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Henrietta Louisa (Farrell) Lear

# A DOMINICAN ARTIST

A Sketch of the Life of the Rev. Père Besson  
of the Order of St. Dominic

BY THE AUTHOR OF "LIFE OF S. FRANCIS DE SALES"

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# CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHIES

BY

H. L. SIDNEY LEAR

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**Madame Louise de France**, Daughter of Louis XV.,  
known also as the MOTHER TÉRÈSE DE S. AUGUSTIN.

**A Dominican Artist**; a Sketch of the Life of the  
Rev. PÈRE BESSON, of the Order of St. Dominic.

**Henri Perreyve**. By A. GRATRY, Prêtre de l'Oratoire,  
Professeur de Morale Evangélique à la Sorbonne, et Membre  
de l'Académie Française. Translated, by special permission.  
With Portrait.

**S. Francis de Sales**, Bishop and Prince of Geneva.

**The Revival of Priestly Life in the Seven-**  
teenth Century in France. CHARLES DE CONDREN—S.  
PHILIP NERI and CARDINAL DE BERULLE—S. VINCENT  
DE PAUL—SAINT SULPICE and JEAN JACQUES OLIER.

**A Christian Painter of the Nineteenth Cen-**  
tury; being the Life of HIPPOLYTE FLANDRIN.

**Bossuet and his Contemporaries.**

**Fénelon**, Archbishop of Cambrai.

**Rivingtons**

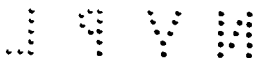
LONDON, OXFORD, AND CAMBRIDGE

## PREFACE

THE substance of this sketch has been taken from M. Cartier's *Vie du R. P. Besson*, supplemented by the memoirs and letters of Père Lacordaire. There are no startling events or political interests in Père Besson's life, as in those of his great leader, but the point which forms its attraction, is the simplicity and purity of a holy life;—the singleness of heart which sought and found God every where. Whether in his devoted love for his mother, or in his warm, generous friendship, or in his reverence for spiritual authorities, or in his tender care for the souls he watched over, Hyacinthe Besson saw God before all else. His deep, unselfish affection

was refined and ennobled by its first concentration on his Lord. Love is the leading feature of his soul's life, and love it was that found expression in his paintings, his unstudied letters (which are, almost without exception, an outpouring of love for God and man), his devoted labours, and, not least, in his death—the result of devotion to his fever-stricken flock. “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

It has been asserted that the monastic life chills and represses love, or at all events forces it into unnatural, constrained shapes, which withdraw it from those who have the first claim upon affection and support. Père Besson's life may be contrasted with this opinion ;—it is a living commentary upon the solemn truth that “He that loveth God, loveth his brother also.” The world attempts to separate these two loves, but in the Christian heart they form a living whole with two faces ; one turned towards heaven, the



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other towards earth and all its needs and sufferings.

“ Sweet thoughts are theirs that breathe serenest calms,  
Of holy offerings timely paid,  
Of fire from heaven to bless their votive alms  
And passions on God’s altar laid.  
The world to them is closed, and now they shine  
With rays of love divine,  
Through darkest nooks of this dull earth  
Pouring, in showery times, their glow of quiet mirth

“ New hearts before their Saviour’s feet to lay,  
This is their first, their dearest joy :  
Their next, from heart to heart to clear the way  
For mutual love without alloy :  
Never so blest, as when in Jesus’ roll  
They write some hero soul,  
More pleased upon his brightening road  
To wait, than if their own with all his radiance flowed.”

# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER I

	PAGE
Besson's childhood—School days—First days of artist life—École Buchez—Requedat—Piel—First visit to Rome—Returns to Paris, and studies in Delaroche's atelier—Besson returns to full religious convictions—Abbé Desgenettes—Residence at Rome—Louis Cabat—Visit to Assisi—Development of a religious vocation—Lacordaire's profession—Confraternity of S. John the Evangelist—Besson goes to La Quercia—Final decision to join the Dominicans . . . .	I

## CHAPTER II

Santa Sabina—Novitiate—Death of Requedat—Dispersion of the French Dominicans—Besson goes to Bosco—Separation from his Mother—Letter to her—Death of Piel . . . . .	46
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

## CHAPTER III

	PAGE
Profession—Letters to his Mother—Père Besson gives up painting—Ordained Deacon and Priest—Licensed as a Confessor—Lacordaire returns to Notre Dame—Père Besson Master of Novices . . . . .	71

## CHAPTER IV

Père Besson at Chalais—Visit from his Mother—Letters—Death of his Mother—Letters—Père Besson goes to Paris . . . . .	101
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER V

Nancy—M. de Beaussant—Père Besson preaching Retreats at Langres—Revolution of 1848—Chalais—He becomes Prior of Nancy . . . . .	132
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER VI

Père Besson is recalled to Rome—Reform in the Dominican Order—Père Jandel appointed General—Interview with Pio Nono—Life at Santa Sabina—San Sisto Paintings—Visit from the Pope—Friendship with Overbeck—Eastern Missions—Père Besson volunteers as a Missionary—Sails for Constantinople	
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--



---

	PAGE
—Smyrna—Aleppo—Journey to Mossoul—Difficulties there—Père Besson practises as a Doctor—Visit to the Holy Land—Return to Rome . . . . .	161

## CHAPTER VII

Divisions in the Order—Père Besson sent to France as a Peacemaker—Return to Mossoul—Dangers in the East—Massacres of Libanus—Fever at Mossoul—Père Besson goes to Mar-Yacoub—Last Illness—And Death . . . . .	206
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER VIII

Père Besson's Direction—Spiritual Letters . . . . .	237
-----------------------------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER I

Besson's childhood—School days—First days of artist life—École Buchez—Requedat—Piel—First visit to Rome—Returns to Paris, and studies in Delaroche's atelier—Besson returns to full religious convictions—Abbé Desgenettes—Residence at Rome—Louis Cabat—Visit to Assisi—Development of a religious vocation—Lacordaire's profession—Confraternity of S. John the Evangelist—Besson goes to La Quercia—Final decision to join the Dominicans.

“ART,” it has been said<sup>1</sup>, “is a revelation from heaven, and a mighty power for God; it is a merciful disclosure to men of His more hidden beauty, it brings out things in God which lie too deep for words. . . . In virtue of its heavenly origin it has a special grace to purify men's souls, and to unite them to God by first making them unearthly. If art debased is the earthliest of things, true art is an influence in the soul so heavenly that it almost seems akin to grace.” Surely this is true in the

<sup>1</sup> F. W. Faber.

deepest sense. In a reverent spirit we may look back to the beginning of art as filling the earth when "God saw every thing that He had made, and behold it was very good;" and from that time the wondrous gift of a creative power has been bestowed upon men; a power so exquisite, so precious, so mighty for good to him who possesses it, and to all who come under its spell, that it may indeed be called "akin to grace." That among men too often "noblest things find vilest using," is a sorrowful truth, and heavy is his guilt who turns the heaven-sent gifts of genius to aught save God's glory, and the good of men. But art, true creative power, as it is part of that noble heritage bestowed on man when the Ever-Blessed Trinity vouchsafed to make him "in Our Image, after Our Likeness,"—so it is one of the noblest offerings of praise and adoration which the creature can offer to his Creator,—a lavish outpouring of all the gold, myrrh, and frankincense of his mind's treasures; every line, every tint, every beautiful outward expression of the inward conception of loveliness, offered up as a mighty hymn of thanksgiving, a great "Sursum corda;"—in heathen art, it may be to a great "unknown God;"—in Christian art to Him Who is the fount and source of all beauty, and to Whose worship all in beauty turns again, as waters flow onwards to the sea.

“Akin to grace,” art seems most certainly to have been in the case of the young artist whose short career and early death (he was called to his happy rest when only forty-five) are lovingly narrated by the artist-friend who was as a brother to him, and a son to his mother—M. E. Cartier,—whose writings have done so much to set Christian art in its highest form before the nineteenth century.

This “beautiful growth of grace, the most exquisite reflection of Fra Angelico, a soul infinitely pure, true, and simple, possessing the faith of a great saint,” as he was described by Lacordaire, was a young Frenchman named Charles Jean Baptiste Besson, and was born April 10th, 1816, in his grandfather’s house near Besançon. He was the only child of a widow, nor did he see the light of day till after his father—a soldier—had died from the results of a wound. Young Besson’s childhood was almost idyllic in its simplicity. His mother’s parents, in whose château it was spent, were staunch Royalists. “My soul is God’s, my life-blood my King’s,” was their traditional code ; and the household was governed almost like a religious community, partly perhaps owing to the presence of a favourite aunt, who, having been driven forth from the cloister during the Revolution, had returned to her father’s roof, and there continued to live according to her rule, teaching the little children and

deepest sense. In a reverent spirit we may look back to the beginning of art as filling the earth when "God saw every thing that He had made, and behold it was very good;" and from that time the wondrous gift of a creative power has been bestowed upon men; a power so exquisite, so precious, so mighty for good to him who possesses it, and to all who come under its spell, that it may indeed be called "akin to grace." That among men too often "noblest things find vilest using," is a sorrowful truth, and heavy is his guilt who turns the heaven-sent gifts of genius to aught save God's glory, and the good of men. But art, true creative power, as it is part of that noble heritage bestowed on man when the Ever-Blessed Trinity vouchsafed to make him "in Our Image, after Our Likeness,"—so it is one of the noblest offerings of praise and adoration which the creature can offer to his Creator,—a lavish outpouring of all the gold, myrrh, and frankincense of his mind's treasures; every line, every tint, every beautiful outward expression of the inward conception of loveliness, offered up as a mighty hymn of thanksgiving, a great "Sursum corda;"—in heathen art, it may be to a great "unknown God;"—in Christian art to Him Who is the fount and source of all beauty, and to Whose worship all in beauty turns again, as waters flow onwards to the sea.

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servants of the family, loved and loving, in all ways the "Angel of the house."

But a cloud soon came over this sunny picture. Through the dishonesty of a relation, Madame Besson's father was ruined, his estates sold, and the happy family party dispersed. The young widow must have been a woman of no common character, as well as of exquisite beauty. Instead of giving way to the pressure of misfortune, she resolved at once to support her child and educate him fittingly ; and accordingly, without hesitation, she sought and found a situation in the neighbouring town of Besançon, where her days were spent in wearisome toil, the one sufficient reward for which was her return each evening to her little son, and the delight of teaching and fondling him. This arrangement soon came to an end. Madame Besson's youth and beauty exposed her to annoyances from which she saw no escape save flight. Making her father her sole confidant, the brave woman left her child in his care, and started alone and on foot for Paris, with a view to beginning life anew there. It was a rash step, and many a time Madame Besson's courage nearly failed, in spite of her fervent trust in God and His ceaseless protection. One evening (she told her son afterwards), as she passed over a lonely bridge, the temptation to plunge into the deep eddying waters below, and so fly

for ever from her earthly troubles and perplexities, came all but irresistibly upon her. But He Who heard Hagar's voice in the wilderness was not heedless of the desolate young widow as she leant over the rushing waters of the torrent; His angel whispered courage, and set before her a young child's face, recalling one who would be left an orphan were she to refuse to bear the burden God laid on her;—and making the sign of the Cross, she fled from the dangerous spot.

Once in Paris, matters took a happier turn. Some friends placed Madame Besson in a position of considerable responsibility with an old American lady, whose affection she so entirely won, that on discovering how bitterly the young mother felt being separated from her son, he was speedily fetched to Paris, and soon became almost as dear to his patroness as to his mother. The old lady placed Jean Baptiste at school, and herself instructed him in preparation for his first Communion. Madame Besson's means were, however still but scanty; and her nights were often spent, after the day's toil, in washing and mending her child's clothes. Years after he alludes to this in one of his letters to his mother:—

“Dearest mother, our dear Lord seems always to have stamped you with the sign of His cross, the special mark of His chosen ones; He has indeed



brought you through fire and blood. Never fear! all the sorrows of this life pass away, however grievous they may seem, and meanwhile they lead us to the portion of the saints in Heaven. How lovingly I look back upon the trials we bore together in the Rue Trois-Frères—trials which I was then too young to appreciate. But I can recall the long, bitter winter nights, when you used to sit over your scrap of fire by my bedside, bearing it all so cheerfully. When I remember how, cold and weary as you were, you used to take off your warmest clothes to cover me, I could cry for tender love, and with the longing to make you some return. So lonely as you were, and yet so unshaken in your trust in God's Providence, which strengthened you to bear up under all trouble and discouragement."

Better days were coming: the old American lady died, leaving some small provision for the widow and child; and her relations, who had learnt to value Madame Besson, offered her an advantageous position in the family. But she had other views, and, looking chiefly to her son's truest good, went to live with the Abbé Leclerc, the venerable Curé of Notre Dame de Lorette, who had taken a warm interest in the boy. The good Abbé had been an exile in Germany and England during the storm of Revolution; and now he filled an honoured position among the most

highly esteemed clergy in Paris. Madame Besson delighted to be the helper in his countless charities; while the Abbé watched over her son with a fatherly care, the effects of which probably went far to shape his future life. The Abbé Leclerc wished young Besson to be placed in a seminary, with a view to the Priesthood; but his mother could not bring herself to contemplate what at that time seemed a great sacrifice to her, little knowing that a greater one was in store for her loving heart. Accordingly the boy was sent to a private secular school, where he does not seem to have learnt much except mischief. During the revolution of 1830 the boys thought it amusing to set up a private revolution of their own; and there was no hand over them strong enough to hold the reins. The worst crime, however, of which young Besson was guilty appears to have been ripping up all the bolsters in the dormitory, in order to make an artificial snowstorm out of the garret windows, greatly to the surprise of the neighbours! His love for drawing already got him into many scrapes: exercise-books were filled with various wild compositions; and when punished, Jean Baptiste was wont to satiate his revenge with caricatures of his masters.

Fortunately this state of things came to an end when, in 1832, M. Roux Lavergne, a really able man,

took the head of the school. Quick to perceive and appreciate character, he soon singled out the slight, handsome boy, whose temperament combined so much gentleness and affection with such a determined will,—who was so ready to rush headlong after whatever notion approved itself to him, that a less long-sighted professor in the school foretold that young Besson would soon come to grief. Had he plunged into politics, the prediction would very likely have been fulfilled ; as it was, by God's grace, the lad gave himself up to His service, and laid down his life therein.

M. Roux Lavergne was a philosopher, a man of taste and poetic imagination ; in religion and politics his school was not that in which young Besson had been brought up hitherto, and the novelty of philosophic speculation now opened to him proved a great fascination. The tutor discouraged his seeking to repair past neglect of Latin and Greek, and fostered Besson's passion for art, which seemed the more congenial expression of his thoughts. Life began to be a reality to him ; he felt the yearning every healthy mind must experience for work, for an occupation which should be at once the delight and toil of a man's life. This craving seemed to Besson to find its fulfilment in the painter's career, and he already began to look to it, not merely as an attractive,

agreeable profession, but rather as a serious vocation into which he thought to throw himself, almost as a sacred calling like the priesthood. Circumstances made it easier to carry out his wish than had so far seemed probable. In 1833 the Abbé Leclerc died, leaving Besson a legacy, which placed him and his mother in an independent position. Eleven years later, in a letter to his mother, Besson alludes to the Abbé as follows—he was then a newly-ordained Priest, and his first Mass was offered with intention for his benefactor: “I cannot tell you how ceaselessly I thank God for the grace He vouchsafed to me through that dear old man. God knows how he used to hope that the day would come when I should pray for him! Oh, my Saviour, grant that his desires may be fulfilled! Restore him fourfold all the love and the blessings he bestowed upon me; and that not for my poor sake, but in Thy Holy Name, dear Lord, and because of the boundless charity with which Thou didst inspire him!”

Jean Baptiste was now seventeen, and, throwing aside his school-life, he and his mother established themselves in the Rue de la Monnaie, she to live her wonted quiet life of devotion to her son and the poor, he to pursue the study of art under Souchon, a painter of David's school. But a more weighty influence was brought to bear upon the young

artist's mind, in the society to which he was introduced by his late tutor, M. Roux Lavergne. He too had left his scholastic position, and had joined M. Buchez in an arduous literary work, the "Histoire Parlementaire de la Révolution Française." Buchez at this time was wielding no slight power over the public mind, especially among young and ardent men, who were fascinated by the depth and earnestness of his views, by the straightforward unselfishness of his character, and the elevating tone of his theories. His house in the Rue Chabannais became the rendezvous and propaganda of a numerous body of friends and disciples, among whom he encouraged a free discussion of all the questions of the day; and although M. Buchez's theories undoubtedly must be called Socialist, and are wanting in the higher tone which can only be found within the pale of Christ's Church, and her unflinching, rock-built dogma, at the same time France and Europe generally have cause for gratitude to a school which boldly resisted the atheistic spirit of the Revolution, and its attendant materialism. In later years Besson alluded with sincere gratitude to the impressions he had received during his intercourse with M. Buchez, as having influenced all his future life for good. "I have an abiding attachment to M. Buchez," he wrote, Feb. 20th, 1842, "and never can forget that he was one

of the instruments our Lord employed to call me to Himself."

As this school had an important part to play in forming Lacordaire's earliest disciples, and thereby in leavening and shaping the Christianity of not France only, but that of the world generally, it may not be useless to examine into M. Cartier's clear and interesting account of its teaching.

"Of all the Socialist schools in our times, that of Buchez is the most Christian," he writes. "Instead of founding its theories on the intoxicating doctrine of the rights of man, this school takes its stand upon duty; and duty as revealed by the Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, it holds to be the true fraternity. Such duty is the source, the only test, and the only end of man's rights, and its fulfilment is his final law. God alone can lay it on us, and in order to this, there must needs be a revelation of His will—a revelation which He gave through the teaching and life of our Lord, Who taught the duty of fraternity, when He died for His brethren, and when He made the precept of mutual love to be the very foundation of all society. Man has no claim to power save in serving his fellow-men. Let him that would be first, be the servant of all."

Superior as this theory was to those which had preceded it, there was still much wanting; its base rests

rather upon the quicksands of rationalism than the immovable rock of truth. It puts morals before dogma, whereas faith must precede works—men do right because they believe that which is right. True fraternity can only be the result of knowledge and love of the Father, without which, as a primary, practical, element, the love of mankind is unattainable. But this socialist school did not inculcate such love of God, and it ignored the Church, which is the embodiment thereof. It sought after a social Christ, and failing to perceive that the Church is the only sure bond of all, it took reason, and a free inquiry into the Gospel—as though that were on the same level with the writings of Plato—for the groundwork of its organization. Instead of the Church, France was to be the ruling passion of men, and this passion, exceeding as it did the bounds of a legitimate and noble affection *pro patria*, became mere fanaticism. France, they taught, was the mother of nations, it was for her that our Lord proclaimed the dogma of fraternity, it was her mission to teach it throughout the world. But this was not the vocation which Lacordaire attributed to her in Notre Dame later on; he dwelt eloquently on the position of France as the Church's eldest daughter, commissioned to protect her heathen; the socialist school viewed her as a power armed with truth, which she must enforce on every side—their

watchword was Fraternity or War. They strengthened themselves in this position by our Lord's parable of the wedding feast, and His words, "Compel them to come in :"—Truth is bound to extend itself, and consequently it has a right to strive.

To this theory a new historical system was combined, according to which France has ever striven to fulfil this fraternal duty, to which alone all her struggles, all her revolutions have tended ; her early Christian teachers, Clovis and his followers, the Crusades, Louis XI., the League and Richelieu, in destroying feudal rights, all were working to the same end. The Revolution aimed at establishing fraternity, but for lack of appreciating history and the Gospel, it failed ; building rather on rights than on duty. This school proposed to finish the work which the Revolution had begun, and to lay the corner-stone of that social organization which the Gospel inculcates. This corner-stone is association. The time for compelling men to come in had not arrived—as yet all association must be voluntary, and it was among the working classes that the first nucleus of those who were to convert the world must be sought. A few men were to unite under the banner of fraternity, share their tools, their labour, their possessions, and create a capital which was to belong to the association. Self-governed, they were to choose their own ruler, and profits were to be



shared according to the labour each man accomplished. It was expected that the fascinating example would attract many, and spread itself rapidly. The working classes were to become an organized brotherhood—justice and simplicity were to prevail, the struggle between labour and capital was to cease, the despotism of speculation was to die out, and all the miseries of poverty, sickness, or lack of work were to be for ever counteracted. Agriculture they believed would speedily follow in the same track, and in no long time the whole State would be organized upon this system. Then only the French nation would fulfil its true mission, and establish true fraternity throughout the world.

It was an attractive theory, and one which was followed out with energy by Buchez and his disciples. Associations were founded, and the propaganda of the Rue Chabannais spread among all classes. But in spite of the really generous ardour of its professors, the system did not thrive. Love of man apart from the love of God is a mere chimera; no one can contend against the natural selfishness of human nature without special grace from the Saviour, which alone can enable us to conquer the hindrances original sin and man's ingratitude are for ever showering upon all self-devotion. Difficulties of all sorts arose; the working men in their respective associations looked first after their own profits, and

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before long a very Babel arose of varying opinions and theories. "Every one diverged according to his own view of the subject, and the members of the school, scattered on all sides, sought the realization of their dreams of fraternity, some in revolution and on the barricades, others in the Church and her Sacraments. Of course there was every conceivable intermediate shade between these extremes ; nor would it be just to deny that even those who stopped short of the truth forwarded the cause of Christianity, by pointing out the road they themselves failed to follow, and drawing together those who seemed most entirely divergent : Catholicity found real friends from out the ranks of a hitherto unjust and inconsistent liberalism ; and the great difference, as to religious toleration, which we see between the Revolution of July and that of '48, is mainly owing to the influence of Buchez' school on the "National" party, which led the latter insurrection. Buchez himself was appointed President of the National Assembly, an honour which he mainly owed to his Christian learning, as well as to the honesty of his character."

Such was the phase of life into which young Besson entered, as he emerged from the schoolroom ; and who can wonder that his ardent, generous nature fell under the spell of so high-sounding and generous a theory, or that he should have been ready to devote

his whole energies to its advancement? His love of art kept him apart from the less intellectual class of the school ; and while not acting up to his knowledge, early impressions, and the training he had received in Church principles, kept him from straying into the wilder errors from which all his companions in the Rue Chabannais were not exempt. His most intimate friends were Eugène Bion, Duseigneur, Steneile, and Boileau, all artists, whose aim was to restore Art from her debased position, and make her fulfil her fitting task as the regenerator of society ; while he was bound with a still closer bond of friendship to Hippolyte Requedat, a youth some three years younger than himself, whose mind, of a singularly intellectual cast, was drawn through the often perilous process of philosophy and speculative inquiry into the true light of faith. Speaking of him later on, Lacordaire says, "Many souls of a similar cast joined me in after-times, but none of more exquisite beauty, none purer or more self-devoted, none stamped with a higher mark." By degrees the truth and beauty of the Church system had penetrated his mind ; and, having entered S. Etienne du Mont one day, he took his place near a confessional, and, when his turn came, approached it for the only time since his first Communion—thenceforth a fervent Catholic. Another of the little band of friends was Piel, a young man of remarkable literary talent,

who, like Besson and Requedat, was one day destined to fulfil his vocation as a Dominican. Piel was a native of Lisieux, and some eight years older than Besson. After trying various pursuits, he had suddenly declared, "I will be an architect, or nothing!" It was his true worldly vocation, and in spite of the little favour with which Gothic architecture was regarded at that time in France, he went in heartily for it. He undertook to build a Gothic Church at Nantes; and, meanwhile, the study of Holy Scripture, Origen, and Dante was gradually moulding the mind which was to embrace Lacordaire's teaching and his self-devotion. Piel wrote diligently for the *Européen*, in which he fought a steadfast, untiring battle on behalf of the higher tone of art; and Besson asked no better than to assist in all that was concerned with art, and tended to establish a higher view of its aims and obligations than that commonly prevalent in the world. Art, so they affirmed, is no mere outpouring of emotion, no mere means to attain wealth or repute, by pandering to the passions of the multitude. Real art should be the utterance and expression of truth, teaching and preaching morality and fraternity; it was bound to cast aside the self-seeking heathen traditions of the Renaissance, and maintain Christian tradition only, reviving the Faith which flourished in the catacombs, and restoring all the

expansive symbolism of mediæval times. "Beauty," they said, "must be a manifestation of the good and true, having God Himself for its ideal : this can only be realized by means of a revelation, and religious truth must be its foundation ; Catholicism is the fullest and most perfect revelation of this truth." Piel maintained, while pleading the unity of art, that of its three branches architecture was the queen ; that it is the first expression of art, and in its very nature less subject to the influence and corruption of passions than painting or sculpture. "Sculpture," he said, "is never more potent than when subject to architecture, and adapted to her lines and proportions ; while painting intensifies the beauty of both by the harmony of her colours and lights. God's House is the highest work of art, inasmuch as it expresses a religious truth, and gives outward shape to the greatest of all truths. The beauty of God's truth should be duly set forth in that of His Temple ; and when this is attained, a Christian church is the noblest work of art which man can achieve. A cathedral is the outward expression of a Divine doctrine, a new world created for the Christian : externally it is a bold affirmation of truth, a noble reaching forth towards heaven ; while internally it sets forth whatever is best fitted to develop the soul's life, and draw it into closest union with God."

Besson had chosen painting as his expression of truth and art; but he delighted in the study both of architecture and sculpture, and became a practised modeller. A painter should be familiar with art in all her branches, he was wont to say. One way by which he sought to make his favourite pursuit available for the propagation of principles, was by a series of popular engravings, breathing only the spirit of Christian poetry and noble deeds, which might take the place of the battle-pieces and other sensational pictures which had become the common decoration of working men's walls. Accordingly, Besson made a number of drawings, which were engraved at Metz and published in Paris. Of these but a few remain, and they present a somewhat strange combination of the special doctrines of the young artist's school, with the higher teaching of the Faith. But the intention was admirable, and consistent with Besson's aspirations after what was true and noble. Nor was his life out of keeping with such aspirations: he found enough to satisfy his wishes in art and philosophy, and was never for a moment led astray by the temptations and seductions which Paris offers to a young man, free and independent like Besson. His mother's society at home was all he cared for; indeed, his devotion to her was more than that of an ordinarily loving son; and

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it was remarked in after-years by one of his friends, that, unconsciously, Besson continually reproduced his mother's countenance (she was singularly beautiful) in the faces he painted best,—adding the touching comment that it was but natural, since she was the only woman he had ever loved. It was characteristic both of this devotion to his mother, and of the steady, pure life the young artist habitually led, that when, in 1835, he determined on indulging his art-longings by a visit to Rome (where his master Souchon invited his assistance in making a copy of Michael Angelo's Last Judgment), it was at once decided that Madame Besson should accompany him. Her presence never was any restraint upon him, nor did he ever seek to separate himself from the bondage of a mother's love, until the day when a higher love called him irresistibly from her side, to give himself wholly to his Lord.

In those days railways had not penetrated France and Italy, as now; and Besson and his mother spent a month in the pleasant vetturino journey which took them by the Riviera to Genoa, Florence, Sienna, Perugia and Assisi. His visit to this latter place made a powerful impression on the young artist's mind; St. Francis of Assisi opened a new manner of fraternity to his soul, and as he studied the life of that holy man, whose large-hearted spirit of brotherhood embraced not only humanity, but all creation (he was wont to call the

lambs and birds, the flowers and streamlets, "sore-line," and to speak gratefully of the warmth and brightness imparted by "messer frate il sole"); the social theories of Buchez and his school faded before a greater, nobler fraternity, leaving only the framework of true Christian brotherhood. Besson's pure, high-toned temperament was peculiarly open to the impressions of early art, and during this journey he acquired that devotion to the earlier masters which permanently influenced his artistic taste, and which prepared him to take a line of his own in studying the treasures of Rome. Souchon soon gave up his intended labour in the Sistine Chapel; and after some brief sojourn in Italy, Besson returned to Paris. Here, for a time, he studied under Paul Delaroche, in whose atelier he was a favorite both with the master and his fellow-students. His professional ardour was great: he worked diligently at the Louvre, with a view to attaining the richness and depth of colours he had learnt to prize in Italy, and studied anatomy under the guidance of his friend, Dr. Tessier, who, once like Besson a frequenter of the Rue Chabannais, became not only pre-eminent in his own profession, but remarkable for his Christian and holy life, in the course of which he did good service to the cause of Christ and His Church<sup>2</sup>. Besson also frequented the

<sup>2</sup> "Your friendship was a great blessing to me when I was in

society of his early friends, Piel and Roux Lavergne, with whom he spent many hours studying the architecture of Notre Dame, where they found "sermons in stones," and day after day were more deeply impressed with His power and love to Whose Glory that noble structure had been raised in the days of a more glowing faith. Piel had taken up his abode close to Notre Dame in order to feast his eyes and heart with its architectural beauties; he knew it by heart, and loved it with the ardent passion of a youthful imagination. Perhaps these growing convictions in the young artist's mind were rather strengthened than otherwise by the repeated attacks they had to encounter from his fellow-students, who were chiefly rationalists, and whose onslaughts required Besson to be ready to give an answer for the faith which was in him. He had acquired the habit of logical argument during the time he frequented the Rue Chabannais, and had no great difficulty in discomfiting his assailants. If, as sometimes happened, the conversation became blasphemous or licentious, Besson set himself steadily to stop its course—taking his stand as yet, it is true, on the lower ground that whatsoever is of

the world, and the thought of you is a blessing to me now. You are in a good position, and you well deserve it; but what I am most thankful for, is the Christian use you make of it."—*Letter from Père Besson to M. Tessier.*

evil repute must of necessity be in antagonism to all real artistic feeling, of which purity and beauty is the life. The men around would laugh at his enthusiasm, thereby confirming his resolution;—the young orator waxed warm, and eloquent, until the end generally was that Besson carried the day, and drew the greater part of his fellow-students to his side. In truth he was so genial, so generous, and so free from that selfish angularity which heeds no bruises save its own, that he was a general favorite even with those whose opinions least coincided with his. Indeed, Madame Besson's only complaint against her son at this stage of his life, was his almost exaggerated liberality; his purse had a chronic disease of emptiness, and she, the prudent Chancellor of the Exchequer, was slow to fill it, knowing what the inevitable result would be. But one way or another, he generally got the better of her prudence, and persuaded her, who was nothing loth to be convinced, of the goodness of his cause. His mother used to tell of one such instance, when Jean Baptiste, having seen a poor artist in the Louvre, who looked the personification of despair, inquired into his woes, and found that for want of respectable clothing, the man was unable to give certain private lessons, which would set him straight with the world. Eager to relieve this difficulty, young Besson persuaded his mother to give him

one of his own coats, somewhat worn, but still respectable, for the poor artist ; and accordingly, the next day he carried it off under his arm, wearing a new coat himself. But as he walked along, he was seized with a pang at thus keeping the best for himself, and the order of proceeding was reversed. The mother's quick eye immediately detected the proceeding, when her son returned ; but her maternal remonstrance was cut short with a hearty kiss, and the words, "O mother, if you had only seen the poor fellow ! He almost cried for joy !"

Such a man could not linger long on the borderland ; Christ Himself spoke the " *compelle intrare.*" Besson and Roux Lavergne had been drawn by an irresistible attraction to a certain bas-relief in the choir of Notre Dame, representing the institution of the Holy Eucharist—in which the Head of the Saviour combined a manifold beauty and holiness which preached to them more than many sermons. Besson secretly made a copy of this head ; and when finished, he placed it in his friend's room. Roux Lavergne, coming suddenly, was so struck with it, that he fell on his knees in prayer, and from that moment was a changed man. Fresh from his gracious labour, the young artist, too, received a new impulse towards that fulness of truth after which he had been feeling his way. Reading the Gospel of St. John, he came to

Mary Magdalene's plaintive appeal to our Lord in the garden after His Resurrection, and his artist's imagination vividly depicted the exquisite scene, and the Lord's making Himself known to His faithful follower in the single word "Mary,"—which re-echoed in his heart with a silvery tone of personal vocation, until he too cast himself at his Saviour's Feet, crying "Rabboni, Master!"

Soon after, May, 1837, the two friends made up their minds to seek the Curé of Notre Dame des Victoires, the Abbé Desgenettes. Years after, the Abbé loved to describe this interview in the presence of the former socialists, one of whom (together with several friends whom they induced to follow their example) then had long worn the Dominican robe.

"M. l'Abbé," the spokesman said, "we accept all the truths of Christianity, and we wish to follow the practices it enjoins; but, first of all, we feel bound to tell you that we are Republicans, and that we must be faithful to our principles."

"Well, my friends," the Abbé answered, "that will not hinder you from being good Christians; I confess Republicans and Legitimists alike."

"Do you really mean to say that you would not refuse to give us the Sacraments, though we are Republicans?"

"Religion has nothing to do with party; she

respects every man's politics ; and it is quite possible that you may believe republicanism to be the best form of government. Only remember, if some day you should consult me in the hour of strife, when you are going to rush to the barricades, I should most likely advise you to let it alone. But, meanwhile, there is nothing to hinder you from confession and absolution."

A little more intercourse completely cleared away the prejudices of the young artists, while the Abbé Desgenettes became sincerely attached to them, and lost no opportunity of fostering their religious development. Under his direction, Besson studied a little book, called "Pensez-y bien," with such wrapt interest as to leave his painting for days together, until his mother grew really uneasy, and though as yet no thought of embracing the religious life had come upon him, his day-dreams were all of self-sacrifice and self-devotion. He now began to marvel how he could have visited Rome without a more Christian emotion for her martyr-fed soil ; and his desire to return thither met with no opposition from his loving mother, whose sole ambition was to see her son happy. Accordingly, in the autumn of 1838, the Bessons went to Rome, intending to make it henceforth their home ; and to live content with each other's society, and the service of God. At this time young Besson's enthusiasm for

his art knew no bounds; but it was essentially an unworldly enthusiasm, free from the natural longings after competition and fame. He was wont to say that he could not believe in the bliss of Paradise itself without the power of painting, and that he would willingly live in a desert and paint pictures on which no mortal eye was ever to gaze. Painting was for him at that period the form in which prayer and worship expressed itself, as the bird's song or the flower's perfume rises up in unconscious (as we suppose, perhaps mistakenly) worship of the Father and Creator of all things.

M. Cartier, a young French artist, who was to become a very brother to Besson, made his acquaintance about this time, and gives a graphic description of his first visit, early in 1839, to the artist's studio at the corner of the Via Felice and Via della Purificazione, near to the well-known Capucin Convent in the Piazza Barberini. Besson's studio on the first floor was a heap of drawings, sketches, studies, and casts; and on his chimney-piece, facing him at his work, was a mediæval statuette of the Blessed Virgin, before which a lamp burnt night and day. Louis Cabat, the landscape painter, lived with the Bessons, and the two artists worked together, and strove each to forward the other's progress in their cherished pursuit, as well as in the higher one of leading a holy,



Christian life. "Cabat and Besson are living together," Hypolite Requedat wrote to their mutual friend Piel,—“two angels under the same roof!” Day by day Besson heard mass in the Capucin church hard by; and after an unluxurious breakfast, which was training him for Dominican austerities, he would set off for the more ancient sites in Rome, or the Campagna, whence he would only return at nightfall, bringing back numerous sketches, and too often, also, a touch of fever, which made his mother tremble. Who that is not wholly without poetry, or the love of art, could fail to be captivated by the scenery and picturesque groups which meet one on all sides in Rome? or who wonder that at every turn in the streets, every pilgrimage amid her shrines and ruins, Besson paused to catch the forms and colours that met his view? Sometimes in his wanderings he would fall in with some religious procession; and then, half-artist, half-devotee, he would fall into its ranks, drawing materials and all. His friend M. Cartier recalls having seen him thus eagerly following the Via Crucis in the Coliseum—a scene which none who have beheld can forget, whether as Christian or artist.

During the summer of 1839, Besson, with Louis Cabat and a few other friends, made a sketching tour, which embraced Albano, Aricia, Civita Castellana,

Foligno; Besson himself going on to Assisi, from whence he wrote to Cabat as follows :—

“CASA CARPINELLI, ASSISI,

“*July 20th, 1839.*

“I have been here for the last fortnight, and no words can express how I delight in it. The dear little town is placed like an amphitheatre on the slope of a hill, with such a fertile country, and such a gracious horizon at its feet! It is so perfectly quiet and peaceful! the people are very poor and devout,—too few strangers come here to spoil their primitive simplicity; it suits me beyond measure. All this time I have only been to one church, S. Francis. Between my veneration for that great saint, the beauty of the church itself, and the paintings with which it is covered, the hours I spend there are so delicious that I have as yet not had the least inclination to go elsewhere. I have tried to make a few rough sketches; but there is such wonderful dignity and purity in these paintings, that I feel them much more subjects for admiration than imitation. If you come to Assisi, you will see how grand this early Christian art was, the exquisite taste with which every component part was put together, and how religion was so at one with true dignity and beauty, as to raise the external form to the level of the great subjects treated by art. I

will not begin upon details, there would be too much to say ; such pathos, such lofty aspiration, such lovely and pure conception are to be found on these walls, rendered with such truthfulness, that altogether the delight and suggestiveness that fill one in gazing on them know no bounds. I have never seen any thing which impressed me so much, and I emphatically prefer this school of art to all others. But how sadly conscious one is of the difference between our age and that ! How weak our faith, how grudging our devotion, in comparison ! One fails to find words which express the love with which all was done. Every least detail sets forth the large-heartedness of these artists, how full they were of God's Presence, and how far more they sought Him than any mere human praise ! Surely our Lord blessed their labours, and if He fostered their humility by withholding that scientific perfection which the world prizes so greatly, He gave them an abundant compensation on the spiritual side, through His grace. How many holy souls have been helped by gazing on these works ! Surely now those who produced them have a far higher reward than any thing which this world's fame can give ! One always comes back to the same point—all true glory is in our Lord Jesus ; all that is done for love of Him is good ; all that is done without that is idle and fruitless. Doubtless, talent is a great gift if well used ;

but the important thing is to be God's faithful servant. Our motto should be "All for God," to our very helplessness. We must store up our treasure with Him, so that as He Himself teaches us, we may give Him our hearts. Indeed, dear Cabat, I thank God for having brought me to Assisi, because sometimes I feel that I love Him better for it. Pray for me, as I pray for you, and for our friend Cartier, and M. Pagés ; we have great need to strengthen one another thus, for one passing moment of devotion, how many cold and lifeless days one has !"

