, and happy, the perfect religious, such as was the venerable Libermann.”

As a perfect religious, he delighted in the strict observance of the Holy Rule; he found treasures in poverty, freedom in obedience, and delights unspeakable in the virtue natural to the angels. The life of our saint appears like a magnificent painting. The longer and the more attentively it is contemplated the more beauties and perfections it displays. Each of those perfections attracts our gaze; but those which spread like a heavenly radiance over all the others are the religious virtues, which give the saint's life its freshness and angel-like radiance, captivate the reader's attention, and compel him to exclaim, in the words of our Blessed Lord, that perfect prototype of the true religious: “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven! . . . Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God!”\*

\* Matt. v. 3 and 8.

If the holy founder was strict to make his religious keep the rule, he was far stricter towards himself. He never considered his position of superior a reason for exemption from any religious duty; and, if he had to dispense himself in any point, he only did so when he would have dispensed his subordinates. He never spoke during the time of silence, unless there was real necessity; and then he would speak in a low voice, even with strangers. The rule seemed to be his life, as it is the life of a community. When the rule is well kept in a community, all religious virtues flourish, and everyone grows in holiness. Take away the rule, and all languishes and withers. Hence the great anxiety of all religious founders and superiors, to consider the observance of the rules as the vital element, which causes their religious families to be the pleasure-gardens of Jesus, the God of peace, Who delighteth in solitude and feedeth amongst lilies.

A model of regularity, the venerable servant of God was also a model of poverty, obedience, and spotless innocence. He felt happy in poverty; and the more pressing his wants, the happier he was, knowing that he resembled the better the Son of Man, "Who had not even where to lay His sacred head."\* In all things he wished to be treated like the other religious, and he constantly practised the vow and virtue of holy poverty, most minutely and almost scrupulously. His room was always simple and unadorned. A common table with a few papers, his breviary, the *Novum Testamentum*, and a Hebrew Bible, three common chairs, and a few pious pictures, made up all the luxury of the Superior's apartment. His clothes were always neat, though often wornout and patched; but saints are not particular, and heed not the frivolous judgments of men.

\* Luke ix. 58.

One day, when about to start from La Neuville for Paris, where he had to negotiate some very important business at the Ministry, a novice said to him: "Reverend Father, your soutane is rather too threadbare for such visits." "Do you imagine," replied the saint, "that it would greatly advance the work, if my dress was more stylish and more costly?" Having been presented with a rich gold-edged breviary, he stained the edges with ink, so as to render it conformable with holy poverty. When tearing a letter, he would carefully preserve the white sheets, afterwards to write on them his scrolls and notes. It was his heart's earnest desire to penetrate all his disciples with the true spirit of religious poverty.

He likewise wished all to be animated with the same feelings of respect for authority by which he was himself animated. Whilst an inferior, wherever he passed, he was all respect and obedience to those placed over him; and, even as superior, he would obey in many instances as readily and as humbly as the simplest religious. "One day," relates Father Delaplace, "the local superior being absent, the venerable father came to my room, and, in presence of a novice brother, informed me that he was unable to assist at some regular exercise." The humble superior was perfectly submissive to the father in charge of the divine worship for the hour of saying Mass, or the manner of performing the sacred ceremonies of the Church. He constantly loved to obey rather than to command.

Need we speak of his predilection for the angelical virtue? On coming out from the baptismal font, his soul was whiter than the brightest lily, fresher than the untrodden snow, and the splendour of his purity went on increasing until, rivalling his guardian angel in spotlessness, he stood, in his unsullied robe, before the throne of



his Judge. The holy servant of God lived here below as an angel would live if he sojourned on earth : he lived for heaven. His thoughts, words, and deeds were for heaven ; his pure soul charmed the Lord and His angels. Nothing is more delightful to God, nothing more attractive to men, than a pure and innocent soul. The Holy Ghost Himself declares that nothing on earth is comparable to the price and beauty of a pure soul : “ *No price is worthy of a continent soul.*”\* A pure soul is the throne of the Adorable Trinity. “What,” exclaims St. Bernard, “is more beautiful than chastity, which changes and elevates a mortal man, conceived in sin, to be the equal of a bright, pure, and immortal angel ?” Hell itself is not darker than a sinner’s soul ; but heaven is not purer than the heart of a saint. The soul of a saint mirrors in itself all the beauteous perfections of the God of holiness, even as a silent, sheltered lake reflects in the depths of its placid waters all the bright beauties of the glittering firmament.

The venerable Libermann’s predilection for the angelical virtue was immense. It is worth remarking that the very name of the vice opposed to the angelical virtue is perhaps not even once mentioned in all his writings. When speaking of this awful vice, the saint has usually recourse to figurative language, such as : “These are despicable manœuvres of the evil one, from which we must turn aside with sovereign contempt.” Nor did he neglect the means to be always reserved and modest in all his movements, alone or with others, whether standing or sitting. He never laughed aloud, nor did he excite a loud laugh in others. If he was ever so hurried, he never ascended two steps of the stairs at one time, and whenever he perceived any-

\* Eccles. xxvi. 20.

one doing so, he would not fail to address him a gentle reproof by saying : "This is not in accordance with holy modesty." His disciples never saw him running ; he walked almost his ordinary step even when surprised by a shower of rain : he preferred to be drenched than to break the rules of religious modesty. His was truly the earnest, edifying Christian modesty recommended by Saint Paul : "*Let your modesty be known to all men.*"\*

One of the brightest ornaments of Holy Church is the peerless garland of her devotions, that eloquent and practical expression of her dogmas, that touching symbolism of her love, that noble crown of her ecclesiastical year, that unceasing delight of all her faithful children. Every month in the year, nay, every day in the week, is sanctified by a special devotion. The various devotions are so many fountains placed at intervals for the refreshment and strength of the weary traveller. All the devotions are good ; from all gushes forth, in copious streams, the Redeemer's Precious Blood, which, like a mysterious under-current, flows from one to another, connects, and enlivens all. May it not be said that the grand DEVOTION TO THE PRECIOUS BLOOD is to the other devotions what the Adorable Eucharist is to the other Sacraments ? The venerable Libermann, a grateful friend of the Precious Blood, passed by none of the fountains, neglected none of the devotions ; he lived of the life of the Church, and drank in abundant draughts from these sources of grace, piety, and holiness. Still he, too, like most other saints and interior souls, cherished some favourite devotions, foremost among which was his ardent love for the hidden God of the tabernacle. He delighted to converse with Him Who delights to be with the children of men. At

\* Philip. iv. 5.

the feet of his Divine Master he found consolation in his trials, strength in his weakness, sympathy during his long years of agony. There his heart was more and more transformed into a furnace of love and zeal; there he learned to be, like Jesus, meek and humble of heart, patient, generous, and ready for every sacrifice to procure the glory of his heavenly Father. His ardent love for our Blessed Lord in the Eucharist became particularly manifest, after he was raised to the dignity of the priesthood. As he had received Holy Communion every day before being a priest, so after his ordination he celebrated the holy sacrifice every morning, and each time with increasing fervour and devotion. Whilst immolating the Victim, he never failed to offer up his own life in union with the sacrifice of Jesus. One of his disciples asked him what was the best manner of celebrating Mass worthily: "*By sacrificing yourself,*" replied the man of God, and he repeated the same words several times. "*On the altar,*" he added, "*we have before our eyes Jesus Who immolates Himself; let us be one victim with Him. I know no better method, and I follow no other.*" This is substantially the method recommended in the "Pontifical:" "*Imitami quod tractatis.*" To all who saw the venerable Libermann prostrate before the tabernacle, or offering the Holy Sacrifice, he appeared rather an angel than a man.

His second leading devotion was to Our Blessed Lady, whom he honoured as his sovereign, cherished as his mother, and always invoked as his special protectress. He was never tired speaking of her prerogatives, of her power, and of her goodness; and he found a particular delight in exalting the privilege of her Immaculate Conception, the greatness of her dignity as Mother of God, and the

maternal tenderness of her Immaculate Heart.\* The Devotion to the Holy Heart of Mary he bequeathed to his religious family as a precious inheritance. From the Heart of the Queen of Apostles he wished his children to draw the spirit of persevering self-sacrifice and devoted zeal, which they require to carry out their noble mission among the abandoned souls. His other special devotions were to Saint Joseph, the holy angels, the souls in purgatory, and the apostles, in particular Saint John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, and the ever-faithful servant of Mary.

The venerable Libermann practised every virtue to an heroic degree; yet, with the humility of a saint, he considered himself as a useless servant in the house of his Lord. In his letters he delights to call himself a wretched sinner, a mere obstacle to the designs of God on his society. But far different was the opinion of his disciples. "What a man our Father Libermann is," wrote one of them towards the end of 1851, "every day he grows holier

\*The following is a consecration written by the venerable Libermann, in October, 1831, for M. Edouard de Farcy, a seminarist of Saint-Sulpice, who was then with his parents at Rennes:—



J. M. J.

*Honour, praise, glory, and love to the Immaculate Conception of the most glorious Virgin Mary, our good Mother! Amen!*

O purest, holiest, and most admirable Virgin Mary, Immaculate Mother of my adorable Lord Jesus, my Mother, my Queen, my Happiness, and my Hope, I, the poorest, the most abject, and the most unworthy of all thy servants, prostrate myself before the throne of thy glory, to consecrate to thee all that I am, all that I have, and all that I can. I solemnly declare before the angels and saints, that I wish to belong entirely to thee, during my life, at the hour of my death, and during all eternity. Dispose of me, O my great and amiable Sovereign, as of a thing which is wholly thine; but, in return, protect, sustain, and strengthen thy servant, against the powers of hell, and against my own weakness and malice, that I may never

and holier. He has lately given us a few conferences, full of the spirit of holiness, every one of which was worth a dozen sermons by the most celebrated preachers." "I confess," says another, "that I never yet knew a man less a man than the venerated founder—that is to say, more dead to the world and to himself, and more replete with the Spirit of God, nor any saint who appeared to make less efforts to advance in holiness."

