

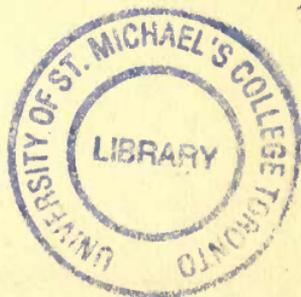
UNIVERSITY OF ST. MICHAEL'S COLLEGE



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TRANSFERRED



LIFE OF ST. LEONARD OF PORT-
MAURICE, O.F.M. (1676-1751) ∞ ∞



MAR 27 1952

NIHIL OBSTAT:

INNOCENTIUS APAP, O.P.,

Censor Deputatus.

IMPRIMATUR:

EDM. CAN. SURMONT, _

Vicarius Generalis.

WESTMONASTERII,

Die 6 Septembris, 1920.





“FATHER LEONARD.”

From a portrait, described as “a true likeness,” which appeared in 1752,
a year after the saint's death.

Frontispiece.

LIFE OF
ST. LEONARD
of PORT-MAURICE

O.F.M. (1676—1751)

By FR. DOMINIC DEVAS, O.F.M.



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IMPRIMI POTEST:

F. GEORGIUS PAYNE, O.F.M.,
Minister Provincialis.

Die 6 Februarii, 1920.

AD
QUEMDAM PATREM LEONARDUM
AMICUM ET FRATREM
ORDINIS NOSTRI

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INTRODUCTION

A HOPE was once expressed to a religious, desirous of publishing some documents on monastic history, that his work "might prove fruitful of good," the underlying intimation being that possibly it might not. The present writer has been constantly beset, whilst writing these pages, with a similar fear. What, it may well be asked, is the use of putting before us to-day the example of one who, though modern in the ranks of the Saints, was most certainly what is called—contemptuously, I fear—a mediævalist, a man who followed old-time ways and customs, and sought to perpetuate them? True, Leonard was beyond all question a great missionary, a prolific giver of Retreats, a popular preacher, and as such is not regarded without some condescending sympathy, as being, up to a certain point, intelligible to the modern spirit. But to think of him in that light only is, I venture to suggest, wrong, and the resulting picture a distorted one. Far better, so it seems to me, to relegate his memory to complete oblivion, rather than to resuscitate him only in part. We have no right to mutilate our subject, and then present a partial figure, on the plea that such is the only aspect of his life of any interest to-day. To put the question on no higher level, such a proceeding

would be a falsification of history ; to me it seems the falsification of a Saint.

Consequently, in the following pages I have endeavoured to make a fair division and give equal prominence to the two sides of the Saint's life, so admirably summarized by him in his letter to Brother Stephen (p. 23).

The initial difficulty, however, still remains, and I must endeavour to justify myself in presenting what to many must always seem an impossible ideal. Now, no one would dream for a moment of advocating anywhere to-day the construction of a religious house on the lines of *Incontro*—it was peculiar to country, time, and people, a monument to admire, but not to imitate. But what of the spirit animating these heroic missionaries who—for brief spaces of life—were bent on being solitaries? Is there, perchance, no connection between their wonderful success as preachers and this, to us unseemly, hankering after a mountain-top? Is there not something in their outlook on the world we may do more than admire? Indeed, they stand before us as the embodiment of a great spiritual truth, which they laid hold of in act as well as mind, but which we may well ponder over and clutch at from afar, be it ever so slightly. Were I propounding some theory of my own on the foundations of the apostolic life, I might well be asked for credentials, but I am leaving the Saints to speak.

There are not wanting to-day manuals on preaching, excellent, I understand, in every way,

and calculated to satisfy an undoubted need, but what of that on which every preacher must build? It has its prophets indeed,¹ but alas, for the most part, crying in the wilderness, or conned over but by those whose quiet lives leave them a leisure which the modern apostle seems seldom to find.