During this happy visit to Assisi, Besson made many studies from Cimabue, and Giotto, who were his favourite masters, as well as others from Puccio Campana, Simone Memmi, Pace di Faenza, and Fra Angelico ; and also not a few landscapes from nature. Day by day, as he worked, his heart seemed to grow more and more full of love to God and man, and few as his expenses were (for he had found a lodging where his whole daily expenses were only 1 f. 50 c.) he had given away with so free a hand, that when the six weeks of his absence came to an end, he returned to Rome without money or clothes, and the vetturino who took him back to Via Felice would not give up his portfolios of sketches until Madame Besson had paid for the carriage. The following winter there was great suffering in Assisi, and the parish priest at once

appealed to the young French artist, whose liberality had been so notable, for help; nor was he mistaken in so doing, for Besson immediately set to work to beg for the poor inhabitants of Assisi, and by this means, and a heavy mulct laid on his charitable mother, he was able to send a sum of 1500 *l.* for the relief of his favourite town.

Passionately as Besson was devoted to art, it is evident that a stronger passion was developing itself day by day within him, and God's Grace was drawing Him onwards to the time when a distinct call from the Holy Spirit was to sever him wholly from the things of this world. Even now he was setting forth God's glory in his life as well as in his paintings. In the same house with the Bessons there lived a Portuguese family of high position, and the religious indifference of the father was roused by noticing the devout life led by his young co-locataire. Acquaintance was made, under pretext of drawing lessons for the younger members of the family, and Besson had the satisfaction after a time of putting his neighbours under good religious instruction. In later years, some of this very family became his own spiritual children. Among his artist friends, too, he revived a marked religious influence. Thus we find a letter to one of them who was in trouble :—

*December 8th, 1839.*

“My poor dear friend, how many unforeseen troubles have come upon you! How I wish I were near you, to try at least and comfort you. Do not be cast down, but face your adversity with calmness; the surest way to relieve our troubles is to accept them all for the love of God, to offer them one by one to Him, as they arise, as a willing sacrifice. Can we ever do too much for Him Who has done so much for us? Do not overwhelm yourself with work—you are so necessary to your family and friends—it is a duty to consider your health. Do what you can quietly, and leave the results, good or bad, to God, without paying too much heed to men. Our chief work on earth is to save our souls and to love God and man—that is the long and short of all things. . . . But be ready for whatever may arise—no one can foresee what to-morrow may bring forth. We are apt to judge from outward appearance, and in our ignorance we often sorrow over those very things which are really our greatest good. But our Lord, Who knows all, and Who rules all for our benefit, sees otherwise; and so let us trust all that is dearest to us in His Hands, with full confidence in whatever He may appoint. In joy or sorrow, in sickness or health, in riches or poverty, desolation or consolation, let us be wholly His, Who is the Saviour and Lover of our souls.”

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“I sometimes marvel at my own blindness,” he wrote that same winter to M. Cartier. “How can one halt so long between self-love and love of God; between death on the one hand, and Infinite perfection on the other? Yet, while I fully perceive this great truth, why am I so slow to act upon it? It must be because of the hardness of my stony heart, which lacks even a handful of good soil wherein to foster the gracious seed sown by the Great Husbandman.”

Such a mind, surrounded by such influences as Rome presented, could not fail to appreciate the religious life. Besson spent more and more time among the friends he had made in different convents, and though he said nothing of any intention of himself becoming a religious, it scarcely needed the quick penetration of his devoted mother to foresee that, sooner or later, such would be the case. Poor thing! she who had refused to let her son be educated for the priesthood, lest she should in some measure lose the sole possession of him, which was her one happiness in life—was she indeed to have this far sharper sacrifice laid upon her? The dread was overwhelming, and she used to watch for M. Cartier on the stairs, when he came to see her son, and implore him to dissuade his friend from taking a step which would be so terrible to her. M. Cartier could not withstand the poor mother's entreaties, and discussed the matter

with Besson : the result being that the latter promised never to leave his mother, so long as she herself should not wish him to do so.

During this winter the Abbé Lacordaire came to Rome, full of eagerness to restore the Dominican Order in France, and with him came Requedat, one of Besson's early friends of the Rue Chabannais ; and naturally the attraction of La Minerva, where they staid, became great for the young artist. On the 8th of April Lacordaire and Requedat received the Dominican habit,—Besson assisting with the deepest emotion, and no little envy of those to whom it was given to be foremost in this self-devotion. The next day the French novices left Rome for the convent of La Quercia at Viterbo, not without a struggle which Lacordaire himself describes as “a sacrifice of blood.” “It had cost me nothing,” he says, “to leave the world for the priesthood, but it cost me more than I can say to add the burden of the religious life to that of the priesthood. But on the second occasion, as on the first, having once made up my mind, I had no misgiving or thought of turning back, but went straight on to encounter my difficulties.” There is a wonderful simplicity in Père Lacordaire's account of his first arrival at Quercia, and it is surely encouraging to those who may have felt—who does not, at times?—weighed down by the Cross they have sought and accepted



voluntarily? After describing their arrival at La Quercia at the end of an exciting day, he says, "Then we went each to his cell. It was very cold, the wind had gone round to the north, and we had only our summer habits in fireless rooms; there was no one in the house that we knew; all the excitement and *prestige* of the day was over; our friends were no longer near, but we were alone with God, face to face with a life the details of which were new to us. That evening we went to matins, then to the refectory, and so to bed. The next day it was colder still, and we only half understood the routine of our duties. Then a passing weakness came over me; I thought of all I had left—the clear prospects and certain advantages of my life, the cherished friends, the pleasant and profitable society, the warm hearths, my own cheerful rooms, the numberless attractions with which God had blessed me. To lose all these to indulge the pride of one vigorous action was surely a heavy price! I prostrated myself before God, and asked Him to give me the strength I needed. Before the end of that first day, I felt that He had granted my prayer, and during the last three days my soul has been more and more comforted<sup>3</sup>."

The life was a strict one. "We rise at a quarter past five o'clock, and in a quarter of an hour we go to

<sup>3</sup> à Madame Swetchine, *Viz*, i. 280.

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the inner choir, where we sing Prime, hear mass, and make our meditation. Then we say our own mass. Before noon, we sing Terce, Sext, and None in choir, and on great days High Mass is sung. Dinner at twelve. All our food is *maigre*, save under dispensation; and on Friday we fast; on other days we eat some bread in the morning, but from Sept. 14th to Easter the morning fast is continuous. After dinner we go to recreation or take a siesta, as we will. At three, vespers and compline. From four to eight o'clock we are free to go out if we like. At eight we sing matins and lauds, at a quarter to nine supper, and conversation in the common room till ten, when we go to bed. Besides this, the novices make a short meditation, morning and evening, in their own little chapel. . . . We can meet in the novices' sitting-room for conversation at the free hours."

Besson returned to his easel, but he had received a fresh impetus towards the religious life; and the first result was a desire to follow a stricter rule while yet living in the world, and to form an association of artists who should pledge themselves to seek God's glory in all things. With a view to such association Besson wrote to Père Lacordaire, asking him to frame a suitable rule of life. The answer was that many similar applications had already reached the Father, and that he was about to frame a rule for a confraternity of artists,

of which the fountain-head should be in Paris. Accordingly, the Confraternity of S. John the Evangelist was founded on the 21st July, 1839, under constitutions framed by Lacordaire, who begins them thus:—

“Certain French artists, deeply feeling the present condition of society, seek to forward its amelioration by means of Christian art, and, inasmuch as one of the sorest social wounds lies in the unnatural isolation of men living in an artificial state, they have thought good to establish among themselves a confraternity which shall be, in the Church’s pregnant language, a brotherhood. The rules which follow are an expression of their present resolution, which they hope will be life-long, of striving together, subject to Jesus Christ and His Church, for the saving of men. May God, the only Source of all lasting good, bless their attempt! Should they be enabled to win some souls from the mere interests of this life to those of one higher, they will in no wise attribute their success to any merit of their own, but to Him Who can raise the dead, and Whose Hand is never weary of reaching forth refreshment to the tired, of filling the empty heart with heavenly abundance, or of healing the broken in spirit. This Brotherhood is placed by its founders under the protection of S. John the Evangelist, because that Saint, Apostle, Evangelist and Prophet

was foremost among all the Saviour's disciples to penetrate the mysteries of Divine love and beauty, which are the eternal objects of contemplation to all true artists."

The Confraternity professed as its aim the sanctification of art and artists, and took as its motto, "Non nobis, Domine, non nobis, sed Nomini Tuo da gloriam." Its members pledged themselves to lead a Christian life, to pray for the conversion of artists specially, to have the Crucifix and a picture of the Blessed Virgin in their rooms, and to dress simply, in black, grey, or white. They had fixed gatherings, in order to discuss all that concerned Christian art and the Church, and festivals for special prayer and Communion. Further, they undertook to look after the younger members of their profession, and to place them under right-thinking masters, as also to endeavour to raise the tone of their models. Their first Prior was Piel, Besson's former intimate friend, who had so warmly shared his early aspirations after the higher tone of art, and who was powerfully attracted by Lacordaire's influence, and that of his friend Requedat, to cast in his lot with them. "It is very fitting for a future Dominican to end his worldly career with the inauguration of such a work," Requedat wrote to Piel, just after he had himself taken the habit

with which he earnestly desired to see his friend also clothed.

The Confraternity was immediately joined by a good many distinguished men, some of whom had, like Piel and Besson, formed part of the *École Buchez*, and others, who had fallen under the spell—probably the most powerful of the day for the more refined and cultivated young Frenchmen—of *Lacordaire*.

Besson, aided by Charles Hallez, the eminent pianist and composer, formed a branch Confraternity at Rome, in which we find the names of the sculptor *Bonnassieux*, and *Gounod*, whose compositions are the proof that he was a worthy member of the high aims he and his companions set before them.

Various other guilds followed upon this Artist Brotherhood: the Confraternity of S. Luke among the medical profession, headed by Dr. Tessier; that of S. Yves, for lawyers; and that of Fra Angelico da Fiesole, for engravers;—the principle of each being identical, i. e. that the members should lead a pious life in the world, and unite their efforts to promote the Kingdom of Christ in their respective professions. The natural result was, that men who had a hidden vocation, developed it under such training; and sundry of those who began as members of a guild, passed on to the religious life.

When the Third Order of Dominicans was restored in France, these Confraternities ceased to exist—a matter of regret, inasmuch as there must at all times, probably, be men whose power to leaven their own circles with holiness of life would be invaluable in such a shape, whereas they might as yet be unequal to the higher demands of the Third Order, which the guilds would tend to supply.

At this time Besson was working at his first large picture, the raising of Lazarus. Overbeck used to criticize and encourage the young painter; and all but himself anticipated that it would be a noble work. Besson, however, felt wholly unequal to express on canvas the conceptions of his heart, and he often despaired of success. "Thanks to God, and to your good advice," he wrote at this time to Cabat, "I am beginning to have somewhat more patience with myself, and to rest content under all my difficulties and infirmities. God knows it is not easy; and sometimes I fall into such distress, that I am forced to recall all the arguments I have already laid before you, and before our Lord, Who is my only real succour at such seasons." This picture was never finished: the artist's vocation was about to express itself distinctly, and his future course was well nigh decided.

At the close of the year 1839, Besson had pro-

mised Lacordaire to go to La Quercia, and make a copy of a celebrated Madonna, painted by an unknown artist of the fifteenth century, which the Father wished to place in the first Dominican house he might be able to found in France. This picture had been an object of great veneration; and in early times a convent was built beside the church which contained it; but the Senate of Viterbo was unable to decide to what Order both should be entrusted. They finally resolved to send a deputation to the Porta di Firenze, and there offer La Quercia to the first religious who should enter. This proved to be a Frenchman, Martial Auribelle, General of the Dominicans; and thus the convent came into the hands of that Order; and there the first French novices were spending their novitiate. "I was passing through Viterbo in 1836," wrote Lacordaire, "and as I entered by the Porta Toscana, I was struck by the porch and belfry of La Quercia, without knowing even its name; and now it has become my home and shelter, contrary to all human foresight. How marvellously the future is hidden from us, and how often we unconsciously cross the soil where we are destined one day to rest!" . . . "You remember," he says, writing to Madame Swetchine, "the handsome, saintly young Requedat? He is still more attractive as a religious; and merely to look at him is a joy to me. He is a treasure; and

were I to die now, I should feel the establishment of our Order in France safe in his hands. . . . He is a saint! and such a tender, devoted friend to me; a very precious stone among the holy souls God has sent to gladden me hitherto! . . . A young painter, who is a friend of ours, a Frenchman, and a holy fellow, is coming here to copy the Madonna della Quercia for us."

Just before Lent, 1840, Besson fulfilled his promise, and went to La Quercia, where his overflowing happiness, and his clear view as to God's call, left him with a mind distinctly made up as to the future. While working at the promised copy, he also sketched freely in the neighbourhood. More than forty landscapes, drawn at this time, yet exist. And when his work was finished, he solemnly laid his brush upon the altar, and vowed to forsake his dearly-loved profession and become a Dominican, whenever his mother's consent could be obtained. Only those who knew him best could realize what a sacrifice this was, since painting was, as his friend M. Cartier says, "his very existence and happiness, without which he could scarcely suppose perfect bliss in heaven."

Meanwhile, that poor mother, who was left behind at Rome, must have had little doubt as to the sacrifice she would soon be called upon to make. How she must have prayed and striven with herself, before



she could bring her deep maternal love to the last point of unselfishness, and voluntarily give up her child to God! Her son returned to Rome for Easter; but he said nothing about his vocation, and perhaps at first Madame Besson hoped that after all the blow was really not about to fall. Such hope, if it ever existed, was not to last long. All his life they had lived in the closest, truest confidence,—next to God, she had no love, no thought, no object save her son, and such love is not easily deceived. The mother's wistful eyes read his inmost soul; and after hearing Lacordaire preach at the church of S. Louis, there was one final struggle with herself, and she resolved to do as she had ever done, since her fatherless babe first lay in her bosom;—sacrifice herself to him. Unbidden tears of reverence rise as one pictures the touching scene, when trembling, and yet strong in her pious resolution, striving to fortify herself with the thought of Abraham offering up his only son—perhaps, poor mother! indulging a half-hope that some good angel might even yet remove the sharp sword which she was thrusting into her own breast—Madame Besson went one morning into her son's studio (where he himself has told us she rarely penetrated, out of her unselfish consideration and fear lest she should disturb him), and voluntarily gave her unasked consent to part with him. Strong feeling rarely finds many words. “My

child," she said, "I know your wish, and I will not be a hindrance to your happiness. You shall be quite free ; and I myself ask you to follow the religious life. I have but few years to live ; I only ask to go where you go, and if you are happy, I shall be happy too."

Besson had not had time to speak when Père Lacordaire rang at the bell. He had come to thank his young friend for the copy of the *Madonna della Quercia*. Besson told him what had just passed, adding simply, "Will you have me, Father?" The good Father was taken by surprise, and his ever-ready flow of sympathy made his tears to flow for the mother, whose sacrifice he knew how to appreciate. The three wept together ; but the victory was won for God, and from that moment Besson never looked back. On May 13th, 1840, Père Lacordaire wrote to Madame Swetchine,—

"The young painter who copied the *Madonna della Quercia* has joined us. We had no expectation of this at present, on account of his mother, for he is an only child ; but she herself has urged him to follow his vocation. . . . I went to their house, all unknowing, and needed but to stoop and gather this lovely floweret. He is a very miniature *Angelico da Fiesole*, with an infinitely pure, good, simple soul, and the faith of a saint. His name is Besson."

## CHAPTER II

Santa Sabina—Novitiate—Death of Requedat—Dispersion of the French Dominicans—Besson goes to Bosco—Separation from his mother—Letters to her—Death of Piel.

**P**ÈRE LACORDAIRE'S work was prospering ; and on May 16th, 1840, he and five other Frenchmen entered the Dominican Monastery of Santa Sabina, under the special protection of Pope Gregory XVI. The monastery and church are upon the Aventine Hill, and command one of those wide-spreading, solemn-coloured views with which the lovers of Roman scenery are familiar. The original church, of Basilican form, was built on the site of Santa Sabina's house, A.D. 425. Pope Honorius I. gave the site of the monastery to the Dominicans in the thirteenth century. S. Dominic himself inhabited it ; and in the garden an orange-tree, planted by the Saint, still flourishes. A graceful legend asserts that the year before Lacordaire gave this new impulse

to the Order of S. Dominic, a fresh shoot had burst forth from the venerable stem.

Early on the 16th May, Père Lacordaire said mass in the Saint's cell ; and after the festival of the day—which was joined by many notable persons, both French and others, sympathizers in the work—was ended, he gathered his companions together in the novices' chapel, and spake at length to them of what they were about to do. His first words were, "Brothers, we are gathered here to pursue a work appalling in its difficulty." He did not wish any one concerned to undervalue this difficulty, or to imagine that success could attend the "Frères Prêcheurs" by any means, save the blessing of God. Once established in France, he looked with confidence to the work they would accomplish for Christ and His Church ; but at present that establishment was but a hope, and he felt that he and his companions might not live to see the result of their sacrifice. These companions were Besson, Requedat, and Piel, who, after some struggle and deliberation, had given himself to the work, writing to his father, on the eve of his departure for Rome, "Once more, farewell ! before I leave our dear France, where my heart will ever be, as far as is consistent with obedience. God has given me grace always to love my country dearly, and I thank Him for

it now that He sees fit to send me forth. I leave a most dear family behind, and many cherished friends—above all, some very precious graves. I could not pray beside them as I wished when I was last at home: you must do it for me. And when you meet with strangers who are in need, help them in the Name of Jesus Christ, for the sake of your absent son<sup>1</sup>." The fourth was HERNSCHEIM, a native of Strasburg, by birth a Jew, the grace of whose baptism lay dormant for years. His intellectual powers won him a professorship of philosophy; but it pleased God to open his eyes to the truth by means of a simple Sister of Charity, who nursed him in a severe illness, and from a disciple of Cousin, HERNSCHEIM became a son of S. Dominic. Lacordaire's fifth companion was the Abbé Jandel, the only one of the little band who had ever studied theology. He had become known to Lacordaire when the great orator was preaching an Advent mission at Metz, near which town the Abbé Jandel was at the head of a *petit séminaire*, and being powerfully drawn to the religious life, he came to Rome with the intention of joining the Jesuits, but was led by God's good Providence to the Dominicans instead. Thus three of the novices had been formed in the École Buchez; and Lacor-

<sup>1</sup> *Vie du Père Lacordaire*, i. 346.

daire himself kept up some intercourse with M. Buchez, who, while approving some part of the design, would rather have seen his disciples create a new order, more in keeping with his modern political and social views, than submit themselves to a yoke of comparative antiquity. Buchez corresponded on the subject with Lacordaire, proposing a compromise with the Church, some of whose precepts he would have abrogated as unsuited to the existing state of the world, while he would have substituted others, such as prohibitions against luxury and idleness. "Père Lacordaire had no mission to transact such exchanges on the part of the Church," M. Cartier somewhat quaintly observes; "and, moreover, he thought that the Gospel contained sufficient injunctions against sloth and luxury already. Discussion on such terms was simply impossible."

Lacordaire wrote at this period, "We are six Frenchmen now inhabiting the Convent of Santa Sabina on the Aventine, who have all been led from the world in different ways, all having lived a life very unlike that to which God now calls us. We shall spend some years here, if God so wills it, not with a view of delaying the struggle, but in order to serious preparation for our difficult mission; so that, returning to France, we may be armed, not merely with our rights as citizens, but with the rights

which always arise out of a well-proved devotion to a just cause. Unquestionably it is a trial to be exiled from our country, and leave undone that which even now we might do ; but He Who required his only son of Abraham, has made present renunciation the ordinary condition of a greater good. Some one must sow, where others are to reap. And for this reason we would entreat all those who have hopes for our future to forgive our temporary absence, and not to forget us, or cease to pray for us. Years pass quickly ; and when the day comes that we are found again in the camp of Israel and France, we shall be none the worse for having grown somewhat older, nor will Providence have been passive the while <sup>2</sup>."

At the same time Besson wrote to his friend Dr. Tessier, "You know how gracious God has been to me, and that I am at Santa Sabina, where, under Père Lacordaire's direction, I live in hopes of one day becoming a son of our holy Father S. Dominic. How happy I am ! The Lord has indeed granted the dearest wishes of my heart, unworthy as I am of so great grace, but His Mercy is measured by His Own Infinite Goodness, not by our poor merits. This it is which makes me perfectly happy, and fills me with hope. Our Lord Jesus Christ is so loving, and it is so infinitely sweet to love Him. We are to spend three

<sup>2</sup> *Vie de St. Dominique.*

years here before entering upon our work, and meanwhile we are studying S. Thomas, for Père Lacordaire wishes us all to be ordained priests before we enter the Order of Frères Prêcheurs. So we are striving to prepare ourselves for that privilege, with God's help."

The little band did not muster any great amount of theology: as we have seen, the Abbé Jandel alone had given any previous attention to this pursuit; but one and all were enthusiastic in studying the Summa of the Angelic Doctor, a study in which their guide and leader was himself making rapid progress. Those were happy days at Santa Sabina, spent in study and prayer, relieved by frequent visits to the countless sites and scenes which afforded such intense interest to the artist minds of the young brothers. A glowing letter from Piel to his father describes such a visit to the Coliseum, whence he sent a few leaflets as a relic.

A trial was in store for the attached group of friends, and one of their choicest members was never to leave Santa Sabina. Requedat—of whom Lacordaire wrote, "I know all the secrets of his spiritual life, and I should scarcely dare tell them to any one, so incredible would they seem"—had already shown symptoms of failing health;—he now became worse, and though Lacordaire, always ready to take the bright side of



things, hoped against hope, the others felt that they must make ready to part from their brother. Besson wrote to Dr. Tessier,—

“*Aug. 16th, 1840.*”

“So far from improving, our poor Requedat’s health fails rapidly, and his doctor gives us no hope of recovery ; nothing short of a miracle could save him. This illness, which is likely to deprive Père Lacordaire of his first and dearest companion, and us all of a dearly loved brother, is a most searching visitation of God’s Providence. Pray for him, dear Tessier, and ask the Abbé Desgenettes’ prayers.”

Sept. 3rd Piel wrote also to Dr. Tessier, “Let us bless God always, and above all when He chastens us, for then we may be sure that He is near at hand in mercy. But to-day we are indeed offering Him our first-fruits ! If I could only tell you how gently He has dealt with our dear brother, lulling him to sleep like a child, and causing death to be sweeter than the sweetest sleep. At half-past four this morning, dear Requedat fell asleep in my arms. . . . You knew and loved him as well as any of us—his great soul, his true heart, his large mind, his fine vigorous frame—who more likely to have lived long, and to have been foremost among the salt of the earth ! We can but gaze in silence upon the hidden mysteries of God’s Will. What wild and noble dreams we have all had

together in days gone by ! noble they were sure to be when he shared them. What wonders he thought to work ! We turned the whole world round our own way in imagination, changed it, ruled it, what not ! And now the most highly gifted, the youngest, best of us all is dead—dying, under the monk's hood, obedient as a little child. He was almost wildly devoted to his country, yet he has died in a foreign land. We, dear Tessier, must never forget that God, Who could thus change one man, can equally change a whole nation. On the Sunday before his death, Requetat told me that he wished to be thoroughly prepared for the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, which he was to receive the next day. 'If I live,' he said, 'I pray God that I may serve Him truly as a son of S. Dominic, and if I die I shall still be a Dominican.' He gave no heed to any thing but the Extreme Unction and Communion which he was to receive the next morning. This was at night ; the following day he received the Sacraments in a state of glowing happiness, and then lying down again (for he would be raised to receive our Dear Lord), he had nothing more to wish for. He had already asked forgiveness of all his brothers for any thing wherein he might have offended them, or given cause for scandal. Two hours after, he seemed in the last agony, but he had still so much strength that he rallied, opened his eyes

anew, recognized me, and kissed the Crucifix. I cannot tell you how often he did that up to Tuesday evening. His beautiful face was bathed with a cold sweat, but he smiled gently at us. That night Père Lacordaire stayed with him till one o'clock, when I took his place, and it was in my arms that he fell asleep in Jesus. His eyes were raised to heaven, his hand lay on his heart—there was not a movement, not a sigh; he died exactly as he might formerly have fallen asleep after having finished some good work. Père Lacordaire washed his body, and we clothed him in the habit, and laid him in his coffin. Dear friend, till he was laid there I had not realized that he was dead, he looked so much as though he were only resting on his bed in the choir wrapt in prayer. And when I felt that he was stiff and lifeless, I threw myself upon him, and kissed him repeatedly in the name of all who love him—then I seized one of the brother's hands with a loud cry. I fear that it was an act of rebellion against God for depriving me of him. All this I tell you in the strong confidence of your friendship. You will care to know every thing. . . . He was and is the link which binds us together, next to God, the Author of all good; he was the means of bringing us together, and he will draw us still closer."

A few days later Père Lacordaire wrote, "He died

after fourteen months' illness, during which he set forth marvellous courage, patience, and resignation, and all the other good qualities which you know he possessed. Although God sends us others to mitigate the loss, I feel that it is irreparable, and can only understand it by remembering that all good works must needs be tried by the fires of tribulation. He will plead for us in Heaven, he is the first among us to greet our holy patriarch, S. Dominic, and the many other holy ones of our Order. Whatever may have been God's design in taking him from us, our part is to accept the Divine Will, and persevere in what we have undertaken."

About the same time, Besson fell ill under the pressure of too much study, and an austerity which would probably have been restrained by Père Lacordaire, had he still been at Santa Sabina. For a month his mother had the happiness of nursing him in her own home, a happiness somewhat marred by his sufferings. As soon as these were relieved, Besson returned to Santa Sabina, where Père Lacordaire shortly rejoined his little flock, accompanied by some new brothers. It was now thought well to begin a real novitiate. The General of the Order proposed the convent of San Clemente as more convenient for the purpose than that of Santa Sabina, and the little French colony was speedily established there, carrying with

them Besson's copy of the Madonna della Quercia, and his unfinished Resurrection of Lazarus. A Belgian Dominican was chosen as prior, and a Spaniard as master of novices. Just as the retreat preceding the clothing was about to begin, a new novice arrived. This was a young artist named Danzas, who had known Besson as a member of the Confraternity of S. John the Evangelist, and who now came to take leave of him. But a sudden change came over the youth, and he suddenly determined to remain with his friend, and join in the retreat. Just at this time, when all seemed prospering, Père Lacordaire was obliged to announce to his disciples the unwelcome fact that the superior authorities had ordained their separation. He had been well received and made much of, but all the while a presentiment hung over him that a trifle might disturb this prosperity, and now his fears were justified. Enemies in France had denounced Lacordaire and his followers as being propagators of La Mennais' doctrine, and the Roman powers took alarm and sought refuge in separating the little band. It was ordered that while he himself remained in Rome, the rest should spend their novitiate, some at La Quercia, some at Bosco in Piedmont. At the same time Lacordaire announced that he left them perfectly free to withdraw while it was time, if this trial was too great for their strength,

they being not yet bound, as he was. Not one, however, altered his determination, and at the Mass, which closed the retreat, each novice, just before receiving Holy Communion, took from off the Altar a paper with the name he was to bear in religion. That of Hyacinthe fell to Besson's lot. Soon after, the dreaded separation took place.

On May 13th Père Lacordaire says, "I write from our deserted San Clemente. This morning at six o'clock our brothers who are destined for Bosco started, those sent to La Quercia went thirty-six hours sooner. After having been surrounded by a large and happy family I am now alone! We parted with great sorrow, and yet joyfully, having full trust in one another, loving one another, and hoping one day to be reunited in France<sup>3</sup>."

The Père Jandel, with Hernsheim and three others, went to La Quercia, and two days later the rest set out for Piedmont, taking Besson's mother with them; for if her son was no longer to be in Rome, she could not live there either. The affectionate respect with which Madame Besson was treated by the French Dominicans is a strong witness both to her own religious character and to their love for her son; and on this occasion, as on many others, every one's aim and object was to soften as far as might be for her the pang of parting. They all went together

<sup>3</sup> *Vie*, i. 389.

to Sienna and Florence, and on May 25th, 1841, they reached Alessandria, where the final separation was to be. Mother and son slept that night in two rooms only divided by a thin partition, and each strove vainly to stifle their sobs, in order to spare the other. But nature would have her way; and though the mother, ever self-forgetting, would whisper through the wall, "My child, do not weep; I will be brave, I will not cry any more,"—but a brief moment, and on both sides the sobs broke out anew. Next morning Besson went to Bosco, and his mother to Turin. She had been specially commended to the Director of the diligence service; but she forgot all about this, and when on arriving her boxes were taken off, the poor solitary woman simply sat down upon them and wept. It was some time after that she was found in her lonely grief by the official to whose care she had been recommended, and he took every possible care of her, doing all he could to facilitate her journey to Paris, where she arrived, still incapable of all thought save one—her precious child, "for he was her only son, and she was a widow."

M. Cartier very soon took up his abode with Madame Besson, and continued to fill the place of a son to her during the rest of her life; and the constant letters which reached her from the novice at Bosco were no small consolation. These letters are

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brimming over with tenderness, and with a deep, true, venerated love such as too many mothers seek in vain from their sons yet with them. "I think continually of you, dearest mother," he writes, "I know all that our separation costs you, and I share to the full your every grief; but like you, I look for consolation to us both from God. Whenever I grow anxious about you, either because I do not hear from you, or because I begin to think of all that may befall you, I lay open my heart before God, and commend you to Him. . . . As to myself, nothing can be desired beyond our present condition. You saw how kindly the Bosco Fathers received us, and their kindness is unaltered, so you may be at rest for that matter. Our brothers send you many remembrances, and are grateful for your thought of them. Be of good cheer, dearest mother. . . . I trust that soon you will regain that peace and comfort which our Lord grants to those who love Him, and which can ease the heaviest woes. I do not bid you not to sorrow—I know too well how hard all real sacrifice is; but such sorrow and tears, if offered to God, are a priceless treasure, and will be a cause of rejoicing to you at the Last Great Day."

Every little interest of Madame Besson's Parisian ménage, was duly appreciated at Bosco. Thus the novice who was deep in S. Thomas Aquinas could



find sympathy for the death of his mother's pet dog ; for all the various little annoyances consequent on her change of abode in Paris ; and for every trifling detail concerning her health. He writes, "Cartier tells me that you take great care of him, but that you do not take enough care of yourself, and that he is obliged to quarrel with you sometimes about it. I am quite ready to believe it, for it was always the same ; you never let me want for any thing, you foresaw every possible wish of mine, with your boundless love and forethought ; but you never gave any heed to yourself, and you know you have sometimes made yourself ill, for want of taking proper care. Be sure that I do not want to hinder your kind consideration for our friend ; in truth, I know that in all you do for him, you are not only fulfilling our Lord's teaching, in preferring others' welfare to your own, but that it is your greatest consolation to show your gratitude to Cartier. So that I entirely approve all that your dear Christian heart does for him, but that is no reason why you should neglect yourself ; your health cannot stand all that you have had to bear, toil and sorrow, without proper care. Now listen to Cartier, and forgive me for saying it, be obedient to him. If you only knew how much care we religious are made to take of our health, and how watchful our superiors are to enforce due preservation

of health ! and yet one might imagine that if any one has a right to give little heed to such things, it is a religious, whose very profession calls him to die to the world. But it is not so, there is a fitting order and proportion in all things ; and whether in things natural or supernatural, discretion must regulate even our good deeds. God gives us health in order that we may serve Him, and we are bound to do every thing we can to preserve it ; although at the same time we should be ready to lose it, if such be His Will. So please do not suppose that you are as strong now as you were once. You cannot do as you used to do. You know that formerly you were apt to go without food for much too long a time, or only to take the first thing that came to hand, and I have not forgotten how ill it often made you. Do not overdo yourself with household cares, which too have often knocked you up. In short, pray take care of yourself ; I know well enough that there is no fear of your ever being too self-indulgent, your danger is all the other way."

All Besson's letters to his mother are full of a warm, earnest love which continually reminds one of S. Augustine and Monica. " You know, dearest mother," he writes (Nov. 28, 1841), " that although we are separated, we still share every thing, especially troubles, if you have any. I am as much your child

as ever, and I love you as my precious mother, to whom, alas, I have caused many griefs and troubles, and but little consolation. Oh, do not suppose for one instant that I love you less because I have given myself to Jesus Christ ! On the contrary, at His Feet I learn how to weigh the greatness of your sacrifice, the tenderness and unselfishness of your love ; how great a claim it has upon me, and the poverty, ingratitude, and hardness of my own heart. Dearest mother, forgive me for all the pain I have caused you ; offer it all to God, He will accept every pang, and will give you the strength and courage which you so greatly need, and still more, that peace and joy which fills the whole being, and which none can fathom save those who possess it. I pray many times each day for you ; do the same for me. Let us pray together, coming to God as poor orphans who put all our hope in Him, and He will give us all the help we need ; for humble, trusting prayer wins every possible blessing."

Again, "I thank God for the resignation and strength He has given you, for I well know how your poor heart is rent, and I know that God Alone can enable you to bear your trial. Many times a day I commend you to Him ; I tell Him that He is your only hope, strength, and consolation now ; that when I caused you to bear a sacrifice so hard

to a mother's heart, above all to such a mother, I left you in His Hands, certain that He would be all that I could ever be, and far more, to you; for what is a frail human being, however dearly loved, compared to the Sovereign Lord, Creator of all things, the Very Source of all that is good and precious, Who loves us with such tender, comprehensive love? Dearest mother, put all your trust in God, He Alone is our unfailing Friend, and He Alone will protect and comfort us, come what may; when all else fails us, He is sure to abide by us. We may safely cleave to Him, for neither sorrow, nor difficulty, nor death itself can separate us from Him and His boundless love. All else we must leave, but He will never leave us."

The change from Rome to Bosco was not acceptable to Besson as far as outward things were concerned. The monk's vocation had by no means extinguished the artist, and Besson missed the glorious views and the venerable associations of Rome, the marvellous beauty of the scenery, the magnificence of her churches and ruins. But he gave himself up to diligent preparation for taking the novice's habit, which ceremony took place on the 28th May, 1841; and immediately afterwards a fresh anxiety arose through the serious illness of another of the little band of friends. Like Requetat, Piel, who next to him was Besson's closest

friend, was to be called to rest before he had borne the burden and heat of the day. He had been taken ill during the journey from Rome to Bosco; and but a few days after taking the habit, he became so much worse as to leave no hope of recovery. Lacordaire wrote on his return to Bosco, "Four months have made such ravages, that I should not recognize him but for his spiritual characteristics. These are unchanged: he is lively, calm, serene, resigned, inconceivably cheerful. Frère Pierre (Requedat) was equally resigned, but there was a certain severity in his calmness, whereas death seems to smile on Piel, and he knows neither regrets nor temptation. It appears that he always expected to die thus at his present age. We who watched Frère Pierre's long illness, and who are now called to watch this dear brother, can only accept God's Will, and rejoice in the hope that these two sweet souls, so soon lost to us here, will plead for us in Heaven. Amid all our trials and crosses, we see God's Hand above us, training us for His work as He has ever trained all His servants, through suffering. Doubtless there is much more in store for us."

Besson wrote of the illness as follows:—

"Bosco, *Sept. 17th*, 1841.

"Dearest Mother,—Perhaps you know, though I did not want to make you anxious, that our dear

brother Piel is ill. He has been suffering from his chest ever since he came to Bosco, and soon after we took the habit he went to bed, and has never been up since. . . . M. Tessier writes that his father is painfully anxious ; and in truth I grieve with them, without any power to give other consolation than that which our Lord imparts with every Cross He lays upon us ; but it is hard to bear nevertheless. Père Lacordaire has written to M. Tessier, or I should have done so myself. Tell him from me that while God lays on us this trial of losing our dear brother and his friend, there is every ground of comfort for one who, like himself, knows that it is by the pathway of suffering alone that we may hope to follow our Dear Lord Jesus Christ, and enter with Him into His Glory. Our dear invalid feels this so strongly that he daily thanks God for the Cross laid on him, a Cross which does not seem either too heavy or too lasting, but one to be cherished as coming from a Hand Which is wont to prove those He loves, and Which turns, all things to their good. He is perfectly at rest, quite cheerful, desiring nothing save what God wills, and only asking patience and courage to be faithful to the end. We shrink from the thought of our loss, and yet death must come to all ; and why should we look that those we love should be spared when Our Lord and His Mother passed through its

gates? He has warned us that it will come upon us like a thief in the night; may it be given us so to watch that we may be found ready! 'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.'"

"Oct. 12th, 1841.

"Dear Piel is no better; and there is, humanly speaking, no hope. We are looking for the parting, which is made easier by his courage and trust. Happy indeed are those who have put all their trust in God. At such seasons as these one realizes the emptiness of the things of this world, and one learns to long after the only real treasures, which are beyond the reach of death. At this moment our brother's greatest comfort lies in that he has given up every thing for the Saviour's Love, Who is his hope and joy. What one has sowed in life one will reap in death, and they who sow in tears shall reap in joy. May God give us grace to die as he dies, in the Love of Christ! It is possible that Piel's illness may go on for some time yet. God could restore him to health; but be it as it may, he is ready, and by God's grace so are we—His Holy Will be done."

On the 19th of December the young novice's illness was closed in death, and Besson wrote to Dr. Tessier and his other friends in France, to inform them.