It must not, however, be supposed that his holiness was one of temper or natural inclination. Holiness, as a rule, comes not by itself, nor by grace alone. Perfection requires struggle, labour, suffering, correspondence with grace, resistance to passions, detachment from creatures, self-denial, and the spirit of prayer and union with God. In all this consists the perpetual warfare of man upon earth. To become a saint, every one has to fight against a thousand difficulties, and to subdue his sensitive and

cease to be thy faithful client. Alas! how often, instead of serving thee, have I not offended thee! My heart is rent with grief and my soul overflows with sorrow at the thought of my past iniquities. Henceforward, I ardently wish to love, honour, and glorify thee before heaven and earth . . . and through thee, thy well-beloved Son Jesus. O Mary, Virgin most holy, and most immaculate in thy admirable conception, look not on the hideousness of my soul, nor on the number of my infidelities, but only consult the maternal kindness of thy Immaculate Heart.

O Jesus, entrust me to Thy Virgin Mother, that, like Thee, I may belong to her; place me under her powerful protection, that, under her guidance, I may constantly advance in the path of virtue, and be ever agreeable in Thy sight.

O my sweet angel guardian, my patron saint, and all ye angels and saints, unite your prayers to mine, and together let us beseech our glorious Queen graciously to accept my offering, receive me as her child, guide all my steps through this sinful world, assist me at the hour of my death, and conduct my soul to the throne of God, there to enjoy the glory of the Most Adorable Trinity, for ever and ever. Amen.

sinful nature with the double-edged sword of Divine grace and a strong good-will. The greater the difficulties and the fiercer the struggle, the richer the reward; the heavier the crosses, the brighter the crown. What must be the reward and the crown of him whose every step was strewn with thorns, and who, though his life was a succession of trials, sufferings, and contradictions, a long and painful martyrdom, suffered all, lovingly and heroically, till he closed his noble career by the precious death of a saint!

There is a model to be upheld to Christian souls, especially to such as are plunged in grief, sickness, or poverty, or to souls which are tempted and contradicted in their undertakings or in their progress in virtue. Remember, Christian soul, that you are the conquest of the Precious Blood, and the purchased property of Jesus, that you have shaken off the odious yoke of sin and Satan, and willingly taken upon yourself the sweet and light burden of your heavenly Master. Why, then, should you ever regret the flesh-pots of Egypt? Why, after you have put your hand to the plough, should you look back? If your lot is cast in the world, in whatever state you may be, even in the world, you can easily become a saint. If you have been called to the more perfect vocation of the religious or missionary life, then especially is holiness within your reach; then gratefully remember that Jesus called you to labour, to pray, to suffer, and to grow daily in virtue. But how? By living, like the venerable Libermann, a life of innocence, of contempt of creatures, of total self-denial, and of loving union with Jesus; by keeping the Divine Commandments; by faithfully observing all the prescriptions and duties of your holy rule; by edifying the religious of your society or community; in a word, by constantly labouring for the glory of God and




the salvation of souls. "If," exclaimed the great St. Austin, "others—men like ourselves—triumphed over their inclinations and temptations, why cannot I do what they did?" And with the grace of God he began, persevered, and became one of the brightest glories of the Church. Likewise, by the grace of God, the sickly son of the rabbin of Saverne, came out from the darkness of Judaism, walked in the light of God, remained ever faithful, and died a great saint. Why should not every Christian follow his noble example, and choose for the rule of his conduct this beautiful motto: "*Ever faithful in innocence*" —"SEMPER FIDELIS IN INNOCENTIA!" How few would be lost! How many would be saints!

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## CHAPTER III.

Progress of the Society since the death of its saintly founder.  
1852-1880.

EN pass away, but their works, whether good or evil, live after them. The pernicious influence of the wicked, such as Luther, Calvin, Henry VIII., or Voltaire, is felt during ages; and, on their account millions are born in the bosom of error, die in their sins, and are eternally lost. Likewise, the influence of the saints continues its beneficial effects from generation to generation. One man, animated with the proud spirit of evil, has often, like Lucifer, caused the ruin of countless souls, whilst one saint, burning with the flame of zeal, has frequently, like the apostle St. Paul, enkindled the fire of divine love in the hearts of whole nations. Little is required to produce great and lasting effects, either for the ruin or for the resurrection of many. "Behold," says St. James, "how small a fire, what a great wood it kindleth."\* See how a small seed little by little grows and develops into a mighty oak; how when a little pebble is thrown into the calm and crystal lake, ripple after ripple is formed till the whole surface is ruffled and disturbed.

On the second of February, 1852, the venerable Libermann was called away from the scene of his labours to enjoy the blissful reward of the elect. He had entered eternity; but, on the sands of time he had left a visible and lasting trace of his passage. An angel had passed, diffusing a heavenly light as he gently glided along; and

\* James, iii. 5.

legions of ardent souls soon followed the luminous path which he had traversed.

The servant of God had heroically prepared the ground, he had planted the seed of his work and witnessed its first growth, when a premature death removed him from a promising field, which, however, still stood in the greatest need of his presence. Once again the words of our Blessed Lord were to be realised: "Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone; but, if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."\*

Indeed the religious and missionary society with which the venerable Libermann has adorned the Church, has been wonderful in its progress during the short period of eight and twenty years, which have elapsed since the death of its founder to the present year, 1880. Like the Gospel tree, whose roots struck deep, whose branches reached high, and extended far around, and whose fruit was the food of the birds of heaven, it first took deep and firm roots in France, and in various other countries of Europe, whence it derives the vital elements of its duration, and then gradually spread its branches over almost every part of the earth, where, as well as in Europe, it nourishes with the food of God's word and with the grace of the sacraments, many thousands of needy and abandoned souls; a striking evidence, that it is a work according to God's own Heart.

As God is admirable in His saints, so also is He admirable in the works of the saints, by which He is pleased to show forth the inexhaustible fruitfulness of His Church, for His own greater glory and the salvation of souls. Jesus Christ, our Divine Redeemer, has brought from heaven upon earth a supernatural element of wonderful fecundity, which, according to the various neces-

\* S. John, xii. 24-25.

sities of times and places, produces the different institutions, which, in every century, spring up and grow in the Church, at the precise time pointed out for each of them.

The Society of the Holy Heart of Mary is one of these works which are manifestly marked with the seal of God ; it is a flower that sprang forth, not from the natural trunk of the human race, but from the supernatural tree, planted by Jesus Christ, and vivified by His Holy Spirit. To be convinced of this, we have only to consider the poverty and weakness of the instruments employed by God in its foundation ; the obstacles of every kind, by which it has been for several years surrounded ; the truly heroic zeal of the first generation of its members ; and the abundant fruits of salvation and holiness which it has already produced. Flourishing in its youth, vigour, and beauty, the society of the Holy Heart of Mary has not in the least deviated from the end, rules, and spirit of its venerable founder ; and, under the wise guidance of the Very Reverend Ignatius Schwindenhammer, it has not only preserved, but even increased its primitive vigour, and has steadily progressed in its religious and apostolic career.

On his death-bed, the venerable Libermann pointed out to his children the person whom he considered to be designed by God as his successor in the office of Superior-General. This advice of a dying saint, though powerful, was not decisive, and could have no effect unless accepted by the elective chapter, and sanctioned by the Holy See. All the members of the Congregation felt, as it were, irresistibly inclined to adhere to the last wish of their venerated Father. The Reverend Father Schwindenhammer was looked upon as the elect of the Lord, and on the 10th of February, 1852, he was appointed Vicar-General for a year. This nomination was

hailed by all with an unanimity which could only be the result of a perfect union of minds and hearts.\*

The Vicar-General convoked the elective chapter for the 10th of February, 1853. The same reasons which had caused him to be elected the previous year, as also because he possessed, in an eminent degree, the qualities required for such a position, now raised him to the dignity of Superior-General. He obtained the votes of all the electors, except his own, which he gave to the Reverend Father Frederick Le Vavasseur. The Holy Father confirmed this choice through the medium of the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda, by a decree of the 18th of March, 1853.

It naturally was to be expected that the holy founder should be only replaced by the Reverend Father Le Vavasseur, who had conceived the first idea of the Congregation; but God seemed to have expressed His will, by the last legacy of the dying saint. The disciples of the venerable Libermann faithfully adhered to the last desire of their departed father, but none felt happier at the

\* According to the Rules approved of by the Holy See, the following points are to be observed after the death of a Superior-General:—The members of the Society residing at the Mother House, and in the nearest communities, select for a year a Vicar-General, who, for the transaction of ordinary affairs, has the power of the Superior-General; but not that of effecting any important changes or innovations. All the absent members are then to be informed of the appointment of the Vicar-General, and of the future election of a Superior-General, that they may send deputies from the most distant missions. The elective assembly, which can only take place after the expiration of an entire year, is convoked and presided over by the Vicar-General. The superior is elected for life by a majority of the votes of the electors present, and the result made known without delay to all the members of the Institute. However, the new Superior elect can exercise no act of his power, before having obtained the confirmation of the Holy See. (*Regula*, pars i. caput. v.)

choice of the new superior than the holy founder's first companion, whose noble act of renunciation deserves to be inscribed in the history of the Society, and to be treasured up in the minds of all its members as a precious example of humility.

The Very Reverend Father Schwindenhammer, during an administration of well-nigh thirty years, has fully justified the confidence placed in him by his holy predecessor. His wise and energetic direction, as well as the many works he has already accomplished, is a clear proof that it was God Who had inspired this choice. On him devolved the arduous duties of terminating what had been left unfinished by the Founder; of removing the many obstacles which encompassed the infant society; of strengthening regularity and discipline; of maintaining and increasing the religious and apostolic spirit; of drawing up the rules and constitutions; and of multiplying the vocations and houses of the institute confided to his care. When accepting the post of sacrifice, he had inherited from his departed father the spirit of devotedness that enabled him, despite a health far from robust, to carry, during so many years, the heavy burden of all the anxieties and responsibilities attached to his office, and to complete many important works which we leave to be recounted by others.