Here, then, is a *complete* picture of a "life"; not just one aspect of it, but the whole: a very brief and imperfect picture, let me be the first to confess it, and that in no spirit of mock modesty. Apart from Leonard's *Resolutions*, my sole authority has been itself a translation, that of the *Life of the Saint* by Fr. Salvator d'Ormea, O.F.M., translated into French by the Chanoine Labis, and published at Tournai in 1858, but I have no reason to doubt the facts.

For the frontispiece I am indebted to Mr. Montgomery Carmichael, and for the remaining illustrations to Fr. Paschal Robinson, O.F.M. I take this opportunity of thanking both for their kind interest and help.

This, then, is no learned work, nor, in any sense, a historical study, but a simple *Life of a deeply religious priest, a Franciscan and a Saint.*

P. D. D.

In festo S. Antonii Abbatis,
1920.

¹ *E.g.*, Dom Chautard's admirable work, *L'Ame de tout Apostolat*, translated into English by Fr. Girardey, C.S.S.R., under the title of *The True Apostolate*.

CHAPTER I

Beginnings

“Quam dilecta tabernacula tua Domine virtutum.”

PAUL JEROME CASANOVA was born at Port-Maurice, then forming part of the Republic of Genoa, on the 20th of December, 1676, and was baptized the following day in the collegiate church of St. Maurice. His father was in what we should speak of nowadays as the Genoese Merchant Service, and was captain of his ship. Paul was an only child, and two years after his birth his mother died. Dominic Casanova shortly afterwards married again, and had four children, three boys and a girl. The girl subsequently became a Dominican nun in the Convent of St. Catherine of Sienna at Taggia, and two of the boys, following their step-brother's example, became Franciscans. The third remained in the world.

Till he was thirteen years old Paul Jerome Casanova remained at Port-Maurice. He was of the number of those who, like St. Bernard, seem from their earliest childhood to have been gifted with an extraordinary appreciation of divine things. The house of God was where he felt most at home; a pilgrimage to some outlying church of Our Lady was for him a relaxation and recreation more appreciated than games. However, he had no wish to draw aside from his play-fellows; it

was as yet no passionate longing for solitude that rendered the rollicking joys of a healthy child's life distasteful to him, but simply a great desire for the presence of God, and for his companions to share with him in the delights of that presence. He did not, as so many child saints have done, retire to some secret place to pray, but rather rejoiced in being allowed to join with his parents in saying the family prayers out loud.

Life at Port-Maurice for Paul Jerome must have been a very simple affair. He attended the parish school, and was a familiar figure in the parish church: he used to go for long walks with his friends, wandering over that lovely coastline, and say his Rosary with the rest night by night before bed. He had, however, what so many have wished to have and dreamed about, a real rich uncle, Augustin Casanova, who lived at Rome. Doubtless his brother Dominic had seen to it that Augustin should know of his promising young nephew and of what "parochus" and schoolmaster thought of him, insinuating at the same time that his own modest means could go no further than Port-Maurice and its parish school. The best happened; and Paul Jerome was soon making his way to Rome, at his uncle's invitation. He was just thirteen years of age.

On his nephew's arrival, Augustin Casanova went straight to work. He first chose the boy a confessor in the person of Fr. Grifonelli, an Oratorian, and then arranged for him to attend a private school kept by a learned priest.

After three years with his tutor, during which Paul Jerome seems to have more than fulfilled the high expectations of his uncle—already somewhat disappointed, it would seem, in his two sons—it was arranged for him to attend the courses of study given by the Jesuits at the Gregorian. After two years at Humanities and Rhetoric, he passed on to Philosophy, always living with his uncle, to whom he endeared himself more and more.

Whilst at Rome Paul Jerome naturally made new friends ; not many, it appears, as already the call to solitude and retirement was beginning to make itself felt, but still a few, and those genuine. Such a one was the tradesman Louis Foggia, to whom the Saint often referred in later life as one to whom he owed much, to whom he owed in particular the great grace—invaluable to him as he advanced in life—of so walking constantly in the presence of God as never to become ruffled or put out by the failings of others. Such a one, again, was the student Peter Miré, who later became also a priest. In holiday-time Peter and Paul would walk out from the Gregorian to Augustin Casanova's house in the Via Salaria, reciting the Rosary together as a prelude to their recreation.