"On Sunday morning, at four o'clock, after nine

hours' agony, our brother Piel went to the reward of his patient sufferings. You who loved him, and were so truly loved by him, know how heartily he offered himself up to God when he left the world; and you know, too, that nothing bound him to this life; so that he did not find it hard to leave a world to which he was in truth already dead. On S. Andrew's Day (November 30th) he made his profession; rejoicing to make this formal offering to God of that which had practically long been His. From that day he was increasingly recollected, and gave himself up to a constant preparation for death, which he looked for as very near. His body grew daily weaker, but his clear, strong mind rejoiced to see the gradual crumbling of the clay wall which alone kept him back from God. For some time past he had received the Blessed Sacrament as a Viaticum every week, always with tears of mingled joy and contrition. On the 17th he was so weak, and his countenance so changed, that it was thought well not to delay administering Extreme Unction. He made ready and received it calmly an hour after being united to our Dear Lord in Holy Communion, and from that time his gentle happiness became still more marked—his words were so sweet and so holy, we all hung upon them. In the evening he revived a little, and the doctor thought he might live till Christmas, but he did not think so



himself, and he made all his last preparations, asking me, among other things, to write to his father and to you, to say how heartily he loved you to the end. The next evening the brother who had been watching by him fetched me: I found him oppressed and coughing violently. "I do not know what it is," he said, "but I never felt any thing like this." I asked if he was in pain. "Yes," he said, "I feel a sort of heavy pain which will kill me, I scarcely seem able to breathe." . . . . The Prior staid with him till midnight, and gave him absolution several times. After he was gone, Piel became a little easier, and spoke freely of the mercies granted to him. "What pain!" he said, more than once, "what pain! My God, I do not murmur, I deserve far more! What mercy to have brought me out of the abyss of my past life, to die here in the bosom of the Church, surrounded by so many blessings and sacraments. Supposing I had died while I was an architect!" Then he would kiss his crucifix, exclaiming "Blessed Jesus, Gentle Jesus, how gracious Thou art! When I recount all I have done to offend God, I marvel that He has taken pity on me! My God, my sins are so many, so grievous!" I said, "God's mercy is greater, and that has led you here." "I know it, I know it," he said; "all my hope is in the Blood of Jesus Christ." And again he kissed the crucifix, repeating, "Sweet Jesus, I long

to die, I long to die to-night, but I know I ought only to wish that whatever Thou wilt may be<sup>4</sup>." I asked him when he should come to the Presence of God, to remember all of us his brethren, his father, you Tessier, and all his friends. He raised his head a little, and said with a look which seemed to touch my very heart's core, "Do you think that I could ever forget you any where?" He went on thus, in converse with God and us, or rather, in truth, always with God, until half-past three in the morning, when his sufferings became easier, and his breathing less laboured; he said that he wished to sleep a while. And seeing his countenance bright, and finding his hands warm, I thought there was no immediate prospect of death; and as there might yet be many hours of suffering, I left another brother with him, while I rested a little while, in order to be with him at the end. But I was altogether mistaken; that drowsiness was one of the last symptoms, and in half an hour two or three moans were the only sign that soul and body were severed, so that I had not the sad comfort of closing his eyes. He was robed in his Dominican habit, the brethren assembled and said the customary prayers,

<sup>4</sup> As another holy man has worded it :—

"I wish to have no wishes left,  
But to leave all to Thee ;—  
And yet I wish that Thou shouldst will,  
Things that I wish should be."

and at nine o'clock he was carried in procession to the church, where a solemn Mass was sung, and the Office for the Dead said. All day some brothers remained beside his body saying the Psalter. In the evening the burial rites were performed—the body carried by his brethren in procession round the church, amid a crowded congregation, and then, after the last touching service, we saw him we so loved covered with a handful of earth, and laid in the vaults below the church. The next morning the grave beneath the High Altar was closed, and there he awaits the Coming of the Lord to kindle the dust, and clothe him with that glory and immortality which He has promised to His Saints. Let us be comforted, dear Tessier; but a little while, and we shall be gathered together again in the Bosom of God, never more to part. Then, as the Church teaches us, mourning and sadness shall be no more; the Lord will wipe away all tears, and all sorrow shall have passed away for evermore."

## CHAPTER III

Profession—Letters to his mother—Père Besson gives up painting—Ordained Deacon and Priest—Licensed as a Confessor—Lacordaire returns to Notre Dame—Père Besson Master of Novices.

PIEL had been allowed to make his profession as death drew near, but it was not till the following spring that the other brothers made theirs. Besson announced the coming event to his mother as follows :—

“SANTA CROCE, BOSCO, *May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1842.*

“Dearest Mother,—I am afraid you will think that I have been long in writing, but I waited for Père Lacordaire’s arrival, which was delayed owing to his illness on the road. He came at last well, though weak, and only wants a few days’ rest. You can imagine how glad we are to have him with us, he is always such a help and comfort. He confirmed all that you have told me as to your being comfortable in

your lodgings; and he says that, thanks be to God, you are as calm and resigned as is possible after the sacrifice you have made. I know well that you still shed many tears over our separation—in truth so do I sometimes, when I think of you, poor dear mother; but they are not altogether sad tears, for I know that they are not displeasing to God, and that while we offer up to Him the happiness of living together, He would not have us love each other less fondly; rather on the contrary, He sanctifies and strengthens our natural bond by grace. Yes, dearest mother, now that I am on the point of being consecrated to God for ever by the solemn vows of my religious profession, I feel that I love you more tenderly than ever; I value more deeply all that you have ever done for me,—above all, the costly sacrifice, so hard to a mother's heart, of consenting to my vocation. You could make no more precious offering to God, and surely you may feel that in so doing you have laid up treasure in Heaven, which 'neither moth nor rust can corrupt.' Your cross will likewise be your abiding consolation. Next Sunday fortnight, May 29th, the festival of Corpus Christi, we are to take the vows. You will pray specially that day for us all, and for me in particular. On such a day no prayers can be so effective, or draw down so many blessings upon me, as yours, for our Dear Lord sees your heart, and knows that you are

giving Him your best earthly treasure. I have a special favour to beg of you, too ; for I most earnestly wish that on that day you should receive the Holy Communion, joining your intention at the Altar to ours, that God's Blessing may be upon us. Ask Him that we may be faithful unto death, that He would make us religious after His own Heart, truly humble, obedient, and devoted to His most Holy Will. Once more, dearest mother, I ask your forgiveness for all the sorrow I have ever caused you during my whole life ; sadly too much it has been. Such a mother deserved a better son. Forgive every thing, and give me your blessing, the most precious inheritance a mother can give her child ; with that every thing which God may have in store for me will be welcome ; troubles will lose their bitterness, and it will be my comfort in my last hour to remember that I had my mother's blessing. Adieu, dearest mother, write and tell me that you forgive me, and ask God to pour out His Blessing upon me, of which yours will be a pledge. May God and His dear Mother keep you, and fill your heart with strength and comfort."

The 29th of May came, and the young French postulants took their final vows. Besson, now Frère Hyacinthe, wrote the next day as follows to his mother :—

"Dearest loving Mother,—God has completed the

precious work which He vouchsafed to begin in us. Yesterday evening, at seven o'clock, after the procession of the Blessed Sacrament, and Benediction, we took the vows with a joyful soul, and henceforward we are for ever sons of the holy S. Dominic. The Lord indeed is our inheritance, and all this world's treasures seem very paltry as compared to that which we possess. The Lord Himself is our portion; what can we ask save to love Him day by day better, and to be more and more closely united to Him? Oh, dearest mother, if you could but know what intense happiness there is in our religious profession! To the world it seems all sacrifice; but he who has made it knows in the bottom of his heart that, while seeming to give up every thing, in truth he wins every thing;—it is not really he who makes a gift to God, but on the contrary, he himself receives the gift of gifts, and his eyes are opened to see the priceless treasure which was smothered under the worldly dust he has now cleared away. I thought of you many times during the day, for I felt that you would be sad at heart, and were probably shedding not a few tears. I prayed that God would soften them with His loving consolations, rather than that He would check them; for I know well that it is not possible but that a mother should weep on such a day, and in truth the tears we shed upon our Dear Lord's Breast are a sweet relief to

an afflicted soul. I kept your dear letter about me all day for the sake of the blessing it contains ; it made me so happy. I kissed it with as much love and reverence as if it had been your own dear self ; nor was it the less precious because I knew well all that those few lines cost you !

“And now, dearest mother, be comforted ; look for comfort in our Dear Lord, and put all your trust in Him. This world’s trials are sharp, and often hard to bear. When I recall all that you have already had to bear, and still have to bear, I feel that you may indeed be called a *Mater dolorosa*, but it is a name in which you may glory, since it is the name given by the Church to the Mother of God, and Jesus Himself is called in Holy Scripture a ‘Man of sorrows.’ The true Christian finds strength and comfort in the Cross. Oh, dearest mother, every thing in this world passes away so quickly ; happiness, pleasure, youth, health, all flies before us, and then we come to the time appointed for all men, when we stand literally naked before God ; with nothing left save that which we have done for Him. Let us try to do a great deal for Him, and if our weakness hinders us, let us at least do what we can ; let us bear patiently the Crosses He lays upon us, and if they are not such as we should choose for ourselves, let us bear them all the more willingly and trustfully, inasmuch as we thereby know



that they are free from self-will. Above all, dearest mother, comfort yourself with the hope of that hereafter which is our all, and in the light of which all earthly troubles, however heavy, seem as nothing; and remember that God will never forsake you; we are never so safe as in His Hands. Be sure that I love, and shall ever love, you with all the love and respect I owe to my mother, and to a mother who has borne and does bear so much for me. Nothing can ever lessen this love; religion does not loosen the sacred ties of nature; on the contrary, it confirms them, because they are sanctified and rest in God. I cannot say when we may meet again, that we must leave to our Dear Lord, the Friend and Father of us both. Let us leave the disposal of all things to Him, thanking and blessing Him for all He gives and all He takes away. Adieu, dearest mother, pray without ceasing for me, as I for you, . . . especially at Mass, and during the interval between the Elevation of the Precious Body and Blood, because I know your great confidence in prayers offered at that most solemn time."

On the same day Besson wrote a few lines to M. Cartier: "I prayed most sincerely for you," he says, "on the day of my profession, asking Him to pour out upon you all such graces as may make you most acceptable in His sight. Oh, be sure that our Gracious Father

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will never forsake you ; but that, however great the troubles of this life may be, He will be ever ready to sustain you. We made our profession before the Father Provincial, who came that day to the convent. Père Lacordaire gave us a brief and loving exhortation out of the fulness of his heart. It was the brightest day in our lives, and our profession seemed a climax to the festival of Corpus Christi, in itself so beautiful. Oh, my dear friend, if you could but know how happy, how light-hearted we are now ! Thank all our brethren of the Confraternity of S. John for us. We fondly hope that their prayers have had a part in confirming the grace we have received."

Some years later, the Père Besson wrote to congratulate one of his spiritual children on her profession, in language which one feels recalled his own experience of the like occasion. "I share your happiness," he says, "on the eve of so important a day. May the Lord, to Whom you are about to dedicate yourself as a pure and happy bride, abundantly fill you with all the best and richest blessings ! You know now what strength and comfort there is in giving yourself up wholly to Him : His Providence has watched over you through all the heavy trials through which He has led you, He has upheld you that you should not sink in your weakness, and now He gives you a foretaste of that bliss which He has prepared for them that love

Him in Heaven. May the remembrance of to-day's happiness be your stay during the hours of exile which you have yet to endure before you are called to the Very Presence of Him Whose own you are henceforth to be ; however trying that exile may be, you will not be dismayed while you bear in mind that the Lord is your Rock and your strong Salvation. The Cross which you wear on your breast was steeped in that Blood which He shed for love of you ; and one look at that will comfort you in every trouble, and rekindle your sinking heart if sometimes you are half ready to faint under your burden. Fear nothing, you who this day are receiving so great grace, but give yourself up with confidence and joy to Him Who gave Himself for you. You will never again know so bright a day as this until the blessed day when Jesus will receive you into the Company of His Saints ; but this is the dawn of future happiness, and though your days to come will not be so joyous as this is, they will not be less sanctified. May God fill your heart with peace, courage, and love ; may you grow in Jesus, and ripen for Heaven, which is yours already through Him Who is the glory and joy thereof ! ”

Shortly after Besson's profession, the French Dominicans who had remained at La Quercia joined their brethren at Bosco, and all gave themselves up with fresh ardour to their theological studies, as Lacor-

daire's earnest desire was that all his disciples should receive Priests' Orders before beginning their work of preaching. At that time, however, Besson had not made up his mind on this point, his humility made him wish rather to remain as a lay brother; he thought himself unequal to grapple with theological studies, and affection for his old pursuit led him to believe that he might do more for the cause of Christ and His Church if he continued to paint than as a preacher. Père Lacordaire himself had said in his original "Mémoire," "Although the principal aim and object of this Order is to carry out the work of Apostles, and teach the knowledge of Divine things, S. Dominic did not exclude any work which might be profitable to souls; nor must we marvel to find his disciples following art, or employed in pastoral ministries, ecclesiastical government, or a multitude of other duties which have no seeming connexion with the Order save the common bond of self-devotion. Thus no one who has grasped the true view of religious art need marvel to find artists—ay, and great artists—among the Frères Prêcheurs. Art, like eloquence and literature, is but an expression of Truth and Beauty, and may well be cultivated by those whose aim is to raise the souls of their fellow-men to contemplate the invisible. God Himself not only gave the tables of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai, He also

set before him the pattern of the tabernacle, and of the ark of the Covenant. In truth the Architect of all creation is the First and Greatest of artists, and the more abundantly man is filled with His Spirit, the more able and worthy he is to aspire to great and holy achievements of art. The Religious of mediæval times were alive to this truth. Great architects, sculptors, painters, composers, were formed in the Cloister, as well as great authors and orators. When a Christian man entered within its shelter, he offered, not his body and soul only, but whatever talents had been bestowed on him, to God; and let those talents be what they might, he was well nigh sure to find that others had gone before him with the like. Within the sanctuary, all our brethren were alike, all offered the same sacrifice of prayer; but when each returned to his cell, the prism was dissolved, and every one sent forth a ray of Divine Light after his own peculiar fashion<sup>1</sup>."

Consistently with this expression of opinion, Père Lacordaire left Besson absolutely free to decide his own course; and after much thought and many prayers, the Dominican artist resolved to give up painting, though, as we shall see, the renunciation was not for ever; and at a later period he resumed his favorite

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoire pour le Rétablissement en France de l'Ordre des Frères Prêcheurs*, chap. v.

pursuit under the auspices and even the direct commands of the holy Father himself. But by that time Besson was confirmed in his religious vocation, and probably no longer felt that his passionate love of art was a peril, or likely to draw him down from his higher aspirations. At the present time he was inclined to look upon the fascinations of art as a snare to his soul, and accordingly he entreated Père Lacordaire to destroy all his sketches and studies. The Father had no mind to perpetrate such a barbarism ; instead of which he gave them all to a French artist then in Rome, Claude Lavergne, who knew how to appreciate them. Madame Besson naturally wished that they had been given to her, and when M. Cartier wrote to express her regrets, Besson returned the following simple, humble answer:—

“ Pray forgive me for not having sent you my drawings, which our friend Cartier says you would like to have had. The truth is, that in disposing of them we were guided rather by circumstances than by feeling, although in truth and justice I ought to have had more consideration for you. After my profession, Père Lacordaire, knowing how painful the struggles I felt between my new state of life and my natural inclinations were to me, bade me weigh duly before God which course I ought to follow, and whether I should give up painting, or stick to it as my occupation. I would fain have had him decide the question, but he

refused to do so ; and being thus forced to choose for myself, I thought it all over before God, and in so doing I was struck with the danger of giving Him half a heart, when I had promised one whole and undivided. So I determined, as I believe, according to God's guidance ; and I told the Father that I would give up painting for ever, and never touch a brush again, unless obedience should call me to do so. Consequently I begged him to get rid of all my drawings as soon as possible, burning or giving them away, because I felt I should be stronger when they were out of the way. It would have cost much more than the drawings are worth to send them to Paris, and Lavergne was at Rome, so the Father thought we had better give them to him. And there is the whole history of his having them rather than you. I am so very sorry that you and Cartier should have been grieved about it! please, both of you, forgive me. After all, those wretched daubs are not worth a moment's vexation."

All this time Besson's letters to his mother show how fondly she was still grieving over the separation from her child. Every one is full of such consolation as he could set before her. Her devoted friend M. Cartier was absent, and Besson writes,—

"Bosco, *June 24th*, 1842.

"Poor dear Mother,—I was moved to the bottom of my heart by your dear letter, and I kissed it ten-

derly, as if it were your own dear self. So you are alone for a little while? Yet not really alone, for our dear Lord and His holy Mother are with you, strengthening your heart—invisible to outward sight, I know, but visible to the soul's eye. I could see it in every word of your letter. Indeed, who but our Lord could give a poor mother courage to sacrifice all that is dearest on earth to her? When you consented to our separation, it was not that our love was lessened; on the contrary, we love each other more closely than ever, and being apart we find relief in tears, knowing that He Who joined us in such close, sweet love is the same Who parts us now. But we know, too, that this separation is but brief, and we bear it gladly, in the precious hope of being soon brought together again, never more to part."

"Bosco, *August 2nd*, 1842.

"Dearest Mother,—How shall I tell you how happy your generous, loving letter has made me! If I could but give you in return as much comfort as you have given me! Poor dear mother, telling me not to fret about you, because you are satisfied, and quite happy in my religious profession! In truth, I recognize God's All-powerful Hand in this strength and comfort which He gives you, and I thank Him with all my heart, for nothing gives me so much pleasure as to know that you are calm and satisfied. If you only knew



what it is to me to think that you are anxious and sorrowful!"

"Bosco, December 9th, 1842.

. . . . "Yes, dearest mother, our Lord said truly that whosoever should forsake father or mother, son or daughter, for His Sake, should receive a hundredfold in this world, and in the world to come life everlasting! You have given one son to God, and He has given you several instead, and surrounded you with kind friends who love you heartily, and do their best to comfort you. And although all that is but earthly comfort, on which we must not lean over much, since the real aim of all Christian sacrifice is not of this world, and we do not suffer and toil for its poor pleasures, still it is very precious, *en passant*, to experience the truth of our Blessed Saviour's promises, in which alone all our hopes are fixed. Let us be at rest, dearest mother; let us go on quietly, day by day, without anxiety as to the future; let us accept thankfully all the blessings God vouchsafes to send us, bearing in mind that whether He gives or takes away, all is still goodness and mercy, and that while we accept His blessings, we should no less accept His afflictions, for the Lord is a good Father, Who loves us dearly, and knows, far better than we do, what is best for us, causing all things to work together for good to those that love Him. Let us cleave to Him, dear mother,

and to Him Only, for He is our true Friend, Who will never forsake us, and Who Alone can succour us when the time comes, as come it must, in which no one else, however loving and devoted, can be of any help. Whether our remaining days be sad or glad, they have a sure and speedy limit; every day, every hour, brings us nearer the Living God: whether we will or will not, death will before long call us hence, and we shall taste of His Justice or His Mercy, for ever. Dearest mother, what are all the comforts or joys of this world, compared with that blessed eternity? Every thing good and beautiful which delights us here is the work of God's Hand, and if the mere reflection of His Light is so exquisitely enjoyable, what must the Very Light Itself be? All joy, beauty, glory, abundance—all pure, strong love is wholly of God, and that in a measure beyond our understanding. But here no joy is quite unmixed, no possession free from care, no love from trial, whereas to those who attain that blessed union with God, it will be far otherwise; nothing will be able to deprive them of their inexhaustible treasure, but their hearts will be filled for ever with a joy which can never fade or pall. Who can tell the good things which the Lord has prepared for them that love Him? Dear mother, let us fix our hearts on Heaven—our treasure is there, let our heart be there too. Let us be full of trust. If God so loved

the world as to deliver up His Only Son Jesus Christ for us all, how shall He not with Him freely give us all things? Let us often call to mind all our Saviour's sufferings for us in His Passion: His Blood and pains are an endless treasure from which we may continually draw all precious gifts. Of ourselves we can do nothing, but we can do all 'through Christ Which strengtheneth us.' Courage and confidence! so may we rejoice in Him Who has called us to the inheritance of Saints, through His Own Merits. Farewell, dearest mother! Commend me to dear Cartier, and beg him to let me hear of himself as well as of you. Adieu, adieu! I embrace you both in our Saviour, in Whom I love you, and to Whose protection I commend you, entreating Him to make you happy by causing you to grow daily in His love. Adieu, dearest mother, adieu!"

On September 24, 1842, Besson received Minor Orders, and during Lent, 1843, he was preparing for Deacon's Orders. On March 30, he wrote to his mother,—

"Next week we go into retreat, preparatory to receiving Deacon's Orders on Holy Saturday. Pray very specially for me during this season: I never knew before how much I need it! How wonderful are God's ways! I overflow with wonder and awe when I think how God's Infinite Mercy has destined me to the grace of Holy Orders. All the circumstances

of my childhood—especially the fatherly care of the dear old Curé of Notre-Dame de Lorette—seemed to point that way out for me, but, far from following it I gave myself up to the wildest follies of heart and imagination, drinking deep of them all; and just when I was in the depths of spiritual darkness, and wandering in a labyrinth of weakness and passion, God's Merciful Hand arrested me, and led me, by secret ways which I knew not, back to the threshold of His sanctuary, which I am now about to enter, and that, too, with the additional blessing of my religious profession. O mother, you who know, in some measure, how great my faults and wanderings have been, how richly I deserved to be forsaken by the God I so continually offended—you who know, though but little, the terrible pride of my heart which so often led me to condemn harshly the trifling faults of others, while I myself was nothing but a whited sepulchre, full of all uncleanness—surely you must cry out with me, that God is indeed Good, and His Mercies past finding out! After such experience of them, who need despair? and how can one teach those who have not had any personal experience of it, how abundant His forgiveness is, and how fatherly and loving is the kiss with which He receives the poor prodigal who returns to Him? If men did but know 'the gift of God,' they would indeed think far otherwise than they do of the things

of this world. Pray, dearest mother, pray for your child who loves you fondly in Jesus Christ our Saviour, to Whom he daily commends you. Adieu\*.”

A little later he wrote,—

“Bosco, *August 23rd*, 1843.

. . . “I do not know when it may please God that we meet again: I do not wish either to kindle or destroy the hopes you entertain—hopes which I should so rejoice to see realized! God’s Providence is our guide, we are in His Hands, and it is easier to give our selves up to His guidance than to foresee what He may appoint for our future. But anyhow, in all human probability, I see no very immediate prospect of any such happy meeting. I shall probably be kept here, for some time to come, by the studies which are necessary before I can set to work in my ministry; unless indeed circumstances were to arise which might recall us all to France. I know this is very hard for your poor loving heart, but what can we do? God’s holy

\* It must be borne in mind that this language was not justified by Besson’s early life, which, as his mother and all who knew him testify, was more than usually good and pure for one who had not as yet opened his eyes to the full beauty of the Faith. But he looked at his past life in the pure light of God’s Love, and tiny motes became as beams under its searching power. The “wild imaginations” to which he alludes were probably his political and socialist dreams, and his passionate devotion to art.

Will must be done ; and we cannot expect to enlist under the banner of the Cross without suffering. I know it is you, poor dear mother ! not I, who are sacrificed. Your sufferings have been, and are, such as my hard, unfeeling heart can scarcely fathom. Compared to you, I hardly know what love is ! . . . My ordination is fixed for September 23, only a month hence ! Need I ask you to pray for me ? Of old, the Church only admitted those who had not soiled their baptismal robes to the Priesthood, and now she admits even such a one as I am ! Alas, you know my past life enough to understand how such an awful grace ought to fill me with trembling and abasement ! Would that I could wash away my stains in tears, but my hard heart refuses to shed them. Dearest mother, pray for me. Adieu ! May our Saviour have you in His Holy Keeping, and soften all your tears by teaching you to shed them on His Breast ! ”

The Ordination took place at Alessandria, and the new priest announced it to Madame Besson as follows :—

*“September 23rd, 1843.*

“Dearest Mother,—I was ordained this morning, and I write you one line, just to thank you for your last letter, and to pour out some part of the happiness with which I am filled into your loving heart. But, after all, what can I say ? No words can express

what I am feeling to-day, it is too far down in the depths of one's soul. I am happy; but it is a happiness which will not take shape in words: if you were here, I should embrace you, and as I pressed you to my heart, yours would understand the joy which almost oppresses me. Dear mother, God's joy is very deep. Your child does not recognize himself: I love, but I want to love more—our poor human hearts are too narrow for such great things! I shall not celebrate my first Mass until October 1, Sunday next. . . . I need not say how I shall daily remember you, my dear Cartier, and my venerable benefactor the Curé, before the B. Sacrament. I hope God will give me grace never to be ungrateful any more! And now that I possess that great treasure, I mean to draw largely from it for you, for all my friends, and enemies, if I had any, but up to the present time no one has ever wronged me or injured me in the smallest degree—I am every one's debtor, and have nothing to forgive.”

On November 7th, he wrote from Bosco,—

“I said my first Mass on the Feast of the Rosary, as I told you I should—Père Lacordaire served me at the altar. It was a great festival in the convent, for I am the first of our Brothers who has been ordained. Two French travellers came to spend the day with us, and join our festival, which was a sort of

family fête in this foreign land. My next Mass was said for M. le Curé (Notre-Dame de Lorette), my benefactor, and that following for you. I knew you would not grudge giving him the preference. . . . Remember how he used to say he hoped we should pray for him! He was a good Father to us, and we can never forget him."

Père Besson had next to pass his examination as a confessor; and the venerable theologians of his Order who examined him expressed their admiration of his clear head and accurate knowledge.

Madame Besson's house in Paris had become the established rendezvous of any French Dominicans who might come there, and she found her greatest happiness in being a sort of agent for all that concerned her son's Order. Many of those who wished to forward the incipient work used to make her their confidant, and she frequently became the channel of gifts and other assistance. To her great delight, this year, when Père Lacordaire came to Paris for his Conferences at Notre-Dame, he took up his abode in her house, where he was an honoured guest. Her son wrote at this time,—

*"December 5th, 1843.*

"I was very pleased to hear that our good Father was staying with you: I am sure it will be a great comfort to you, and I thank God for it. I am quite



sure that every time you see him, it makes you think of me ; nor am I, on my part, forgetful of you. God knows how glad I always am to hear of any thing which can soften the privation our Lord has laid on you. You see, dearest mother, that His Providence never leaves us, but brings gladness out of our very sorrows. Trust wholly to Him, and be sure every thing will turn to good. I am not the only one who is pleased to hear this news : my brethren have rejoiced too, for although the greater part of them have never seen you, they all know you from hearing us talk of you. I am well aware that there is no need to tell you to take good care of our dear Father, or to watch over his health,—I know you will do more than I could suggest ; but let me remind you to see that he is quite free and independent, because, you know, we religious want to be a great deal alone, with a view to prayer and the various other duties belonging to our state of life. I dare say it is needless to say this, for I well remember all your thoughtfulness for me in this matter, and how unselfish you were in securing my quiet hours. I did not sufficiently appreciate that proof of love then, but now that our Lord has given me greater light, I feel how generous and considerate you were. Alas ! I was more of a bear than a man in those days, and caused you great pain—but why should I return to that subject, since you have forgiven

every thing? Cartier, too, will be very pleased. I do thank God for having given you this pleasure! you are now, both of you, quite a part of our little Dominican family, and sharers in our thoughts and prayers.

“Père Lacordaire was to preach yesterday: I am sure your knees shook under you all day! It was an important day for us: we prayed a great deal, as we thought of our friends and brethren, and of our country; we asked many blessings, above all the fulfilment of God’s Will, which is the real aim of all Christian hopes. What has happened? we know nothing; but we are not anxious, knowing that the Lord is Good, and that, whatever He may have ordered, He will not forsake us, and that whether in success or defeat we must alike thank Him.”

Mgr. Affre, who was a steadfast and true friend to Lacordaire, dreaded the result of his appearance in his Dominican habit in the pulpit of Notre-Dame, and he accordingly, to Lacordaire’s regret, obtained a special permission from the Pope for the Father to appear in the dress of a secular priest. It ended in Lacordaire’s wearing the rochet and surplice of a Canon over his habit, and, as he had himself foretold, after the first few words he spoke, no one heeded any thing save the subject of his discourse—he had taken that vast congregation by storm. This was on December 3, 1843. The Archbishop’s anxiety was manifest, as was that of all

Lacordaire's friends ; and Père Besson was quite right as to his mother's intense feeling on this occasion : she shared to the full all the suspense of the Dominicans as to its result, though from a different motive ; her uppermost thought, poor woman ! being that if the Order were once established in France, her son would return thither, and she might once more enjoy the blessing of living near him. Her excitement was so great that she did not venture into Nôtre-Dame, but kept walking about outside, listening whether there seemed to be any stir or commotion within. And when the bold measure of Lacordaire's return to France as a monk proved successful, no one was more delighted than Madame Besson. Her ardent wish for her son's return to France was not yet gratified, however, though some of the brethren from Bosco were sent there early in 1844, and she was not a little disappointed. Père Besson was alive to this, and on June 9 he wrote,—

. . . "I feel how hard it is for you to be alone in your old age. Poor mother! I am the cause of a heavy cross being laid on you, just when, according to the natural order of things, I ought to be lightening the burden of your latter days. Would that I could bear all the pain instead of you ! Dear, good mother ! the only thing which gives me the least care in this world, is the great sacrifice you have had to make. I know none could be greater ; and when I think of all

that you have borne for me, and are bearing to the end, my heart is grieved, and I long to take all that is sharp and bitter for myself, and give you nothing but peace and joy. . . Our dear Lord has dealt so differently with us : your life has been full of sorrows and scant joys, while, on the contrary, I have scarcely known any trouble. When I think of this, I am afraid, for I know that it is the sign of His chosen ones to bear the Cross with Christ, and that I ought to atone for all the misuse I have made of God's gifts. Dear mother, join me, if you will, in the prayer I often make to Jesus Christ that He would grant me to share His Sufferings here, so that, as we say in the Angelus Collect, I may, 'by His Cross and Passion, be brought to the Glory of His Resurrection.'—I do not know when I shall return to France ; some of our brethren are there already, but I am still left here—a proof of our good Father's confidence in me, more perhaps than I deserve. If any thing could make me wish to return home, it would be the pleasure which I know it would be to you to feel me nearer to you. But you see we must be patient, and submit to God's Will. I need a great deal of study yet, for I am very ignorant, and good for very little. My work here just suits me, and, but for you, I really should wish for no change. Do believe that God's Providence orders all for the best, although we cannot see the reason—let us

give ourselves up to His guidance with unquestioning trust. The time will come—and that at no such very distant period—when we shall reap the reward of perfect trust. Dearest mother, take courage! I have a full hope that God will comfort you, and grant your wish that we should embrace one another yet again in this world—only I cannot say when it will be; we must leave that to Him.”

Poor Madame Besson found it hard to wait as patiently as her son required for her consolation, and when she found that Père Lacordaire had actually recalled some of his French Dominicans, among whom the only one she cared for was not included, her mother's heart waxed wrath, and, disregarding the necessity of considering the welfare of the Order before any private matters, she expressed not a little displeasure towards “*Monsieur* Lacordaire,” as she called the good Father, in her anger. Yet all the while (M. Cartier, her devoted friend, tells us) she could be led to change her tone, if any one would begin to blame her son for having been led away by Lacordaire. Sooner than allow a word to be said against him, she would forthwith protest that he had entered religion with her fullest consent, and that she was thankful to have him under so holy a man as Lacordaire. When Père Besson knew how strongly his mother felt in this matter, he wrote as follows:—

"Bosco, August 16th, 1844.

. . . "One of our brothers writes me word that you are very much troubled at my prolonged stay in Italy. Do not grieve about it, poor dear mother. I quite understand how when other brethren return to France it makes you long that I should come back, but you must bear with this trial a little longer. I am here, because it is God's Will, and that makes my exile, if it is to be called an exile, easy to bear,—let it also lighten your natural regret at the distance between us. It was absolutely necessary that some one should stay here to represent Père Lacordaire, and take his place in the French novitiate; and as I am both a priest and a theological student, I was selected for the duty. In fact, while prosecuting my own studies, I also fulfil the easy office of Sub-Master of novices, being called upon to direct persons who are worth a great deal more than I am, and who are a perpetual source of edification to me. As all our other Fathers are employed in France, as confessors and preachers, we do not know how long our novitiate will have to continue here; circumstances, which are God's means of bringing about His chosen ends, can alone decide. Anyhow, except that I am grieved that you should be troubled, I am quite content, and have neither wish nor anxiety as to the future. That is one great blessing of the religious life; for having renounced the

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whole world for Jesus Christ's Sake, we have nothing to do, come what may, but spread our sails in confidence, and trust the ship to God's Providence. With Him for our pilot, we are sure to reach the port safely. So be of good cheer, my dear mother; perhaps God may grant us the happiness of meeting again sooner than we expect, though it may indeed be longer. What is the good of reckoning so much upon the future, when we know not what a day may bring forth? Let us leave all our fears and hopes, our sorrows and joys, in our Saviour's Breast, hiding ourselves, as David says, under the shadow of His Wings, knowing that His Holy Will is all Love and Goodness. I am not preaching for your sake only, dearest mother, but still more to myself, because though I know the truth of all I say, I do not always realize it sufficiently. The world passes away, and its trifles;—we all know it, and yet how little we do to obtain a true spirit of detachment. Adieu, dearest mother."

But the mother was hard to console; each letter is full of the same words, a mingling of the son's tender respectful love, with the Priest's affectionate admonition. "Love me as your child," he says, "but still more as the offering which you have brought to God's Altar. It is but a poor offering in truth, but it is the widow's mite, you have given all you had, all that is dearest to you in this world."

And again, "Poor mother, I am indeed a son of sorrow to you! But while you weep over me, recalling all that I have cost you, and do cost you still, offer me up at the Feet of Jesus as your daily sacrifice; and in so doing, you will find the strength and courage you need. Like the poor widow of the Gospel, you have given 'all the living you had,' for, little as I am worth, I am your child, your hope, the natural prop of your old age; and all this you have given up as an offering to Jesus Christ when you let me go to Him. Your store is now with Him, and He will both use it, and restore it with usury, when the Great Day comes. . . In Him we can hope and love on, for we know that if we remain united to Him we shall meet to part no more. Nothing of holy and pure earthly love but will abide, and be continued in Heaven, purified and raised by His transforming glory. There friend will love friend, the mother her child, the son his mother—and amid the overflowing joy which will fill every heart, all will love each other with a boundless, endless love.

"Blessed are they who now sow in tears, for they shall reap in joy. . . O dearest mother, we are indeed happy in the knowledge of whence we came, and whither we go, and, by God's Grace, we know the vanity of all perishing things. Let us duly weigh the greatness of our blessing, let us know Jesus Christ,



love Jesus Christ, be wholly His ! He is wholly ours, it is but just that we should be His. Ask this grace for me, as I ask it daily for you.

“ Pèrè Lacordaire tells me that he thinks of sending me back to France this year. I leave all in his hands, as in those of God, concerning this matter. But above all else which makes me rejoice in the thought of returning to our country, comes the certainty of your happiness. I enjoy it already in anticipation, asking our Dear Lord to give us both grace to wait with patience and resignation for the perfect fulfilment of His Will. We *say* it daily in the ‘ Our Father,’ let us henceforth say it with this special intention.

“How soon the days which now seem long and wearisome, become a thing of the past ! and the day still afar off, will soon be past too ; each night is the knell of another day, gone to the reckoning of the past, which together form the chain held in God’s Hand. Every thing passes away, and passes so quickly ! It is fifteen years since the July Revolution, and although that seems but as yesterday, here I am in my thirtieth year !”

## CHAPTER IV

Père Besson at Chalais—Visit from his Mother—Letters—Death of his Mother—Letters—Père Besson goes to Paris.

THE Père Besson's belief that God's Good Providence would restore him before long to his country, was not mistaken. The first Dominican settlement in France at Nancy was placed under the care of Père Jandel, who was summoned from Bosco to take charge of the small community in the summer of 1843; and having gained this point, Père Lacordaire's next object was to find a suitable spot wherein to install his little company of brothers still at Bosco, as they were now sufficiently numerous to begin an independent novitiate—which could not be formed without a certain number in the community. While preaching at Grenoble in 1844, he visited the deserted Convent of Notre Dame de Chalais, which had belonged to the Grande Chartreuse, and had been used by the Carthusians as a refuge for their weak and aged

brethren. Its position is singularly beautiful, and Lacordaire was so delighted with the whole thing—the old Convent and its cemetery, the Romanesque church surrounded with trees and overhung with rocks, and the glorious view over plain and valley, bounded by blue mountains—that he determined, if possible, to restore the Convent to its original purpose; and accordingly, not without some difficulty, and strenuous opposition from the secular authorities, through which Mgr. de Bouillard, Bishop of Grenoble, was his staunch friend, he bought it. Early in April, 1845, he went there. “The Church,” he says, “has a religious beauty of its own, in its noble simplicity, choir, altar, painted glass and all, and I rejoice to feel that at last we have a real Church—one that has been deserted for fifty years, in its mountain solitude, and now once more restored to God’s service. I was very uneasy as to how I was to pay for Chalais, and now the publication of my Conferences brings in 24,000 f. in the course of four months, not to be paid immediately, but certain. What a providential thing! But do not speak of this, or it will be supposed that we roll in riches, which God knows is not the case! We shall be able by and by to live very economically at Chalais, but at present the necessary repairs will cost a great deal; it will be several years before we shall be able to finish them. We have six cows and three or four calves, but these

*petits frères* allow us to have milk, butter, and cheese. We have sown corn, oats, colza, potatoes—hay and wood we have in plenty, and even bee-hives! Oh, you must come and see Chalais!”

As soon as the General of the Order had authorized the establishment of a Dominican novitiate in France, Lacordaire appointed the Père Besson Master of the novices, writing to him in the following terms:—

“I know this will be a heavy burden upon you, my dear friend, but you will receive it as laid upon you by our Lord in behalf of His Church. Let me urge upon you, my dear son, great gentleness with the Brothers, and respect towards the Fathers. Avoid too much self-assertion in your intercourse with them; strive to tolerate and enter into other men’s opinions; be all things to all men, so as to render the yoke of obedience light. Firmness is a necessary element of government, but so are flexibility, patience, and tenderness<sup>1</sup>.”

Père Besson’s first letter from Chalais to his mother was full of quiet happiness at being once more in France, and of his enjoyment of the place, of his work, and of all around him. He proposed that M. Cartier should bring Madame Besson to see him. “If we have fine weather while you are here, I think you will appreciate this charming place, with which I can find no fault save that it is too beautiful and too delightful,

<sup>1</sup> *Vie*, ii. 22.

though indeed I know that the beauty of our scenery will not be your first consideration !”

Madame Besson and M. Cartier lost no time in journeying to Chalais, arriving at Voreppe (a little town at the foot of the Val Grésivaudan, one of the loveliest valleys in France) just as the sun was rising. “We started at once along the mountain paths which lead to Chalais,” says M. Cartier, “without any idea which was the right way, or any fear of losing ourselves. Père Besson had set out before daylight to meet us, and we had not got farther than the churchyard wall when we saw his dear form coming through a little pine wood. His mother almost broke down, but she was soon held tightly in her son’s arms. Silence and tears at first were the only possible expression of so much happiness. We sat down a while to gain composure, and then followed the mountain ascent, all unconscious of fatigue.”