From the beginning of his administration, the Reverend Father Schwindenhammer, walking in the footsteps of his master and model, sought to penetrate as much as possible the designs of God regarding the youthful institute. To bring about the accomplishment of these designs more effectually, he strove above all to establish firmly the missionary life, on the solid basis of the religious life. Accordingly, he always maintained with prudent firmness the strict observance of the holy rules, the keep-



ing of which has ever been the strongest bulwark against relaxation and abuses in religious societies. This end he attained by his frequent epistolary correspondence with every house of the Institute, by his numerous and truly admirable "*Circular Letters*," by the publication of a monthly "*General Bulletin*," by the general annual retreats, most of which he conducted himself, and by various other means, proper to keep alive in the hearts of all that primitive spirit of regularity, fervour, charity, and sacrifice, which ought to animate a society of apostles consecrated to the Holy Ghost and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.\*

The chief solicitude of the Reverend Father Schwindenhammer was to form good religious, animated with a truly supernatural spirit, and capable of being powerful instruments for the salvation of souls. "Who," he says in his first circular letter (February 2nd, 1854), "is better fitted to be the instrument of God's mercy for the salvation of souls, than a good religious, who is attached, heart and soul, to his rule, and living in perfect accordance with its prescriptions?" "How," says our venerable Founder in one of his letters, "have France and England been won over to the practice of our holy religion? By religious who were holy, because they had a lively affection for their sacred rules, and lived practically in conformity with them."

We find the same sentiments expressed in a letter which,

\* The Very Reverend Father Schwindenhammer has written no less than fifty. "*Circular Letters*" on various subjects, pertaining to the spiritual and supernatural life, to the administration and religious discipline. These writings form a valuable collection, full of solid doctrine and of excellent practical counsels. The "*Bulletin général de la Congrégation*" was not issued till 1857. The ten volumes since published contain most substantial and interesting details concerning the Institute in general, the various foreign missions, and the origin and progress of each house in particular.

a short time before his death (9th November, 1851), the holy founder addressed to Mgr. Kobès. In this letter the solicitous father traces a rule of life for his African children. He teaches them that in order to do good, they must, first of all, be good religious; that the thought of being religious ought to prevail over that of being missionaries; that the latter brings us into contact with the world, and may be a hindrance to our sanctification. The more we have our personal sanctification at heart, the more successful will be our labours for the salvation of souls. Missionaries who are men of regularity, fervent religious, shall always have great power over souls; the hearts of men shall be in their hands, they shall change them at pleasure, and find less difficulty in bringing them to God. A good religious shall always be a good missionary. If France, England, Germany, and the other nations of Europe have been drawn from barbarity, chiefly through religious societies, it is only by such societies that Africa, the continent most remote from salvation, can be brought over to the true faith of Jesus Christ. In Africa, the powers of hell still hold more sovereign sway than in any other part of the heathen world. There the influence of the climate, physical sufferings, and various other causes, might easily lead to discouragement missionaries who would not be solidly established in holiness, and who would not, in health, sickness, dangers, life, and death, rely solely on Jesus crucified. Isolated secular priests, however ardent their zeal might be, could never suffice to overcome all the difficulties of so arduous a mission, nor fill up the gaps, which, for centuries, will often be made by premature deaths, in the ranks of the African Missionaries.

A regular religious community is the fortress, wherein men of God, missionaries, united together like brothers,

sustaining and consoling one another, and sanctifying their pains and sufferings with the aid of the prescriptions and counsels of the Rule, must be entrenched and sheltered. Thence they courageously sally forth to attack and defeat the demons of Africa, and snatch from them, through suffering and patience, the eighty millions of souls still retained in chains, amid darkness, and the dismal shadow of death. This fundamental idea Father Schwindenhammer has maintained as the guiding principle of the Congregation, and has constantly endeavoured to instil into the minds of his religious, both by his writings and exhortations, particularly during the chapter which followed the general retreat held at Notre Dame du Gard, in October, 1853.\*

The second Superior-General bestowed likewise his most assiduous cares on multiplying vocations. To effect this, he increased the houses of formation, which are the life-spring of institutes, as the seminaries are of dioceses.

\*This was not, properly speaking, a general chapter but an accidental meeting of the Fathers who had assembled from the different houses to follow the exercises of the retreat. According to the Rules, a general chapter must be duly convoked by the Superior-General, and composed of the principal dignitaries of the Congregation, and of deputies sent by the various provinces; it is held about every ten years, or oftener if required. In an account of the meeting at Notre Dame du Gard, we see that from 1841, to October, 1853, 157 members had entered the society; 98 ecclesiastics, of whom 70 had entered as priests, 19 as deacons, 7 as subdeacons, and 2 in minor orders; and 59 brothers. Since August, 1854, the general annual retreat takes place at the Mother House in Paris, or at Chevilly, near Paris, and is always followed by a meeting similar to that held at Notre Dame du Gard, in 1853. The general retreat always opens on the Sunday during the octave of the Assumption, and closes by the ceremony of profession, on the Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. In August and September, 1875, a regular General Chapter was held, which, among various other important matters, examined a new edition of the Constitutions. These Constitutions have received the approbation of the Holy See. (Letter of His Eminence Cardinal Simeoni, 12th July, 1878.)

To him is due the admirable conception of *Junior Scholasticates*, which he opened successively at Gourin, Langonnet, Cellule, Blackrock, Rockwell, Marienstadt, Saint Joseph Ngazobil (Africa), Braga (Portugal), and Pittsburg (United States).\* In these holy nurseries of apostles grow up in wisdom and age, and are trained in science and holiness, numerous pious and noble-hearted youths, whose numbers swell, year after year, the ranks of the Philosophers and Theologians, in the *Senior Scholasticate*. Formed during many years to the spirit of the Society, and to the religious and apostolic virtues, the Senior scholastics advance to the last trial or novitiate which precedes their profession, and their departure for the various missions.† Numerous novitiates have likewise been established for the formation of coadjutor brothers in France, Ireland, Africa, and America.

At the death of its founder, the Society of the Holy Heart of Mary possessed but a limited number of establishments:—1, The Abbey of Notre Dame du Gard, near Amiens; 2, the Seminary of the Holy Ghost, at Paris; 3, the Missions of Mauritius, 1841: stations of Port Louis,

\* Several religious societies have since established similar institutions which are variously designated by the names of "*Juniorats*," "*Ecoles apostoliques*," &c. We may also mention here the admirable work of the "*Clercs de Saint Joseph*," established at Beauvais, by the Reverend Father Limbour.

† The Senior Scholastics on entering the novitiate are usually strengthened by a contingent of secular priests or seminarists who have terminated their theological studies. These priests and seminarists go through a two years' novitiate, whilst the Senior Scholastics are professed after one year. During the year 1879-1880, the Junior Scholasticates of the society number several hundred subjects; the Senior Scholasticate counts about forty Philosophers and over a hundred theological students, and the novitiate is more numerous than ever. The Lord's vineyard is so extensive, and the work so great, that the labourers cannot be too many.

Sainte Croix, "*Notre Dame de la Delivrande*," Pamplemousse, Flacq, Church of the Holy Heart of Mary, Maïbourg, and Grand Port; 4, the Missions of Bourbon, 1842: stations of St. Denis, Rivière des Pluies, and the agricultural school for the blacks; 5, Monsivry, near Paris; 6, the Missions of Africa, founded in 1843: Upper and Lower Guinea and Senegambia, St. Louis, Gorée, Bakel, Dakar, Joal, St. Mary of Gambia, St. Joseph des Bengas, Gaboon; 7, the Mission of Cayenne, 1851.

The ever-increasing number of Fathers and Brothers enabled the institute to enlarge its sphere of action more and more, and to multiply its foundations from year to year. The following is the summary list of the houses which have been established from 1852 to 1880:—

1853: Great Seminary of Martinique, Morne-rouge, West Indies; French Seminary at Rome; Seminary of Guadaloupe, West Indies; Ploermel, Brittany; Notre Dame des Victoires.—1854: College of St. Mary, Gourin, Brittany; Notre Dame de la Delivrande, Martinique; Great Seminary of Morne-rouge, transferred to Trouvaillant, near St. Pierre, Martinique.—1855: St. Ilan, and Carlan, Brittany.—1856: College at Cellule, Auvergne.—1858: Our Lady of Langonnet, Morbihan, Providence and St. Bernard, Bourbon.—1859: Mana, Cayenne, West Indies; St. Michael, Morbihan; Seminary College at St. Pierre, Martinique.—1860: French College, Blackrock, County Dublin; Port au Prince, Hayti; Chandernagore, East Indies.—1862: Zanzibar, Eastern Coast of Africa; Seminary College at Port d'Espagne, Trinidad; St. Joseph, Senegambia; Mondelice, Cayenne.—1863: Community of the Holy Heart of Mary at Chevilly, near Paris; Sierra Leone, Western Coast of Africa; Pétionville, Hayti; Kaiserswoerth, Germany; College at Fort de France, Martinique; Ilette à Guillaume, Bourbon.—



1864: Our Lady of Rockwell, Cahir, Ireland; St. Joseph, Ngazobil, Western Coast of Africa; Marienstadt, and Marienthal, Germany.—1865: Missions of Congo, Western Coast of Africa.—1866: Ambriz and Mossomedès, Congo; Toulon.—1867: Santarem, Portugal; College of St. Louis, Mauritius.—1868: Sainte Croix, Mauritius; Bagamoyo, Zanzibar, Eastern Coast of Africa; College of Guadaloupe.—1870; College at Gibraltar.—1872: Seminary College at Port au Prince, Hayti; Cassis, Mauritius; College at Braga, Portugal.—1873: Landana, Congo; St. Remy, Ohio, America; College at St. Pierre et Miquelon, West Indies; Piqua, Ohio, America.—1874: Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, America; St. Joseph, Beauvais; Seminary College at St. Denis, Bourbon.—1875: College at Langoyne, Lozère; Sedhiou, Western Coast of Africa.—1876: Gravelines and Merville, in the archdiocese of Cambrai.—1877: Mhonda in Ussigua, one hundred and fifty miles from the Eastern Coast of Africa.—1878: Mission of the Orange River, South-west of Africa; College at Mesnières, Normandy; Mission in Texas, America; College at Pittsburg, United States.\*—1879: the Apostolic prefectures of Cimbabesia and the Central Cape, in Southern Africa; Community at Omaruru; the Prefecture of Pondicherry, India; College at Pondicherry; Missionary House at Gourin, Brittany.