But Paul Jerome, pious young man though he was, was not of the demure and gilt-edged prayer-book type. He was not afraid of the rough and tumble of apostolic ways. When only seventeen he was admitted as a member of the Oratory of Fr. Caravita, the Jesuit, and was soon advanced to

the ranks of those whose duty it was, in mission-time, to round up backsliders in the various districts of Rome—an arduous work, exposing the young apostles to many rebuffs, rude remarks, and ridicule. For such, however, he fortified himself by prayer and spiritual reading, to which he devoted a considerable time, and by practices of mortification which, even at so early an age, he managed to mingle with the amenities of his comfortable home in the Via Salaria. Already we see in miniature the future Saint, attending to the souls of others, yet not neglecting his own, cajoling the lax to attend missions and assiduously reading St. Francis de Sales; retailing fragments of Saints' lives and Jesuit sermons instead of eating his supper, and sleeping on the floor of his bedroom instead of in his bed.

Then, after a general confession made to Fr. Grifonelli in the room once hallowed by the presence of St. Philip himself, there comes a climax. Paul Jerome realizes his vocation to become a religious, but, unlike what usually happens nowadays, whilst quite certain of his vocation, he was wholly at a loss to decide which Order to apply to.

Walking one day in Rome, he came across two religious whose aspect struck and edified him, precisely because of the absence of any pose assumed to strike and edify. Their habit was aggressively poor, no mere make-believe of poverty—their attitude one of real humility, not the feigned air as of condescending kings; and

yet princes they were for all that, *collocet eos Dominus cum principibus*, and living with princes : two Franciscans living—as Paul Jerome discovered, for he followed them—in the Convent of St. Bonaventure on the Palatine. The two friars reach the convent and enter ; Paul Jerome slips into the church. *Converte nos Deus salutaris noster* : such is the greeting he receives, for the friars are chanting Compline. Profoundly moved, stirred as he had never been before by book or sermon, by learned lectors or saintly directors, struck to the quick by the psalmody within and by the undying vision—for they now seemed to him as angels—of the two friars he had seen outside, Paul Jerome finds the peace and rest he had long sought for ; no doubts now—*Hæc requies mea*—here must his life lie.

Quickly he returns and relates all to Fr. Grifonelli. The Oratorian has long known the Convent of St. Bonaventure and those whose home it is, and the manner of their life there. He, too, has no doubts now, after the young man's story and, more still, the manner of its telling. Paul Jerome hears from the lips of St. Philip's son the assurance that it is God's Will he should enter the Convent of St. Bonaventure and become a Franciscan. A Jesuit and a Dominican, consulted at the suggestion of his confessor, both give the same advice. *En avant* then, surely, for what obstacle was there now ? God's Will made evident, what more could man wish for ?

Strangely enough, however, for the new-born

enthusiasm of Paul—naturally enough as we look at it now—Augustin Casanova, in his pleasant house on the Via Salaria, was far from seeing eye to eye with his young nephew. God's Will, so abundantly evident to Paul Jerome, aglow with the spirit of sacrifice, appeared to his uncle in a very different light. Had not much time and labour and money been spent on his education? Had he not already commenced those studies in medicine which were to secure him ultimately a profession and social standing far above anything Port-Maurice could have offered him? Had not his father sent him to Rome precisely for this purpose, and had not he, Augustin Casanova, received him into his household precisely on this understanding? How, then, could he have the face to turn round now, and—regardless of all the tender care so lovingly bestowed upon him—propose to bury himself and his talents in a convent of mendicant friars?

Paul Jerome—with the sublime disregard of logic shown by others before and since who find themselves circumstanced as he—could but assent to all his uncle's arguments and yet persist in ignoring them in practice. Augustin Casanova, however, was no man to trifle with. He had received Paul Jerome whole-heartedly and done his very best for him. A similar whole-heartedness must now mark his disapproval. It did: and Paul Jerome very shortly found himself homeless in Rome. In this extremity he sought and obtained shelter with a distant relative of his, a

certain Leonard Ponzetti, who received him kindly, and under whose roof Paul awaited his father's opinion on the great step he was proposing to take.