There is something very touching in the warm welcome given by the Dominicans to Madame Besson, as though they appreciated the sacrifice the widowed mother was making in their behalf. “They treated her as if she had been the mother of all.” That was a happy fortnight ; the visitors spent the day, and had their meals, at Chalais, joining in the recreation hours often passed beneath the noble woods which surround the Convent, and sharing in all the hopes and aspira-

tions of the Brotherhood. One of the monks took a portrait of Père Besson for his mother, and during the intervals of sitting the former artist used to take his brother's palette, and thus painted a beautiful little picture of the meeting of S. Dominic and S. Francis, now in the possession of the Comtesse de Mesnard. It was the first time he had taken up a brush since his profession, and he felt the inspirations of art so powerfully attractive, that he was half regretful at having exposed himself to the temptation.

Madame Besson slept at a somewhat distant farmhouse, and every evening her son and his friend used to take her there, returning in the July twilight, and enjoying this rare opportunity of intercourse, all of which turned upon the subjects both had nearest at heart—the Church generally, the Dominican Order in particular. But all earthly bright days must set, and the hour of separation came only too soon. Madame Besson, however, had seen her child once more, and realized for herself that he was happy, and she had nothing more to ask. She returned to Paris, where with M. Cartier she occupied an apartment belonging to the Carmelite Convent, No. 89, Rue Vaugirard, taken on purpose that it might be the resting-place of such Dominicans as should visit Paris. It was God's Will that she should never more see her son on earth, but the knowledge that each was gazing

on the face so dearly loved for the last time was spared them, and the Père Besson wrote cheerfully of the happy meeting.

“Are you quite rested after all your fatigue on our mountains, dear mother? It was really hard work at your age; all the same, I hope that the change of air will have done you good, and that, together with the great enjoyment we have both had during this short, happy fortnight, will tend to improve your health, and confirm your mind in peace and quietness. You have seen with your own eyes how the Saviour fulfils His promise of rendering a hundredfold, even in this life, to those who forsake all to follow Him. Everlasting life is before us, we hope through His mercy, but the ‘hundredfold,’ as you have seen, we enjoy already. What are all the poor trifles we have left, compared to the peace, the happiness of dwelling in His courts? If there was any thing to complain of it would be that our lot is too easy, so that we might almost fear having our good things in this life. The only real sacrifice is separation from relations and friends, for a while it seems as though we had really lost them, and yet ‘but a little while,’ and we find them again for ever in the Bosom of our Lord. Oh, if one could but make people realize all the blessedness which there is in suffering for Jesus’ Sake, how much balm and honey there is in that seemingly bitter cup, surely

all men would come to Him Who is meek and lowly of heart, and Who can give rest to the weary soul, and heal the broken heart! His burden is indeed light, for He supports those who carry it; His yoke is easy, and those who bear it are the freest of all men. Those who only stand without and gaze upon the Cross, see nought save our Lord's cruel, bleeding wounds; but if we do but enter in through the precious wound of His Heart we shall not be long in perceiving the ineffable sweetness of that mystery, we shall understand all that is summed up in those words, to love and to suffer. Good-bye, dearest mother, I have no time for more to-day. All the novices are well and happy, indeed we are all that; would to God that the many poor suffering hearts throughout the world were as happy!"

The Père Besson was devoted to his novices, and gave himself up to them, it might be said, day and night. His rule was one of extreme gentleness, and at all times he was anxious to impress upon those under his direction that austerity was but a means to perfection, not perfection itself. "When you are tired," he said to some of his spiritual children at a later period, "give yourself some rest, and never wait till you are driven to extremity. Health is soon destroyed by persisting in a manner of life which all the while may not be really severe. No doubt great saints



have done with very little sleep ; but then great saints have a superabundant grace which enables them to do what we cannot. S. Dominic used to pass whole nights in chapel ; but it is reported, too, that he sometimes fell asleep in the refectory ! When I began my novitiate, I was wild about mortification ; I had the greatest possible enthusiasm for the life led by the Desert Fathers, which was very attractive to my temperament. So I used to get up in the night to pray before the Blessed Sacrament ;—I got up at two o'clock, and did not go to bed again after matins. What was the consequence ? Why, I used to fall asleep during my meditation ! Then I took to making that in a long corridor at Bosco, walking up and down to keep myself awake, instead of which I used to knock my head against the wall like a tipsy man. I persisted in trying to do without sleep, and I became almost idiotic ;—I had not proper command over my faculties ! No, our Good God has not framed us as we are framed, that we should injure our constitutions by depriving ourselves of sleep, or by any similar excesses :—He created us in order that we might love Him with all our heart. Insufficient sleep is one of the most dangerous of all-austerities, because it is insidious—there is nothing very alarming in it, but all the same it is ruin to the soul's strength."

To another, he says, "In your present state of

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health, I cannot allow you to think of bodily austerities. Just now your mortification must be in obedience to your doctor, and submission to your parents. You may rest satisfied that you will lose nothing by this; nor will your penitential spirit grow less in consequence of such indulgence, if used properly. Strive to exercise great self-control, and do not be hard and stiff, or restless. Do what you can do quietly and gently, without fretting about what you are unable to do at present. Make up for all seeming deficiencies by faith and love, and remember that Christian perfection is simply a perfect love of God and man, all else is no more than the means to this; and you need not mind about the means if you can attain the end.

The Père Besson's view of what was required of those charged with the direction of novices may be gathered from a playful, and yet very serious letter which he wrote from the East in 1861, to a nun, whom he had known well, on her appointment as Mistress of the novices in her Convent.

“My dear little Sister,—God does all things well, and so here you are, Mistress of the novices in that dear community! You will say that I am very naughty; but I really am most heartily glad! After all it is not my fault if I feel sure that the authorities have made a good choice, and I suspect that all your novices would agree with me. Of course I know that

you will never be of this mind ; but you may have what opinion you please, God has willed it so, and there you are ! and since it is by His Will, He will give you all that is needful for the welfare of the souls entrusted to you. Above all, He will give you a mother's heart, so that you may love your children in Him with a holy, tender love,—all the real art of directing souls lies in possessing a holy love for them. God's help will make you gentle, firm, kind, and wise ; He will show you the way to their hearts, especially as they see that yours is ever open to them ; and thus you will easily train them in that loving simplicity which is so acceptable to God, and which makes goodness so attractive to all around. Let the heart be trained before all else ; if that is good and pure, if God is enthroned there, ever present, all the rest will come of itself, and you are sure to do well. All religious perfection lies in a perfect heart, that alone kindles true life, and produces all that is substantially good. All perfection which does not come from this source, is a mere shadow ; and your utmost efforts, and your novices' most fervent desires, will go for nothing unless our Lord Himself co-operates with His tender, powerful grace. And you must continually ask His Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Love, the Infinite source of all charity, to help you ; and with such help, dear little Sister, you will achieve what now seems

impossible. While you teach without, our Dear Lord will teach within, and give a divine impetus to all your words. Put all your trust in God—expect every thing you want from Him—you may sow, but He only can give life and growth. Poor little Sister! it is indeed rather hard upon such a little body to turn suddenly from housekeeper into novice mistress! Well, Providence orders these things very often as we least expect, does He not, my dear little Sister? though to be so little, and yet have to direct great big novices, is no trifle, I am bound to confess! but I am sure that our Dear Lord will make it all right, by giving great grace to the little Sister, so that all will be well.”

The notes of an address given to his novices on taking the habit, are among the few written papers (letters excepted) which the Père Besson has left. It is simple and characteristic.

“My dear Brothers,—When this day you ask for our holy habit, you practically ask for the Cross of Jesus Christ, His poverty, His humiliations, His labours and sufferings,—for those, as you well know, are the sacred heritage the Bridegroom has left us. If you accept these, come and be our brethren. We will work with one aim, and mingle our hearts in one Love. Come among us, and behold. We are neither numerous nor powerful; but rather we are weak as

new-born babes, and devoid of all which, humanly speaking, gives stability and strength. We are but a little flock, slowly moving on towards a mysterious future by an uncertain and stormy light. We know not what our destiny may be. We only know that none who trust in the Name of Jesus can perish. That All-powerful Name is written in our hearts, and on our brows, and though of ourselves a breath of wind might sweep us away, through It we dare and hope all things.

“The nations of the earth are disturbed, all creation is moved; infidelity has shaken the world to its centres, and as we gaze on the manifold sufferings around us, we turn to Calvary, to the Cross, and in it we see a bright star of hope, whence we gather courage to believe that all this suffering is but as the travail pangs whence the Kingdom of Christ shall arise, and the triumph of His Church—Behold, the Bridegroom cometh!

“Then we, soldiers of Jesus Christ, draw more closely beneath the sheltering wings of our Mother the Church, and pressing His Cross to our hearts, we accept the stamp of His sacred Wounds. We cry aloud to our distant brethren, Come, in the Saviour’s Name, Come. Let us mingle our toils and our blood in healing the deadly wounds before us. Let us put on the strong armour of Christ. Let us go forth, and preach Him every where; let us kindle the world

with the fire of His Love, and fill it with our sacrifices. Let us glory in the foolishness of the Cross ; let us set before the world a sight which, old as it is, yet seems ever new, till no sorrow, no pain, be found on earth, for which we have not a tender, ready compassion. Let us go forth, fearing nothing ; we are victims, and as such, we ask no better than to fall beneath the sacrificial knife. This is what we say to our brethren, this is what to-day we say to you whom the Lord has guided hither.

“Would you look into the future ? would you know what lies before us ? Wherefore ? The Lord says to us, as of old to His Apostles, ‘ In the world ye shall have tribulation ; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.’ Yes, assuredly we all have to suffer ; but what of that ? May we not count ourselves happy if, through suffering and death, we can in any degree glorify God ? or shall we draw back if we are called to tread in the bleeding Footsteps of Jesus Christ, before we enter into the blessedness of His saints ? Let us cast aside all fearfulness, and throw ourselves heartily into His open Arms ; our only thought how to love and serve Him daily better. Let us leave all that concerns ourselves to Him—whether He lift us up or cast us down, all one to us. ‘ Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.’

“But it is not enough merely to cast away fear, when

you draw near to the holy Altar ; you must seek, my brethren, to bring hearts filled with a confidence which cannot be shaken. Jesus, our Saviour, overcame the world, and He overcame it even as you are now overcoming it—by offering Himself for it. Self-sacrifice is a mighty cry going up from earth to Heaven, it is that ‘Bread of the strong’ which was the daily food of Jesus, and with which He feeds His chosen ones.

“How was it with the holy men of old, confessors, doctors, hermits, virgins, martyrs, with the Apostles themselves? What did they do for the saving of souls, the conversion of nations, the confirmation of the Faith? You know well—the whole world knows—how they endured hunger and thirst, nakedness, toil, privation, persecution. The prison, the desert, the scaffold—such was their portion ; but their work abides, and will abide for ever.

“Weigh it well, Brethren ; God accepts you as favoured children, He marks you with His own seal and stamp. When He admits you this day to carry the Cross of Christ, receive it gladly, cherish it fondly, and during this short year of probation which is before you, clasp it firmly to your heart, seek your wisdom and strength in it. You will find sweetness beneath the sharpness, and you will learn to cry out with the Apostle, ‘I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation’” (2 Cor. vii. 4).

Besides his conventual duties, the Père Besson was now frequently sent out to preach and give retreats, and he was also much occupied as a confessor. On the 28th April, he wrote to his mother apologizing for an unusually long silence, caused by his work.

“And now you see I have taken the biggest sheet of paper I can find, because I know how mothers like long letters! . . . . During Eastertide I was very busy; and, indeed, now I have not much time to spare. In spite of bad weather and our mountain heights, a great many people came here for confession, so that we often had to spend seven or eight hours a day in the Confessional—which, after all, is little enough compared to the work of parish priests at this season, but that added to our conventual exercises, and my charge of the novices, left me little leisure. Then, too, I had to preach the Passion on Maundy Thursday<sup>2</sup> at Voreppe; by God’s Grace I

<sup>2</sup> In many parts of France it is usual to preach the Passion at a very early hour on Good Friday morning, which is probably what Père Besson means. Few things can be more solemnly impressive than this service; the sermon being usually little more than a vivid setting forth of the Passion, often preached to a dense mass of people, among whom men are usually the most numerous; beginning, perhaps, long before the dawn of day, which only creeps in—cold and chilly,—upon the wrapt listeners—towards the conclusion of the long discourse, showing the bare, stripped altar, and the empty tabernacle, whence the Blessed Sacrament was taken on Maundy Thursday.



was able to do it, and spoke for two hours, so as to be heard, without being unusually tired afterwards. I tell you this to prove that I am well, and stronger than I look, though I am not going to boast of my strength, or indeed of any thing. We are overrun with workmen now, and smothered with brick and mortar, trying, if possible, to get the most important part of the works done by the time Père Lacordaire comes, that is, on the 4th May. Every one is well, and no one has suffered from the Lenten fast; our meadows are covered with flowers;—there is still some snow on the top of the mountains, but it is scarcely visible, and the little there is serves as a pleasant contrast which enhances the delight of fine weather; and for your satisfaction, let me add that I am both happy and really well. We have good tidings of the brothers at Nancy. Père Jandel was ailing, but is better. He has had a great deal of extra fatigue this Lent; but God has given him strength. Père Danzas, too, is well—he has been preaching a Retreat in preparation for Easter, near Nancy; that is all our news. . . . Now as to yourself—How are you? what are you doing? are you calm and happy, or sad? Sometimes one, and sometimes the other; is not that the truth, dear mother? and perhaps more often sad than glad. You think about your child, and say to yourself, ‘If he were but

here! What is he about? perhaps he is ill. Why is he so long without writing? and a hundred other things which rise up in a mother's heart; and then come the tears! Well, I suppose it must be so, and that God is not displeased by such tears, especially when offered up to Him. He Himself shed tears over His friend Lazarus, to teach us that He would not condemn, but sanctify our grief. He wills us to love Him above all—and that is but just, since He is more worthy of love than all else, and all we have comes from Him. But He would also have us love one another, and that very dearly—even as He has loved us; and little as we can understand it, we know, nevertheless, how much He loves us: His pierced Hands and Feet, His wounded Side are for ever telling us this, and will tell us through all eternity. Alas for the many sorrowful hearts which are for ever wearily seeking after happiness, not knowing that it is to be found only in Love! Dearest mother, if we did but know how really to love God, and how to love one another in Him, we should be perfectly happy. . . . But why should I go on saying all this to you? in truth I have been rather preaching to myself than to you. I have long been saying that I want to love God; but all the time I have not acted up to what I said, and have given my love to less worthy objects; yet all the while I know that this one Love,

which includes all other love, is the one joy which includes all other joys. Because we are religious, we are supposed to be saints : we ought to be such, or at all events we ought to be striving earnestly to become saints ; but we shall not be sanctified by what other men think of us. As S. Francis used to say, what we are in God's Eyes, that are we, and nothing more. The habit and tonsure are worth little, or less than nothing, if our hearts are not clothed with purity and detached from the love of this world's vanities. What will it avail us to leave the world with our body only, if the world still lives in our hearts, and we cannot detach ourselves from self? How much need we have to dread the good opinion of men, and what a burden their trust in us lays upon our weakness ! A peasant who was journeying with S. Francis of Assisi, said, as they went, ' If you are this Brother Francis of whom such wonders are told, take heed that you are not a deceiver, but that you are in the Eyes of God what you seem to those of men.' It is said that S. Francis fell at his feet, and embraced them, so joyful was he to hear such words of truth ; and though perhaps S. Francis did not need the lesson, other men do. Worthless as we may be, we are always tempted, each in our own little sphere, to believe ourselves of some consequence. Well for those who are saved by the world's rebuffs or neglect, from pride

and self-satisfaction. We shrink from this salutary grace, and yet it really is a grace, inasmuch as humility is the essential foundation of all true Christian life. When our Saviour Jesus 'gave His Back to the smiters, and His Cheeks to them which plucked off the hair,' it was not alone as an expiation for our pride, but also an important lesson for all who would follow Him. The result of all this, dear mother, is, that you must pray earnestly for your son, and that all the more as he may be thought not to need prayers. S. Paul's words will remain to the end of time as a warning to all who are placed in authority over others, to guide and teach, 'I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.' After that what are such as we to think or fear for ourselves. Many a time when I meditate on Paradise, I think how different our relative positions there will be. How many of high estate here, will be low down there, while others who have been last and least here, will take the first place there."

The Père Besson's allusions to his own health arose from the anxiety his mother felt at his spending the winter in a place so much colder than he had ever been accustomed to. In fact he suffered considerably from the cold, used as he had been for long to the more genial sky of Italy. And though he never com-

plained, he was sometimes livid and almost paralyzed with cold, so that the Prior was obliged to order him to go to the fire "to thaw himself." At this time he had begun to draw again in recreation hours, with a view to the embellishment of the church at Chalais. Some of the brothers there were more skilful in wielding the brush than in preaching, and Père Besson was anxious to turn their talents to account in decorating the church. Sometimes, too, he sent very exquisite little sketches to his mother and friends; the fear lest love of art should lure him from his higher love seems to have passed away as that love ripened. The last letter which we have addressed to his mother is dated May 27, 1843. He writes in glowing language of the love we all should bear to the Blessed Sacrament, of Père Lacordaire's return after a long absence to Chalais, of the exquisite spring beauty surrounding him, the flowers which covered the fields, above all the lovely narcissus; closing with a few earnest words as usual, and an entreaty for his mother's prayers, as well as those of some ladies with whom she was intimate, and "who must, I am sure, be very near God's Heart, from all you have told me of their sufferings." Père Besson's numerous duties did not allow of his writing very frequently, and this was probably the last letter he wrote to that much-loved mother. She had said, after seeing him at Chalais, that she could die

content, and now God was about to close her time of watching and waiting, and to take her to her rest. On July 1st Madame Besson was seized with cholera, and M. Cartier, who was fully alive to the danger, wrote at once to Père Lacordaire, entreating him to send her son at once to her. The communication between Chalais and Paris was not then as rapid as it is now, and even had the Père Besson's duties as Master of the novices allowed of his immediate departure, he could not have arrived in time to see his mother alive. Her illness was very brief; she herself felt sure it would be fatal from the first, and lost no time in preparing for death. Père Lavigne, her Confessor, gave her the last Sacraments, and she retained perfect consciousness and calmness throughout, talking constantly of God's Love, and of her son, following his daily occupations in thought from hour to hour; and when the last moment came, she passed away without suffering, embracing her crucifix, and gazing on her son's portrait, as though realizing that he who had been the source of deepest sacrifice to her, would also be the source of an abundant reward. "Crux mea, Lux mea."

On July 9th the Père Besson wrote thus to M. Cartier:—

"My dear Brother,—Perhaps this will be too late, and if it be so, may God's holy Will be done. Per-

haps I have by this time lost the only earthly treasure He had left me, that tender mother whom He so graciously gave me. Nor can I grieve if He has permitted her to fall asleep on His Breast ; rather I would bless Him for it, however sore the aching of my heart is at this moment. Ever since I left her, I have asked but one thing, that He would fill her with His own peace, and take her to His own Almighty Arms. Poor dear mother, if it is not too late, dearest brother, be to her more even than I could be, give her a son's last kiss for me, and tell her that I do not cease to cling to the Feet of Jesus in prayer for her. Duty keeps me here, but my whole heart is at her bedside, sharing every pain she has to bear. Hold up before her the Precious Wounds of her Saviour, His pierced Heart, pierced with a more than earthly love for her. Bid her in this last most solemn moment of her life offer the sacrifice of my absence, as the crowning point of the complete surrender she has already made of all that was dearest to her. To-morrow I will offer the Blessed Sacrifice for her. Write directly ; you know how I shall long for further tidings. O my dearest mother, I clasp you in a last embrace on the Heart of Jesus Christ, in His Bleeding Wounds."

Before this letter reached Paris, the mother's heart was at rest, and she was laid in her grave ; her burial was attended by a large gathering of friends of Lacor-

daire and the restored Dominican Order. Madame Besson had been loved for her own sake, her gentle, unassuming goodness, and unselfish piety,—and there were many who knew how to appreciate the sacrifice she had made to the Order, in giving up her only son to it. Père Besson's grief was simple and loving, and as he said, almost a rejoicing sorrow. On July 14th he wrote to Père Danzas.

“My very dear Brother,—I thank you and dear Père Jandel with all my heart for your kind letters, comforting me under the loss of my mother. I am now altogether without earthly ties, and like S. Francis I may say in every sense, “Our Father Which art in Heaven.” In truth, dear brother, the Lord has laid His Hand heavily upon me, in taking away that dear mother, whom I loved perhaps overmuch, but He has upheld me the while, and my sorrow has not been unmixed with joy; my heart has been filled with loving hope, and even while I wept, it was with a deep mysterious sense of inward calm and peace and happiness. I feel that my mother is nearer to me now than before; I can pray for her with a confidence and an indefinable rest which is more precious to me even than her actual presence. I believe that she sees me, hears me; I feel that we no longer need words or letters, but that now there is a communion of heart between us which can only be felt, not defined.



“The night after I had received the sad tidings, after saying the Office of the Dead for her, I had laid myself on my bed. I could not sleep ; but as I lay there in a sort of half trance, I was conscious of such a sweet, delicious, indescribable sensation as I have rarely experienced, a sense of perfect rest and peace, not altogether free from sadness. I suppose it was my Guardian Angel comforting me, and leading me to pray more earnestly.

“I am very grateful to you all for having offered the Blessed Sacrifice for her dear soul ; it is the greatest kindness you can do me. Dear brothers, pray for her, and especially that God may forgive her excessive love for me, and that His Precious Blood, our only hope, may purify her soul from all lingering earthly stain.”

To M. Cartier he wrote,—

“*July 22nd, 1846.*”

. . . “We are both orphans. Our mother has been the first to set forth on that journey. The parting has cost me many tears, but they are free from all murmurs or bitterness. I felt that this blow from our Saviour’s Hand was rather meant to heal than wound me ; it has stilled the only anxiety which I had, and fulfilled my one remaining wish, that my dearest Mother might die in His Peace, might fall asleep on His Bosom. That is such an infinite and precious grace ; from the first moment it was my inexpressible conso-

lation. I knew that sooner or later that dear mother must die, and my daily prayer was that she might die in the faith, love, and hope of Jesus. Now He has accepted, granted my prayer ; and I thank the Gracious Father Who hearkens so lovingly to His children's shrinking prayers over and over again. . . I was only anxious that one day during which I knew of my mother's illness. When I heard in the evening that the Lord had taken her, and had given her a blessed end, I wept, but my tears were so peaceful, they were almost a happiness. Sometimes I dwell upon those dear arms which so often carried me, the lap in which, as a child, I loved to nestle, the bosom where I rested, the loving eyes which used to watch me so fondly, and are now closed for ever, the dear white hair, the mouth which spoke such tender words,— all these cold in death ; and my heart begins to sink ; but a truer thought arises, SHE, MY MOTHER, is not dead. I must seek her in the Bosom of God, her Saviour, and I rise up gladly to find her there ; I pray for her, I ask her prayers, and I feel that she is far nearer than ever she was in this life. O dear brother, how all-powerful the love of Jesus Christ is ! how precious our hope in Him ! Is it not wonderful that this great grief should be my very strength, and that what might seem to be a sorrow past comfort should bring such undefinable peace and consolation ?

“Madame Bourard and her two daughters are here; it does so remind me of your visit last summer, every detail of which is fresh in my memory; but it is a happy, soothing remembrance. When will you come again? when shall I see you, who watched over the last hours of her I loved so dearly? when shall I grasp the kind hand which closed her eyes? I know not, since you cannot come here this year; but, meanwhile, let us meet constantly in the Heart of Jesus. May God bless you, and reward you according to the greatness of His Love! that is my daily prayer. Dear friend, I pray, too, that when your mother’s last hour comes, she may have as tender, as loving a friend by her pillow, as you have been to mine—to comfort her as you comforted my mother, to be to you what you have been to me. Thank you for sending me my dear mother’s crucifix,—it is very precious to me to kiss it, and feel as though I were once more kissing her who pressed it to her dying lips. Farewell, kind brother! Pray thank all the friends who ministered to my mother in her last hours. I know them not, but God knows them, and I pray Him to reward them out of the treasures of His Love. Once more, farewell! May our Dear Lord have you always in His Holy Keeping.”

As soon as it was practicable, Père Lacordaire sent Père Besson to Paris to see M. Cartier, to hear from

his lips all the details on which affection delights to linger, and to visit her grave. His arrival was unexpected. "I found him in my house, one evening, on my return from bestowing some last attentions upon his mother's grave. Next morning, very early, we went there together. As soon as we reached the spot where his mother's body waits its joyful Resurrection, Père Besson sprang over the little inclosure, and threw himself down upon the earth which covered her whom he loved so well. He remained there some time motionless,—his thoughts and prayers known only to her blessed spirit, and to the Angels. After a while he got up, and threw himself into my arms, and we wept together. Then we went home together, unable to say a word."

Père Besson remained a week at Paris, during which time he saw many old friends, and presided at a gathering of Sisters of the Third Order, to whom he spoke of his mother in the most touching manner. Then, "with nerves new braced and set," he returned to his post at Chalais, announcing his arrival there to M. Cartier as follows:—

*"September 11th, 1846.*

. . . "How thankful I am for those few days we have had together! Short as they were, they are enough to fill me with calm gladness, their peaceful influence abides with me; indeed I seem more able

to enjoy the unexpected comfort which God granted us, now that I am again in the peace and silence of our mountain retreat, than while we were actually together. God knows whether we shall ever meet again. All that I leave to His good Providence, which orders all things so wisely for us; but supposing we never meet again in this life, that week of affectionate intercourse over our dear mother's grave will serve to brighten and refresh such weary days or years as may yet be our portion. Henceforth, our meeting-place must be the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ through prayer; and there, too, we shall meet that dear mother—not in her grave, but living and bright, as I fondly believe. Meanwhile, let us both strive to sanctify our lives by following the leadings of God's Grace whithersoever He wills; let us remember that He grants such intervals of blessedness in order that we may gain fresh strength to offer ourselves up for His service. The Transfiguration on Mount Tabor was a preparation for the Cross of Calvary. Let us dwell stedfastly on this truth. S. John leant upon his Dear Master's Breast at the Last Supper; but it was in order that he might follow on to Golgotha; and as he shared the joys of friendship, so did he share the bitterness of his Friend's Sufferings. Do not be long without writing to me, my very dear brother; remember how my poor heart clings to

you. How much I owe you, and what a comfort it is to tell you so sometimes !”

Just before All Saints' Day Père Besson wrote again. “How can I write at this special season without dwelling on the uppermost thought of my heart ! My dearest mother, who was as yours too, I think continually of her, and yet I sometimes reproach myself because I do not dwell more upon her memory. . . . What mother in the whole world ever did more for her child than mine for me ? who ever loved better or suffered more, who ever gave herself up more entirely for a son, than the dear mother I have lost ? and how the thought of her should kindle me to exertion, how it rebukes me for my indolence and carelessness in my duties ! I ask myself, ‘Was it for this that you laid such a sacrifice upon her ? was it for no more earnest a life than you now lead that you left her for ever, pleading that you must needs follow God's call ? She consented to give you up, you who were her very life, to promote God's Glory, she accepted her portion of loneliness and tears, she died daily to her warmest affections, her strongest love, she even accepted the deprivation at her last hour of her son's presence. All this she bore in order to give you to God, that you might live for His Service and that of His Church, and now—wretch that you are, selfish, ungrateful, forgetful man—you are living for your-

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self! You can use fine words indeed, but what are your inmost feelings? Is not your heart full of vain wishes, and mere wilfulness, rather than of the true spirit of self-sacrifice? When the day comes, and it cannot be very far off, in which you will pass through the gates of death, and appear before your Saviour, and meet her again, how will you be able to meet her gaze? Will she not ask whether all her tears, her self-denial, her lonely death, could do no more than this? Such thoughts as these beset me often. I have entered upon a holy way of life, but I do not live holily therein; I do not grow in grace,—through my fault, my own most grievous fault. If any human being could see me as God sees me, as I see myself, he would indeed pity me for having made so little use of the numberless mercies I have received, and do receive daily in my sacred calling. I am happy in being the object of so much grace, but in truth I deplore my own ingratitude deeply.”

On the anniversary of Madame Besson's death, M. Cartier sent her son a flower gathered from her grave. “I thank you from the bottom of my heart,” he answers, “for the little flower; I have laid it at the foot of my Crucifix. How many things it recalls, and what a touching symbol of resurrection the flowers which grow upon the graves we love are! Dearest mother, how many tears she has shed for me! I

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cannot tell you how great a comfort it is that you watch over her grave. I cannot think of her without thinking of you. I wished to write to you that very day, just when you were writing to me, for I knew that our hearts were full of the same thoughts, and it would have been a relief to share them. Let come what may, nothing can ever loosen the bonds which unite us. However far apart, we are bound together through my dear mother. How mighty a power death is, and how its touch consecrates all around! It is through that power that our hearts are knit together for ever; you in the world, I in the cloister; wherever we may be, scattered east or west, we can always remember confidently that each has a brother who loves and prays for him."



## CHAPTER V

Nancy—M. de Beaussant—Père Besson preaching Retreats at Langres—Revolution of 1848—Chalais—He becomes Prior of Nancy.

IT has been said already that Chalais was not the first Dominican home in France. Père Lacordaire had taken Lorraine by storm when preaching there in 1842 and 1843; the Bishop of Nancy befriended him, and a valuable theological library was offered him for the convent he hoped to establish in the diocese. Accordingly he was contemplating a settlement at Lunéville, when God's Providence decided otherwise, and Nancy became the scene of his first convent, where accordingly the Père Besson's copy of the Madonna della Quercia found its home. The circumstances which led to this were somewhat remarkable. A well-born, wealthy inhabitant of Nancy, M. Thierry de Saint Beaussant by name, was leading a life of mere luxury and self-indulgence,

moral and intellectual, when one evening, happening to be in Marseilles, a violent storm made him seek shelter in a church, where at that moment a priest was speaking to his flock of that search after happiness common to all men, a search which, he said, could nowhere be effectual save when it reached to God, and His holy religion. Perhaps the sermon—which apparently was nothing special as to eloquence or novelty—made no extraordinary impression upon the general congregation, but to use Père Lacordaire's own words, "Whenever God touches a sinner, let the touch of His Hand be ever so light on head or heart, that sinner is forthwith converted." M. de Saint Beussant felt that gracious touch, and he returned to Nancy an altered man; from that time he gave himself up to good works, and being altogether fascinated by the holiness and eloquence of Père Lacordaire, he threw himself into the Father's work, bought and furnished a house for the Order, and, in course of time, himself joined it<sup>1</sup>. It was on Whit

<sup>1</sup> M. de Beussant died at the Dominican College of Oullins, where Lacordaire placed the following touching Inscription over his tomb :—

HIC  
 DOMINUM EXPECTAT  
 F. AUGUSTINUS THIERY DE SAINT BEAUSSANT,  
 ORDINIS FRATRUM PRÆDICATORUM,  
 QUI  
 POST MULTOS ULTRA JUVENUTEM ANNOS  
 IN SÆCULI ERRORIBUS ET FLORE DUCTOS,

Sunday, 1843, that Père Lacordaire took possession of this house. In December, 1846, Père Lacordaire sent Père Besson there, in order that he might lead a more active life of preaching than he had hitherto done at Chalais. He had perhaps been an over-indulgent novice-master. "I am not fit for the office," he said himself, "I never can reject any one, I always expect people to improve, and it won't do." In a few farewell words, written to his late novices, Père Besson expresses his pleasure at hearing that his friend Danzas had succeeded him, adding, "I am all the more glad because I hope that his zeal will undo all the mischief my carelessness has done. If it had been allowed me, I would fain have knelt before you all to ask forgiveness for my negligence, before I left Chalais. The Prior indeed thanked me for the edification I had caused you, but I felt keenly how little I deserved any thing save blame;—in truth I have always been indolent and careless: you must all

LUCEM ÆTERNÆ PULCHRITUDINIS, IMPROVISO ICTU,  
 ASPEXIT,  
 ET FRATRIBUS PRÆDICATORIBUS E FRANCIA EXULIBUS  
 PRIMAM DOMUM IN PATRIA DEDIT,  
 CORPUS DEINDE SUUM, ANIMAM ET NOMEN,  
 DONO FAUSTIORI,  
 ET TANDEM,  
 POST BREVE, SED MIRABILE, RELIGIONIS STADIUM,  
 ANNO SALUTIS MDCCCLII.  
 DULCITER HIC AD DEUM TRANSIENS,  
 MORTEM SUAM ILLIS PIISSIMAM,  
 ULTIMUM ET ÆTERNUM DONUM,  
 RELIQUIT.

have felt it, but like faithful sons you cast a cloak over your father's shame. Pray for me, for after all it is to God that I must answer, and His judgment is not to be set aside."

Writing to Père Danzas, he says, "I want to tell the novices through you how much I think of them, and ask that God may give them the grace of perseverance to the end. There is no lack of work to do; every religious of our Order should do his best to fit himself for his vocation, in all ways best calculated to increase his knowledge and love of God. There is a great deal to be done in the sphere of labour assigned to us, and those who are best prepared will do most. Those few quiet years of retreat pass quickly by, but the result of what is acquired during those years does not pass away; and every day I see more clearly that whoever aims at attaining a powerful Christian influence over the minds of others, must himself be filled with the spirit of self-sacrifice, and of entire forgetfulness of self. There is an infinity of souls waiting and seeking some one to guide them into the way of truth, some one who will lead them on, himself foremost in the way; but before a man can do that, he must die to himself. Such mortification is a real science, and the years spent at Chalais are a precious opportunity for our novices to acquire it. A man whose whole heart was filled with

God Only, would draw the whole world after him. We must love before we can persuade men; love solves difficulties, and reveals mysteries which many words do but render more confused. O dear brother, who will give us this gift of true love, our real vocation, our loving, beautiful calling. Blessed are they who are taught of the Lord Himself, in whom He speaks, the really pure in heart!"

In spite of all his self-accusations of sloth and negligence, no one who knew him but felt that such words as these aptly described Père Besson himself, and that he had the gift of drawing men to walk in the paths of holiness, through that very spirit of transparent unselfishness in which he believed himself to be so deficient.

The life at Nancy was a complete change from Chalais and its peaceful retirement. Père Besson's own letters are the best description of it.

"I have no novices to teach, but I am myself an arch-novice in the work before me. In another week I must set to work in good earnest, after a very apostolic fashion, for in truth I know not what I shall say. Tomorrow, Sunday, I have to say a few words in a girls' school here, on the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a nice beginning. Oh if some grace from that adorable Heart might kindle mine, so that loving the Only True Love myself, I might know how to lead others to find all that the heart of man can desire in Him! Next

Saturday I am going to a place near Pont à Mousson, to preach a fortnight's retreat with Père Hernsheim. Père Jandel will help us the first day or two, but he will leave us plenty to do nevertheless. Then I shall be for a fortnight at Nancy, and after that go alone to give another retreat ; so you see I shall be fully occupied till Easter. However, I shall not wait till then to write. You shall share my first campaigns, through your prayers : while we work without, grace must work within ; the preacher indeed speaks, but it is God's Holy Spirit Who touches and convinces men's hearts. You are quite right, dear brother, not to ask eloquence for me, rather ask God's Grace and Love, without which all the rest is useless. Ask Him to impress deeply upon me that all my thoughts, hopes, and affections must be in and for Him, that He Alone must fill my heart, and be my life, my all. It is of little use merely to know this ; the thing of importance is to feel it. It is easy enough to see that the world and all external things are nought, and that God Who gives us life, strength, love, is our All ; that without Him, all is vanity. All this is easily perceived and said, but it is not so easy to act upon it ; that involves self-renunciation and death to the world and to self. We are fascinated by the unreal life around us, which keeps us back from our true Life, and we can scarce bring ourselves to leave it, even while we know that

the life to which Jesus Christ calls us is the best ; partly perhaps because while we feel the wrench immediately, the ineffable blessings of union with Him are not as yet known to us. May He Who has made us, draw us powerfully to Himself, so powerfully that we may be set free by Him from ourselves, because of ourselves we can in no way loosen or burst the bonds of self-love, and if all who would love God and His Truth need self-detachment, how much more do they need it whose business it is to teach others !”

“NANCY, *May 14th*, 1847.

“I am now stationary again till autumn, perhaps till winter. . . . I am looking forward to this time as a season in which, without neglecting study, I may renew my soul within me, and refresh it with recollection and prayer.”

He studied Holy Scripture and S. Thomas Aquinas diligently at this time, in preparation for preaching, and sent to Chalais for a copy of the *Summa* divided into small volumes, which were easily carried, because, as he says, “One finds a Bible every where, but not always a copy of S. Thomas.”

“*June 14th*, 1847.

“Since the beginning of May my time has been spent between the Confessional, prayer, and study ; and in truth it passes so quickly, and is so short compared with all I have to do, that I grow very stingy of it ! I

am only now beginning to understand how much knowledge and how much love they ought to possess whose mission it is to preach and direct others."

Père Besson took great pains with his sermons, thinking them well out first, and then writing notes which were afterwards to be expanded as thoughts presented themselves to his mind. He was never a great orator, but his sermons were artist-like in their clearness of outline, their abundant imagery, and their warmth of colour and feeling. His action, in which the great charm of his oratory lay, was peculiar, and consisted more in an indefinable humility and gentleness, in the purity and sympathy expressed in his countenance, than in energy of gesture. There was something entralling in his calm manner and his sweet voice, which seemed to tell of habitual close communion with God. A Lorraine peasant once expressed this by saying, "He needn't talk, he converts one by looking at one<sup>2</sup>." Later on, when preaching at Rome, people who did not understand French, used to come to his sermons "to look at him;" and a French soldier was overheard exclaiming to his comrades, "That man is just a speaking Crucifix!" But Père Besson never accepted any credit to himself when, as often happened, his sermons wrought powerfully on men's

<sup>2</sup> "Celui-là n'a pas besoin de parler, il convertit en vous regardant."



hearts. Thus after a mission, he writes to Père Danzas, "I have been often amazed at the easy access I have found to people's souls, and to tell you the truth, it has half frightened me ; for though it is a gift of God's Grace, like all else, there is so little corresponding grace in me. Pray for me, dear brother, that I may grow in grace, and that, while converting others, I may be converted myself

"As time goes on, I realize more the shortness of life, and I marvel more that perceiving Eternal Truth as I do, it does not stamp my heart more deeply. How is it that one clings so tight to that which one knows to be worthless, all the while doing so little to possess oneself of what one knows to be the only real good? . . . Every day one says, I will begin to-day, and then at night one finds that one has not really begun to love Christ. There are souls who say little and love much, how blessed are they!"