A few of these houses have subsequently been suppressed, such as those of Germany, from which the members of the Congregation were banished, in 1873, as being related to the orders of the Jesuits, Redemptorists, Vincentians, and Christian Brothers. We cannot

\* The missions of America are confided to the Reverend J. Strub. Aided by such missionaries as the Reverend Fathers Power, Graf, Heizmann, Rickert, &c., he cannot fail to reap an abundant harvest of souls, as well in Arkansas as elsewhere.



even attempt a sketch of the various houses of the society. Each one has a special history of its origin, progress, trials or success, the narrative of which would fill many volumes. We merely single out one foundation which had long been the object of the holy founder's desires. The venerable Libermann had bequeathed to his disciples his ardent devotion to Rome; and it was this devotion which, a few months after his death, prompted them to establish in the Eternal City the "*Séminaire Français*," where the *élite* of the students of France come to draw, at their purest source, the waters of the sacred science, and the spirit of true priests and apostles. This seminary, constantly patronized by the Episcopacy of France, was the special object of the fostering care and protection of the late illustrious Pontiff, Pius IX.; who gave it his solemn approbation by the Bull: "*In Sublimi*" (14th July, 1859), as it is now an institution dear to the heart of his Holiness Leo XIII.

We regret that we must refrain from tracing, at least the outlines of the history of missions, such as those of Guinea, Senegambia, Congo, Hayti, Cayenne, Zanzibar, and America; of institutions such as Chevilly, Langonnet, and Cellule, the remembrance of which gladdens the hearts of hundreds of missionaries all over the world; of Colleges such as St. Pierre (Martinique), Port au Prince (Hayti), Blackrock, Rockwell, and others. As for Ireland in particular, we shall merely say that God has visibly blessed the efforts of the Congregation. Catholic Ireland has wished to join in the holy crusade for the conversion of the African tribes, and other abandoned souls. Many of her sons have already entered the ranks of the Society, a proof that the apostolic spirit is still alive, still ardent in the land which has always been famed among nations for its many and zealous missionaries. Though scarcely

freed from the cruel thralldom of an unheard-of persecution, Ireland, at the call of Jesus, like a generous mother, gathers the noblest of her children, and places them as willing and agreeable holocausts on the altar of the living God, saying: "Accept my children, O Lord, that they may carry Thy name, proclaim Thy truths, and found Thy Church in the uttermost limits of the earth."\*

We would convey but an inadequate idea of the institute, if we omitted to mention a few honoured names which recall heroic deeds, burning zeal, nobly spent lives, and holy deaths. But who could speak worthily of a Bessieux, a Kobès, a Boulanger, and of a legion of missionaries, who for years laboured like heroes, and suffered like martyrs on the burning shores of Africa? Who could count the many fervent prayers, the many acts of charity, zeal, and mortification of a Father Laval, or a Father Thévaux, his worthy colleague and successor in the apostolate of the negroes at Mauritius; of a Father Lannurien, or a Father Freyd, who so ably conducted the house of Rome; of a Father Dufrien, the great popular preacher and unwearied missionary of Martinique? Who could relate the arduous labours of a Father Lœwenbruck,

\* The Society of the Holy Ghost and the Holy Heart of Mary possesses two institutions in Ireland, "The French College," Blackrock, county Dublin, and "Rockwell College," Cahir, county Tipperary.

Besides the lay colleges established at Rockwell and Blackrock, there are in both communities Junior Scholasticates for the education of the Irish subjects who join the Order before having completed their literary studies. After their classical course, they are sent for their philosophical and theological studies, and for the novitiate, to the great central house at Chevilly, near Paris. There is also at Rockwell a novitiate for coadjutor brothers. Since its foundation, the French College, Blackrock, is under the direction of the Very Reverend Jules Leman, and Rockwell College, under that of the Very Reverend Peter Huvétyz.

one of the most active and most successful apostles of this century, who, during sixty years, evangelized without interruption various provinces of France, and whose ministry was so eagerly sought for, that he had usually his missions promised or accepted for several years in advance? Who could reproduce the homely features of the Reverend Father Gaultier, one of the most devoted and most intrepid champions of the Catholic cause in France, that religious with simple and unassuming manners, whose humble cell was for years a rendezvous of all the Catholic celebrities of the present day, and whose select theological library was, in the French capital, the arsenal of the staunchest defenders of the Holy See; the friend of the illustrious Cardinal Gousset; the zealous professor of moral theology, who, the first in France, publicly consigned to the flames the Gallican and Jansenistic works of Bailly, to replace them by St. Alphonsus, the prince of moral divines; the true ultramontane, with his genuine devotion to the See of Peter, with his unrelenting zeal for the promotion of the pure doctrine; in fine, the ever active and unsparing consultor of the Index, the terror of the French Liberal and Gallican writers, by whom he was so deservedly styled "*an unknown yet vigorous hand, striking in the dark?*"

Amongst the living we cannot omit mentioning the Reverend Fathers Frederick Le Vasseur and Collin, the first companions of the venerable Libermann at La Neuville, who are at present the assistants of the Superior-General; the venerable Father Burg, former Provincial of the German Communities; Mgr. Duboin; Father Léon Le Vasseur, universally renowned for his liturgical works; Mgr. Emonet, Prefect Apostolic of Guiana; the Reverend Father Horner, the liberator of the slaves of Zanzibar; Father Blampin the devoted client of '*Mater Admirabilis*;'

the Reverend Father Libermann who has inherited so large a share of the virtues of his venerable uncle; and many others, now actively engaged in reaping the harvest of souls, whose names, with those of their glorious departed brethren, deserve to be inscribed in luminous characters, in the Annals of the Propagation of the Faith.

It would indeed be a pleasing task, to admire the virtues and follow the deeds of so many missionaries, to number the churches, colleges, and schools they erected, and to speak of the thousands of souls with which they have peopled heaven, but we feel reluctantly compelled to leave those virtues, deeds, and triumphs, hidden like so many precious gems, from the eyes of men. They are no less resplendent before God, Who, on the last day, will bring them to the light of His glory, and cause them to shine during endless ages in His heavenly kingdom.

From the preceding pages we see that under the leadership of the Very Reverend Father Schwindenhammer, the Congregation has yielded abundant and consoling fruits, and promises to yield a still more plentiful harvest. The society which, in 1852, was almost in its infancy, and counted relatively but few members, numbers, in 1880, hundreds of missionaries, fathers, and brothers (not including the novices and scholastics), who, with unremitting zeal, labour in every land and clime, promoting the greater glory of God, the exaltation of the Church, and the salvation of the abandoned souls.


May the spirit of God still animate with the zeal of apostles many noble-hearted youths from every nation, to join in an undertaking so vast, so holy, so exalted; and may numerous missionaries formed into a valiant legion fearlessly advance, like the Crusaders of old, against the strongholds of heathenism, Mahometanism,

and infidelity, and finally, take possession, not of earthly cities and kingdoms, but of the heavenly Jerusalem, where conquerors and conquered will live in eternal triumph and peace! May this wish and these hopes be fully realized through the assistance of the Holy Ghost, and the powerful protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary!

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## CHAPTER IV.

Translation of the mortal remains of the Venerable Libermann from Notre Dame du Gard (near Amiens), to the Community of the Holy Heart of Mary, at Chevilly (near Paris), July, 1865.

REAT was the grief of all the missionaries of the society, on hearing of the death of their beloved founder. They felt that they had lost their father, their counsellor, and their support; but they rejoiced at the thought of a saint's entrance into heaven, where, as a protector, he would use his influence in behalf of his Institute. Mgr. Kobès wrote from Dakar (Africa), in his own name, and that of his *confrères*, to Father Schwindenhammer: "I shall not endeavour to describe the first impressions which this sad intelligence made on us. They were those which faith causes to spring up in the hearts of orphans, who have lost a well-beloved and holy father, and we feel happy to acknowledge that to his words, examples, prayers, and merits, we are indebted for the resignation and peace with which we have adored the designs of Divine Providence in our regard . . . What especially moved us to tears, was the blessing which our dear father gave to Guinea, and the prayer, mingled with sobs, which he offered up for our mission. I cannot tell you what I in particular experienced, when I saw my name appear in the last memento of my well-beloved father. I cannot even think of it without feeling myself moved to tears. . . ." (Signed by the missionaries, 18th March, 1852).

The following are extracts from letters, written from



Rome, by Mgr. Bessieux. To Father Lannurien he writes: "How happy you are to have assisted at the last farewell of our beloved father! How much I should have wished to ask his advice, and to recommend myself to him! I did not deserve such a favour. . .!" (19th February, 1852).

To Mgr. Kobès, he says: "The passage of our well-beloved father to heaven fills me with a more heartfelt confidence than I have hitherto experienced for the missions and the Congregation. Our good father was everything to us. He now knows our wants and those of our poor people. Let us have confidence, my Lord and very dear *confrère*, we have henceforth a powerful advocate in our pains and difficulties. Our good father has gone to plead our cause. God will be with us, let us be faithful, full of courage, confidence, and devotedness." (28th January, 1852.)