For Dominic Casanova the religious life was not a mere churlish fleeing from the world, such as it appeared to his brother Augustin, but much rather a living to God, and it was in the realization of this great truth that he took up the letters he had received from brother and son, and went out into the church of Port-Maurice. Here, kneeling before the high altar, he offered up to God the sacrifice of the son he so dearly loved. Then he went home and wrote off the letter giving his consent.

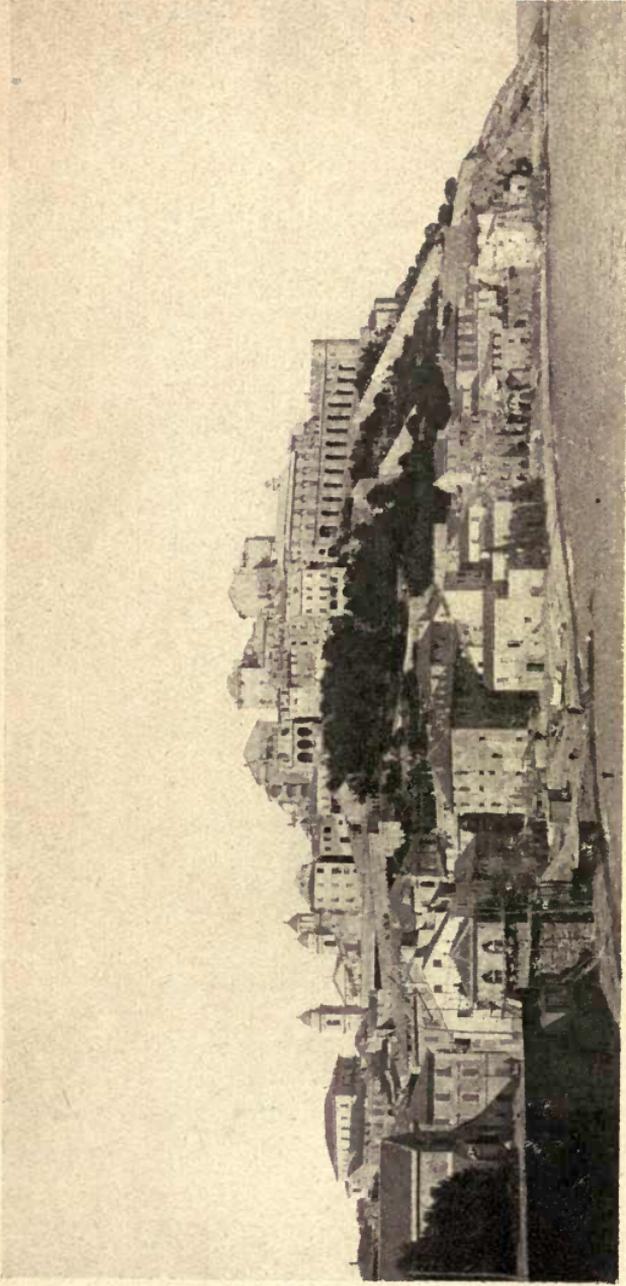
Paul Jerome, however, was not one easily to forget all he owed to his uncle, and the old man's unbending opposition to his Franciscan vocation caused him the deepest concern. And now another obstacle made itself felt. His friends pointed out to him his delicate health, and argued very plausibly that if, well clothed and housed and fed as he had hitherto been, he still remained so weak, what possible prospect was there of his ever persevering in the austere life of the friars of St. Bonaventure? Paul Jerome must have felt the force of this argument, for he confessed one day to his friend Peter that if he had to leave, after entering the novitiate, he did not intend to remain at Rome, but meant to return to Port-Maurice, to continue there the work of instructing the children of the poor, which already for some

considerable time he had been carrying on in Rome in connection with the Oratory of Fr. Caravita.