Missions and retreats followed closely one upon the other—it was a life of constant hard work. Sometimes Père Besson found himself in places where infidelity and immorality were rampant. On one such occasion his first sermon was attended only by a few old women and some curious and evil-disposed critics, but the next night the church was crowded, and before the mission ended, the preacher's Confessional was surrounded till midnight by men who had neglected

their religious duties for years. At other times persons whose past life had been wholly unsanctified were drawn to the gentle monk, whose words breathed so much love and pity ; and by God's blessing, he was able to bring many wanderers home. But the work he liked best, and which was most congenial, was when it fell to his lot to give retreats to religious communities ; several times he gave a retreat to the Dominican Sisters at Langres. After one of these he writes, " I have been greatly edified in this retreat. Nothing does one so much good, or so tends to refresh and strengthen one, as coming in contact with pure, generous, simple souls ; and God Only, Who can read the heart, knows how many such hidden treasures are to be found within the Cloister. I cannot tell you how small and poor I felt myself beside such refined, noble souls ! It has been a prosperous retreat ; God blessed the prayers of His servants, and filled us all with His choicest consolations. Perhaps it is the contrast which I perceive in myself that now saddens me. Without presuming to compare myself to S. Augustin, I feel in a measure what he felt at the time of his conversion—I seem to be far away from God. How these poor earthly hearts of ours rise and fall with hope and fear, zeal and sloth—never the same—always fluctuating ! When shall we put an end to all this, and cleave solely to God for ever ? Happy he

who sees, desires, longs for but one thing, who realizes that one thing alone is necessary, and gives himself up wholly to God. All is peace for him—he has built upon a rock ; the winds may blow, the rains fall, the floods overflow, but he is unshaken in his strength. Why is it so hard to detach oneself from what in truth is leaving one day by day? Why so difficult to die once for all to that to which one inevitably dies daily? Why are the threads which bind us to self and to the world so subtle and elastic? why do they unite again almost before one has snapped them? I thought I was dead for ever to the world, and now I find that I am wholly alive to every thing ! O Jesus, without Thy precious gift and calling, how should I ever conquer my weakness and instability? without the three nails of poverty, chastity, and obedience, to fix me irrevocably to Thy Cross, where should I be? Blessed Jesus, it is good for me to be here, here will I abide for ever. Those sacred nails which fasten me to Thee keep my hands and feet from straying as my heart strays, while they call back that same wandering heart, and stay it on Thy Cross. What should we be, but for Jesus, and for Jesus crucified? Whither would our weakness and our troubles carry us, without Him to support and comfort us?”

One of the Sisters of Langres writes thus of the Père Besson's visits to her community: “Whenever Père

Besson came among us, we were always struck with his simplicity, his angelic gentleness, and the purity of soul which seemed the atmosphere he lived in. It would hardly be possible to convey the impression which he made; one might have applied to him the words used by S. Vincent de Paul of S. Francis de Sales, and have said, 'How good God must be, if Père Besson is so good!' He was kindness and gentleness itself; there never seemed to be the least change or unevenness in his outward manner, which was a reflection of his pure and calm soul. When he was among us, it recalled what we read of our Father S. Dominic among his nuns at San Sisto; there was the same open heart, the same simplicity, the same transparent truthfulness. One felt that Père Besson was at home in his Dominican family: he used to make our recreations so pleasant with his cheerfulness and his little anecdotes, though sometimes he would reproach himself afterwards with a fear lest he had made us dissipated! During a retreat he and Père Jandel gave us in 1847, he could not sleep one night for fear he had hindered our edification in this way, and at last he got up and went to Père Jandel to confide his anxiety to him. The next day at recreation, Père Jandel told us, laughing, of this nocturnal visit, and all the time Père Besson was plucking his gown, and looking at him beseechingly, as though to stop

him, hanging his head like a naughty child! The 'dissipation' had only consisted in recollections of his novitiate, and he never left out any little details which seemed to tell against himself; it was above all at such times as these that his exceeding humility was seen.

"When the community was assembled in order to discuss serious matters, and Père Jandel was explaining the constitutions or any customs of the Order to us, Père Besson would remain silent and recollected; but often Père Jandel would break off suddenly and say, 'After all, Père Besson knows infinitely more than I do about all this—he has practised it himself, and taught it to others as novice-master;' and then Père Besson would give the required instruction, so gently and so clearly. We always noticed that, however animated his conversation—and he was very cheerful—he was always charitable and indulgent to others; and if any one spoke unfavorably of another, whether absent or present, he would always take up their defence, and find something to praise in them. His spirit of obedience used continually to edify us. One day at our mid-day recreation, Père Jandel turned suddenly to him, saying, 'Father, you must give this evening's instruction on the Judgment.' Père Besson was not prepared, and he considered himself incapable of preaching without considerable preparation,

so that this requisition took him by surprise. 'I shall have nothing to say, *mon Père,*' he answered; 'I fear I shall be unequal to being of any edification to our Sisters, being quite unprepared.' 'Never mind, do your best,' Père Jandel replied. 'Besides, there are some hours for you to think over your subject.' Père Besson said no more; but as soon as recreation was over he went to the chapel where he remained for long, kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament, seemingly altogether absorbed in prayer. When he entered the pulpit his first words were upon the solemn subject allotted to him, but he soon passed from that to the subjects which more habitually occupied him: trust in God, loving confidence, and the blessedness of Heaven. Afterwards some of us said to him, 'Well, Father, your Judgment was not very long or very severe! you soon led us on to Paradise!' '*Que voulez-vous?*' he answered. 'I cannot help it, I do not think I shall ever be able to preach those great and awful truths.'"

While at Nancy the Père Besson was largely occupied in direction, a work in which he probably excelled more than in preaching. He had a great gift of reaching other men's hearts, more as it seems through his quick and loving sympathy, than through any special penetration. If any thing his defect was

an excessive indulgence, and he was some times accused of attaching his penitents too closely to himself. "*Que voulez-vous ?*" he would answer, "What can I do if it seems to help them?" His reproofs were so kindly, and his patience so great, that the most timid souls took courage under his guidance, and those who were by nature self-sufficing, readily submitted to his obedience. Where the need of souls was in question, nothing was allowed to interfere ; however great the distance, or whatever his occupations, Père Besson was always ready to spend and be spent for those who needed him.

"It will be long before his gentleness and kindness are forgotten here," writes a friend from Nancy, "or the marvellous gift he had of sympathising with and comforting all who were in trouble. His vocation in Nancy seemed to be that of giving universal comfort and encouragement. He never spared himself, but gave time, words, heart, all full of the grace of Jesus Christ to any who needed his help. If he gave the preference to any, it was to the poor and lowly, to servants out of place, unfortunate people in the hospital, to all such as had no other friends or protectors,— what he was to such as these only those can tell who knew what his personal holiness was. After he went to Italy, he used still to remember his poor friends here, and when he wrote to the Fathers of this Con-

vent it was generally about some of them whose sorrows or frailty made him yearn over them from afar."

We have seen how, even as a young layman, Père Besson's almsgiving reached to the verge of imprudence, and in this respect he never amended. As long as he could lay hands on any thing—money or food—it was sure to be given away; and when in 1849 he succeeded Père Jandel as Prior of the home at Nancy, the unlucky *Père procureur* was often reduced to great straits owing to his Superior's generosity.

Before the end of 1847 another brother from whom much had been hoped was taken away—the Père Hensheim, who from a disciple of Cousin had become an earnest and able son of S. Dominic. He made his profession at the same time with Père Besson, and was one of the first of the Dominicans who were sent to Nancy. His power of speaking was remarkable, and Père Lacordaire, after slipping unperceived into the Church where he was preaching, and listening from behind a pillar, thanked God for having sent him so able and apostolic a colleague, one possessing "such a vigorous, clear, powerful mind, with so great a gift of expressing himself, at once combining so much imagination with such tender and heart-searching beauty of expression."

Père Hensheim's health had been feeble for some time past, and on his return in May, 1847, from some



laborious missions, he could no longer fight against the inroads of disease. Père Besson devoted himself to the sick man, and soothed his last weeks of suffering. On Nov. 14th, 1847, Père Hensheim entered on his rest. He was buried at the Chartreuse de Bosserville, near Nancy.

The year 1848 and its manifold troubles and anxieties will not soon be forgotten. Before the revolutions which convulsed Europe had actually burst forth, there was a strong under-current of insecurity and storm which prepared the minds of thoughtful men for what was at hand. Père Besson wrote to M. Cartier,—

“NANCY, *January 30th*, 1848.

“We expect you here for the Congress, and I look forward to having you among us for a few days; till then we must pray for one another, and often meet in the Heart of Him Who binds us together, the Lord Jesus. What shall I ask for you? that you may love Him more and more, that He may detach your heart from the things of this world, and strengthen your trust in Him. How happy one is to be able to lean solely upon Him amid all the surrounding agitation, to remember that He governs all things, that He holds the destiny of the world and of His Church in His Hand, and that neither storm, darkness, nor tempest can prevail against His all-powerful Will! When one

sees the sky lowering, the floods threatening, and the earth 'reeling like a drunken man' in the language of Holy Scripture, how blessed it is to know that one is safe within the ark of Christ's Church ! and how pitifully one grieves for those who persist in refusing to hearken to His threats and promises, unheeding the coming deluge ! I often muse over such thoughts as I watch what is going on all around. There are troublous, stormy times before us, but God can build up His own House amid surrounding ruin, and I look confidently for the deliverance of His children. If at times my heart sinks under the prospect of a temporary triumph of the Evil One, I take comfort in the certainty that our Lord Jesus will come, and 'will not tarry.' . . . Who can penetrate into the future, and foresee what will be our position at the end of this century ? I doubt not but that God and His Church will triumph, but there will be sharp struggles before victory, and we shall have to mourn over many a fallen warrior. How I pity those who in such days as these are without Christian faith, hope, and love ! Shall we live to see the troublous times that are at hand ? Shall we be called to confess the Name of Christ on the scaffold, in prison, or in exile ? I know not, but I wait trustfully, asking that I may be found ready for the time of trial whenever it comes, and that God will give both to me and my brethren grace

and strength to fight for Him with our last breath. 'Blessed are they who die in the Lord,' it is written ; and more blessed still they who die for the Lord and His holy Church. I am unworthy of such grace, but if He grants it me, I should indeed esteem it precious."

There is no need to recapitulate the events of that troublous February, which are a matter of history ; we are chiefly concerned with them in so far as they affected, or were affected by, the Order of S. Dominic. The streets of Paris were still barricaded when the appointed time for the Conferences at Notre Dame to begin arrived. Père Lacordaire sent word to this effect to the Provisionary Government, and was told in reply that he was not only at liberty to resume his post, but that they requested him to do so, and thanked him for the trust in them to which his message bore witness. Lacordaire had no sympathy with the fallen dynasty, but neither was he a republican. Nevertheless, as is well known, he accepted the republic, believing that he could best serve his country by a loyal adhesion to the form of government she was about to try, while he steadily refused to pander to any of the popular fallacies of the day, or to yield in any thing which he believed the duty of a Christian or a Churchman. Père Lacordaire's share in the *Ère Nouvelle*, his election as the representative of Marseilles, and his single appearance in the National Assembly

in the long proscribed monkish habit, are all well known facts, as are the motives which led him to resign his seat on May 16th, convinced as he was that the republic was entering upon a fatal and suicidal career. The French Dominicans, though of course none were prominently before the public like their leader, followed in his line of opinion; while leaving politics aside, they continued their labours of prayer and preaching. Vivid memories of the enthusiastic days of the Rue Chabannais must have come upon Père Besson, but politics and social theories had no longer any claim upon him save in so far as they concerned Christ and His Church; he still indeed was ready to take Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity as his watchword, but his definition of their true meaning was drawn from the Gospel of Christ, and thence alone did he expect to find a remedy for all social wrongs. His former friend, M. Buchez, raised to the post of President of the National Assembly, was constrained to see his more noble theories perverted and degraded, while his former disciple was on the other hand carrying them to a higher perfection than Buchez had ever dreamt of, under the transforming light of the Gospel. Père Besson's opinions on the subject that so largely occupied the minds of men at this time, may be gathered from the notes of a sermon he preached on the Sacred Heart.

“Suffering,” he said, “has a large share in the life of man. Of old, Christians submitted to this inevitable suffering with resignation and love, because they could fathom its mystery; they wept, but without bitterness, and that because their gaze was fixed on Heaven, the Cross was in their hand, Christ Jesus was in their heart. But now men have ceased to lament after this fashion, and their mourning savours of recrimination and blasphemy. Physicians have arisen who sought to probe our social wounds, but far from healing, their rough, unknowing hands have but made those wounds deeper and sorer. We have turned a deaf ear to the Voice of Jesus Christ, and have hearkened to the siren delusions which would fain seem more soothing than Himself,—we have trusted to false and hollow hopes :—hence has poured forth an ocean of untold troubles.

“The social life of our day has fallen into its present deplorable state wherein it lies grovelling, because it has ceased to believe in the Saviour, and has given itself up, body and soul, to rationalism. Rationalism has led on to sensuality, sensuality to egoism, and who can wonder if, thus undermined, society is in danger of plunging into an abyss of anarchy? There is no hope, no comfort, no life for it, save in what it has rejected, the Heart of Jesus. Of a truth our age is crushed with these great and hopeless troubles

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because it has forsaken the Arms of Jesus Christ, and has ceased to seek life and impulse from His Heart ; like the prodigal son, it has grown weary of its Father's house, it has given ear to the promptings of pride, and has thought to find happiness in absolute independence. It has said, Why need I crave of others that which I possess myself? Have I not reason to enlighten me, a heart tending naturally to that which is good, and a conscience guided by an internal revelation of truth? I will cast aside my swaddling bands, and take possession of my heritage. Thus modern society has forsaken God its Father, and the Church its mother, to seek a self-created happiness,—it has ceased to be Christian, and has become rationalist.

“ But rationalism leads to sensuality ; it cannot set aside the natural aspiration after happiness which is inherent in man, a happiness towards which all our faculties must tend, whether in a right or wrong channel. Far from denying that happiness is our true destiny, reason proclaims such to be the case, and rationalism, which is reason abused, reiterates the cry, and would fain make it the ground of its warfare against Christ and His Church. Rationalism abhors us because we would keep the human race fixed in adoration before the Cross and its mysteries, and put it as a barrier between man and the indulgence of his material inclinations. Rationalism would have us

believe that it possesses the real key of happiness, and holds out the promise of a wondrous age in which man is to enjoy absolute happiness under its rule. But what is this happiness? It must be spiritual or material; now rationalism, severed from God's Providence as it is, can give no spiritual happiness, it can offer nothing save a material happiness, one appreciated through the channel of the senses, and that is sensuality.

“Sensuality must lead to egoism for two reasons. First, because the good things of this world are insufficient to satisfy all claimants, and the few must of necessity sacrifice the many, enjoying their sensual indulgences at the expense of others; and next because sensuality stifles the higher instincts of the soul,—it degrades and corrupts men's hearts. Nothing so hardens men as luxury and selfishness, the inevitable result of rationalism; and sensuality is the most boundless source of social suffering that exists; it is the supremacy, the autocracy of the individual who thinks of himself before all, above all, to the exclusion of all. He is to take the very place of God in the things of sense, of the affections, of the intellect. Egoism is a false, destructive principle; it is opposed to all the realities of life, and consequently it leads to every possible form of delusion and suffering; and every thing that is false is of necessity destructive. Truth must

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needs be the foundation of all that endures, it is, thanks to the element of truth which lurks in most errors, that they exist at all. This false and destructive egoism attacks society with all its might and main; and if it conquers, it is but over a ruined society,—anarchy must ensue; the hand of every man is raised against his neighbour, men's desires, hopes, longings, clash on all sides; and peace will never be attained save by a return to Gospel truth and the love of Jesus Christ.

“Christianity had installed a new order of things; it had enlarged and exalted man's heart, which rationalism has depressed. The crying evil of our day is that men have learnt to consider enjoyment the object of their existence. It is not true; we are here that we may reach on to Heaven; suffering will always encompass us, and holiness alone will diminish that suffering.

“The true object of association is not increased production with a view to increased consumption, but an increased mutual love. As it is, the words Liberty and Fraternity are borrowed from Christianity to be applied after pagan fashion; for to what end is a mere union of strength where there is no union of hearts? and hearts cannot be united save through the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ. Now men separate religion, which is God's law, from that liberty by which it should



be fulfilled, as though liberty belonged solely to this world, and religion to the other ; thus riches are the result of labour, labour of capital, capital of slavery. So long as liberty is not conjoined with faith we must have revolutions. Man's earthly life has an end beyond this world, and the true object of all social combinations is to lead the human race to God in a happy eternity."

Scarcely was there a lull in the political world and its manifold troubles, when a fresh visitation came from God's Hand, to lay all classes low, an awful and practical lesson in the equality of sickness and death. Cholera appeared in an aggravated form, and all the country around Nancy was laid low beneath that fatal scourge. Politicians and demagogues fled before its approach ; but those whose theory was Liberty to serve God and man, Equality in sickness and death, and Fraternity wherever a suffering mortal needed a brother's help, came bravely to the rescue, and there was no lack of the true spirit of self-devotion either among the parochial Clergy, the Sisters and Associates of S. Vincent de Paul, or the Dominicans. One parish especially, Hauraucourt, was devastated in a most terrible way ; and finding himself wholly unequal to meet the call upon strength and time, the parish priest applied to the Bishop of Nancy for help ;—the result of which was that Père Besson went immediately

to the scene of suffering, where directly on his arrival he was summoned to a poor dying woman, whose only nurse was her idiot son, and who was utterly destitute of every alleviation, bodily as well as spiritual. Père Besson took upon him the office of nurse as well as priest, which was the more difficult as he had to beg such food as his patient required. The mother died, but the son recovered, and attached himself devotedly to the good Father, who indeed was well appreciated on all sides, and the "*Prêtre blanc*" was in universal request. It was impossible for him to carry on the work single-handed; he wrote to Nancy for reinforcements, and Père Jandel speedily arrived with two other religious and two members of the Conférence de S. Vincent de Paul. They further obtained the help of four Sisters of Charity, and by means of good organization, secured fitting attention to body and soul among the poor sufferers. Père Besson continued the good angel of the place, and whenever he was not occupied in his directly religious functions among the sick and dying, he might be found carrying soup or other food to their homes, or assisting to bury the dead, for so great was the panic that it was difficult to find any one to render those last offices.

Some of the people likened him to Joseph of Arimathea, as they watched him tenderly and reverently laying those in the grave whose parting moments he

had soothed and helped. His companions used to assert that Père Besson only had one night's rest while at Hauraucourt, and that was because once while making a sick man's bed he upset the lamp suspended from the low ceiling and deluged himself with oil, a performance which obliged him to remain wrapped up in a blanket while his habit underwent such purification as was practicable. Far from strong as he was, Père Besson went through the hardships of this time without betraying any serious consequences from them ; worst of all these hardships, perhaps, to his sensitive nature, were the numerous and unwelcome insects which the Fathers brought away from the filthy cottages in which they ministered. But he used to say, laughing, that, after all, even fleas were an exercise of patience from which something might be gained ! Some of the inhabitants who had fled at the first sign of danger, leaving others to minister to their neighbours, affected to believe that the religious were taking their ease at Hauraucourt, and these stings were treated like those of the material vermin. " Let us pray for them," was the only answer Père Besson would give when told of the calumnies put forth. When the danger was gone, and there only remained some convalescent patients, the Dominicans gave a mission, which at such a moment, as might have been hoped, had great success. As they were returning to

Nancy, one of the religious observed that Père Besson looked sad, and inquired the reason. "No," he replied, "I am not sad, but perhaps I am a little disappointed that God has not accepted the sacrifice I offered of my life. I am not worthy of being buried among these poor people we have so gladly tended, but it would have been an honour to the Order if a Dominican had been laid beside them." The same labours were renewed at Château Voué, and other villages; and though Père Besson never complained of fatigue, and never even alluded to the exhausting toils he was undergoing to his friend Cartier, he was well-nigh spent when, in October, 1849, Père Jandel was removed to the Priorate of Flavigny, and was succeeded at Nancy by Père Besson, who thereby gained increased liberty for self-devotion. But with winter weather the cholera diminished, and he was able to give himself again more to preaching missions and retreats than to actual nursing. One of the missions took him to the neighbourhood of Domremy, where he made a pilgrimage to the scenes connected with Jeanne d'Arc, for whose memory he had a special veneration. He sent M. Cartier a flower gathered from beneath her window, a twig from the cypress growing by the door of her house, and a scrap of wood from a beam in her own room. Domremy, it seems, bore but a bad reputation at this time for

religion and morals; and Père Besson says, "This contrast with former times, and with the simple, earnest faith of La Pucelle, made me feel very sad, for it is a type of the distance there is between our modern France and that of our forefathers. Where is the faith or hope of modern France? She no longer clings to Jesus Christ, or realizes what it is that alone can save her, and give her peace; and how can one help looking anxiously to the future where such is the case? Life and death are before us, but it seems as though we had not strength to choose life: Faith is necessary for such a choice, and the spirit of self-sacrifice, and we, alas, reject both!"

## CHAPTER VI

Père Besson is recalled to Rome—Reform in the Dominican Order—Père Jandel appointed General—Interview with Pio Nono—Life at Santa Sabina—San Sisto Paintings—Visit from the Pope—Friendship with Overbeck—Eastern Missions—Père Besson volunteers as a Missionary—Sails for Constantinople—Smyrna—Aleppo—Journey to Mossoul—Difficulties there—Père Besson practises as a Doctor—Visit to the Holy Land—Return to Rome.

**PÈRE BESSON** was not destined to remain long Prior at Nancy ; he was soon called to leave it, never to return. While Lacordaire and his little band were striving to restore the Dominican Order to its original vigour and usefulness in France, the Italian houses of the same Order were slackening their ardour and their toil ; in many cases the Rule was greatly relaxed, and the Fathers more generally gave themselves up to a quiet studious life, which did but little towards fulfilling their professed task of teaching and kindling

men's hearts through the agency of missions and retreats. Pope Pius IX. earnestly desired to alter this state of things, and to bring back the Order of S. Dominic to its primitive purity and usefulness, and for this end he resolved to employ the French Dominicans, whose self-devoted earnestness had made no small impression on him. No doubt Lacordaire himself was the leading mind and most commanding intellect among the little company, but he had a distinct work to do in France, and perhaps, too, the Pope's keen penetration saw that he was better suited for his present labours, in which his wonderful gift of eloquence served so great a purpose, than for the weight of administration which must fall upon the General of so important an Order. Accordingly the Holy Father summoned Père Jandel to Rome, and Père Lacordaire writes, "Our chief news just now is that the Holy Father has sent for Père Jandel concerning the affairs of the Order, which engross him much. He has reserved the appointment of a new General for himself, and before filling the post, he wishes to inquire more precisely into our work of restoration in France. For this purpose he has summoned Père Jandel just because he is *not* the Superior, and between ourselves, perhaps with some idea of making him General of the Order. It would be a great honour to our province, and a great joy to

me<sup>1</sup>." Nevertheless when it came to the point, Père Lacordaire regretted the appointment, and even undertook a journey to Rome with the hope of retaining so valuable a member of the Order for France. "He is invaluable," Lacordaire says in a letter, "the very man I need: I can do the outer work, and he the inner,—for although I make some advance in the spiritual life, the eager activity of by-gone days has not disappeared in me as yet."

But Pius IX. had resolved that it should be so, and on September 27, 1850, the Père Jandel became Vicar-General of the Dominicans, the seal and symbol of his dignity being a Crown of Thorns. One of the first steps taken by the new General was to summon the Père Besson nominally to represent the French province at Rome; practically still more to avail himself of the services of his dearest friend, whose fervour and self-devotion he well knew how to appreciate. Moreover, Père Besson was already familiar with Italy and the Italians, and had many friends among the Roman Dominicans; his gentle, conciliatory character, not unmixed with firmness, was likely to be invaluable in the work of reform, and the friends had not worked together all these years without fully entering into and sharing one another's aspirations after the primitive spirit of S. Dominic, from which the Order had un-

<sup>1</sup> Lettre à M<sup>de</sup>. Eudoxie de la Tour du Pin.



questionably fallen. Père Besson announces his departure to Frère de Saint Beaussant thus :—

“NANCY, *August 28th*, 1850.

“Pray for me, dear brother; I need it more than ever, for I am just about to leave Nancy and join Père Jandel at Rome. He wishes me to be ready to come as soon as his nomination is definitively settled, and that I suppose, from what he writes to his own family, is pretty well certain, in spite of all his reluctance. I am very far from being fit for such a task, for though of course mine will be nothing to our poor Father’s burden, still it is far too heavy for such as I am, and I shall indeed need God’s most special help to sustain me under it. So I would most urgently commend myself to you and our brothers : I only ask one grace, that I may give myself unreservedly to God : that includes all else ; and if I could but attain to that, I need fear nothing !”

On October 8th, 1850, Père Besson left Nancy, and wishing to take leave of the Dominican Sisters at Langres, he hurried to their Convent during the time in which the diligence stopped for the passengers’ breakfast. The officials amused themselves with a practical joke, as they considered it, and hurried the diligence off before the proper time, carrying on Père Besson’s luggage, and even his breviary, in order, as they said, “to have the fun of seeing the Jesuit in a passion.”

But they were surprised, and vexed at their own impertinence, when they saw how gently and patiently the object of their petty spite bore the annoyance.

M. Cartier met the Père Besson at Flavigny, where, as usual, there was a continual demand upon every moment of his time; he then went to Toulon, from whence his journey was by sea, and the night hours of his passage were spent in earnest conversation, resulting in the conversion of one of the ship's officers.

Père Besson's first return to Rome, so full as it was of associations, was very touching; but he had no time to give up to mere feeling, there was too much real work to be done. Almost immediately after his arrival he was presented by the Père Jandel to the Pope. His own account of the audience, written to Frère de Beaussant, is interesting:—

“The Holy Father received us alone in his cabinet, and remained standing, talking with us for more than a quarter of an hour, so that I was well able to study the holy expression of his countenance, the indescribable calm and peace stamped on every feature, and to listen to his kindly, courteous words. He took my scapulary and cloak between his fingers, to examine the stuff, and pronounced it good. His chief conversation was with the Very Reverend Father, but he also said some kind words to me. I could not tell you what an impression the interview has made upon me.

But the most touching part of it was when the cannon of S. Angelo announced the *Angelus*, and Pius IX. knelt down before his table, and repeated the wonted prayer aloud, we making the responses. Then he gave us his blessing, and we kissed his hand; after that I asked him to bless the Crucifix which I wear on my breast, telling him that it was the same which my mother had embraced in her dying moments. 'We must hope,' he said, 'that it was her guide to Heaven.' Then he took it, and blessed it, and then I knelt down and kissed his feet with the deepest veneration and love. My heart is full of the sacred remembrances of this time, and it will ever be one of the most precious moments of my life."

The new General had no easy task before him; the very facts of his youth, his being a foreigner, and the unusual way in which he was appointed, were calculated to excite opposition, and he had to deal with men whose age and intellectual capacities were in many cases entitled to all respect. However, Père Jandel set to work cautiously, inquiring first into the general condition of the Order, through the Provincials—an inquiry which laid bare the decadent state of things, and proved that the great work to which the Dominicans were destined—Mission preaching—was almost totally neglected. From the time of his own novitiate Père Jandel had studied the subject of reform, and he

now put forth a circular, stating his views and intentions. "We are the children of saints," he says, "and we glory in our forefathers, but let us bear in mind that if on our side we do no credit to them, our glory will be turned to shame. If a degenerate son is a shame to his father, so the glory of ancestors is the shame of degenerate children, who lose all right to their heritage when it becomes a mere shadow, devoid of substance. S. John Baptist warned the Jews, 'Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham;' and our Lord Himself said, 'If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham;' and S. Paul says, 'For they are not all Israel which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children.' Let us beware, lest the kingdom of God be taken from us, and given to those who bear more fruit. . . . We hope better things of you, brethren."

The most effectual way of regaining the true spirit of S. Dominic seemed to be the establishment in every province of a house in which the original Rule should be strictly observed—which was very far from being the existing state of things in Italy. The General determined on making the Convent of Santa Sabina at Rome a model for the rest, and to this end he appointed Père Besson its Prior. He went

there at once, and wrote as follows immediately afterwards to Père Danzas :—

“SANTA SABINA, *October 23rd, 1850.*

“I reached Rome four days ago, but I have not had a moment at my own disposal till now. Yesterday evening I came here as Prior ; we shall be about twenty in all, novices and fathers, and our aim is to live more strictly in accordance with the spirit of our Order, though we shall still come short of the perfect fulfilment of our constitutions, short even of what we have been able to do in France. The Italians are frightened at the idea of an exact observance of our Rule, and it will not do to lay upon them more than they are willing to accept at present. We must be content to do what we can now, and look on to the time when we may aim at better things ; nevertheless I hope that time may not be far off, and that we shall ere long return to our real bounden duty and practice. I shall take the measure of my companions, and see who can be trusted, and whenever there are as many as four who heartily wish it, we will go in for the great work of reform. I am certain we shall never do any thing really lasting until we go back fully to the life our predecessors led. . . . I do not know whether S. Dominic’s stem will flourish anew in our day in Italy ; any how it certainly thrives in France. . . . Let us be filled with the spirit of self-sacrifice, and we shall be true men of God, real

Apostles. Let us adhere diligently to the practice of our Rule—neglect of that has been the cause of all our ills; our Rule is our life—let us never lose sight of that truth. Let us strive to be religious, not merely in name and habit, but really and truly, and to that end let us study to imitate our saintly forefathers in all things. . . . This is what our Very Reverend Father thinks about the Order; he would have us seek strength by internal regularity and external activity, and that activity will be in proportion to the inward vigour from which it emanates. . . . Let us each strive to be ourselves what we should be, and then our aspirations will not remain mere sentiment, but they will take shape in real work.”

On December 1st, Père Besson wrote to one of his spiritual children, “I am at the head of a community in Santa Sabina, a Convent given by Pope Honorius III. to S. Dominic. Every thing around reminds us of our forefathers, and one seems still to hear the echo of S. Dominic’s sighs, as he knelt within this church, offering himself for the salvation of sinners—the spot where he was wont to pray is still pointed out. . . . There is one cell where he, S. Francis of Assisi, and the Blessed Angelo de Carmi once spent a whole night together talking of heavenly things; and it was in the Chapter-room that my patron, S. Hyacinthe, received the habit from

S. Dominic. Numbers of holy men have gone forth from these ancient walls to evangelize the world, and how many lie beneath the pavement we tread under our feet, whose souls we believe to be with God! God's Providence has cast my lot in a pleasant place, and I am sustained and strengthened by so many saintly memories; nevertheless I do not forget Nancy, and daily at the Holy Sacrifice, I go over the names of all the souls God entrusted to me there, entreating Him to give them fresh supplies of His Grace, and through His Mercy to make up for all my many deficiencies towards them."

There were many difficulties to be encountered, and much opposition, sometimes even from the very men who had wished to see the Order reformed, but who were not prepared for such downright reform. The opposing party nick-named Père Jandel "the great Tiger," and Père Besson "the little Tiger"! but nevertheless, they both worked quietly on in the spirit of the words which Père Besson had inscribed on the Convent walls: "In silentio et spe erit fortitudo vestra" ("In quietness and confidence shall be your strength"). "Our house," he wrote, "consists almost entirely of young religious who are either novices or students, and who cannot as yet serve the Order as we hope they will do hereafter; but their hearty good will is an encouragement to us, and we trust that God

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will continue to bless our small beginning. The Reverend Father has an immense burden resting on him, of which the weight increases daily, and he does indeed need many prayers. His task is so difficult that he can only hope to perform it with the help of God's special Grace. Mine is easy in comparison, having only to deal with men whose will is all in the right direction, and but for the share I must of course take in our dear Father's Cross, I should have nothing to trouble me. All the while our work prospers, in spite of all the opposition of the devil; it advances but slowly of course, but the spirit of reform gains ground, and begins to show some result; above all, we are upheld by the unquestionable tokens God has given us of His protection. These are so clear, that we cannot fail to see His Hand in all that has occurred, and so we are strong in hope; no such undertaking ever was made without great difficulties to encounter. God would have man feel how powerless he is, before He blesses the work, so that we may realize that all good comes from Him Alone, and may be humble in success, giving all the glory to Him Who Alone is worthy of glory.

“The work of reformation goes on, though but slowly, and day by day the burden presses more heavily on our Reverend Father-General; as his sphere of action grows larger, his anxieties necessarily



increase, and at times he is very much oppressed by the difficulties he has to encounter. Still his courage does not fail, feeling as he does that he is upheld almost visibly by the Hand of God in all that concerns the Order. Such difficulties are inevitable; no great work was ever yet accomplished without a great deal of suffering.

“Since you left us, we have sent a brother and three novices from hence to Santa Maria at Florence, the Fathers of that Convent having resolved to begin a strict observance of the Rule, and having consequently asked us for some one to guide them. This has been a great cause of thankfulness to us. Tuscany used to be a land of saints, and in former days our Order reaped a great harvest of glory there: S. Catherine of Sienna, S. Antoninus, S. Catherine of Ricci, S. Agnes of Monte Pulciano, and the Blessed Angelico da Fiesole, not to speak of many more, came forth from thence, and we cannot think that the spirit which called forth such saints is altogether extinct. Let us hope, rather, that the Order has only been slumbering, and that now it is about to wake. God has not forsaken us; His Mercy is too evidently leading us, for us to be hopeless: perhaps our very humiliation is one of His best gifts. Our wounds were concealed, but He has laid them bare that we might seek their remedy from Him Who Alone can heal us.”

All this time the artist spirit was rising strong in Père Besson, and while toiling at the spiritual restoration of his Order, he was most anxious to bestow some labour also upon the material defects of his Convent. Among other things, he discovered and opened the long walled-up windows of the Chapter-house, and himself designed some cartoons for the painted glass with which he hoped to fill them.

“You know,” he wrote to M. Cartier, “that I am doing what I can towards the restoration of Santa Sabina; I feel as if restoring the sanctuary was a type of what we seek to do for its moral condition. As you offer to do what you can to help me, I will ask you to get me any information you can about glass-painting, the proper colours one should use, and the right way of baking the glass. I don’t know whether I shall find time to use your information when I get it, for in truth I have little enough at my disposal, but still it may be useful.”

Indeed, Père Besson had no time for art, and still less money. It was hard enough to meet the daily calls, and the *économé* of the Convent had too much difficulty in paying the baker to have any surplus for brushes and colours! The revenues of Santa Sabina were not more than sufficient for four or five religious, and now there were more than fifty to be fed. Nevertheless, thanks to God’s Good Providence, the brethren

struggled on, and were even able to continue their accustomed liberal alms to the poor, not however without episodes wherein their faith was severely taxed. Thus, one day the baker announced his determination not to supply any more bread to the Convent, unless his bill was paid before sunset. The Father in charge of these matters came to the Prior with the tidings. "Well," replied Père Besson, "he has a right to his money—we must pay him."

"But, Father, there is not a *scudo* in our purse."

"Very well ; go into Church, and kneel before the Altar of the Blessed Virgin until the money comes."

The Procuratore obeyed willingly, and in about three quarters of an hour the porter called him to see a person, who brought money enough to defray half the debt. Immediately he went to tell the Prior, saying, "I should think the baker will be satisfied with this, and wait for the rest."

"Do you suppose that the Blessed Virgin does things by halves in that way?" asked Père Besson. "Go back into Church, and wait for the rest." And not long after, more than the required sum was brought.

The Procuratore became an adept in inventing all manner of wondrous salads and *frituras*, so that his extraordinary dishes became a standing joke in the convent, and "he was wont to assist Providence by the most unheard-of culinary inventions ;" unmoved alike

by praise or blame from those who depended upon his cares, but highly delighted when, as often happened, timely gifts of eatables arrived at the Convent, to help out his inventions. The Holy Father himself not unfrequently contributed to their supplies, and many a fine fish from the Tiber or the Mediterranean found its way to his "cari figlioli di Santa Sabina," to help them through their abstinence<sup>2</sup>. Père Besson continually received offerings from France for the Convent. Many of those who had benefited by his direction rejoiced in this opportunity of showing their gratitude, and not unfrequently when he was behindhand in his correspondence, his spiritual children played him the trick of extracting a letter by sending money, which must needs be acknowledged, hoping at the same time to obtain a few words of counsel and help.

"Your alms have come opportunely," he writes to one, "for the poor Padre Sindaco is at his wit's end, with fifty religious to feed! He makes his cabbages go as far as he can, but that is sorry work with an empty purse, and whatever comes in has no time to spare—it is soon gone again." And again, "I ought sooner to have thanked you for the 460 francs you sent me, but I do so now in the name of the whole community. It was a very welcome gift, for our num-

<sup>2</sup> One point in the reform which the French Dominicans were striving to effect was a return to total abstinence from meat, save in cases of illness.

bers and consequent expenses are increasing. Novices come in from all sides, so that soon we shall be puzzled where to stow them, but these are not troubles to complain of; God, Who brings them upon us, will undoubtedly help us through them. The Holy Father is most kind to us, and has lately presented us with a chalice. Providence sends us help from various quarters according to our needs, much to the amazement of those who are not accustomed to look to God for every thing, and who are always anxious to have good security for the supply of their temporal wants."

Much of Père Besson's time was spent at La Minerva with the General of the Order, whose constant counselor he was. Père Jandel's health was bad, and the heavy cares of his office did not mend it, so that frequently the Père Besson had to undertake all his correspondence, and to see all those who desired interviews with the General; while on the other hand, if well enough to move, Père Jandel was often absent, visiting distant houses of the Order, so that the work which fell upon his friend became really incompatible with the office of Prior of Santa Sabina. Accordingly when his term of office expired, it was not renewed, and he writes,—

*"October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1852.*

"I have no news to tell you to-day, except that my Priorate is at an end, and for a week past I have resigned the responsibility of my dear community.

Père Amanton has been elected, and I think the work will prosper in his hands, for having no other occupation he will be able to devote himself to strict observance of rule."

The Père Amanton had been in the East as a missionary, and now he had returned to Rome to study Oriental languages, with a view to extending his usefulness. He subsequently returned to the East, where he became Bishop of Mossoul, and was once more associated with Père Besson, who had the highest esteem and affection for him.

A few months after Père Amanton's election, Père Besson wrote, "Santa Sabina is going on well ; the new Prior is more precise than I am, as well as firmer and more observant, and he has made great progress in the regularity of the house."