The missionaries of Bourbon and Mauritius expressed their feelings in the following words: "The death of our holy and venerated father has come upon us all like a thunderbolt . . . and to-day we are assembled together in profound sadness. We adore and bless in silence the holy will of the Lord, despite the tears which flow from our eyes, and the heaving of our hearts; for we feel convinced that, although called away by God to be our protector in heaven, he will still live in our midst upon earth, in the person of him, who of all his *confrères* is most imbued with his spirit and his eminent virtues. . ."

One of the holy founder's first disciples, Father Collin, writes: "On the 27th of April, we were overwhelmed with this crushing news. 'Our dear father is dead!' Poor orphans, we are assembled at the *Rivière-des-Pluies*. Oh! how sad it is to see men shed tears like children!

I think, however, that we have been all faithful to cast ourselves into the Holy Heart of Mary, as children, assembled in the mortuary chamber, throw themselves into the arms of their mother, when their good and tender father has breathed his last." (The missionaries of Bourbon, 29th April, 1852.)

"Our good father is gone to heaven to pray for us, his poor children," exclaims the saintly Father Laval. (Mauritius, 13th June, 1852). "You could not believe," writes Father Lairé to the Reverend Father Schwindenhammer, "what impressions of light, grace, and love God has vouchsafed to communicate to me since this intelligence reached us, no doubt through the intercession of our dear founder; for, let me tell you, that when after hearing this news, I offered up the Holy Sacrifice for him, instead of praying for the deliverance of his soul from purgatory, I felt rather inclined to unite my thanksgivings with his, my love with his love, and my prayer with his prayer, believing him to be before the throne of the Lamb, engaged in thanking, praising, and loving God, for himself and for us." (Africa, 22nd of June, 1852.)

Many similar letters arrived from the missionaries expressing their sorrow, resignation, and the high esteem in which they held their founder, as well as their joy and gratitude for having received from his dying lips the person whom heaven had designed to be their new Superior-General. These extracts show that all looked on Father Libermann as a saint. Hence their veneration for his memory, as well as for his mortal remains, and whatever had belonged to him.

The faithful have at all times attached the greatest importance to the possession of relics, and especially of the bodies of saints, and of those who, though not canonized, have left their memory embalmed by the fragrance

of their virtues. The many disputes which, as history records, have arisen between cities, and even kingdoms, for the possession of the mortal remains of confessors, virgins, and martyrs, are an evidence of the value set upon such relics.

As we have previously seen, the venerable Libermann had no sooner breathed his last, than all were eager to secure some of his relics. His remains were interred at Notre Dame du Gard, but the Mother House religiously preserved his heart and tongue, that heart which had loved so well, and that tongue which had spoken so well the feelings of the heart.\*

Father Boulanger, Prefect Apostolic of Senegal, hearing that the heart of the venerable founder had been preserved and embalmed, claimed this precious deposit for the African missions, in the name of the missionaries of Senegambia and Guinea, on the ground that during a serious illness in 1849, the venerated Father had expressed the desire of leaving his heart to the Africans; but, as he had not mentioned such a desire during his last illness, and as such a treasure should be the relic of the entire Congregation, and not of one province in particular, it was decided that it should be preserved at the Mother-House.

A few months after his burial, the first finger of the right hand, and several teeth were furtively taken from

\* "After his death," says the Reverend Father Frederick Le Vasseur, "we could perceive how great must have been the sufferings of the holy servant of God during the last years of his life. Before the physician took out the heart, Dr. Samson Libermann requested him to search for the cause of his brother's illness. On examination it was found that the liver was ossified, and they came to the conclusion that, for ten or twelve years previous to his death, his sufferings must have been very acute, and his life a martyrdom and a prodigy."

the body by Father Delaplace, Brother John, and M. Eugene Schwindenhammer, when, at an early hour in the morning, they had to take out the coffin from the vault, which needed some repairs. This finger was afterwards restored to the Superior-General, who, by way of compensation, sent it to the missions of Africa.

When, in the year 1856, Notre Dame du Gard was abandoned by the children of the venerable Libermann, to their great regret the mortal remains of their father did not accompany them, either to Paris, Monsivry, Saint Ilan, Langonnet, or Cellule, as these communities, although important, were not considered sufficiently central for the Congregation, and like Notre Dame du Gard, might only have been a temporary resting-place. The community of the Holy Heart of Mary, at Chevilly, near Paris was the central position where Providence had designed that the remains of the saintly founder should permanently repose in the midst of his disciples. No sooner had the Congregation acquired the extensive demesne of Chevilly, than the Superiors decided to bring their venerated father to this final resting-place. The Reverend Father Frederick Le Vasseur was entrusted with the care of superintending and directing the exhumation and translation. The Reverend Father Barillec, Secretary, Brother John, and M. Eugene Schwindenhammer, were happy to assist him in the performance of this pious duty.

The news that they were about to be deprived of the precious deposit caused a great sensation amongst the inhabitants of the surrounding district, at Picquigny, and especially at Saint-Pierre. It spread rapidly, and caused universal regret. Most of the inhabitants had known the venerable founder; they considered him a saint, and the remembrance of his virtues was still fresh in the minds

of all. Several spoke of him with sentiments of the highest admiration, especially in the village of Saint-Pierre, where they always entertained the hope of seeing the fathers return, sooner or later, to Notre Dame du Gard. The tomb of the founder was to them a pledge of their return.\*

The Reverend M. Graval, parish priest and dean of Picquigny; the Reverend M. Hamonet, parish priest of Croy, wherein Notre Dame du Gard is situated; the Rev. M. Segard, parish priest of Hungest; the Rev. M. de Saint Paul, residing at the Abbey of Gard; and several other persons of the environs were witnesses, when, on the 26th of July, Father Frederick Le Vavas seur proceeded to the exhumation of the remains. The single stone which, since 1852, closed the opening, was perfectly intact. The stone being removed, the coffin was respectfully drawn out from the vault, but as the upper part was somewhat decayed by humidity, it was not opened till the following day. The skull was still covered with hair, and contained the brains which were of a whitish colour, uncorrupted, and free from odour. The Reverend Father Le Vavas seur respectfully took the head of his holy friend in his hands, and all kissed it with feelings of the deepest veneration.

The remains were placed in a coffin of zinc, which, in

\* Since the departure of the fathers, this ancient abbey has undergone many changes. They ceded it to Canon de Genlis and to the Reverend M. Graval, who established an orphanage, which after some years of fruitless attempts was given up, and the abbey became a diocesan property, to be used as a country-house of the great seminary. Some years after, the Bishop of Amiens had resolved to offer it almost gratuitously to the Congregation, when, in 1871, it was bought by the Prior-General of the Carthusians for a Community of Nuns of St. Bruno.

its turn, was enclosed in a large wooden case. A few hours after, Father Le Vasseur, in charge of the much-valued treasure, left Notre Dame du Gard, and arrived at Chevilly, on Friday morning, 28th of July, 1865. It would be impossible to express the feelings which gladdened every heart as the report spread rapidly through the Community. "Father Provincial has arrived; the *Vénéré Père* is here!"

The holy remains were deposited in the chapel of the community, and after the ceremonies usually observed on such occasions, were carried in procession to the monument prepared to receive them. All were happy to form the cortège of honour around the relics of their saintly Father. It was rather a triumphal than a funeral march. Although this translation was accompanied by outward emblems of mourning, such as black vestments, and the mournful songs of the Church, yet there was no grief in the heart of anyone: all who took part in the ceremony were filled with joy and happiness, convinced, as they were, that their venerated father was looking down from heaven upon them, whilst on earth they paid to his mortal remains the solemn tribute of their loving and filial affection.

The coffin was borne to the mortuary chapel on the arms of his children: fathers, brothers, novices, and scholastics relieving one another, not so much on account of the weight of the precious burden, as because they were anxious to satisfy their pious desire of honouring their father, their master, and their model. At the mausoleum, the Very Reverend Father Schwindhammer recited the customary prayers, and all retired impressed with feelings that shall never be effaced.

Thus, after many years of separation, the venerable father reposes in the midst of his own, within the pre-



cincts of the Community of the Holy Heart of Mary, which is the centre and heart of the Congregation, as the house of the Holy Ghost at Paris is its head and foundation. From that moment, the tomb of the saintly founder became a pious and daily pilgrimage for all his disciples.

The writer of these lines having had himself the happiness of taking an active part in this touching ceremony, remembers, with unfeigned delight, a rather diverting incident which followed the translation of the mortal remains. Although the fact may cover the authors with some confusion, yet it must be related, as it turns to the honour of the venerable Founder, and shows how highly his relics were valued even then by all his children. After the procession, the four planks, or sides of the coffin, in which, during more than thirteen years, his body had reposed, were to be carried to the mortuary chapel, there to be deposited in a glass coffin prepared for the purpose. Four Sepior Scholastics, of the last year's divinity, were deputed by their director to perform this pleasing and honourable function. They carried the precious burden, observing a respectful silence, for over a quarter of a mile, each one given up, no doubt, to joyful and pious considerations. But then it was so tempting an occasion! One of them looked at his plank, and beholding a rather considerable particle which might easily be detached, could not resist: it was at once appropriated. As they went along the shady walks, a second particle followed the first, then a third, then another, and another, until he felt certain that he had enough of relics for himself and others during many days to come. Some scruples strove to rise within his conscience, as to the lawfulness of this act, but they were soon crushed beneath the weight of a well-known though not uncontested

axiom, that "*there is no harm in stealing a relic.*" Meanwhile, he and his three companions reached the mausoleum, deposited their trust, offered up a short prayer before the tomb, and retired. When they were at a little distance, one of them asked his nearest companion if he had any relics. "Do not speak," replied the latter, in a mysterious tone, "Do not say anything, of course I have." They asked the third one who was equally guilty, and the fourth likewise had not resisted the temptation. It was a larceny which no one seemed to regret very much. Soon, however, the theft was divulged, and came to the ears of the director, Father Grizard, who decided that all should be scrupulously restored. Happily for the culprits, on the same day Father General was to spend the recreation in the midst of the Senior Scholastics. They determined on profiting of so favourable an opportunity, and on deputing one of the four to ask the favour of having their innocent theft duly legalized, and of being liberated from the onus of restitution. The Superior-General could not help smiling at the harmless larceny, and, to their great contentment, kindly granted the daring request of the guilty petitioners.

At the approach of the Prussian army towards Paris (September, 1870), the remains of the venerable Libermann and several other precious relics were carefully hidden in a deep pit, purposely dug beneath the floor of a building in the centre of the property. This demesne which is entirely surrounded with a wall, and bordered with spacious alleys of immense lime-trees, was soon occupied by a numerous horde of Prussian soldiers, who changed it into a fortified camp, to shelter themselves from the terrific fire of Fort Bicêtre. No one can have forgotten the battle of Chevilly (30th October). When in March, 1871, the Community returned to Chevilly, the building, beneath which the


relics had been concealed, was a heap of ruins, but the relics were found in a state of perfect preservation. As the Commune broke out soon after (18th March), they were left there until the conclusion of peace, and the defeat of the insurgents. On the 14th of August, the precious remains were once more replaced in the humble mortuary chapel.

The sons of the venerable Libermann have since erected a more suitable monument over the mortal remains of their saintly father. They have not displayed that pomp and exterior magnificence which sometimes embellish the tombs of the great ones of the earth, whose memory often lives rather in letters of gold and columns of marble, than in the minds of men, or in the Heart of God; but the monument at least testifies to the sincerity of their veneration, gratitude, and filial piety. The hearts of the crown of apostles, of fathers, brothers, novices, and scholastics, will ever be the saint's brightest ornament, and, like so many mystical lamps, their ardent hearts will burn before this sanctuary of death, where all may learn to live the life of the just, and to die the death of the saint. "*Defunctus adhuc loquitur!*" "*Though dead he speaketh still!*"

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## CHAPTER V.

Process of the Ordinary—Introduction of the Cause : Father Libermann is declared Venerable, 1852-1876.

HEREVER the humble Libermann appeared, from the moment of his conversion until his blessed death, his virtues spread holy edification, and impressed those who lived with him, or even merely saw him, with the conviction that he was a saint; and even during his life it was surmised by many that he might one day be numbered among the canonized saints of the Church.

“I have seen,” says Mgr. de Conny, “and approached him very closely, without ever perceiving in him the least imperfection. He practised virtue as something that was quite natural to him, as was likewise remarked in the Curé d’Ars. Thank God, we see many holy persons, but we often remark in them the weaknesses of humanity. Father Libermann practised virtue quite naturally and quite simply. It is thus that I picture to myself a saint of heaven descended upon earth.” M. Garnier of Saint Sulpice was accustomed to say: “I do not believe that M. Libermann is impeccable, but I believe that he commits no sin.”

The students of the great Seminary of Bayeux, where the holy founder was for several weeks detained by sickness, were so deeply impressed with his admirable patience, that when going to visit him they would say, “Let us go and see a saint suffering.” The following passage from the postulatory letter of the Abbé Baillereau shows the

great fame of holiness which M. Libermann left after him at Saint Sulpice:—"When I entered the Seminary of Saint Sulpice, in 1838, the Reverend Father Libermann had just left it, after embalming it with the perfume of his virtues." The students who had known him spoke of him only with the greatest admiration: "Our pious directors venerated him as a saint; all spoke frequently of his many edifying acts of humility, of his astounding mortifications, his heroic charity, his detachment, and his zeal for the glory of God." "I remember," says Father Thévaux, "that whilst I was at the seminary I frequently heard my director, M. Gamon, express himself in the following terms:—'Whoever will live shall see; but I say that M. Libermann is called to do great things in the Church of God.'"

M. Pinault, in particular, who, during seven years, had been the most constant and most attentive observer of his conduct, repeatedly expressed this belief before the students of Issy: "Ah! my good Libermann will be the first canonized saint of our time!" The Superior of the great Seminary of Saint Dié likewise declared, in presence of all his seminarists assembled at conference, that he would not be surprised if it were one day said, "M. Libermann has been canonized."

He was especially looked upon as a saint at Rennes, at Rome, at Strasburg, at La Neuville, and at the Seminary of the Holy Ghost in Paris. All experienced in his regard the feelings of a Superior of a great seminary, who affirmed that when in the presence of M. Libermann, he was entirely penetrated with respect, as in the presence of a saint. In short, M. Libermann was, at all times and in all places, a living image of Jesus Christ. No wonder that at an early epoch all his actions were studied with attention, his words scrupulously noted down, and many objects which had belonged to him carefully collected and

preserved, with the firm conviction that they might one day become precious relics.

The hope of seeing the venerated founder canonized constantly increased, and the aureola of sanctity which surrounded him during his mortal career, from day to day shone brighter and brighter.

In another part of this volume we have related how, during life, the venerable Libermann was seen surrounded with a supernatural halo. We found with delight a similar instance in the voluminous depositions of the sworn witnesses who, before the ecclesiastical tribunal, testified to the great virtues and holiness of this servant of God:—“On two different occasions, at considerable intervals,” says a lady whose director he was, “I saw, in the open day, on the visage of the meek Father Libermann, a something which filled me as well with surprise as with deep veneration for him. It was especially reflected on his countenance, which it caused to shine with a beauty that is not of this earth: The first time that I saw so strange a sight, I could not help exclaiming with astonishment: Oh! dearest Father, do you, then, come from heaven? Oh! how beautiful you are! Father Libermann, with an inspired appearance, and all beaming with happiness, replied: ‘You speak the truth, but keep this to yourself; I ask you that expressly.’ I promised it to the good Father, and I have never revealed it whilst he was alive. If I attest it to-day, after his death, it is with the hope that my testimony, although very feeble yet very true, may perhaps contribute to procure both the glory of God and that of the venerable Father Libermann.”

It was especially after the death of the saintly founder that the Lord was pleased to manifest the glory of His servant by numerous extraordinary events. From the many we shall select but a few, declaring at the same time



that we wish in no way to anticipate the Church's judgment on the miraculous character of these facts :—

The father of the Reverend Frederick Le Vasseur, suffering from most acute chronic pains, one day, in a paroxysm of agony, seized the bust of the venerable Libermann, exclaiming : “ O you, that have been my son's friend, obtain that I be freed from these torments ! ” His prayer was granted ; the pains at once vanished, and never returned afterwards.

The sister of a coadjutor brother of the Society was instantaneously cured of a disease against which, during seven years, the prescriptions of several doctors had proved ineffectual, by applying to her chest during a novena the image of the saint.

The Reverend Father J. M. Ebenrecht, a zealous disciple of the venerable Libermann, felt likewise the powerful protection of our saint. Having fallen dangerously ill, the good Father suffered for several days most atrocious torments, which went on increasing to such a degree, that his *confrères* were filled with the greatest anxiety as to his recovery. When his pains became unbearable, the devout patient confidently implored the assistance of the holy founder, and immediately was relieved from his sufferings.

Sister L—— of St. Joseph of Cluny, afflicted for nearly two years with a disease of the chest, was unable to leave the infirmary, or assist at the exercises of the community. In the course of 1870 she was attacked by a very violent bronchial affection, which the physician declared to be incurable. Her weak state of health did not permit of an operation, and, as she could not swallow anything, it was feared that she would die of hunger. Such being her situation, the physician attempted, but without success, to introduce food by means of an œsophagic tube. Almost

immediately she became speechless. Her resignation increased with her sufferings, during a novena in honour of the Blessed Virgin. Another novena to Father Libermann was commenced four days later. A relic of the servant of God was hung round the neck of the invalid, and the whole community joined with her in prayer. However, the ninth day had already arrived, and her state became so precarious, that they requested the chaplain not to defer any longer the administration of the last sacraments, with which request he complied, expecting her almost immediate death. The agonizing sister preserved throughout an unshaken hope of recovery, nor was her confidence disappointed. Between one and two o'clock, whilst she was plunged in a kind of slumber, the venerable Libermann appears all resplendent before her. He places three fingers on her head, then lowers them on her breast, and seems to tear out her heart and the whole diseased part. At that moment she experiences an inexpressible pain, which makes her cry out, "Oh! what pain you cause me," and immediately she feels herself cured. All fever and suffering have disappeared. She rises, dresses herself, takes some nourishment, and descends to the chapel, where, standing, and without betraying the least sign of weakness, she sings, in union with her sisters, the touching canticle of Mary, the "*Magnificat*." This happened on the 21st of May. For twenty-one days previously she had not been able to swallow even one drop of water. Since then her strength rapidly returned, and she enjoys to-day better health than she did before.

A nun of the Order of the Reparation was, after a long sickness, almost on the point of dying, when she was suddenly restored to perfect health on the last day of a triduum to the venerable Libermann, on the 2nd of February, 1876, the anniversary feast of our saint's holy death. Great was the

surprise of the physician, who had attended her since December, when, on the following day, he saw the patient he had left with the conviction of never seeing alive, coming to meet him, smiling, and walking with a firm and resolute step. She had recovered her strength in an instant, though for an entire month she had been unable to take any food.

The community of the "*Daughters of the Holy Heart of Mary*,"\* at Larue (Chevilly), has especially experienced the protection of the venerable Libermann. A young person of this establishment, afflicted with the nervous disease called "Dance of St. Vitus,"† on the last day of a novena, insisted, despite a continual downpour of rain, on being conducted to the tomb of the venerable servant of God. There being seized with a most violent crisis, she said interiorly to the holy founder: "My venerable Father, if you suffered from as violent a headache as I do, you would surely cure me." At once she felt a piercing pain, like that caused by a lance, which would cut off the entire sensitive portion of her head, and at once she exclaimed, "I am cured!" And cured she was, for she never afterwards felt the least symptom of her malady.