Père Besson had been reluctantly compelled to give up his plans for the restoration of Santa Sabina, but now that he had more leisure, he transferred the design to a less extensive enterprise, and undertook the decoration of the Chapter-hall of San Sisto, the spot where S. Dominic had first established his work in Rome. San Sisto is on the Via Appia, not far from the Porta Capena, and when Pope Honorius bestowed Santa Sabina upon the Order, the earlier foundation was given up to a community of nuns, trained by S. Dominic. Malaria, however, proved too powerful an

enemy to be resisted, and the Sisters removed to the Quirinal Hill. Later on some Irish Dominicans came there, but for some time past the Convent has been deserted owing to its insalubrity, and no part of the buildings used save the Chapter-hall, which is specially associated with the memory of S. Dominic. The Irish Prior of San Clemente, to which San Sisto belongs, was himself warmly devoted to art, and gladly accepted Père Besson's offer to paint the hall, which is so sacred to all the sons of S. Dominic, undertaking to provide for all necessary expenses. This had all been arranged before the expiration of Père Besson's Priorate. Some time was occupied by the workmen who prepared the walls, but even in May, 1852, he snatched occasional spare moments in which to visit San Sisto, and to study the work he longed to undertake. When once able to give himself to it, he became greatly absorbed—early in the morning he would descend from the Aventine, accompanied by a certain little lay brother, Fra Angelo by name, who was his attendant, assistant, and model (for which latter office his personal beauty specially adapted him); and once upon his scaffolding he would remain praying and painting, forgetful of meals and all beside, until failing light obliged him to come down, faint and weary, when he would return to Santa Sabina, pondering over his next day's work. One

day while thus working at the highest point of his scaffolding, he was called down in his painter's apron, his palette and brushes in hand, to receive no less a visitor than the Holy Father himself, whose special interest in the young Dominican artist had brought him to inspect the work. Père Besson was too much absorbed to hear the arrival of the Pope's carriage and suite within the deserted court, and little Fra Angelo was the only person ready to receive Pio Nono, who rather enjoyed the amazement of the artist, and after inspecting his painting, entered into a conversation of some length with him. "You Frenchmen are full of zeal," the Holy Father said on this occasion; "you are first-rate in action, but you lack prudence. We have the gift of prudence in Rome; we receive that from God Himself. As a man, I am not worthy to grind your colours, or to be your lay brother here at San Sisto; but as Pope, I feel very differently, '*sento in me un pezzo enorme.*'" And turning to the crucifix he added, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." From this time Pio Nono took the warmest interest in the progress of these paintings, often inquiring about them, and himself giving the order for the work to be continued, when at a later period it was at a standstill. Père Besson wrote,—

"August 20th, 1853.

"Tell Cartier that when I saw the Holy Father



lately, he asked about my painting at San Sisto, and desired me to go on with the work."

And later still when the artist was in the East, it was proposed to Pio Nono that he should be appointed Bishop of Ispahan, but the answer was promptly given, "No, Père Besson must come back and finish his painting at San Sisto; besides, he does too much good in Rome to be spared,—I shall keep him near me."

He had numerous other visitors: at first, only some few who were really interested in art; but his fame soon spread, and it became the fashion in Rome to go and see the Dominican artist and his work. Père Besson suffered not a little both from the often irritating waste of time involved, and from the ignorant admiration lavished on his work; but he was always patient and gentle, and the most vexatious visitors generally went away charmed with his courtesy. Towards the close of 1852, M. Cartier went to Santa Sabina; and we must give his own account of his visit:—

. . . "I had the happiness of occupying the cell adjoining his, and of watching his active mortified life, as also the great empire which his gentleness had acquired both within and without the Convent. It was to him that the religious came in all their doubts and difficulties; it was he who was perpetually called to the parlour and the confessional to receive strangers of

every description ; and few indeed were the moments during which he was left at peace in his cell. The sole furniture of this cell was a deal table, on which his theological books were generally lying open, two common chairs, and in one corner a coffin-like box, which was his bed—the bottom covered with stones and pieces of wood, a folio volume of S. Augustin his pillow, and a rough blanket which served to hide his discipline and to cover him at night. Ill or well, he had no more luxurious resting-place.

“In January, 1853, we went, with Fra Angelo as our attendant, and took up our abode at San Sisto, in the rooms where formerly the Dominican Pope, Benedict XIII., used to spend the Carnival in retreat. Our object in this was to give Père Besson more time for his work, both by escaping visitors and by saving the daily walk between the Convents ; he now only returned to Santa Sabina on Saturdays, to hear confessions, remaining there over Sunday. What pleasant memories I have of those months spent in this peaceful enjoyment of his saintly friendship and intercourse ! Appropriately enough, I was at that time writing the life of Fra Angelico da Fiesole, and I could not but frequently compare the living and departed artists. Our rooms were only divided by a thin partition. He used to wake me every morning, having already said his office and made his meditation. At five

o'clock we used to go down to the deserted Church, where he said Mass; and while he was making his thanksgiving, I used to prepare his colours and brushes, so that he might set to work at once. Nor was it easy to drag him from his painting at noon, when our dinner was brought to us from San Clemente. After that, he reluctantly consented to rest for half an hour, returning then to his scaffold till evening, when we met again for supper and prayer.

“But such days of unbroken work were rare, after all—not often more than two or three in a week. Not to speak of the more frivolous interruptions of visitors, he was often called for hours to the confessional, and directly that any one required his priestly offices, he would leave his painting even at the most critical moments of inspiration.”

In August, 1853, he wrote, “I have been working all the winter and till June 15th at the San Sisto Chapter-hall, but my work does not get on fast, because after all I spend more time in the confessional than with my palette. In spite of its solitary position, San Sisto is a place of considerable resort, partly from the novelty of a painter monk, and partly owing to my spiritual connexions, which are very extensive in Rome—there are so many strangers here of every nation who, for the most part, speak French, and consequently seek for French confessors.

We might find work of this kind, and that most valuable work, for several religious—it is a place more than most where there is a great work to be done for souls. At present my chief work is as confessor to one of our Convents, Santa Caterina di Sienna—where I am taking the place of the usual confessor, who is ill. That, with other confessions from without, and the letters I write for our General, occupy me entirely.”

“These constant unforeseen interruptions” (continues M. Cartier) “would not allow of his painting in fresco, and moreover he would have been hampered by the necessity of preparing cartoons, and of being constantly assisted by other people. He painted in oil and wax on stucco, and was for ever improving his compositions, painting some of his figures over and over and over again. To make up for the lack of living models, he was in the habit of making clay models for himself, and he had a marvellous power and rapidity of moulding beautiful statuettes, which he would drape in wet linen, fixing the folds with pins. . . . When he was evidently spent with his work, I used to persuade him to walk with me, and taking the Porta San Sebastiano, we used to wander about the Campagna, studying the tomb of Cecilia Metella, the Egerian fountain, or those noble lines of aqueduct glowing against the purple sky, which Poussin loved to draw. As we walked, we used to discuss the past

glories of the Order, and its future hopes. Père Besson's favourite day-dream was that it should be a very Art mission—and he built many a castle in the air which restored San Sisto to life, and filled its cloisters with studios for Dominican artists, affording likewise a retreat for seculars who by degrees might form a Confraternity of painters, sculptors, and artists, under the Dominican wing, promoting the decoration of churches and the general development of Christian art. These dreams actually became so definite, that I was about to take the Convent on lease, and make the necessary arrangements; but unforeseen difficulties arose, and I was obliged to return to France, leaving the scheme a vision only—but who knows? the seed may yet take root, and with God's Blessing it may some day bring forth fruit.

“No one would have been better fitted than Besson to direct an Artists' Association, not only from his peculiarly attractive gentleness which drew men together in a remarkable way, but from his keen perceptions and his power of appreciating whatever came before him of talent or beauty. He entered deeply into the principles of artistic beauty, and was fond of defining his theories, but he was ready to allow every separate mind to conceive and express it after its own fashion, just as in nature the sun's rays are variously reflected by varying objects. He had no

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wish to bind men to a system, and so long as they would take truth as their rule, and that which was good as their aim, he was ready to admit all kind of talent, and all individual tastes with regard to design and colour. His opinion was that the best guidance for artists was that of the heart; and he held that the true theory of Christian art is to love God, and to promote His Love in all possible ways. At a later period he wrote to me, 'I would urge you not to hesitate about publishing your life of Fra Angelico;—even if all your views of art are not correct, that is no reason for withholding it. One thing is certain, namely, that the tone in which you have written the book is altogether good and Christian, and that the general impression made on those who read it will be the same;—that is what matters most, for the only way to make art dignified and useful is to impart a high and holy feeling to it. Take my advice, finish your book and publish it, and others will add what may be wanting hereafter.'"

In June, 1854, Père Besson was sent to rest awhile at La Quercia (where, however, he was still occupied in painting), and as on his return to Rome he was again elected Prior of Santa Sabina, the work at San Sisto was suspended till 1858, after his return from the East, when he completed it. The subjects of these paintings are chiefly taken from the

life of S. Dominic, and whatever fault critics may find with their design or execution, the high Christian tone is unquestionable. Overbeck, whose judgment is not to be lightly weighed, pronounced Père Besson fit to be the master of all his contemporaries, himself included. As might be expected, these two artists had the deepest admiration for each other. One Sunday, when, as usual, the public was admitted to Overbeck's atelier (and who that has ever enjoyed the privilege of entrance can forget the dignified gentle courtesy of the venerable Christian artist?), Père Besson met the young Princesses Bonaparte and some other ladies by appointment there, and became eagerly interested in showing and explaining his friend's works. He was dwelling with enthusiasm on the cartoons representing the Sacraments, their composition and symbolism, when Overbeck himself came in, unperceived by Père Besson, and took his place quietly among the listeners. It was not till afterwards that the Dominican artist discovered that the master himself had been present, and began to apologise for having usurped his place. But Overbeck thanked him warmly, assuring the Father that his had been a far more able exposition of the cartoons than he could have himself given \*.

\* As these words are written, the tidings have come of that venerable man having entered into his rest, at the age of eighty. Eternal light shine upon him ! May he rest in peace !

During Père Besson's second Priorate, some archæological discoveries were made at Santa Sabina, where the brethren began to make a garden on the slopes which extend down to the Tiber. Père Besson hoped for some important results; the government investigated the "avanzi," and M. de Rossi wrote a paper upon them; but there the matter ended, and the Prior's attention was soon occupied with matters more near to his heart. Among these was a journey to Corsica, with a view to the foundation of a Dominican home there, which was accomplished at Corbara, near Bastia, in the spring of 1855. A more distant journey, however, was in prospect for him. The Eastern Missions in Persia and Armenia had originally been in the hands of the Dominicans, and in spite of hindrances and scanty results, had never been wholly abandoned. Their head-quarters were at Mossoul, and at Mar-Yacoub, a convent founded by Padre Marchi, at no very great distance from it, after the former place had been pillaged, and the monks murdered, in an outburst of Mussulman fanaticism. The General of the Dominicans proposed that the French province should undertake this mission; but those who were first sent to Mossoul were not successful in their work, and when Père Besson forwarded the bad tidings to the General, who was inspecting his houses in Germany, he offered to go himself to Mossoul, and



devote his energies to that mission. It was an act of great sacrifice on his part, for he was warmly attached both to Rome and to those among whom he lived, while, as we know, his artist spirit was not smothered under the monk's habit, and he would fain have completed his paintings at San Sisto. But all such considerations were not worthy to be put for a moment in competition with God's Glory; and though on his side it was no small loss to the General, Père Jandel decided on sending his best friend to the East, and Père Besson was accordingly appointed Apostolic Visitor of the Eastern Mission. Before leaving Rome he was to take his Doctor's degree, during which ceremonial the custom is to place a gold ring on the finger of the new-made doctor. But Santa Sabina could not supply any such article, and at last the want had to be met by substituting a bit of the brass wire used for hanging lamps!

On Sept. 25th, 1856, the General and some few intimate friends went as far as Civita Vecchia with the Père Besson, whence he sailed for his Eastern destination. He writes to M. Cartier as follows:—

“ON BOARD THE ‘SIMOIS,’ *September 30th, 1856.*”

“My dearest Brother,—Before this reaches you, you will probably have heard that the Reverend Father-General has sent me on a Mission to our Convent at Constantinople, and then to Mossoul,

where I am to remain as long as may be necessary for the reorganization of the Mission, which is henceforth to be entirely French. I thought not a little of you while preparing to start, and had hoped to write before I left Rome, but there was so much to do, and so many letters to answer, as in a measure to hinder me. I say in a measure, because there were times when I might have written, but that I hardly felt sufficiently calm to do so. I take Frère Augustin and good Frère Midan, whose unchanging devotion you know well, with me. This journey is a fresh proof of his devotion, for which I am heartily grateful. Père Schaffhauser will follow in a week, and join us at Aleppo, so that we may cross the desert together. I scarcely need to tell you how earnestly I feel to want the prayers of all who love us, or how specially I count upon yours. We began our voyage uncomfortably enough, with a heavy sea which made every body ill, but now all is prosperous. We are at present going from Malta to Syra, where, with God's Blessing, we ought to arrive in the course of tomorrow. The motion of the ship makes it difficult to write, but I hope you will be able to make me out. This morning the sea was like a mirror, and nothing could be more beautiful than the boundless horizon lit up by the rising sun. . . . I am very happy, and am able to throw myself heartily, without any *arrière*

*pensée*, into my new work, in which I hope God will give me grace, weak as I am, to serve Him."

Having touched at Smyrna, where he said Mass at the Franciscan Convent, Père Besson arrived at Constantinople on October 4th, and remained there until the 17th, when, armed with a firman which styled him and his two companions "distinguished physicians," they continued their route by sea to Rhodes and Alexandretta, thence by land following the line of Aleppo, Nisibis, and Diarbekir, whence they were to descend the Tigris to Mossoul. It was a trying journey to unpractised travellers;—Frère Midan had been in Palestine, but the rougher experiences of Asia were new to him, and the little party were not properly provided with coverings for the night, with necessary provisions, or with fire-arms, which were required to keep off the predatory natives who hang about the skirts of travellers. Moreover, the long days on horseback were very tiring to one not used to riding, and Père Besson soon became quite ill with fever. He describes their journey, and how they missed the way to Antioch, in very simple, unexaggerated language; the last night, when he was really ill and exhausted, was spent in a little hut, where, he says, they found "all that was necessary,"—in other words, a crust of hard bread and a handful of hay! During the eleven weary hours spent on

horseback, he comforted himself with repeating Psalms and passages from the Lamentations.

At Aleppo, Père Schaffhauser met his brethren according to appointment—and here, under the instructions of MM. Marcopoli and Bentivoglio, representatives of France, Père Besson learnt, not without some discomfort, the use of the *chibouque*, so necessary for visitors to the East. On All Saints' Day, after saying High Mass at the Franciscan Convent, the Dominicans started again in Eastern costume, not very similar to that ordinarily worn by the *Frères Prêcheurs*! Their horses were but indifferent, and that day's journey was long. During the necessary halts, the brethren said their Office together, and it was Frère Augustin's duty to be purveyor;—tea and coffee, with hard eggs, being their chief food; varied occasionally by a chicken or some dried fruit, bought in the native villages. Of course the rule of total abstinence from meat was suspended during such severe travelling, and at times when perhaps no other food might be attainable. At night their tent was pitched, one while beside some pleasant brook, another time within the precincts of an old cemetery or of a ruined village. They reached Orfa on the 7th of November.

“There we made a triumphal entry! I had sent our guide on with the Consul's letter, and we were

met and taken to the Consulate, where great hospitality was shown us. When we went out, the Consul's dragoman accompanied us, preceded by his janissary, who, as the wont is, cleared our way forcibly, driving camels, mules, and people alike before them with his sticks. It is the Eastern custom, so no one seemed astonished; but we would gladly have dispensed with such honour! Orfa is an interesting place; and the spot where S. Ephrem the Syrian was buried is still shown. The Turks have built a mosque over the house where they affirm Abraham to have been born, and they have a reservoir which they call Abraham's lake. It is full of fish, which are so tame that they follow you in troops as you walk along the shore. . . . These fish are held sacred by the Turks."

On November 11th the travellers went on towards Diarbekir, accompanied by the Superior of the Capucins at Orfa. It was a weary and perilous journey, by roads little better than stony water-courses; and though the Dominican party was not molested by robbers, they passed the bodies of two murdered men, scarcely covered with stones, by the way. From Diarbekir the travellers descended the Tigris in *kellecks*, a kind of raft-like boat, to Mossoul. The voyage occupied ten days, and but for the cramped condition in which they were, the boat being too small for the party, this was the pleasantest part of

their journey; the scenery beautiful, so that Père Besson often sighed for his drawing materials, and the climate delicious. At a later date he introduced various recollections of the Tigris into his paintings at San Sisto, and he frequently urged artists to leave the more beaten tracks, and seek fresh inspirations in the glowing East. They reached Mossoul on S. Andrew's day, and on December 11th Père Besson writes,—

“Mossoul is more like a tomb than a town, it is so full of ruined or forsaken houses. I was rather ill when we arrived; but we found a most kind Italian doctor here, who is a great friend of our Order, and thanks to his care, I am all right again. The climate is said to be generally good, and people are supposed to grow very fat here; so they tell me that I shall soon begin to grow into a ball! I cannot say that I see any prospect of it at present!”

The difficulties of a long journey were not the only ones, or the most trying, which Père Besson had to encounter. On arriving at the Dominican Convent at Mossoul, he found that Padre Marchi, the Superior, had taken offence at the mission of an Apostolic Visitor, as casting some reflection on himself, and accordingly he had gone to Mar-Yacoub, leaving a young French monk in charge, who went even beyond his instructions, and rejecting the Visitor's authority

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entirely, declared that if it was asserted in any degree, Padre Marchi and all his community would instantly depart. It was a trying position,—Père Besson had come expecting to be welcomed by his brethren, and here was open war instead! With his characteristic gentleness, however, he refrained from asserting his rightful authority, and until such time as he could communicate with Padre Marchi, Père Besson put up with the impertinence of the young monk, who continued to be as disagreeable as he could make himself.

Padre Marchi was an able, active man, quick-tempered, but well-meaning, and on receiving Père Besson's conciliatory letters, he returned to Mossoul, and was speedily on excellent terms with the Apostolic Visitor. But before this, he had had differences with the Propaganda as to the management of the Mission, and he now persisted in returning to Europe with his community, leaving the whole burden upon Père Besson, who found himself almost alone in this half-barbarous country, unacquainted with Oriental languages, and surrounded with dangers; amid which he would have to reorganize the Mission, make up to the Christians for the loss of Padre Marchi and his religious, and conciliate, as best he might, the Chaldean clergy.

Out of the 80,000 inhabitants of Mossoul, 1200 were Christians of different ritual, all equally despised by the Mussulmen, and not a little divided among

themselves. The Chaldean and Syrian Christians are united to the Church of Rome; but they abhor the Latin ritual, and accept the protection of her missionaries unthankfully and grudgingly. Père Besson could not preach to those around him, he could do little but afford general protection to all Christians who were oppressed, by appealing to the French consul; and by degrees he won the confidence of the Christians, and of the Chaldean clergy, while devoting as much energy as possible to the schools already established by the Dominicans, from which it might be hoped that a more intelligent, advanced generation would issue forth, as also that they would afford subjects for a seminary in which to train a native clergy of a higher character than existed at the present time. The Chaldean priest was often no more than a worthy labourer, who after a few weeks' technical training, received Holy Orders, and then administered the Sacraments among his people, without discontinuing the daily labour by which he supported his own children. Yet to touch the Chaldean ritual would be fatal to all success. Père Besson's hope was that in time there might be a branch of Chaldean Dominicans who, while maintaining their own ritual, would follow the Roman rule, and be the most effectual missionaries among their own people.

Meanwhile, the good Father lost no opportunity of



giving physical relief where he could do no more ; and profiting by his supposed medical knowledge, he soon was in great request as a doctor, all the more as the ordinary Mossoul physician fell ill himself, and was unable to practise. Many members of the profession have a less active business than was Père Besson's. By five in the morning he had said Mass and finished his private devotions, and from that time till the mid-day heat made it impossible for the sick to come out, he was besieged with patients. Then he would set forth with a young interpreter, and go to all who needed him, Christian and Mussulman alike, coming home at night, worn out and weary, to his uninviting supper, which was shared by his only companion, a lay-brother (Père Schaffhauser was at Mar-Yacoub). Even his night's rest, taken after Oriental fashion on the roof of the house, was often broken by a summons to persons who had been stung by scorpions, or were otherwise taken suddenly ill. Faith in the doctor is perhaps generally an important element of success ; but Père Besson had really some considerable medical skill. He had learnt a good deal during his anatomical studies at the Hotel Dieu in Paris, and his intimacy with Dr. Tessier had brought him among medical men, in whose professional pursuits he was always interested. Then, too, his work during the cholera season in Lorraine had

taught him a great deal, and before leaving Rome he had procured sundry medicines and corresponding instructions from Dr. Mayer, as well as certain homœopathic books and remedies, all of which he used as he best might. Later on, at Mar-Yacoub, the sick were often brought several days' journey to the Dominican doctor, as many as a hundred patients sometimes coming in one day—poor Christians, rich Mussulmen, Nestorian priests and bishops, native chieftains—all alike claiming his care. Sometimes he would be sent for from great distances, and if possible, Père Besson never refused to go. Occasionally he worked most successful cures, but when asked if he had not effected some that were miraculous, he would smile, and say, "Certainly, if *le bon Dieu* would perform miracles, I should be very glad to make use of the opportunity." He used to tell, laughingly, how once he really thought he had worked a miraculous cure by means of homœopathy. A native woman brought her child to him, with its gums grievously affected by scrofula: he gave her certain remedies, and at the end of a week, the mother returned with her little girl, all fresh and rosy, without a symptom of disease. The Father was delighted, he called his brethren together to see the wonderful cure, and it was not until the unwelcome intervention of his interpreter that the truth was discovered. Through him, the poor mother, who

was perplexed at the general excitement she occasioned, explained that this child was the twin sister of the one she had brought before, and had never been ill!

A letter of Père Besson's to the General gives some idea of his position during this first year of his sojourn in the East.

"MOSSOUL, *June 1st*, 1857.

"Most Reverend Father,—There is but little to tell you, expecting the immediate arrival of Mgr. Amanton as we are still; what there is, is satisfactory. On the whole the mission has not suffered from the departure of the former missionaries. Padre Marchi is much regretted, but it is quite understood that he did not go because the management was altered, and that on the contrary, it was his determination to go which involved this change. I receive all the usual visits, and there are many proofs of increasing confidence on the part of those around. In many quarters regret is expressed that our Sisters are not arrived, because they might do so much good. I hope that this may be managed when Mgr. Amanton is here, they would be invaluable both for nursing the sick and teaching the girls. I visit the schools, and do all that lies in my power to foster this confidence, which is a first step towards effecting any real good. It is evident that all the original opposition to our having Sisters here to work arose

from Padre Marchi's reluctance to employ them. . . . I quite understand the reasons for his opposition, but I think the objections were overrated, and that if rightly managed, the establishment of Sisters here would be of great spiritual advantage to the mission. . . . Père Daruis writes me word that those he took into Persia answer admirably;—they have a school of one hundred girls, they teach older girls on Sundays, and visit the sick—the Mussulmen often consult them, and show them great respect. It would be well that the Sisters destined for this mission should go for a time to the Sisters of S. Vincent de Paul, to be trained in nursing the sick, as well as in the management of schools for the poor.

“The Patriarch's man of business, a highly respectable ecclesiastic, comes often to me. I talk of Mgr. Amanton to him, and have imbued him with confidence in the Bishop, so that I hope all will go right as regards the Patriarch. At Mar-Yacoub Père Schaffhauser resumed his religious habit on Ascension Day. He tells me that no one seemed to notice it. He is well, and busy doctoring, but he is very anxious to get Frère Lion, whose medical knowledge would be much more useful here than in France, he says, and would greatly strengthen the influence of our mission. Frère Augustin is with Père Schaffhauser, he has not been well, but is better now. Frère Midan and I are well—the

great heat has not as yet come on. Give me your blessing, Reverend Father, as your most devoted son in our Lord.

“FRÈRE HYACINTHE BESSON.”

Amid all these cares and occupations, Père Besson found some stray moments for art. “I have been painting a Madonna on a gold ground,” he writes; “it is nothing very marvellous in itself, but it suits the character of this country, where, as you may imagine, art has no great success. . . . I have said nothing of the scenery; when I return I shall have plenty to tell you, and you will see that the glowing East is not altogether such as poets make it out to be! But there are great beauties in it all the same, and a painter might make very valuable studies. I have made a few sketches, but on too small a scale, and too much hurried to give any fair idea of the country<sup>4</sup>.”

When at last Mgr. Amanton reached Mossoul, accompanied by two French religious, he found Père Besson quite knocked up with work and heat, and his first act was to send him to rest at Mar-Yacoub.

This Convent is in the Kurdistan mountains, about sixteen hours' journey from Mossoul, beyond the ruined Nineveh, and the Dominican Fathers liked to trace a resemblance between its position and that of Chalais. It was founded by Padre Marchi, and en-

<sup>4</sup> April 30, 1857.

larged by Père Besson—both looking upon Mar-Yacoub as the best central point of the mission. The Chaldean Christians are in a low state of cultivation both intellectually and morally, and the mountains of Kurdistan are full of Nestorians, under the rule of a Patriarch, whose tone is not a very high one, judging by the French Missionaries' reports. Père Besson made various journeys among these mountains with a view to winning back the Nestorians, if possible, to the Catholic Faith—roughing it to a degree which required all the austere training of conventual life to render bearable, and not unfrequently exposed to real danger. As a specimen of the people he was among, the Nestorian Bishop Mar-Elias introduced one of his priests to Père Besson with the commendation, "He is really worth something—he has already killed several men." After a difficult and perilous journey the Dominicans reached Mar-Saona, where the Nestorian Patriarch Mar-Schimoun lives, and where they received a questionable hospitality, for the servants who accompanied them overheard a chieftain who belonged to the Patriarch's escort discussing with his companions the desirability of disposing of the "white dogs" who presumed to intrude upon their territory! However, no more came of the threat, and they were received the next day by Mar-Schimoun, who resembled a military chief more than a Bishop, as it seems. He

was cold and haughty at first, but Père Besson's warmth and geniality won him at last, and they parted good friends, the Dominican expressing his hope that they might one day be reunited in the Faith, to which Mar-Schimoun would give no answer save "God is merciful."

In the spring of 1858, Père Besson was recalled to France. He had established the Dominican Mission in Mossoul and Mar-Yacoub, and brought about a good understanding with the Chaldean clergy, and Père Jandel greatly desired his presence and co-operation in Rome once more;—the Holy Father himself had also expressed a wish that Père Besson should return. Much as he loved Rome and his work there, the Father did not leave the East without reluctance. It was his characteristic to throw himself heartily into whatever he undertook, and already he had taken strong root at Mossoul and especially at Mar-Yacoub, where his departure was a cause of unmixed regret not only to his own countrymen, but to all the Christians, and even to many Mussulmen, who had proved his charity and helpfulness. On April 20th he started from Mossoul, accompanied for the first stage by the four Dominican Fathers who were left behind, and by M. Barre de Lancy, from the French Consulate. Frère Augustin and Frère Midan were to return with Père Besson to Europe, and the party was increased

by a Jacobite Bishop and priest, and one or two other travellers. They journeyed across the desert to Aleppo, Père Besson enjoying himself like a schoolboy, amid the scenery and vegetation (now in its full spring burst) of the Mesopotamian plains, the towns and villages raised upon the ruins of more ancient cities, among which he was specially interested in Nisibis, which stands upon a world of fallen columns and sculptures. When the party encamped, Père Besson used to take his gun and provide their supper with as much eagerness and energy as if shooting were his natural vocation, and Frère Augustin's journal is a regular gamebook, duly entering the pigeons, partridges, woodcocks, or ducks bagged by his Superior, who was no contemptible shot. Père Besson had received permission to visit the Holy Land on his way back to Rome, and accordingly he and his companions went by sea to Beyrouth, and thence through the ancient Sidon, and Saint Jean d'Acre, visiting the Convent on Mount Carmel, where he found time to descend to the shore in order to sketch the sacred mountain.

Continuing their route we find Père Besson dismounting, and kneeling down in a burst of almost ecstatic devotion at the first sight of Nazareth, and one can imagine the devotion and reverence with which he visited the hallowed scenes of Cana, the



lake of Tiberias, and Mount Tabor; returning to Nazareth for the Feast of Corpus Christi. He reached Jerusalem on June 7th, where he remained until the 24th, entering into the sacred associations of the place with all his characteristic fervour, and filling his portfolios with sketches which are said to be of a higher tone than any that he made at Rome or elsewhere. A night spent in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, a visit to Bethany and to Bethlehem, were among his choicest privileges, and it was while sorely longing to linger yet amid such deeply-interesting scenes, that duty compelled him to say his last mass in the Holy City, and resume his homeward journey. Père Besson arrived at Rome on July 8th, 1858, and almost directly had audience of the Holy Father, to whom he had brought a stone covered with cuneiform inscriptions. The Pope had some conversation with him concerning the East. "We add to our museums from its source," Pio Nono said, "but in my heart I have little satisfaction in that quarter, and I sometimes ask myself why there is so poor a result from all the labour and money spent in the East? I suppose it is owing to the state of servitude in which the people are, without energy to raise themselves:—What can I do for them?" And then he quoted the Prophet Isaiah, "Quid est quod debui ultra facere vinæ meæ, et non

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feci? an quod expectavi ut faceret uvas, et fecit labruscas?<sup>5</sup>”

<sup>5</sup> “What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?”—Isaiah v. 4.

## CHAPTER VII

Divisions in the Order—Père Besson sent to France as a Peacemaker—Return to Mossoul—Dangers in the East—Massacres of Libanus—Fever at Mossoul—Père Besson goes to Mar-Yacoub—Last Illness—And Death.

THE Dominican family had not been altogether without troubles during the two years of Père Besson's absence; and on his return to Europe he found two parties, each equally desirous of God's Glory and the perfection of the Dominican Order, but taking a different view of the manner by which these results were to be obtained. Lacordaire, whose strong earnest nature was largely moulded by his contact with and knowledge of the world, had always thought it wise not to press the strictest observance of Rule at first, whereas Père Jandel believed that the strength and efficiency of the Order lay in that very observance, and as we have already seen, on becoming General of the Order, his attention and efforts had been devoted to bring

this about. There were many men ready enough to resist the pressure of a strict Rule, who were animated by more selfish motives than those of Père Lacordaire; and the contest between the two parties waxed warm. The Pope referred the matter to Cardinal Orioli, who had full power to decide upon the disputed points. He died soon after, and difficulties continued to thicken. Lacordaire's term of office expired, the Constitutions required that the Province of France should pass into other hands; and the General desired to establish a second province, having its head-quarters in Lyons, where a community of brethren devoted to the Rule should attempt the strictest observance of the Constitutions. In their ardour, the brethren at Lyons went too far, and offended many friends of the Order, by the seeming slight thrown upon Lacordaire and his work.

Things were in an uncomfortable position, and an appeal being made to the Pope, he decided on sending Père Besson into France, to investigate the general condition of matters, and to endeavour, if possible, to reconcile the differing parties. He went almost immediately on his return from the East, and Père Lacordaire wrote,—

*“August 26th, 1858.*

“I am satisfied at the turn things are taking. I saw Père Besson at Lyons. He was acting in the most sincere desire for peace, and with the most con-

ciliatory intentions. He has also been to Chalais, Toulouse, and Bordeaux, and is now at Paris;—the letters I receive prove that his visits have had a good result every where.”

In September, Père Besson assembled the Priors of all the French Convents and their delegates at Flavigny, and the result was that Lacordaire was re-elected as General of the province of France, and peace was made, not without a considerable sacrifice of his own opinions on Père Besson's part, and much blame laid to his door by those who did not fully understand alike his difficulties and his motives.

“The affairs of our province are put right at last,” Père Besson wrote, “and Père Lacordaire is confirmed as Provincial; Lyons being under the immediate jurisdiction of the General, so I hope all will do well. I was very much pleased to find Père Lacordaire so like his old self in all these trying circumstances. He was so full of moderation, and showed such a conciliatory spirit, and such a high tone, that I could do nothing but give God thanks. Nothing short of that could have brought about peace, but now I hope it is restored, and for good, with the help of God.

“The day after my return to Rome I had an interview with the Holy Father, who received me with his wonted paternal kindness. But prejudiced as he is

against Père Lacordaire, he thought our election ill-advised, and gently reproached me with weakness, not realizing that I had really acted with thorough impartiality, and solely with a view to the welfare of the province. I was not astonished at the Holy Father taking this view of the matter, and I explained every thing fully to him, assuring him that so far from regretting what has been done, I felt sure he would have felt as I did, had he seen Père Lacordaire under these difficulties, so generous, so conciliatory, and so firm."

The Pope was satisfied ; but there were many ready to blame Père Besson, and accuse him of wrong-doing in his delicate task. Above all, he feared that the long-standing friendship between himself and Père Jandel might suffer, since although in the abstract his opinions entirely agreed with those of the General, the exigencies of the present time had obliged him not to follow them out. They had been as real brothers, and while at Rome Père Besson was the General's confessor, his counsellor, and chief stay. Was this friendship to suffer? Père Jandel did his utmost to prove that his affection and confidence in his friend was no ways diminished ; and he wished to draw him from San Sisto, where Pere Besson had retired to soothe himself, after his trying mission, with painting, and place him at San Clemente as Prior. But Père Besson declined this post, unless peremptorily called to it by obe-

dience, as also the proposal that he should take up his abode at La Minerva, feeling unequal to the stir and unrest of that house—the head-quarters of the Order. His earnest desire was to retire to some quiet convent in France; but God's Providence had another destiny in view for him.

Since Père Besson left the East matters had not prospered at Mossoul. Mgr. Amanton had been called away, and in their perplexities the Fathers of this Mission intreated the General to send Père Besson back to them, pleading that nothing but his gentle wisdom could cause their work to thrive, and influence the Chaldean clergy, who were always difficult to manage. Père Besson's heart was touched by the appeal—the East had a powerful attraction for him, both as an artist and as a Christian, and it seemed as if he might do better service for the Church there than at Rome. Accordingly he offered to return to Mossoul. The General felt that his presence would sustain the Mission, but shrank from parting with so valuable a labourer in the European field. Fresh entreaties, however, from the East induced him to refer the question to the Pope, who at first altogether refused his consent; but upon the representations of Cardinal Barnabo of the Propaganda, the Holy Father desired Père Besson to go into retreat, and then decide on the course most pleasing to God. There-

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upon, the Father went for this purpose to a Convent at Marino ; and the result was that, having fully faced the subject, he became more desirous of returning to the East, "even if he were to die there alone in some lonely village, far from all his brethren." But even then his renewed offer to go was not at once accepted, and he wrote, April 22nd, 1859, as follows :—

"I have delayed writing to you ; but though I really have been very busy, especially trying to finish my painting, that was not the only reason for my silence, which arose rather from my own inward sadness—a feeling which seemed to shut me up. It still clings to me, but to-day—Good Friday—I am better, and I will devote the time after office to you. You were not mistaken in your conjectures as to what would happen about me. So far it appears to be decided that I am to remain here, unless certain fresh difficulties should alter the decision, which however is not likely. It has cost me a great deal, and does still, to be calm and contented under this, for I have the strongest drawing to our Mossoul Fathers, whose position in that far-away land is likely to become daily more difficult. If the French Government carries out the present proposal to withdraw our Consul, their personal safety as well as the prosperity of the Mission will be in great danger. We are petitioning, but I know not what will be the result.



The moment that there is an attempt to settle the Oriental question, which cannot be done save by driving the Turks out of Europe, and from the Asiatic coasts—that moment will, I fear, see an outburst of fanaticism, of which the Christians who inhabit the interior will be the first victims,—nor can European artillery save them. What will become of our Fathers if France withdraws her protection? I know too much of those countries not to feel that we have every reason to be alarmed.”

A little later, the Pope determined to grant Père Besson's request, and he received permission to share the dangers and trials of his brethren at Mossoul. He announced this in a few touching words to one of his spiritual children, which sufficiently show that he had counted the cost.

“ROME, *May 22nd*, 1859.

“My dear Daughter in our Lord,—The serious position in which our Mission is placed, especially since the French Consulate in Mossoul was withdrawn, has decided the Holy Father to send me there, according to the request of our Fathers. I have been appointed Superior, and am to join them in the autumn. Meanwhile, I am going almost directly to France, in order to push the efforts about to be made, with a hope of inducing Government to retract their fatal measure. I shall hope to see you,

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and speak of the things which concern your soul, for the last time, for I do not expect ever to return. Farewell, daughter, may God bless you !”

On the same day Père Besson wrote to M. Cartier, “The alarming position of our mission, owing to the suppression of the French Consulate, which is equivalent to the withdrawal of protection from our Fathers, and indeed from all the Christian population of those districts, has led the Holy Father to decide on sending me to Mossoul. I have received my papers, and in a few days I start for France, in hopes of promoting the efforts made by Rome and the Eastern Christians to obtain the revocation of a step which I feel sure would never have been taken if the disastrous consequences it involves had been foreseen. I do not know if I can do any thing—it is no easy matter to obtain the recall of a Government measure—but come what may, I shall rejoin our Fathers this autumn, and bear the brunt of the battle with them. I count on seeing you while I am in France, to say a last good-bye, for when once I go, it is not likely that we shall meet again in this world.”

Early in June, Père Besson went to Paris, where he laboured indefatigably in behalf of the cause he had come to plead. Just at this time M. Walewski was succeeded as Minister for Foreign Affairs by M. Thouvenel, who had been French Ambassador at

Constantinople, and had himself pressed the necessity for retaining a French Consul at Mossoul. This settled the question favourably, and Père Besson left Paris, visiting Nancy, Neufchateau, Langres, Flavigny, Dijon, Lyons, and Toulouse,—a welcome visitor in every community. He also went to take leave of Père Lacordaire at Sorèze, to whom he always clung with the warmest affection. His tour was extended to Belgium, where he visited the Dominican Convents of Louvain, Ghent, Tirlemont, and Bruges ; at the latter place all his keen artistic feeling was kindled by Hemling's works,—but as he said himself, his painting days were over, and he could not linger even where the greatest temptations offered themselves.