In July, 1877, a postulant of the same community who had received the last sacraments, and to all appearance seemed destined to fall a victim to a typhus fever that had almost totally paralyzed her, was instantaneously restored to health on the morning of the last day of a novena to the vene-

\*The institute of the "*Servantes du Saint Cœur de Marie*" was founded at Paris in 1860 by the Reverend Father Delaplace, and in the present year, 1880, it numbers eight flourishing communities.

† Saint Vitus's Dance, called *Chorea* in Medicine, more commonly written *Chorea Sancti Viti*, from χορεία, a dance, is a spasmodic or convulsive disease, most singular and formidable in its appearance, and most obstinate in its continuance.

rable Father. A few instants after she appeared in the chapel, to the utter astonishment and delight of all her sisters, then assisting at the Holy Sacrifice. After Mass she partook of some food, and then walked a distance of over a mile to pour forth her gratitude before the tomb wherein repose the mortal remains of her holy benefactor.

After the death of the venerable servant of God, the thought of introducing the cause of his beatification and canonization suggested itself to the minds of several distinguished personages who had been acquainted with him. Mgr. Luquet, an intimate friend of M. Libermann, wrote to Father Le Vasseur, immediately after hearing of the death of their holy friend, to express the high opinion in which he always held him, and to urge his disciples to take without delay the necessary steps for the introduction of his cause. "I need not tell you," writes this venerable prelate, "how deeply I sympathise with you for your loss. One thing alone can alleviate your sorrow, and that is your firm assurance of now having a powerful protector in heaven. . . This confidence that he has not only been received into the bosom of Divine Mercy, but that he now enjoys the happiness and glory of the saints, compels me to exhort you to solicit the immediate introduction of the cause of your departed Father." In concluding his letter, Mgr. Luquet offered his services in the following words:—"Ask with confidence, and if you require any information to guide you in the steps you have to take, use and abuse me according to your pleasure, I am at your disposal."—(Letter, 12th February, 1852.) Shortly after, the Reverend M. de Goy, one of the holy Founder's fellow-students at Saint-Sulpice, wrote to the Reverend Father Schwindenhammer:—"I am convinced that M. Libermann is a saint of the first order, and that God designs to glorify him soon by the honours of beatification, for I have

often seen him practise heroic virtues, and never have I discovered in him even the least deliberate imperfection." —(Letter, 27th May, 1852.)

His Eminence Cardinal Fransoni, and some other illustrious personages at Rome and elsewhere, joined their earnest entreaties and advices to these encouragements; and, the better to insure success, all expressed the desire of seeing published without delay the life of the venerated founder. The task of writing the life could not have been confided to better hands than to the learned and holy Dom. J. B. Pitra, who has since been raised to the dignity of a Prince of the Church.\*

Meanwhile, Father Lannurien, the first Superior of the French Seminary at Rome, was entrusted with the duty of preparing the way for the introduction of the cause. In 1855, Father Freyd communicated the life of Father Liber-

\* To write this English Life of the Venerable Libermann we carefully consulted every available source of information, particularly the excellent Biography by His Eminence Cardinal Pitra (2nd Edition, Librairie Poussielgue Frères, Rue Cassette, 27, Paris, 1872), and the Life recently published by some fathers of the society (Victor Sarlit et C<sup>ie</sup> Libraires-Editeurs, 19, Rue de Tournon, Paris, 1878). We likewise scrutinized most assiduously the voluminous archives of the Mother-House, and the many printed and manuscript writings of the holy Founder, so as to render this work as complete as was in our power. If our success is not equal to our endeavours and desires, we are at least conscious of having done a labour of love, and of having traced every line with the affectionate care which ought to animate everyone who writes the life of a saint. We close our work with a feeling of regret, on the 1st of May, 1880, the Feast of the Holy Apostles Philip and James, and we lay at the feet of the spotless Mother of Jesus the Life of one most devoted to her and very dear to her immaculate Heart, begging of our Heavenly Mother graciously to accept it as an humble tribute of our filial devotion, and to bless its pages, that they may enkindle in many hearts an ardent love for God and a burning zeal for souls! .



mann to the Roman Advocate, Mercurelli, and to Mgr. Estrade, who were chiefly engaged in causes of beatification and canonization. In 1856 and 1857, the Reverend Father Leman, then at Rome, and now Provincial in Ireland, laboured with great zeal for the promotion of the cause, and obtained from Advocate Mercurelli and Mgr. Estrade fair hopes of success and encouragement to proceed without delay. But no one was more zealous than Mgr. Luquet, who was not destined to see the accomplishment of his desires, as he died on the 3rd of September, 1858.

During several years the cause was at a stand-still, but the project was again resumed in 1867, when Father Eschbach wrote to the Very Reverend Father Schwindenhämmer:—"I am just after asking the advice of competent personages concerning the first steps to be taken for the introduction of the cause of our venerated Father. What induced me to do so is, that we frequently meet here with persons who have been in relation with him, and who would be happy to testify to his virtues and holiness.

"We believe here that these steps ought to be taken as soon as possible: for, on the one hand, death carries away every year some of those who might be very useful, and, on the other, the complication of political events might become an obstacle at a later time."—(Letter, 29th January, 1867.) A few days after, Father Eschbach wrote on the same subject to Father Delaplace:—"It is urgent, without delay, to take the first informations, because death daily carries away some witnesses. Here Madame Patriarca and her daughter died in the course of last year.\* This is

\* Madame Patriarca and her daughter considered their holy guest, to use their own expression, "as a saint, and a great saint." The house of the Patriarca family is the property of the French Government. At the request of Father Eschbach, His Excellency, M. de Corcelle,



much to be regretted. Remember especially that the testimonies given previous to the erection of the tribunal are not of great value . . . .”—(Letter of February, 1867.)

In reply to these letters, the Superior-General directed the Fathers in Rome to consult again some advocates experienced in these causes, and Father Eschbach accordingly consulted M. Alibrandi. This advocate was enchanted with the life of the venerated Father, and expressed the opinion that the cause would be favourably received by the Congregation of Rites. The idea of the process of a converted Jew struck him particularly as being “*the first of the kind which came before the Sacred Congregation.*”—(Letter of May 1st, 1867.)

Soon after, the affair was confided to another advocate, M. Minetti, who drew up without delay, according to the life by His Eminence Cardinal Pitra, the articles and questions on which the witnesses were to be examined.—(Letter of June 3rd, 1867.) After these preliminaries, it was necessary to obtain from Mgr. Darboy, then Archbishop of Paris, the canonical erection of an ecclesiastical tribunal, for the purpose of instituting the Process of the Ordinary, and of inquiring into the virtues of the holy servant of God.\*

Accordingly, the Superior-General, accompanied by his Ambassador of France at the Holy See, has given it to the congregation at a nominal rent of four shillings per annum, in virtue of a lease drawn up in due form (in June, 1876), to be renewed every thirtieth year. It has thus become a sort of pious pilgrimage for the congregation, whilst at the same time it remains under the protection of France.

\* The first Process of the Ordinary (*De virtutibus in Genere*) is made by the bishop of the place where the servant of God died, and is commenced and terminated “*auctoritate propriâ Episcopi.*” It is called Process of the Ordinary to distinguish it from the Apostolic Process which is made by the authority or delegation of the Holy See.

first assistant, the Reverend Father Gaultier, in a visit to the Archbishop, on the 14th November, 1867, solicited the institution of this ecclesiastical tribunal. His Grace readily acceded to the demand. On the 8th December following, the Superior-General appointed as principal Postulator of the cause for Rome the Reverend Father Freyd, Superior of the French Seminary, with the faculty of designating, if required, a Vice-Postulator, and the Reverend Father Barillec, Secretary at the Mother-House, as special Postulator for Paris and other places.

The tribunal was composed as follows:—Mgr. Aman-ton, of the Order of Preachers, Archbishop of Theodo-siopolis, kindly accepted the office of president; Mgr. Gaume, Apostolic Protonotary, and M. de Valette, titular Canon of Notre Dame, were appointed as assessors; the Abbé Boeuf, First Chaplain of the Lycée Napoleon, was nominated to the office of Promoter; the Abbé Bernard, Chaplain of St. Geneviève, to that of notary; the office of *cursores* was assigned to the Reverend Fathers Costes and Besserat.

The tribunal held its first session on the 24th February, 1868. In the course of eighteen months it heard the depositions of about seventy sworn witnesses of every state and condition. Bishops, secular priests, religious belonging to various orders of men and women, and lay persons of every rank in society, were happy to give their testimony in support of the cause. Most of the witnesses had been intimately acquainted with the holy servant of God, so that their testimony is of great weight and value.

The thirty-second, and last session for receiving the depositions, was held on the 19th July, 1869. Several secretaries were then appointed and sworn for the careful transcription of the questions addressed by the tribunal, and the answers and depositions of all the witnesses. After the

death of Mgr. Amanton (12th October, 1869), Mgr. Gaume was appointed to succeed him as president of the tribunal. Six new sessions, presided over by the latter prelate, were held from December, 1869, to the 2nd February, 1870, for the purpose of verifying the transcription of the twenty-four first sessions.

Divers circumstances delayed the transcription and verification of the eight other sessions, and when, in July, 1870, war broke out between France and Germany, the process was interrupted. On January 13th, 1872, the tribunal was re-established by Mgr. Guibert, the successor of Mgr. Darboy, and on the 19th of February, 1872, the "*Process of the Ordinary*" was brought to its conclusion. The copy of the questions, answers, depositions, and divers other documents belonging to the cause, were duly signed and authenticated, clothed in legal form, sealed with care, and, in April, 1872, transmitted to the Sacred Congregation of Rites.