All his farewells were made as being the last, and he seemed to take it for granted that he would never again see any of the friends he was leaving, save in Paradise. One of his spiritual children thus describes his leave-taking in a letter to a friend :—

“Père Besson was all love and charity. It made one think of our Dear Lord when at the last Supper He poured out all His Heart to His disciples ;—our good Father seemed to be so full of love and so ready to give himself wholly for his children. And, alas, this is the last farewell before he goes—perhaps to meet a martyr's death ! I cannot think of any thing else. Oh, how ripe his soul is—nothing

of self seems left, he is God's only! I never saw such transparent purity and humility, or such a deep spiritual life and love, producing such calmness and patience and devotion. He is indeed 'conformed to the likeness of the Saviour,' from Whom all his strength proceeds. His is certainly a life 'hid with Christ in God,'—and one longs to be ever so little like him, while he goes on in his gentle, unassuming way, quite unconscious that he is drawing hearts to him, seeking nothing but to serve God humbly. After he had said mass and made his thanksgiving, I saw him leave the chapel, bowing as he passed the tabernacle with an expression which seemed to say, 'Yes, my Saviour, I am going for Thy service, I leave for love's sake, I am wholly Thine.' That day, as before, there was a crowd waiting to see him; every one wanted to get a few words of that kindly, helpful direction, which seems to come out of the depths of a loving heart, and to bring one so near God. What must Jesus be, if those who carry about the mere reflection of His Love and Grace are so infinitely winning and attractive! The dear Father preached several times, and saw various people for direction while he was here, and, as I say, there was a crowd always wanting him. I was specially favoured by God;—I cannot say much about it, but He gave me grace to pour out my whole heart. . . . Père Besson

spoke of the Heart of Jesus so tenderly and with such emotion. . . . I understood as I had never done, the heavenly element which seems to mingle with his earthly being in so remarkable a way. It was a father teaching his child, referring to his own spiritual experiences, all was love and compassion.

“How can I speak of the parting? He had taken leave of the Convent, and came in trembling with emotion. I was waiting to say a few last words. ‘They wanted me to stay another day,’ he said, ‘I could hardly get away—perhaps I ought to have staid.’ Then he sat down, saying, ‘I am so tired.’ ‘I will not keep you,’ I said; and then I knelt down, adding, ‘You will pray for me, will you not?’ His thin hands trembled as he said, ‘Farewell, farewell; farewell in the Lord, I leave you in His Hands,’ and then rising, he gave me his blessing. I was going away, when I remembered he had promised to give me his address. This he wrote down, and then I knelt again for another blessing. ‘Do not grieve,’ he said, ‘we shall meet again in the Bosom of our Lord; whither we are both journeying, I hope,’ he added earnestly. ‘Father,’ I said, ‘if you die, do not forsake me—be my director still.’ But he made no answer, and I was forced to leave him. He went to the end of the corridor with me, and I departed, deeply moved, but calm, and more than ever longing to learn of that Divine

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Master Whose disciples are thus holy, unselfish, and loveable."

To another of his children, Père Besson wrote in leave-taking from Paris,—

"Let us leave all things to God ; I hope He will give me grace to serve Him more profitably in the East than I do here. As to you, my dear child, resign yourself wholly to Him. He will make up to you for my absence, and give you a hundredfold more than I can give, through some other channel. You can always write to me, and I will make it a duty not to leave your letters too long unanswered. Let us leave the future to our Master ; it is all in His Hands, and this life's future is so uncertain, that the only true wisdom is to give oneself up to Him Who overrules it all, with no thought save to do His Holy Will day by day." . . .

Père Besson's departure was fixed for Sept. 18th ; and just at that time the Pope's health made it doubtful whether he would be able to grant a farewell audience to his Dominican missionary. However, on the 14th, Mgr. Merode summoned Père Besson, with Père Rouard de Card and a Belgian Dominican, to the Holy Father's presence. Père Rouard de Card describes the interview thus :—

"It was late, after the Ave Maria, when we were

taken to the Holy Father's own room, for he was confined to his bed. As we entered, he said, 'Here is Père Besson, who is determined, come what may, to go to the East. I should have liked to keep him in the West, but what is one to do? *Spiritus Dei ubi vult, spirat.*' We remained half an hour with his Holiness, who talked about the Mossoul Mission, France, Belgium, Holland, and the Church generally. 'I feel,' he said, 'as though our Lord were saying to me, as He said to S. Peter, "*Duc in altum;*" for like him, I am in the midst of the sea, a prey to every stormy wind, and like him I am tempted to cry out, "Save, Lord, I perish." But our Lord sustains me, and seems as though He bade me walk upon the waters. Poor S. Peter began to sink, and I think I should have done the like. But after all, if one's faith is strong, what matters? If our Lord does not succour His Vicar, who will? "The gates of hell shall not prevail against you."'

"At the conclusion of this audience, the Pope gave the Fathers a hearty Benediction. 'I bless the Dominicans at Mossoul, in Belgium and Holland, I bless all the Order of Saint Dominic. I bless the weak brethren that they may become strong, and the lukewarm that they may become fervent. I bless the strong and fervent that they may grow in strength and fervour. I bless all, and pray that the Holy

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Spirit may confirm their hearts in the unity of the Faith and in perfect love.'"

Sept. 18th, 1859, saw the last leave-taking; the General Père Jandel and a few other attached friends went on board the ship "Quirinal" at Civita Vecchia with Père Besson, and there parted from him, never to meet again in this world. He and his two lay-brothers reached Mossoul on Nov. 7th, and proceeded shortly to Mar-Yacoub, which Père Besson wished to make the central point of the Mission. His intention was to study Chaldean with diligence, in order to facilitate his intercourse with the Nestorians; but he found no time for quiet occupations.

"You ask about the paintings you fancy I am making," he writes to a friend, "but in truth I have never touched a brush. I am continually going to and fro my mountain home and Mossoul, under the pressure of troublesome matters which leave no time for thinking of art. I have begun to learn Chaldean, but for the same reason I make no progress. There are plenty of thorns and briars here; not that I regret on that account having come. Where do we escape them? or who knows which are hardest to bear? The only thing to be done is to expect them to the last. Our good General has the largest share." . . .

In February, 1860, a fresh trouble came in the ill-



ness and death of the French Consul, whose appointment had been obtained with so much difficulty. Père Besson ministered to the sufferer, both body and soul, as well as to the poor widow, who was left in a far-off land with two little children. His tender heart was deeply touched by her sorrow, and he also felt that the difficulties of the Mission were increased by this event. He wrote,—

*“April 14th, 1860.*

. . . “The Cross awaits us here as every where, and I meet with opposition in quarters from which one would not expect it, from the Christians to whose service we are devoted. . . . This unfortunate East is a prey to contentions, a very Babel of strife. One must make up one’s mind to that, and do what one can, without heeding the rest. The suppression of the Consulate first, and then the death of the Consul who was appointed, have been serious blows to us, and the poor Christians in the mountains are pillaged and assassinated without our being able to help them. The Kurds know that we have no Consul, and even after a successor arrives, it will take some time to regain our lost influence. Personally, we are unmolested, but we mourn over the woes which we are powerless to avert. God, Who permits these things to be, has His own designs, and we can but submit, and ask His Mercy.”

The massacres in Libanus which took place about this time were not reassuring.

“Libanus is in a flame,” Père Besson wrote, July 27th, 1860, “and the Druses are committing frightful havoc; but we are far from thence. Nevertheless, the Mussulmen are uneasy at the line taken towards Turkey by our European Cabinets, and the general fear is that they intend to divide the Ottoman empire among themselves. If the day should come when their fears seem about to be realized, it will unquestionably be one of great danger to us; but we are not uneasy, we are in God’s Hands, and do not feel our situation more perilous than that of our brethren in Italy. Oriental fanaticism is not so much to be dreaded as revolutionary fanaticism, and moreover religious, above all missionaries, ought to be at home in danger, and without exposing ourselves rashly, we should not shrink from it, when placed there by God’s Providence.”

“August 17th, 1860.

“The sad events at Damascus will have made you anxious about us. Of course it is impossible to foresee what may be in store for us, if this fanatical movement spreads; but so far we are not uneasy. There are some ill-conditioned men in Mossoul, who would gladly come down upon the Christians here, as in Damascus; but the Pasha keeps them in check by

means of the police and increased military force. Outwardly, things are quiet, though there is doubtless fire beneath the smouldering ashes. In a little while we shall know better what to expect. A great deal will depend upon the effect produced by what has happened in Syria. We do not pay much attention to these future possibilities; but go on in our ordinary quiet course. If the explosion once reaches our neighbourhood, we can scarcely look to escape, so far off as we are from help; but we shall hold on to the last, and not be alarmed. All will be as God wills."

*"September 22nd, 1860.*

"Things are quiet just now; and the fanatics are restrained by the measures taken by Turkey—thanks to European intervention. But no one can say how long this will last. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. The Church in Italy is in still greater danger than we are; and her children cannot count on to-morrow. Surely Providence never made it more plain that our home is not in this world, and that we must fix our hopes and affections beyond it!"

*"November 12th, 1860.*

"We continue in much the same state—outwardly quiet; but the storm broods over us, as, I believe, over the whole Turkish empire. . . . A single spark would suffice to kindle the flame, and rouse the furious spirit of vengeance which possesses most of these

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Mussulmen. They abhor the existing government of Constantinople, and sooner or later it seems certain that some fanatical attempt will be made to overthrow it, and that will probably be the signal for a more or less general massacre of Franks and Christians. Such an event would put an end to the Ottoman empire, for it would inevitably bring all Europe to the rescue; but not until Christian blood has been profusely shed. This seems to me the prospect at present, under the seeming calm."

Meanwhile the attempts made by the Dominicans to reconcile the Chaldeans, and raise their tone, were unsuccessful, in spite of every effort.

"It took me some time," writes Mgr. Amanton, "fully to appreciate Père Besson's firmness and resolution. I used to know him in Rome, but I had never seen him save under peaceful conditions, and I did not know what he could be in battle. Then he came out firm, where most men would have wavered; his usual gentleness, which finds an excuse for every one, disappeared, and directly that he saw the need for vigorous measures, he was resolved to use them, and nothing could move him."

All these cares pressed heavily on Père Besson, and the death of Père Schaffhauser in the end of November was an additional trial. Moreover, he did not feel that sufficient encouragement under their troubles was sent from Rome.

“Would you believe,” he writes, January 28th, 1861, “that we have not yet had one word of encouragement from the Propaganda? It is mere forgetfulness, but at such a time that is much to be regretted. Surely they ought to know at Rome what surprise and pain such forgetfulness causes. My heart has been so full, so weighed down by the many trials we have experienced, that I have had no energy to write save what was absolutely necessary. . . . Our position as regards the Chaldean Christians does not improve, but rather grows worse, . . . and amid all these troubles we have lost one of our youngest and ablest Fathers, . . . another was seriously ill,—and Rome seemed to have forgotten us. . . . Alas, what sorrowful days there are in one’s life! We think much of man’s ingratitude to us; why do we not dwell more on our own ingratitude to God! . . . O Father, infinitely patient and tender, give us grace to forgive others as freely as Thou forgivest us. Root out from our hearts all false zeal and bitterness, and fill them with Thine own true love and charity, so that we may love our enemies, and strive earnestly for the salvation of those whom duty forces us to contend against. It is well for us to cast a glance upon ourselves, when we are obliged to condemn others, and gently to learn a healing self-humiliation which may drive out all the hardness and sharpness of pride.”

Père Ligier had been sent to Rome with a view to setting things to rights as regarded the Mission and the Chaldeans; the result being a conciliatory letter from Pio Nono, inviting the Chaldean Patriarch to come to Rome, and personally discuss their position. This was assumed by their enemies to be a condemnation of the Dominican line of action, and fresh attacks were made upon them. They were even accused of luxury and secularity, the latter from the inevitable necessity they were under of keeping horses, their only means of locomotion, and firearms, which were necessary for their personal security, as well as for occasional supplies of food. The native diet of rice or millet, and a very strong-flavoured oil, made the use of animal food a necessity; fish and potatoes being unattainable, and all kinds of vegetables exceedingly rare. The only real luxury in which the Fathers indulged was the cleanliness of all their personal arrangements, which were certainly unlike those of their neighbours, the Chaldeans. Yet relaxation of rule was made a subject of complaint against them, and though not credited at Rome, Père Besson was informed of the accusation, and received a recommendation to be more strict in its observance! It was rather hard, all things considered, and he wrote in confidence, "There are trials harder to bear than death—things which wound one's heart and soul; and

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such things as these are now our daily portion. What will be the end, I know not; all I can tell you is that we stand greatly in need of your prayers that God may give us patience, and keep us safe in His great Mercy."

Père Besson was under the impression that the authorities at Rome had no longer their original confidence in him; and this it was which he felt "harder to bear than death." Under these circumstances he thought that his usefulness in the East must be hindered; and he sent in his petition to be recalled from his onerous post. But the call to quit it was not to come through man: God Himself was about to give His faithful servant rest.

Typhus fever broke out at Mossoul that spring with violence; and with the pressing need for exertion, Père Besson forgot all that harassed him, and gave himself up as formerly—in the cholera season—to the sick and dying. Rich and poor, Christian and Mussulman, alike received his care—the former needing spiritual as well as material assistance. It was too much for the powers of a stronger man; he used to come home at night to the Convent too exhausted to eat, and almost unable to write necessary letters, prepare the remedies which would be needed the next day, and say his office. The brief rest he might look for when these duties were performed, was often

broken by fresh calls upon his charity. Unconsciously to himself, Père Besson's strength failed day by day: all around could see that so it was; but he was absorbed in his work, and thankful to be consumed on behalf of the Chaldean Christians, who had been the source of so much care to him. Père Lemée heard that the Superior was breaking down, and went to Mossoul in order to persuade him to go and rest at Mar-Yacoub—which was accomplished with some difficulty. But it was too late.

On the 22nd of April Père Besson went with Mgr. Amanton and Père Lemée to their new house at Raban Ormez; and on the 24th the two Fathers proceeded to Mar-Yacoub.

“He had been slightly feverish,” Père Lemée writes, “which we attributed to the journey; but that day he was better and quite cheerful. We rode side by side, talking of many things. There had always been great sympathy between us: he was like a most affectionate father to me; but at this time I cannot say how closely I felt drawn to him. His conversation was so loving and yet sad; there was such gentleness in all he said, and he seemed to find such comfort in talking freely and fully, that I could not help saying, ‘O Father, do you not think that there is a real pleasure in suffering with those one loves?’ As we talked on thus, we reached



the torrent of Maltai, and rested there. The servant found us some cresses, and Père Besson ate with something like appetite. In the afternoon we reached Mar-Yacoub."

Père Besson was very weary, but he was pleased to be with the brothers, to whom he was attached, and to find himself once more in the convent for which he had a special affection. He examined the improvements which he had ordered, and which were just finished, and remained some time in the chapel. The next day he said Mass for the last time; and he dined with the community, but he could scarcely eat any thing; and in the afternoon, violent headache forced him to go to bed. From that moment he grew rapidly worse. No one could deceive themselves as to the serious character of the illness; nor did the Father himself wish to do so. He at once accepted the coming suffering and death with his wonted gentle, loving submission, and offered all to God. Death to him was only gain, not because he looked confidently to his reward, but because, in his great humility, he thought, with a holy Bishop of the English Communion, that, "as he added day to day, so he added sin to sin." As he lay on his bed of pain, he could see the Kurdistan mountains, where he had hoped to labour for Christ, and the resting-place in which so recently

he had helped to lay his comrade and friend Père Schaffhauser, beside whom he was himself about to be laid. His own room was divided by a partition; where in the outer half a bed had been placed for those who nursed him;—and in the restlessness of fever he often went from one bed to the other, seeking a relief which he was not to experience here. Already he was too weak to go alone even this short distance. Amid his pain, he kept his eyes fixed on his crucifix, and on the pictures of S. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin, which were near him, often pointing to them, when speaking was too great an effort, as though to show what comfort he found in the thoughts they suggested. While still able to talk, he dwelt chiefly on the concerns of the Mission, the perplexed state of which was his only earthly regret; and he also spoke lovingly of his friends in Europe, and of his spiritual children, regretting that he had not been able to do more for them. On the third day of his illness he made his confession to Père Lemée, saying that he felt himself getting rapidly worse, and knew not how near the end might be.

During the night of April 28th he was getting fast weaker, and the next day, when the French Consul and a physician from Mossoul arrived, a different treatment was tried, but it only had the effect of

bringing on delirium. Even this was a fresh witness to his habitual purity and holiness of mind, for through all his wanderings there was never an impatient or unloving word; he was solely occupied with thoughts of duty and the wish to promote the welfare of the mission. Every sound which reached his room he took to be the arrival of Mgr. Amanton, and he wanted to go and meet him to discuss mission-business. It was difficult to keep him in bed; and at last he almost forced the lay brother in attendance to give him his clothes, and with the unnatural strength of fever he got as far as the convent terrace. This was his last effort; stupor soon followed, and Père Lemée administered Extreme Unction, and was then obliged to leave him, being himself seized with the fever. Père Rose remained with their departing brother, whose last hours were perfectly calm; his eyes alone retained any power of motion;—they showed that he followed the prayers said by those around, and to the last they were fixed in loving adoration upon his Saviour on the Cross. On May 4th, at 3 p.m., the hour hallowed as that of our Dear Lord's giving up the ghost, His faithful servant was set free for ever from the burden and heat of the day, and entered upon his blessed rest.

Père Rose wrote of the closing scene as follows:—

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“MAR-YACOUB, *May 5th, 1861.*

“My dear Father,—Our Mission has been sorely tried this year; it is barely five months since Père Schaffhauser died, and now we have lost the head of our Mission, our dear Père Besson. This dearly loved brother died yesterday of typhus fever, after a fortnight of great suffering. His health had been visibly failing for some time past, but he did not realise it, and although he was urged to take care of himself, he neglected to do so, thinking more of the edification of those around than of his own needs. Although his digestion had suffered considerably from the bad food which is all that these mountains afford, he would keep the strict Eastern fast of Lent, which tried him too severely; especially when, following his Master in devotion to the suffering and needy, he gave himself up to very hard work for the sick. His last months at Mossoul were spent in the relief of fever-stricken patients of all classes. He was indefatigable in his labour for body and soul, and his gentle tenderness cheered and soothed many a bed of suffering. Every one loved and respected him; the Mussulmen themselves, when brought in personal contact with him, overcame their prejudices against Christians, and revered his unselfish goodness. This ripe saintly life was soon to have its reward; and as we saw him sinking under the weight of toil, we realised that he

was not to be much longer spared to us, and entreated him to come and rest awhile in the fresh air of Mar-Yacoub. He came, but it was only to sicken of typhus fever! From the beginning of his illness, Père Besson felt that he was dying, and he waited his summons with full confidence in Jesus his Saviour, and the calm hope which God vouchsafes to His chosen ones.

“How can I describe his unchanging patience through the severe suffering of those days? There was never a murmur, never one word save of perfect resignation to God’s Will. It seemed as though he was thankful to accept his pain. As usual, he never thought of himself, but as long as he could speak he was always comforting us, regretting the trouble he gave us, and planning for the welfare of our Mission. Except for one day and night, when he was delirious, he retained perfect consciousness throughout, and he received the last consolations of religion with all his wonted angelic devotion. When keen suffering or weakness hindered his speech, we still saw the motion of his lips in prayer. His eyes were continually fixed upon his crucifix, from which he would turn to us with a gentle smile which seemed to bid us be of good cheer, for we should soon meet again in Heaven.

“At last the hour came in which our dearly loved

Father was to leave us; I was kneeling by his bed saying the prayers for the dying, and at the end he pressed his lips to the crucifix, and as he did so, his pure soul passed away. You know how we loved him, and you know how he won the love of those around him; you can understand the sadness with which Frère Antoine and I closed his eyes, and performed the last offices for him. His death is an irreparable loss to the Mission;—I know not how it can be supplied among the young missionaries who leant upon him, and learnt their best lessons from his example. There is no need for more. It is sufficient to say that his last hours were in keeping with his saintly life. Pray for our dear Father, or rather pray for us who stand in so much need of prayers, and for our Mission, so sorely tried of late.

“Your sincerely devoted

“FRÈRE MARIE AUGUSTIN ROSE”

On Sunday, May 5th, Père Besson was laid in his grave. Père Lemée was ill, and Père Rose was too much overcome with grief and fatigue to say the Service, and moreover there was no other priest of the Latin Ritual at hand; so some of the neighbouring Chaldean monks performed the last offices, at which the Consul of France was present. A little later Mgr. Amanton and the Fathers of the Mission built a

chapel near the Convent, as a memorial to Père Besson, moving his body, with those of Père Schaffhauser and another Dominican, Padre Garignani, to the vault beneath, where they rest in sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection.

Over the altar are the words, "Beati mortui qui in Domino moriuntur;" and around the walls, "Hic sunt expectantes beatam spem et adventum Domini nostri Jesu Christi."

The tidings of Père Besson's death was received in Europe with thankfulness for the warrior who had conquered in the battle of life, but with tender regrets for the friend lost to sight. The Holy Father, who had so reluctantly allowed him to depart, grieved pathetically over his "Monachella," as he was wont to call the refined, pure-minded young religious; and the Dominican General, Père Jandel, mourned his earliest and dearest friend, from whom no passing differences of opinion had detached him. Writing to one who mourned Père Besson deeply, Père Jandel says, "I firmly believe that that good and faithful servant has entered into the joy of his Lord, and that he would say now to us, in the words spoken by his Master to the Apostles, 'If ye love Me, ye would rejoice, because I go unto the Father. . . . It is expedient for you

that I go away. . . . I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.' You had not much hope of seeing him again in this world, and he is far more powerful to help you now by his intercession with your Heavenly Father than while he was yet in this land of sorrow and tears. Comfort yourself with this thought, and do not sorrow as one without hope. The hope of the righteous is immortal."

Throughout the Order Père Besson was sincerely mourned; Père Lacordaire sent a circular to all the French Dominicans announcing his death, and though so ill as to be unable to write with his own hand, he dictated one of his warm hearty outpourings to M. Cartier, in sympathy for their common loss<sup>1</sup>.

"He was certainly among those who did most to further our first foundation," Lacordaire says, "by means of his devotion, his clearness of mind, and his personal holiness. Especially he was God's chosen instrument to draw hearts together and heal our wounds, when we were so harassed by internal divisions; and amid the many griefs I have had, I look upon his faithful friendship as one of the blessings and comforts of my life."

The spiritual daughter whose touching account of their last earthly meeting has been given above, was

<sup>1</sup> Père Lacordaire was already fast failing. He died on November 21, 1861, just six months after Père Besson.



ill at the time of Père Besson's illness. One day she came accidentally upon a prayer to the expiring Heart of Jesus, which she had lost, and vainly sought for. She felt drawn to say it daily, feeling a presentiment that Père Besson was dying. But on May 4 she forgot to say the prayer, and though at the time she owed the Father a letter, she could not make up her mind to write, so strong was her belief that he was dead. "Do you know that somehow I have left off praying for him," she wrote, "and I rather ask his prayers. Of late I have often caught myself talking to him as if he were present, and asking his prayers; and I do not think it can be wrong:—perhaps the angels will carry my words to him at Mossoul if he is still there."

## CHAPTER VIII

### Père Besson's Direction—Spiritual Letters.

THIS sketch of Père Besson's life would be incomplete without some reference to what, after all, was probably his most effectual work for God,—his direction of souls. No one can read his letters, simple and unstudied as they are, without feeling how helpful the guidance of such a man must have been to souls struggling upwards towards the life of grace. Madame Swetchine used to say that she had never seen any one who bore so distinctly the outward stamp of holiness, and this was in a great measure, doubtless, the result of his deep humility, which was so intuitive, so entirely a part of himself, that like all true humility, it was unconscious; and while it gave a special charm to his manners, which were naturally gentle and refined, it had nothing forced or obtrusive. He always used to wonder why people loved him so much, and drew to

him so quickly ;—too unselfish to know how attractive his total freedom from self was. Love of God led him as a natural consequence to love of men. “On, ever on towards God,” in his own words, “Jesus must be the stamp of our souls. When I want to learn more of His Heart, I recall the moments in my life when I have felt and understood Him best, for it is only in meditating and dwelling upon Him that one can attain any patience, humility, gentleness, detachment or love of souls, and of holy poverty. Oh, these are moments when one seems to feel one’s own heart beat against His Sacred Heart.” It was noticed among his friends that Père Besson’s habitual and most natural action was a little movement of his hand towards heaven, which was specially significative to those who knew him well. A religious who asked for some remembrance of Père Besson, received the following characteristic prayer : “O Jesus, Saviour, only Physician of my soul, I cast myself all laden with sins and weakness into Thy ever ready Bosom, trusting to Thine infinite mercy. Humbled as I am at the sight of all that I am, I know that I do not yet see myself as Thou seest me, do Thou look upon me in pitying love. Lay Thy healing Hand upon my wounds, and fill my heart with the precious balm of Thy life-giving love. Do for me that which I dare not seek or ask for myself. Let

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me be Thine only, wholly Thine, at all costs ; in humiliation, in poverty, in suffering, in desolation ; Thine as I must be before Thou wilt be wholly mine. Thou art my Master, my Lord, my Saviour, and my God. I am Thy poor weak creature, who has nothing, and can have nothing save what Thou, Jesus, my only hope, vouchsafest to give me." Lacordaire used to say that when he found himself among brother priests, his test of them was the mental decision as to which he would choose as his confessor? and there was something in Père Besson's look and manner which seemed to draw many to seek spiritual consolations at his hands.

"When we went to Rome," a lady writes, "I took a letter from a priest to Père Besson, asking him to see and confess me. I went the very first day to Santa Sabina, accompanied by my husband, who for long had not received the Sacraments, the sole drawback to my happiness. Somehow I had a hope that Père Besson might do something for us, even before I saw him. He received us with his own special kindness, read the letter, and said in the gentlest way that he was at my service. I was full of thankfulness at receiving such help ; but I longed for my husband to share the privilege ; I hesitated, and at last I said, 'Thank you, Father, but I would fain not absorb all your kindness myself.' He understood me, and

going up to my husband, took his hand. He could not withstand the charm of that peculiarly loving, gentle face—he felt himself touched and subdued: tears came into his eyes, and in a few minutes we were both on our knees receiving Père Besson's blessing, having made an appointment for the next day, which was to be the means of uniting my husband and me more closely than ever in the Sacred Heart of our Dear Lord. It was the happiest moment of my life."

The personal guidance of souls was an absorbing interest to him, before which all other occupations yielded; he felt what Lacordaire has expressed, that "intercourse with souls is the one real happiness of a priest who is worthy of his mission; the one thing which prevents him from regretting all that he has cast aside of earthly links, friendships, or hopes." Père Besson was always studying and fitting himself more and more for this branch of his duty, by prayer and meditation, and whatever instruction he gave to others was always from the innermost depths of his own heart; he sought earnestly and sincerely to follow the precepts which he laid upon other men. When any person sought his guidance, he would put aside all other occupations, and go patiently and carefully into their needs, and from the time he accepted the charge, it was fulfilled as faithfully as though he had no other claim upon him,

“Henceforth” (he wrote to one newly coming under his guidance) “I shall consider your soul as committed to me by God Himself, and whatever I can do to promote your advancement in the path of faith, hope, and love, I shall do as in His Presence, by the help of His Grace. Do you look on me as your Father in Christ, as I shall look on you as a child entrusted to me by Him, for whom I must one day give account.”

He required, as the following extracts from his spiritual letters will show, a full trust and confidence from those who were under his guidance; but it was with a remarkable freedom from any desire to obtain influence or power. Ready to spend and be spent for those who needed him, Père Besson never thought of self in his dealings with souls, and we find him constantly suggesting other spiritual help to his children, or reminding them that some other priest might be better able to guide them.

“I would always encourage perfect liberty in the choice of a director,” he writes, “nor can I bear to take charge of souls who do not feel voluntarily drawn to me. Remember that I am no more than a ladder by which you are to mount up to God. If you feel that I am a suitable guide for your soul, be at rest; but if, on the other hand, you feel that I do not reach your real wants, that I do not understand you, or give

you such counsel as your soul requires, then do not hesitate a moment, but seek some more helpful director. There is nothing to be considered in the matter as regards me ; your spiritual benefit is the only thing to be thought of. I have no wish that you should belong to me, but that you should wholly belong to God ; and whether you attain to that through my guidance or that of any one else, is immaterial ; the only important point is, that you should indeed be God's child, and that as thoroughly as possible. This is what I have always felt with regard to direction of souls. I cannot understand the petty feeling which would lead one to prevent them from seeking guidance from any but oneself. Write to me fully and without restraint, even of the temptations you may feel to reject my guidance. I do not mean to constrain you to tell me all such matters, but rather I would encourage you to tell them when you think it profitable to yourself, in order that I may better understand the position of your soul ; such temptations are not voluntary. But if you are really troubled by them, the straightforward course is to tell me ; you would not be more free from restraint in concealing them ; and the best way of overcoming such troubles is to make them known to the director concerning whom they arise ; so once more, always be quite open with me, and do not harass yourself with

misgivings as to whether you say too much, or express yourself badly.

“I am always ready to help you, but do not distress yourself if you should not find in me all you need for your sanctification. I have often told you that I am very weak, very incompetent; and when you find that my words are true, you must think with compassion of me, and seek from our Dear Lord that help which His unworthy servant is not able to give you. I feel as a father towards you, and I look for a child's confidence from you.”

It was probably this fatherly feeling, which was no mere form of words with him, that gave him so much insight into the secrets of the heart. Père Besson had the gift of perceiving what men could not see for themselves, and of unfolding their own thoughts, and weaknesses, and wants in a way which often amazed those with whom he dealt. “He seemed to *see* the souls as well as the bodies of his penitents,” it has been said; and the remarkable recollection with which he gave himself to the work of direction, whether in speaking or writing, confirmed this impression.

He had no set system; patience, gentleness, and discretion were his chief rules.

“I think,” he said once, “that I go less and less



by set rules as time goes on, for I grow more afraid of acting upon my own opinion rather than God's Will. I would always rather wait than hurry on. Of course one must not let souls fall asleep; but neither must one hurry them, or there is great risk of deceiving oneself as to what are God's real intentions concerning them; and one may easily lose sight of the fact that all true perfection lies in fulfilling God's Will in that special position to which He has called us, although that position may not in itself be the highest we could attain to. My leading principle as regards a religious vocation is, that the first call should come from God; and that we must not hinder the workings of His Providence by any impatience of ours. It is sometimes His Will to retain souls for long in what may appear a state of great imperfection, in order to lead them on through it to a more true perfection."

A short paper concerning direction gives Père Besson's summary of its obligations.

I. Direction requires that one should lay bare one's natural inclinations; how far one yields to them; and how far one strives to overcome and mortify them.

II. One's prayers and meditations; whether one gives the due time allotted to them; and their practical results.

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III. Self-examination ; one's progress or backsliding.

IV. One's faithfulness to the light of conscience, to direction, to the workings of grace within us, and to God's blessings and mercies.

V. The beneficial results of one's confessions and communions.

VI. How far one is honest in acknowledging one's temptations and difficulties, concealing nothing from one's director.

I. You are bound to confess every sin of commission or omission against God's Law, all resistance to grace ; in short, all that weighs upon the conscience.

II. When you have accused yourself of all you remember, do not begin hunting after forgotten faults ; the time between your confession and absolution is a most precious one, which should be given solely to seeking deeper contrition.

III. If past faults come back to your mind, they must not keep you from Communion ; tell them at your next confession.

IV. Under some forms of temptation, go on as if you were unconscious thereof ; the best way to drive them away is to despise and treat them as of no moment.

V. If you are really troubled with temptations, raise your heart to God, protesting that you desire and love Him Alone, and seek to love all else in and for Him Only; that you are ready to give up every thing for His Love;—this will promote detachment, and unite you more closely to Him. Then go back to your usual occupations; but never try to regain composure by arguing with yourself.

VI. If you want to decide whether you are failing under temptation, and there is no evidence against you, the decision should be in your favour (when the sun shines we know that it is light). Then do not begin to reconsider the question, but be at rest.

VII. When you feel overwhelmed, and know not what to do, or how to seek counsel, remember what S. Francis de Sales says: “I know what I *wish* to do, but I don’t know what I *shall* do.” If immediate decision is necessary, do your best, and be honest with your director afterwards.

Père Besson always sought to impress upon those he dealt with that bodily mortification is a means, not an end; and that where discretion was lacking, it might easily hinder instead of forwarding spiritual growth.

“I grant,” he says, “that bodily mortification, combined with the spirit of prayer, is most profitable; but a thing may be good in itself, and yet not always

expedient. Great discretion is necessary in dealing with the body, because it is subject to laws which do not always allow the soul to have full empire over it. It must be chastened, not ill-used; subdued, not crushed; it must be treated as subject to the soul, and punished if it rebels; but we must not refuse to supply its real wants, or it will be unequal to its duties; and bodily weakness often seriously affects the soul. The true spirit of mortification is one which expands the soul in heavenly things, while it checks the overflow of self-love and creature-love; so that by its means we may learn to love all things in and for God Alone.

“When the soul prostrates itself before God, it ought to come forth filled anew with life given by Him before Whom it has cast down its burden; and therefore we ought to arise with fresh warmth and energy from the confession of our wretchedness. It is of the very essence of humility to set the soul free from all self-esteem and self-confidence, so that it may prize nothing in itself, save that which is of God, and lean solely upon Him. The result of this is true peace and tranquillity of mind—the certain test of a really humble heart. A humble heart will rejoice in the knowledge of its own weakness, because by that knowledge it has grace to perceive the infinite Mercy of God—a perception which grows with all

such self-knowledge ; and thus true humility thankfully accepts the consciousness of imperfection, thereby realizing more intensely the goodness of God.

“ My one desire for you is that you may be wholly and entirely God’s ; and I think that your weaknesses, your imperfections, and faults may promote that, if you sorrow duly for them. As you become more humble, you will grow in the holy Love of Jesus, and so you will be more closely united to Him ; but too frequent and too fretting self-inspection are a greater hindrance to this than people generally suppose. We must be in peace before we can win light, and peace involves sincere and hearty humility, which expects nothing of itself, and every thing of God. Humility trains the soul in quietness and confidence, so that God’s Spirit may have free entrance therein, and work His good pleasure. We may define humility as a real love of setting self aside, and what we love we accept restfully. I do not mean that the humble soul rests in its own unworthiness, but that in accepting the consciousness that it is unworthy it rises up more lovingly to God, and takes stronger root in Him from the conviction that it has no strength in itself. It is in the depth of our own weakness that we realize the depth of His Mercy, and when the soul realizes that Mercy, it rests therein, and finds to the full how wholly God is its life, and how the more it can

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be free from self, the more truly it lives in Him. Such a soul does not affect to possess any thing, while yet it possesses all things, for it is raised above all that is earthly when it can see and desire God's Holy Will in all that occurs—that Will Alone being its life, its light, its hope, strength, and joy. Then we learn to rejoice that we are nought, and God All in all—and thus humility becomes love. It is for love's sake that Jesus has done so much for us ; and for love's sake we should do all we can for Him. Love is the source, the key of all heavenly mysteries, into which we can enter by no other way. Love is our only light. Simplicity is the soul's attraction towards God, a humble, tender, generous approach towards Him ; and Him Alone. It detaches us from external things, and love attaches us to God ; they are but different names for the same thing. Simplicity helps us to refer all to God, and thus to reduce the multiplicity of this world's cares to a divine unity. By means of simplicity we learn detachment and self-renunciation, and mortification is inseparable from these. Our three vows forward this. Poverty separates us from this world's goods ; chastity guards our senses, our eyes, and ears ; and obedience sets aside the will."

Père Besson was pronounced to be an over indulgent master of novices, and the whole tone of his direction is one of great sympathy and tenderness ; but he

could reprove and administer bracing words when they were required. Thus we find him writing to one of his children :—

“LA QUERCLA, *September 3rd, 1854.*

. . . “When, my poor child, will you become reasonable? I have often told you that I am specially interested in all that concerns your soul, and that I will never forsake you ; why cannot you be at rest, instead of harassing yourself with all these utterly groundless fears? . . . You write as though there were no one to consider save yourself, and as though I could give you the relief which God sees fit to withhold. Read over what I have said before now to you, and you will find an answer to all you say to-day. I know your difficulties, and I pity you from the bottom of my heart ; but I also know that God allows you to meet with these troubles in order that by bearing them patiently and humbly, you may offer your whole being in perfect sacrifice to Him. You say that your pride is wounded, and I answer, so much the better, I am very glad of it, for you can never make any progress in perfect charity until your pride is mortified. If you were full of conscious love to God, without any struggles and temptations from self, I should be afraid for you, but while I see you fighting with Satan, and writhing, so to say, under what is laid upon you, I am in good heart, for this is the royal road of the

Cross. Put your whole trust in God, my daughter, cast yourself unreservedly into the gulf of His boundless Compassion ; do not parley with the devil, but when temptation assails you, take instant refuge in that stronghold, where he cannot touch you. Let your maxim be to die in all things to yourself ; you cannot go far wrong while that is your rule, but strive that love of God be the paramount motive of all your self-sacrifice. Do not be impatient and fretful with yourself ; and however you may fall, rise up trustfully, and correct yourself firmly but gently. You may be certain that all our impatience, however cloaked, is a form of self-love, and that true humility will deliver us both from impatience and discouragement. Put your confidence in God only, for it is He Alone that can give you strength. I expect to return to Rome on the 14th. Be quiet till then, and for the future do not let yourself be thus taken by surprise by Satan's suggestions that you are forsaken. He only seeks to dishearten you, and lay you open thereby to all manner of temptations."

To a Dominican nun he writes,—

"My Daughter in the Lord,—Be at rest, do not torment yourself thus ; seek only to meet the grace you have received with corresponding love and faithfulness, and time will set things straight. Over-anxiety is worse than useless ; it only distracts and



hinders one. When a difficulty, a temptation, or any other trouble comes upon you, reflect quietly what you ought to do, and then carry out the resolutions you have come to at your Saviour's Feet, in a firm, tranquil spirit. . . . Give yourself unreservedly to Him, and learn how sweet He is to those who love Him; learn it through a faithful performance of all your duties, and in the seemingly hard practice of mortification and penitence. Jesus is sweet even now to your soul; what will He be when you know Him better, when you know Him so well that you will have wholly lost sight of yourself? Before we can be His, we must die to ourselves; but what a blessed death it is of which we can say, 'Henceforward I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' . . . . Self-renunciation, mortification, and humiliation are difficult matters, I know well; nor do I wonder that you find them such; the cup is a bitter one, but it is the cup of which Jesus drank, and that takes away the bitterness and infuses a sweetness which you will taste in course of time. But it requires time—Samson slew the lion before he tasted of the honey! and your Bridegroom Jesus was crucified and crowned with thorns before He entered into glory. . . . Do not be afraid; the alarm you experience at the very mention of mortification is profitable, because it teaches you how weak you are, and you will realize

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all the better that whatever there may be in you of good, is not your own, but comes from Jesus only. You will turn to Him with more true sincerity when you have realized that of yourself you can do nothing, you will be grateful to the very weakness which constrains you to lean on Him for every thing, and thus you will become more than outwardly humble,—humble in heart, for that consists in love of God's Mercy as seen by the light of our own nothingness.

“God has given you great grace during your retreat ; you are beginning to see light, and as that enters into your soul you will find that Jesus is there in truth and love. You are beginning to understand His gracious dealings with your soul, and to appreciate the grace of your vocation, you realise more the powerful drawings of His Ineffable Grace, and your heart is expanding joyfully to hope and happiness, to a loving, generous gratitude. Yes, my daughter, you know now that Jesus is your All, and that whoso possesses Him, possesses all things. I cannot say how thankful I am to see this change working in you. Do not hinder it, but daily offer yourself, as a poor little flower, to the Sunshine of Grace, which will tinge and warm and strengthen you with its rays. Give yourself up to Him, for life and death without any reservation ; let it be your sole study and happiness to follow Him, and draw Him to yourself.”

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seeking Him in all things, and doing all for love of Him. This Advent season calls us to make ready to receive our Saviour's Coming—a coming so gracious and comforting, specially to us poor sinners, who so greatly need His Grace. He comes to share our sorrows, to share our hardships, and to mingle His childish tears with ours, until the time when He will shed all His Blood for us on the Cross. I write on the feast of S. Andrew, and it is not without meaning that the Church appoints his Commemoration at the beginning of Advent; the thought of that fervent lover of the Cross calls us to higher and nobler thoughts, till we are able to cry out with the Martyr Apostle, 'Hail, O good, O blessed Cross.' Even so should we hail the Manger and the Cross, we, more than others, who have been called by our Dear Lord to a closer union with Him, in our religious life. He Who called us has said, 'If any man will be My disciple, let him take up his Cross and follow Me,' and that is the whole summary of our vocation, the secret of our life, the mystery of our calling, to follow Jesus, bearing our Cross for love of Him. Thrice blessed they who understand it, for it is not revealed to us by flesh and blood, but by God's Holy Spirit, Which reveals all hidden things, and Which teaches the true followers of Christ that if they would rise and reign with Him, they must first suffer and die.

with Him. May God, Who has led you on so lovingly, add yet more to His Grace, and fill your heart with the Love of Jesus and His Cross. That is your all in all, the treasure of your soul. Love it, and draw others to love it likewise. What could be a more blessed, a nobler mission? God has been very gracious to you; bless Him hourly for it, and ask that I too may become wholly His, for indeed I come sadly short."

To a nun after taking the habit.

"My dear Sister,—I rejoice to hear that you have taken our holy habit—you were preparing for it when last I wrote, and now it is done—and you have laid aside the trappings of the world for the garb of S. Dominic. Henceforth you must strive after that inward clothing, which lies in putting aside your own mind and will, to clothe yourself with the mind of S. Dominic, or rather, with the mind of Christ. And this clothing is not, like the other, to be done in a day. The outer garments of the world are easily laid aside, and the white tunic, the scapulary, cloak, and veil are soon put on; but it takes many a day of weary toil before we can put off self, and put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

"And now, my dear sister, you must set yourself heartily to work; you have made a good beginning, go on bravely, and without self-indulgence. The

heart which aims to be blended and united with the Heart of Jesus, must be ready to endure all things, it must know how to bear both the outward piercings of the lance, and the inward sores of desolation, contempt, loneliness, anguish, and sorrow, which are harder far to endure. One while you will suffer through your external surroundings, and another time you will be weighed down by your own inward self; on all sides you must die to that self, renounce it, and carry your cross silently, step by step, after your Saviour to Calvary. Say often within your heart the Apostle's words, 'I am crucified with Christ. I am nailed to His Cross; yes, nailed there.' Do not seek to draw away hand or foot from those piercing nails; abide steadfast under the trial, or if that cannot be, if nature bows beneath the burden, seek no other consolation than Jesus Christ, Who bears it with you and for you. Let Him be your stay, your strength. Rejoice to be despised with Him, to suffer like Him and with Him. Be willing to be told of your faults, believe that they are great, and not well seen by you, and be sure that there is no truer kindness than that which points them out to you, and helps you, through pain and humiliation, to overcome them.

"Give yourself up fully, like a little child, to your mistress of the novices; let her deal with you as she sees fit, and do not be too curious as to the why and

wherefore of every thing. It is good for you that sometimes you should seem to be forgotten, not considered or helped; even, as it may appear, coldly treated. Bear such trials patiently, if God sends them; they do not really arise from want of love, but their object is to purify your devotion and obedience from the mere earthly element of human love. Give yourself up unreservedly to your guides; and always be perfectly simple, trusting, and open in your dealings with them. Straightforwardness is a royal road; a straightforward heart never gets far wrong, for if any thing turns it aside, there will be a sure re-action which will set it right. This is a short but true summary of perfection. But while I am preaching thus to you, I know full well the weakness of our hearts, for whatever the things may be which trouble you, I find no less within myself. We are weak, and we would fain be strong; what is to be done? The answer is plain; we must pray ceaselessly that He Who is All-powerful and Who loves our souls would Himself be our strength, that He may sustain us, and by His Gracious help enable us to reach thither where His Love has called us; and grant us everlasting bliss after our long and weary toil; we must ever gaze on Jesus crucified, press Him daily and hourly to our hearts, and in that purifying embrace we shall win the heavenly strength we need alike for life and death. May our Lord be ever with you."

**S**



“You must aim at that patient courage which overcomes all difficulties; remember that your first object should be to conquer self, and your too lively imagination. . . . That peace which is promised you, and to which I hope you will attain by and by, will be full in proportion to the fulness of your victory over self. Calm peace and joy are the fruits of sincere mortification; all other is a false peace, and its unsubstantial foundations will crumble and leave you more troubled than before. . . . Do not be disheartened at the prospect of difficulties; work on bravely. . . . Life at the longest is soon spent; its joys and sorrows pass rapidly away, and eternity will restore fourfold whatever we have forsaken here. One moment in the Bosom of God will outweigh all possible pleasures in this world of sin. Be of good cheer, for as each day shortens the troubles of this life, so each day brings that blessed eternity nearer. A few more tears, a few more cares, a year or two more or less,—and the end will come. We shall see God, and the things of this world will have passed away. Farewell; may God give your heart all the strength you need! Pray for me.”

“My Sister in our Lord,—You know that I did not answer your letter at once, because I was in re-

treat. I only came out yesterday, and now I hasten to reply. I am thankful to hear you are enjoying such peace; it is the 'hundredfold' promised in this life to those who forsake all, themselves included, to follow Jesus Christ. Up to the present time this peace has been a hidden treasure for you. You were in possession of the field where it lay hid, or rather you had entered within the field, but you had not found the treasure. Now you have discovered it; see that you guard it watchfully, keeping your heart solely for Him to Whom you have pledged it for ever, your Saviour Jesus, Who Alone can give you real happiness. . . .

"If you use them aright, your past faults will be as a ladder whereby you may ascend to a deeper spirit of detachment, and a fuller love. Always contemplate your own wretchedness through the medium of Divine Mercy—that Mercy which is the Refuge of all men, but specially of us, who have escaped from the world's tempest. God, Who originally rescued us from the sin wherein we were born, has had still greater pity upon us. Jesus has called us, and His Word raised us anew. We live through His Grace; we live, but not without fear, until our final victory over death. Who will sustain and strengthen us against our manifold enemies, above all, against ourselves? Who but Christ Jesus, Who has called us and cleansed us, and Who is All-powerful to keep us unto the end?

“Trust yourself henceforward wholly to your Saviour; a mother does not carry her child lovingly in her arms a while, and then let him fall as he may! And you know that He loves our souls more than the tenderest mother loves her child. When He lifts us up, it is not to forsake us again, but to gladden us with the light of His Countenance, and to feed us with the abundance of His Love. Unquestionably we may quit His enfolding Arms through our own ingratitude; but the child which feels itself falling cries out to its mother, and will she not hold him up? Even so do you cry out to Him, “O Jesus, Thou art Father and Mother, Husband and Brother to me, Thou art my only Hope. I give myself up to Thee, for I am weak and helpless, unable to save myself, nor were I able to walk alone would I stir without Thy guiding Hand. Thou art my Treasure, my Delight, my only Good.

“You ask whether that can be called our ruling passion which most often besets and assaults us, although we do not consent to its suggestions? There are different kinds of ruling passions. Just as we are under the influence both of nature and grace, so there are some passions which have a powerful hold upon our natural temperament, although they do not get the mastery, because we resist them; and there are others to which we have less natural pre-

disposition, and which nevertheless gain so great hold over us, because we do not resist them sufficiently, and allow them to take root in us. Thus you see there are two kinds of evil tendencies; those which we inherit and those which we contract by yielding to bad habits. The subject is too long to discuss fully. I will only say that the most dangerous of these tendencies are those to which we offer least resistance; and they become the greatest source of ultimate evil to us. Farewell; I have no time for more. May God keep you ever in His fear, and hope, and love! Pray for me."

. . . "This anxiety of which you complain, is really nothing but a temptation;—the restless desire to ascertain how far you were to blame in past events, is a useless wish, arising out of self-love, which seeks to justify itself, instead of leaving all to the judgment of God, Who reads our hearts. Whether you were wrong or right, cast yourself unreservedly into His Merciful Arms, leaving past, present, and future to Him; do not indulge a restless desire to know exactly how far you have done right, but own from the bottom of your heart that you have sinned, and that more deeply than you can estimate; and make an act of perfect hope in Jesus, Who died to save your soul. Do not seek justification or peace within yourself, but in Jesus, where Alone they can be found. Never allow the remem-

brance of your faults, or your daily increasing self-  
abhorrence and mistrust, to lessen your confidence in  
Him, but rather, as you realise your own weakness  
more and more, so should you realise His Mercy. It  
is only in an absolute surrender of yourself to Him that  
you will find rest, and when you have done all that  
lies in your power, and feel that you have been faith-  
ful to your trust, do not presume upon it, but say  
humbly, 'We are unprofitable servants.' If, on the  
other hand, you have failed in your duty, and are  
stung with repentance, after the first pangs of sincere  
sorrow, lift up your eyes to Him Who is the Refuge of  
sinners, cast all your sorrow at His Feet, crying out,  
'I can do all things through Him Which strengtheneth  
me.' In truth you can do all in Him—nothing is  
impossible to him whose heart abides in lowly self-  
mistrust, and unreserved confidence in God. I would  
earnestly exhort you to strive after this confidence,  
there is no way more profitable for those who seek to  
follow in the footsteps of our Dear Lord. May your  
soul grow daily in His trust alone!"

To a religious.

. . . "I think you give too much weight to pass-  
ing words, which are often spoken without an un-  
kind meaning, or at all events without the importance

which we are apt to give them. Try to take a broader view of things, and not to dwell upon such trifles as these. The great evil in communities of women is that they pay too much attention to trifles, and do not know how to forget. Nevertheless this largeness of heart and of mind is very necessary for those who would be really at peace. . . . Try to persevere in your good resolutions as to sisterly charity, and never complain of any little troubles among your sisters, save to the Superior, or to me. Do not stop short in outward appearances, but look at the heart within. Many a time, in spite of weakness and faultiness, you will find more good there than you thought for. Strive to put away and crush all the susceptibilities of self-love ; by so doing you will be at rest yourself, and help others to be so too. . . . Let all your consolation spring from the Cross of Christ, do not seek to find any from the hidden sources of self-love. Strive to turn both external and internal suffering to good, accept all that tries you as specially necessary and helpful, and let your sole desire be to please God, rest satisfied if you are doing His Holy Will, bear the consciousness of your infirmities patiently, resist all temptations to be discouraged bravely, and cast yourself upon God, firmly resolved, come what may, to be wholly His. Avoid useless retracing of the past, do not remember it save as a stimulus to make up by present exertions for lost

time. In short, let the few days or years you have to pass on earth be worthy of your holy vocation, which is to have no hope, no aim, no will, no desire save God. 'God, and God Alone' should be the motto of a true religious; and if faithful to that, you cannot fail to be victorious in the end.

. . . "The kindly care of your Sisters will doubtless render the practice of your duties easier, but that will not do alone, our greatest difficulty is from within. Our heaviest cross, that which we are forced to carry ever about us, is self, and we need much humility, patience, and gentleness to bear it. You must expect to find it every where, at Toulouse as at Rome! . . . When you are specially troubled, try to remember what I have so often told you, that first of all you must be patient with yourself, and learn to bear with yourself, being humbled, but never discouraged by your faults. In this way only you will be at rest, and you will make a real progress, although it may not always be a conscious one. Try to keep a quiet heart, avoiding a multitude of aims and wishes—you need have but one, that you may serve God humbly; all the rest will come of itself. Let others seek what they will, but do you confine your longings to one thing, Humility. It is a great gift, and humiliations are our truest good. We cannot always understand this; and because we do not understand it, we are always aim-

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ing at things which we fancy to be greater and more desirable. But what can be greater or more desirable than that which our Divine Master has bid us learn of Himself, as His own special attribute? 'Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest for your souls.' Blessed indeed is the gift of humility—the very source of peace and of all holy love to God and man."

To a member of the Third Order.

. . . "May God give you grace to be more and more wholly His, uniting your will more closely to His Holy Will—that is the main thing; and then it matters little what our position may be in this world. All earthly conditions are but for a brief while. God places us therein that through them we may attain a blessed eternity. Do not fret, therefore, because you are obliged to live in the world, rather than, as you would wish, in the cloister. God's Help is none the less yours, and you will equally attain to everlasting salvation, if your daily aim is to do His Will where He has placed you. God's faithful servants are to be found every where, He appoints our respective posts to all alike, and what He looks at is not the difference of our position, but the faithfulness of our service in that position, whatever it be. . . . No one is safe in



any position whatsoever, unless it be that which God intends him to fill. Of course where we have a choice in the matter, we ought always to strive after the best and most perfect way, but even that should be done with an entire submission to God's Will, for the most perfect abstract way may not be such for us, if God has chosen some other for us. All happiness depends upon a dutiful heed to His Holy Will, but He sometimes sees fit to veil that Will in seeming mystery; and then, be sure, the very darkness which we think to be a hindrance, is in truth but part of the gracious dealing by which His Providence leads us on to the end He has in view. We need to learn subjection of our own minds and hearts, and very often nothing tends so much to teach it as our ignorance of the Saviour's intentions as to our earthly future. We know that we are in His Arms, and no more; whither He means to lead us we know not, but all must be well, inasmuch as we are safe in His Bosom Who is All-powerful, All-wise, All-good; and though we may ask whither He would have us go, in order to more perfect conformity to His Will, we must ask so trustfully, as to run no risk of losing a full and peaceful sense of His guidance, apart from all impatience and self-seeking. When He sees fit, He will make all plain to us. . . . 'As the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress, even so our eyes wait upon the

Lord our God, until He have Mercy upon us.' This will be your greatest comfort; wait humbly, wait patiently, and the time will come when you will know all that is needful for you. You will say that it is easy enough to say all this, but not so easy to do it. I know that; nothing is harder than to curb our wishes, especially when they are right and lawful. But, believe me, that which is so difficult to self alone, will become easy if you remember that it is God's doing, to chasten you for past faults, and to try your real love for Him. Formerly, when you knew His Will, you did not obey it as heartily as you might have done, and now that you long to know His Will and follow it, He tests and strengthens your faith by making you wait a while. Remember that S. Peter, who had denied Him thrice, was thrice asked, 'Lovest thou Me?'

. . . "You need confidence and love, to rest more fully on the Sacred Heart of your Saviour Jesus. It is there alone you can gain strength; and while you learn how to love, learn also how to suffer. You are almost crushed, because you shut up your heart, and allow your sorrow to eat into your soul, instead of pouring it out, like Magdalene, at the Feet of Jesus Christ. Have you forgotten how He said, 'Come to Me, all ye that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, for My yoke is

easy, and My burden light ; and ye shall find rest to your souls' ? Why then, dear sister, do you shut yourself up with your troubles, instead of heeding that Loving Voice which bids you come and find comfort and rest ? 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,' our Saviour says : words full of precious meaning, especially teaching us that whoso would see God, must have a simple, pure heart. Now your heart is pure, I am sure ; but it is not sufficiently simple. You create difficulties and raise mountains, and then busy yourself beneath the structure you have raised ! Do try once for all to turn to God like a little child, heartily, simply, without scruple or reserve, but with the same generous straightforwardness which you have in other matters. Do not be entangled in such cobwebs, go straight to God in all simplicity ; never fear ; if you are weak, He is strong ; what can you fear if you give yourself up freely into His Hands ? He is gentle and pitiful, He came to heal the sick, and bind up their bruises ; He opens His Hands and scatters blessings, graces, strength, and joy upon all, save those who will not open their hearts to Him. Would that I could take your heart, and give it wholly to Christ ! Do, I entreat you, drive away all these anxious thoughts which hinder your soul, and try to serve God cheerfully—that is what I would have you do now. Sadness will only

overwhelm and keep you from making any progress. Love and confidence in Him Who loved you so well that He died for you—that is what you want. No blessing can equal that of feeling and knowing that one is His for ever, of being able to say, ‘I am His, and He is mine. Nothing on earth can separate me from Him ; in Him I live, in Him I will die. Jesus, my Saviour ; mine for ever.’ Farewell ; I commend these thoughts to you, and pray God to comfort and strengthen your heart.”

. . . “Be resolute in overcoming self, and in bearing with your mental troubles whatever they be, leaving all to God, and doing whatever you know to be His Will, quickly and heartily ; be gentle, patient, humble, and courteous to all, but especially be gentle and patient with yourself. I urge this the more, because I think it is a very important rule for you. I think that many of your troubles arise from an exaggerated anxiety, a secret impatience with your own faults ; and this restlessness, when once it has got possession of your mind, is the cause of numberless trifling faults which worry you, and go on adding to your burden until it becomes unbearable. I would have you honest in checking and correcting yourself, but at the same time patient under the consciousness of your frailty. Remember that Jesus our Lord loves to dwell within a quiet heart, and to come to those who

are at peace with themselves ; restlessness and anxiety hinder our seeing Him, even when He is beside us and speaking to us. For the present I shall give you no other rule than this. Will you make it your special aim to apply it to your whole life, as the surest way to attain the perfection you seek after?"

. . . "It is easy enough, my child, to *say* that one is miserable and weak ; but to *feel* it gently and patiently is a hard matter, and only to be accomplished by steadfast gazing upon the Cross of Christ. As we look upon that, we learn what we really are. And the reason that only Saints are really humble, is that nothing, save a hearty search after perfection, reveals man's wretchedness and God's Greatness. I have always found that the holiest souls I knew were most conscious of their own weakness, and that in proportion to their growth in holiness. It was a great thing for you to have been silent with N——. With your character, that was a real victory. Perhaps, however, you thought he meant more than he did, and probably after all his opposition was honest. People may differ as to a point, and yet both may have really good intentions. . . . There are few persons from whom one cannot learn something, if, instead of being on the watch for blemishes, one would try to find out good qualities : in so doing, we should generally discover something which might be a wholesome

lesson to ourselves, and enlighten us as to our own infirmities." . . .

. . . "Now you are again in the midst of your work. When I remember how little time you can claim as your own, I feel that I, whose calling is to be at the disposal of others, have no right to complain. I would rather ask both for you and myself grace to give ourselves wholly to God, in giving ourselves up to our neighbour's service. That should be our continual aim, we can never really devote ourselves to our fellow-creatures unless we are first wholly God's. We are often greatly hindered in the fulfilment of our duties by an unconscious clinging to self, which holds us back from God, and which leads us to seek our rest in something other than the simple fulfilment of His Most Holy Will. We are apt to forget that the one thing essential to all good works is much more a thorough self-renunciation than any possible success in our undertakings ; self-sacrifice is an indispensable element of true zeal, and we cannot serve God fitly except through dying to self. If we honestly sought nothing save His Will, we should always be in a state of perfect peace, let what may happen. But very often, even when we ask that God's Will may be done, we still wish it to be done after our own fashion ; and our eagerness to do right often springs more from natural impetuosity than from

the workings of grace ; thence arise all manner of troubles and vexations. I have studied this in my own heart, and if you watch carefully, you will find it in yours too. Indeed it strikes me as a point for your special watchfulness and care, because with your naturally eager temperament you are less likely to fail in having good intentions than in following them out rightly. There is but one way to accomplish this, i. e. in every thing to seek God's Will so entirely and solely, that however eagerly you may strive to effect what you think right, it may always be in absolute subjection to that Holy Will. You must find your rest and satisfaction in that, not in apparent success. This is the way to attain true freedom of heart, inasmuch as it raises you above all earthly wishes ; and your peace springs, not from visible success or failure, but solely from the oneness of your will with God's, which cannot change. This is equally applicable to all the circumstances of life, and not only to the practice of good works."

"My dear Daughter in the Lord,—I thank God that He has kindled in you so fervent a desire to live in Him, for Him, and by Him, and I pray that He may accomplish the work He has begun in you, so that what as yet is but a matter of feeling, may

become a very deep and blessed reality within you. In saying this, I have no intention of feeding the dangerous self-love with which you have to struggle. That which is good *in* you is not *of* you, it is but the promise of an early flower which may be withered and destroyed by a single blast of wind. Do you, my child, hold fast to the Feet of your Saviour, ever remembering that you are less than nothing of yourself; you need Him every instant, even as your lungs need air to breathe, your eyes light to see. Without Jesus you are helpless and b'ind; through Him Alone you have any power of well doing, and it is only in union with Him that you can have it. 'I am the Vine, ye are the branches: as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.' Let these words of our Divine Master be ever present to your mind, as a strong buckler against the treacherous assaults of your enemy—pride. But do not harass yourself with a perpetual dread of pride and self-seeking; no doubt self does creep into every thing, even that which seems wholly good; but the best way of defeating it is to fix your mind on God, and strive to do all things for Him, and then to go on steadily and calmly, not turning to the right or to the left, but working on in quiet trust. There are some temptations which are best shunned by resolutely ignoring them, and this is

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a case in point. Do what you have in hand simply and heartily, always bearing in mind that when all is done in the best possible way, you are still poor, weak, and unprofitable.

“In the same way, if temptations concerning the faith arise, it is best merely to say the Creed, and not give any heed to them. By degrees these wounds will heal, and your faith will be all the stronger for having done battle with your enemy. I approve of the resolutions you wish to add to your rule of life. It is easy enough to write them down; the real difficulty lies in keeping them, and that will cost you many a struggle yet. I would have you, without neglecting general considerations, give special attention to the particular points which you feel are most important just now to your spiritual progress. Examine yourself carefully, and tell me what you think is your greatest hindrance. If it be pride, make some practical resolution to combat it, and let that be your principal aim for a time. You may receive Holy Communion three times a week, besides Sunday. You have determined to give yourself wholly to God, and it is above all by means of this Heavenly Food that you become one with Jesus, and find rest to your soul. You know and love Him too well now to fear any lessening of your reverence through such frequent Communion; you are too deeply convinced of

the value of your heart's treasure ever to part with it. Although outwardly in the world, your heart is not in it, but wholly given to Jesus. . . . Farewell, my child, farewell in the Lord ; may He be your light, your strength, your consolation, and your treasure, henceforth and for ever."

. . . "I fully grant that bodily mortification combined with a spirit of prayer is most useful to the soul ; but many things which are admirable in themselves, are not always expedient, and great discretion is needful as regards the body, because it is subject to laws which will not allow the soul always to assert its entire superiority. The body must be chastened, but not overwhelmed ; subdued, not crushed ; it must be treated as a slave and kept under, punished when it rebels,—but nevertheless it must not be denied that which is really needful to enable it to fulfil its tasks ; bodily languor often impairs the soul's vigour. I will give you a rule, which you must use with discretion, with the help of God.

"You were quite right to obey the inward impulse which moved you to humble yourself by telling me all the weakness of your heart. In truth, my poor child, you only tell me somewhat of that which I feel daily within myself. We should indeed be miserable if our very troubles did not draw down God's pitying Mercy

upon us. If our blind eyes can see so much to despise and shrink from within ourselves, what must we be as seen by the piercing light of His All-seeing Vision? Farewell, my child. Go on steadily in the path wherein God leads you, and do not inquire anxiously as to the future which He withholds. Rest content with being all He would have you to be now, that is, wholly and unreservedly His. Pray for me; I need it. It is so easy to speak of God's Love; but it is not so easy to practise that which is *involved* therein."

. . . "Do not be so anxious as to what may be my opinion of you; go on as you have done hitherto, in perfect frankness and simplicity. I know what is nature and what is grace in you, and I know too that all comes from God, and 'if there be any praise,' I thank Him for His gifts. Try to be more and more convinced that you can neither increase in self-knowledge or in love of God save through humility. The further you advance, the more helpless and unworthy of all His manifold graces you will feel yourself to be. Do not be surprised at this, accept the knowledge of your own weakness, and go straight on, keeping your eyes fixed on Him Who will be gracious in proportion to your need. . . . Obey the leading which draws you to find your only comfort in trouble at the Feet of Jesus. It will be

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a source of light, strength, and peace to you. The heart becomes empty when it is poured out upon creatures, but the more it is poured into Jesus' Heart, the fuller of love it will be. You will never go forth from that resting-place without finding yourself more gentle and patient, more tolerant of the defects of others, more humbled by your own infirmities. You were too much excited in what you did lately ;—less human respect would have promoted your peace. If such circumstances recur, do what you believe to be right firmly, but try to retain your self-control, and leave success to God. Do your duty, and give no heed to what others may say; knowing that God may set forward His own Glory in His child's humiliation as well as in her success. Be gentle, and kindly; remember what S. Francis de Sales says somewhere about Jacob's 'leading on softly' because of the little children and tender lambs in his flock. We must strive to be all things to all men, that we may win them to Christ. In a word, let your religion be such as may make others love you, and wish to be religious too; not in order that you may be loved, but that God may be loved in and through you. Adieu, my child, pray for me. Be sure that I offer you daily at the Altar to our dear Lord, and ask Him to make you His own for ever. Your faithful Father in our Lord."

. . . "You say most truly that our Lord is the

great Director, and indeed you must refer any good I can be to you to Him. Seek Jesus every where and in all things, and every thing will lead you to Him, every thing will be a means of union with Him. . . . A true spirit of mortification tends to expand the soul in the things of God, while it contracts and withdraws it from earthly things. . . . Do not give way to so much disturbance at the sight of your own weakness—a calmer, more entire spirit of trust in God, would profit you more. No doubt it is well from time to time to reflect upon your own inward weakness, but as a habit it is better to fix your thoughts upon the Heart of Jesus. These constant self-contemplations and self-inspections will tend to distract and weary your soul, I fear. A more even, simple, peaceful state of mind would help you more towards real recollection. Confess your weakness to Jesus in all humility, but do it in a spirit which dwells more on His Infinite Mercy than on your own imperfections, and strive always to rise up from your confessions at His Feet impressed with the former rather than the latter. A Christian soul draws its life from Him before Whom it prostrates itself, and it should gather fresh strength and earnestness from a full and free confession of its own weakness. True humility strips the soul of all self-esteem and false confidence, teaching it to rest solely on God, and prize nought in itself save what is of Him, and

thence arises that tranquillity and repose which are sure signs of a really humble heart. . . . I think, my daughter, that just now you have nothing to do but to strive to serve God heartily in the position wherein He has placed you. Let all your care and efforts be to become more worthy of Him, and to grow in His Love. . . . If He requires further sacrifices of you, He will make it plain hereafter, and leave no doubt as to what He would have you do. Circumstances and your own conscience will show it, but meanwhile it would be a risk to go out of your way to discover what He withholds."

. . . "Write and tell me all about yourself. I am afraid that my departure has been a source of pain to you, and perhaps also it has disheartened you. I say this, not because I think myself necessary to you, but because of the great confidence you have put in me. I know how much you require to pour yourself out freely, and how difficult it is to you to do so. I shall not cease to pray, my poor child, that you may be enabled to open your heart as is best for you. You must ask the same for yourself; the more lonely you are in this world, the more you must trust and lean on your Heavenly Father, Who ever watches over His child, and sends no trial, save in Love. . . . The distance at which I now am will never hinder me from doing all I can to comfort and help you; and when I

cannot speak any words of consolation to you, I speak of you to God, asking Him to give you His special help, and to draw your heart to Him. . . . Let there be no mistrust of your Heavenly Father; be perfectly humble, trustful, and hearty in seeking Him. He watches over you, and all the repeated sacrifices He has required of you are but so many proofs of His Love; with each fresh stroke He has taught you more and more to see that there is but one rest, but one comfort for the faithful soul,—perfect union with Him. Nothing is worth much heed save that which affects our blessed eternity. You must look at all the sorrows and joys of this life in this way, my dear child. I know that there are more thorns than flowers on your path; our Dear Lord has long placed His Cross between you and the seductive pleasures of this life, and your bread has been often moistened with tears. You have learnt in the school of sorrow what some only learn at the hour of death; life has been shown to you in its true sense, and a gentle loving voice has called you forth from its snares. You thought you were hanging upon the Cross; but behold, your eyes were opened, and you saw that in truth you are resting on your Saviour's Breast. He has withdrawn you from the fleeting joys of this world by suffering, but He has taught you to turn that suffering into joy, by uniting it with the pains He bore for you."

. . . "I rejoice to hear what you tell me of the vigorous efforts you are making to restrain your natural impetuosity. It is hard work, but the result will be a great blessing to you, and your very efforts are pleasing in God's Sight, if made for His Sake. Self-restraint is a real sacrifice for Him, a sign that one loves Him better than oneself. Do not be disheartened if you do not succeed all at once, you cannot accomplish your object without many a trial, because self-restraint must be a habit, and that can only be the result of repeated efforts. I would impress this on you because I know myself how easily one is discouraged by one's own weakness; and the more anxious one is to do right, the harder it seems to be so long before one succeeds. But the saints did not conquer their passions without many a hard fight, and patience under the struggle is a good step won towards your end. Try to be very patient with yourself, checking yourself vigorously of course when you fall, but still with gentleness, and so you will learn to be gentle with others. For the most part other people try us from without only because we are wanting in peace within. Often call to mind our Saviour's words, 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.' And remember the gentleness and meekness of the Blessed Virgin. . . .



“When I want to find the best, truest of comforts, I can find none to compare to the dear Name of Jesus, that Blessed Name which calls to our memory all He has been, all He is, all He ever will be to us. The Name of Jesus combines in one word all our hope and all our joy,—God made Man for His creature, dying for us, giving Himself eternally to us. O my child, call upon that Blessed Name continually, above all when kneeling at the foot of the Cross; call upon It when you think over your faults, and what you would be without Him, what you are through Him. . . . Be of good cheer. Go on perseveringly in the attempt to gain real gentleness, and never be discouraged by the difficulties your natural eagerness raises up. Every one has their own special natural difficulties: some have to contend against indolence, whereas your trouble is impetuosity. God sees all our efforts to overcome, and judges us rather by the purity and good intention of those efforts than by their results. May God guide and comfort you.”

“My dear Daughter in Christ,—Your letter has touched me deeply. You were very much tried by my silence, and you accepted the trial as sent by God, and laid your sufferings at the Feet of Him Who suffered for you. This is the way, my child, to meet

all sorrows, great or small; for when thus borne, trial purifies the soul and lifts it up while teaching, with a reality nothing else does, where alone we must seek comfort and rest. Nothing so leads us on in the knowledge and love of God as suffering. We may read, and meditate, and listen to sermons, but suffering is the real teacher. The science of the Cross is the only real science. . . . Go on patiently, my child, this life will probably never have much to offer you; all that are dearest to you are in Heaven, and thither your heart must continually tend. Each day, as it passes, carries away so much of our trial, and brings us so much nearer to the Haven where we would be. Life seems long to those whose lot is a tearful one; but how short it will seem when the blessed day comes in which the Lord will comfort those that are His! Then, for the first time, we shall really know what those words mean, 'Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.' But a little while, and we shall have done with tears for ever, and rest in His Bosom Who is the Fulness of joy, re-united to all whom we loved here in His holy love. May God ever strengthen and comfort you."

. . . "Of all the ministrations of our office, none ever seemed to me so grateful as that of comforting the afflicted. The priest seems then to take up our Blessed Master's words and say, 'Come to Me, all ye

that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,' a rest and relief not like this world's, which can but palliate, whereas Christ's touch turns suffering into pure joy, by teaching us to sanctify our sorrow, through the healing of the Cross. . . . You will never find **your** rest in the absence of suffering, but you will find rest and even happiness in a holy unquestioning submission, in a close union with Him Who suffered for you, in diligent meditation on His Passion. You will find rest in His outstretched Arms, happiness in clinging to His Cross. You will gather fresh strength there, and as you accept His Will in all things you will attain a true freedom from care—perfect rest of heart is the result of perfect self-abnegation. . . . The heart which truly loves Jesus is never free from suffering."

"My dear Daughter in Christ,—There are times in the spiritual life when nothing, however good, in books or words, seems to bring any comfort to the soul. One feels hemmed in and crushed by an indefinable suffering which cannot find relief. The heart is oppressed, and yet it knows not why. This inward trial is one which requires great courage and patience, for not only every thing from without tries one, but one is a sore trial to oneself. Turn where we will, we find no rest; even God seems to have forsaken us.

None can tell the bitterness of this trial, save those who have experienced it. If this is what God is laying on you now, my poor child, do not be cast down, rise up through Him. You may feel as though you had no love for God, but He is full of love for you, however it may seem otherwise just now to you. Try to see in this trial a means of self-detachment, and your love will be confirmed and strengthened. There are many hidden sources of self-love in a lively, sensible devotion, and we are apt to mistake self-satisfaction for fervour, so that sometimes it is well for us to be called, like the Israelites, out of Egypt into the wilderness. Only have full trust in God, and do not look back regretfully. You have been baptised into His Cross, and the closer you come to it, the more acceptable you are to God. Do not marvel if it is sharp to the touch. Our Lord Himself would not slake His thirst save with the gall of bitterness; and He gave Himself up to be forsaken, not by men only, but by His Father. 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' There is the example for us in our desolation, as in His last words, 'Into Thy Hands I commend My Spirit.' Let yours be the same mind; if you seem to be forsaken of God, go on committing yourself into His Hands, offer yourself unreservedly to Him, say 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.' These trials will pass away.

‘Buried with Jesus Christ,’ you will rise again with Him, and how will you then rejoice to have been made a partaker of His Cross, wherein you are partaker of His glory? . . . The day will come when you will understand what now seems only a sorrowful mystery, and you will forget all past sorrows—they will be turned into joy.”

“My dear Daughter in Christ,—You were right to have recourse to me in these troubles. Never fear but that my heart is ready to share all your griefs; and whenever you need me, turn to me as a child to its father. If I am not always able to afford that rest and consolation you seek, at least I pray that God will enable me to help you to bear up until He turns your sorrows into joy, for there is none save He Who lays the Cross upon you that can turn it to sweetness. Until such may be His Holy Will, do you resign yourself and leave all to Him. Try to find comfort, not in what He withholds, but in the very sacrifice which He asks of you. There is no way of attaining His most Blessed Peace save through entire unquestioning self-renunciation; and so far from being alarmed because you are in a state of utter desolation, you must take comfort in the thought that such desolation is the means whereby to attain that heavenly union after which you crave.

“When you feel overwhelmed by the sense of your own spiritual weakness, take fresh courage from our Lord’s words, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God,’ and the kingdom of God is God Himself. Nor is it only that He will belong, He does already belong, to those who, deeply conscious of their own wretchedness, give themselves up wholly to His most Blessed and Holy Will. Do not be led to suppose that your service is unacceptable to God, because of the disinclination you often feel to fulfil your duties. Whenever we are really striving to crucify the flesh, we are sure to feel this disinclination, which is in truth a test of the sincerity of your sacrifice. If you could fulfil your duties without any effort, you might doubt whether you were not deceiving yourself, for the way of purification is necessarily a way of suffering. Comfort will come later on, as the reward of your hardly-won victories. I hope this thought will help you to conquer the temptation to be impatient which troubles you now. Resist it heartily; but do not be surprised at it;—you would not feel the temptation so urgently if you were not carrying on a vigorous struggle against your natural weakness. It is nature’s attempt to escape from restraint, and you must be firm, humble, and patient, bearing with these revelations of your own infirmities, which, by and by, will grow less and less.

“In the same way with the other temptations of which you speak ;—meet them humbly and patiently, frequently offering yourself up anew to our Lord, body and soul ; and remember that one of God’s most frequent dealings with the soul He is leading to perfection, is to permit it to be tried and proved with temptations. The efforts to resist and overcome which the soul makes at such seasons, have a marvelous purificative grace ; we are not conscious of it at the time, but afterwards we realize the truth, and give God the glory. As to meditation, persevere in this holy practice, although just now you find nothing but difficulty in it. In His Own good time God will make His Face to shine upon you, and then you will forget all that has troubled you. Farewell, my daughter ; above all, try to keep your heart resigned and peaceful. You are God’s, wholly God’s, be assured. It is He Who keeps you where you are at this moment. Do not be distressed because He appoints your place in the world. He has His own intentions for you, hidden from your sight, but none the less gracious. When the right time comes, you will have double joy in quitting that which you have so reluctantly endured. Leave all cares for the future to your Heavenly Bridegroom, and be content with seeking to serve Him faithfully and steadfastly. The more you give yourself to Him, the more He will give Himself to you,

and the test of this will be your withdrawing increasingly from all that is not of Him. The more full of thorns your worldly path is, the more you will die to the things of this life ; but for this you might be led to seek rest elsewhere; as it is, you know that there is no refuge for you save in His Heart; be diligent in seeking that refuge, and strive ever to abide at the foot of the Cross. If the shadow of Him you love does but fall upon you, what more need you ask?

“Once more, my child, farewell ; may our Lord speak that peace to your heart which I am unable to convey. His words are heavenly, mine are but weak human words ; He is your Master, your God ; I am only the guide who is to help you to find Him. Pray for me, I need it much.”

**THE END.**

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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## THE SPIRIT OF S. FRANCIS DE SALES.

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