Besides these documents there were sent to Rome numerous postulatory letters from cardinals, archbishops, bishops, superiors of religious orders, chapters, colleges, priests, and distinguished laymen.\* It was on the 27th

\* By the foregoing pages we see that to obtain the honours of canonization is no easy task. "In the first place," says the Reverend Louis Jouin, S.J., "it must be clearly proved that the candidates for the honours either died for the faith, or practised, during a considerable portion of their lives, up to the moment of their death, all the Christian virtues in a heroic degree, which means that they practised them habitually, and even under the greatest difficulties. All the acts of their lives are minutely scrutinized; those who knew them most intimately are examined under oath; all their words and doings are thoroughly sifted; if any doubt arises about their virtues, if all their acts are not entirely blameless the cause is at an end—their canonization will never take place. Then their holiness must be proved by true miracles: nor is any miracle so easily admitted as some suppose the

May, 1876, that His Eminence, Cardinal Orégia di San Stefano, laid the cause of Father Libermann before the Sacred Congregation of Rites, assembled at the Vatican, under the presidency of its Prefect, His Eminence, Cardinal Patrizzi. No sooner had the cardinals presented the case, than from all the seats proceeded voices of approbation: "*Affirmative, una bella causa introducatur!*" It was a truly unanimous acclamation. To explain this unanimity, we must know that the eminent Cardinals had ample opportunity for examining in private all the merits of the cause and for forming their opinions, either on the printed documents which had been laid before them, or on other informations which they might have obtained elsewhere. The unanimity of their vote is a manifest proof that they have been all most favourably impressed by the cause.

Whilst the cardinals were assembled, the Blessed Sacrament was exposed, and the litanies of the saints were being recited at the French Seminary. Immediately after the session, the glad intelligence was brought to Father Eschbach, by his Eminence Cardinal Sacconi, a member of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, and the joyful strains of the *Te Deum* carried towards heaven the expression of the deep gratitude which filled every heart. In a few instants the glad tidings passed with electric rapidity to the Mother-House in Paris, where, in the morning, the litanies of the saints had likewise been recited. As soon as the news arrived, the canticle *Magnificat* was chanted with feelings of thrilling emotion, to give thanks to the

witnesses must be in sufficient number, they must be altogether unexceptionable; the fact itself, which they attest, must be of such a nature as not to be explainable by any natural causes. As long as there remains any doubt whether natural causes may not account for it it is set aside."

Lord and to Mary, for having exalted their humble and devoted servant.

On the following Thursday, 1st June, on the relation of the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, His Holiness, Pius IX. confirmed the advice given by the Eminent members of the Sacred Congregation, as will appear by the following important document:—

DECREE\*

OF THE INTRODUCTION OF THE CAUSE.

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DIOCESE OF PARIS,  
 CAUSE OF BEATIFICATION AND CANONIZATION  
 OF THE VENERABLE SERVANT OF GOD,  
 FRANCIS MARY PAUL LIBERMANN,  
 FOUNDER OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE HOLY HEART  
 OF MARY, AND FIRST SUPERIOR-GENERAL  
 OF THE SOCIETY OF  
 THE HOLY GHOST AND THE HOLY HEART OF MARY.

By Indults dated the Nones of February, and the fourth of the Kalends of March (5 and 26 February), 1874, our most Holy Father the Pope, Pius IX., has graciously authorized

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\*DECREE

OF THE INTRODUCTION OF THE CAUSE

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PARISIEN.  
 BEATIFICATIONIS ET CANONIZATIONIS  
 VENI. SERVI DEI,  
 FRANCISCI MARLÆ PAULI LIBERMANN,  
 INSTITUTORIS CONGREGATIONIS  
 PURISSIMI CORDIS MARLÆ.

Nonis Februarii et iv. Kalendas Martii Anni 1874, quum SSmus Dominus Noster Pius Papa IX. benigne indulserit ut de Dubio signaturæ Commissionis Introductionis Causæ Servi Dei Francisci

the Sacred Congregation of Rites to examine, in one of its ordinary meetings, the question concerning the Signature of the Commission for the Introduction of the Cause of the above-mentioned Servant of God, Francis Mary Paul Libermann, without the intervention or advice of the Consultors, although ten years have not elapsed since the day of the presentation of the Process of the Ordinary before the Sacred Congregation of Rites, and although the writings of the Servant of God have not been collected and examined. Consequently, on the instance of the Reverend Father Alphonsus Eschbach, a member of the aforesaid Congregation, and Postulator of the Cause, and taking into consideration the Postulatory Letters of some Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, as also of a great number of Archbishops and Bishops, and of other personages, illustrious by the ecclesiastical or civil dignities with which they are invested, the most Eminent and most Reverend Cardinal Louis Orégliã di San Stefano, in lieu and place of the most Eminent and most Reverend Cardinal Capalti, Ponent of the Cause, has proposed, on this day, to the deliberation of the S. C. of Rites, assembled for

Mariæ Pauli Libermann præfati ageretur in Congregatione Sacrorum Rituum Ordinaria, absque interventu et voto Consultorum, licet non elapso Decennio a die præsentationis Processus Ordinarii in Actis Sacrorum Rituum Congregationis, et scriptis ejusdem Servi Dei non perquisitis et examinatis, Emus et Rmus D. Card. Aloisius Oreglia di S. Stefano, loco et vice Emi et Rmi D. Cardinalis Capalti Causæ Ponentis, ad Instantiam R. P. Alphonsi Eschbach, Alumni memoratæ Congregationis et Causæ Postulatoris, attentis Postulatoriis Litteris nonnullorum Sanctæ Romanæ Ecclesiæ Cardinalium, itemque plurimorum Archiepiscoporum et Episcoporum necnon aliorum Virorum Ecclesiastica et civili dignitate illustrium, in Ordinariis Sacrorum Rituum Comitii hodierna die ad Vaticanum coadunatis, sequens Dubium discutiendum proposuit, nimirum : *An sit signanda Commissio Introductionis hujus Causæ in casu et ad effectum de quo agitur ?* Et Sacra



an ordinary meeting, the following doubt: *Whether the Commission for the Introduction of this Cause, in the case, and for the purpose at issue, should be signed?* And the same Congregation, having by a mature examination weighed everything, and heard the observations presented *vivâ voce* and in writing, by the R. P. D. Laurent Salvati, Promoter of the Holy Faith, thought it right to answer: *Affirmatively, or that the Commission be signed, if it should so please His Holiness, 27th May, 1876.*

Then a faithful relation of what precedes having been made to our most Holy Lord, Pope Pius IX., by the undersigned Secretary, His Holiness has ratified and confirmed the sentence of the Sacred Congregation, and with his own hand signed the Commission of the Introduction of the Cause of the aforesaid Venerable Servant of God, Francis Mary Paul Libermann.

1st of June of the same year.

|                |                                              |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------|
| (Signed),      | C. Bishop of Ostia and Velletri.             |
| ✠              | CARD. PATRIZZI, <i>Pref. S. C. of Rites.</i> |
| Place of seal. | PLAC. RALLI, <i>Secr. S. C. of Rites.</i>    |

eadem Congregatio, omnibus maturo examine perpensis, auditoque voce et scripto R. P. D. Laurentio Salvati Sanctæ Fidei Promotore, rescribendum censuit. *Affirmative sive signandam esse Commissionem si Sanctissimo placuerit.*

*Die, 27â Maii, 1876.*

Facta postmodum de præmissis per infrascriptum Secretarium Sanctissimo Domino Nostro Pio Papæ IX., fideli relatione, Sanctitas sua sententiam Sacræ Congregationis ratam habuit et confirmavit: propriaque manu signavit Commissionem Introductionis Causæ Ven. Servi Dei Francisci Mariæ Pauli Libermann præfati, Die 1â Junii anno eodem.

|         |                                            |
|---------|--------------------------------------------|
| L. ✠ S. | C. <i>Episcopus Ostiensis et Velitern.</i> |
|         | CARD. PATRIZZI, <i>S. R. C. Præfectus.</i> |
|         | PLAC. RALLI, <i>S. R. C. Secretarius.</i>  |

God Who is admirable in His saints has exalted the humble! When Rome had spoken, a solemn Triduum of thanksgiving was celebrated in all the houses of the Society of the Holy Ghost and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Nor was this joy confined to the children of the venerable servant of God. The loud hymn of praise, which from their grateful hearts ascended towards heaven, was swelled by that of thousands of faithful, who, in every land, wished to unite their feelings of gratitude to those of his disciples.

Far away, within the tropics, in India, at Mauritius, Bourbon, in Africa, in the West Indies, and in America, the highest ecclesiastical and civil dignitaries vied to do honour to the memory of our modern saint. His Grace, the most Reverend Dr. Gonin, the illustrious Archbishop of Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, who had personally known the venerable servant of God, discoursed for fully two hours on his holy life and labours. But the houses of France, Ireland, Italy, and Portugal, were particularly zealous to exalt the virtues of the holy founder.

At Beauvais, where the fathers of the Holy Ghost and the Holy Heart of Mary direct, under the leadership of the Reverend Father Orinel, the seat of the great arch-confraternity of St. Joseph, Mgr. Mermillod, the zealous and illustrious exile Bishop of Geneva, pronounced in the Cathedral, in presence of Mgr. Gignoux and of an immense gathering of priests and people, a magnificent discourse wherein he admirably resumed the Life and Virtues of the Venerable Founder, by showing how he was a conquest of Jesus Christ, a victim of Jesus Christ, an apostle of Jesus Christ.

At Paris, the Triduum was concluded in the Basilica of Sainte Geneviève (Panthéon), on the 16th July, 1876, under the presidency of his Eminence Cardinal Guibert,

when the illustrious Mgr. Freppel, Bishop of Angers, pronounced a magnificent Panegyric on the life and virtues of the venerable servant of God.

When, twenty-five years before, the humble priest passed by the Panthéon, none would have thought, and himself least of all, that his name would, ere long, resound in eulogy beneath the lofty cupola which towers over the French capital. For less could it have been foreseen that a poor child of Saverne, who, half a century ago, was still plunged in the darkness of Judaism, would soon shine with incomparable brightness in the court of Jesus, the Son of David, and that his name would be inscribed in the Sacred Annals of the Church, known, revered, and invoked, throughout all Christendom, as the Venerable Francis Mary Paul Libermann.

THE END.



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*Honor sit sanguini Jesu, et nunc et in perpetuum.*