However, this question of health could only be solved by experience, and, since the opposition of his uncle remained immovable, Paul Jerome decided he must do without the consent he so wished to obtain, and applied without further delay for admission into the Order of Friars Minor.

Needless to say, his request was granted, and in September, 1697, after having entrusted to his friend Peter all his notes and papers, with instructions to hand them over, on his arrival, to one of his young brothers, who was himself about to begin his studies, Paul Jerome left Rome, and proceeded to the novitiate house at Ponticelli, in the Sabine hills.

He was clothed in the Franciscan habit on the 2nd of October, being nearly twenty-one years of age, and took the name of Leonard, in memory of the friend who had harboured him when he was homeless.



PORT-MAURICE : BIRTHPLACE OF ST. LEONARD.

To face page 20

CHAPTER II

At Work in the Order

“Abscondes eos in abscondito faciei tuæ, a conturbatione hominum.”

PARADOXICAL though it may sound, I think it is true to say that the most important years in the life of a religious are those about which there is least to say and certainly least known—the years that intervene between the commencement of his novitiate and his reappearance before others, when first he receives faculties for preaching and hearing confessions.

Leonard is no exception to this rule. He made his Solemn Profession, as was then customary, one year after his reception of the habit. From the convent in the Sabine hills he then returned to Rome in 1698, to begin his course of Philosophy and Theology at St. Bonaventure's, and was ordained priest in 1703. Of these six years we know little. Whilst still a student, hearing that a band of missionaries was being got together, he offered himself and was accepted for the Chinese mission; then, for reasons of which we know nothing, the permission was withdrawn, and Leonard left with a disappointment he seems never wholly to have lost. Years later the most successful missionary in Italy would look wistfully back to the time when, as it seemed to him, he

had been weighed for the crown of the martyrs and found wanting. Like St. Anthony of Padua, he had longed to shed his blood for Christ, and for one brief moment martyrdom had really seemed a practical possibility, and then the dream had vanished, but was never forgotten. "Let us trust in God"—that was one of Leonard's favourite sayings, so let us hope it consoled him now.

Shortly before his ordination, Leonard, still a deacon, was chosen to preach during Lent to the girls—three hundred of them, it appears—who were pursuing their studies at one of the many convent schools at Rome. This first missionary effort was an entire success, and led the convent chaplain to predict a great future for the young preacher.

After his ordination Leonard was appointed Lector of Philosophy in the Convent of St. Bonaventure, and forthwith applied himself energetically to his new duties. Now, however, were verified the pessimistic predictions of his early friends, for his health broke down completely, and he was compelled to relinquish the lectorate. He was first sent to Naples to recuperate, but the gastric hæmorrhage, from which he was suffering continuing as violent as ever, his superiors thought his native air might do him good, and sent him to Port-Maurice. Here he did indeed gradually grow stronger, though he attributed his recovery less to the climate than to the intercession of Our Blessed Lady, to whom he prayed earnestly

to be restored to health, promising, should his prayer be granted, to devote his life to the conversion of sinners.

Leonard was about thirty years old when, on his complete restoration to health, he was empowered to hear confessions and preach, and he straightway entered upon that long apostolic career which has justly entitled him to fame. However, to regard the Saint as an apostle and nothing more would be indeed to malign him, and it will be the purpose of this chapter to bring out that other side of his life, frequently less noticed, and certainly less widely known than it deserves to be. Yet it was one which the Saint himself regarded, not merely as equalling in value his missionary labours, but as being their very foundation and life.

Here is what Leonard once wrote. He was staying for a month in a convent he dearly loved, that of St. Angelo de Montorio Romano, a solitary house, lying in the heart of the Sabine hills, three miles from the nearest habitation, and wrapped round by precipitous and rocky cliffs. It is written to Brother Stephen at Rome :

SAINT-ANGELO,
2nd March, 1732.

DEAR BROTHER IN JESUS CHRIST,

May the peace of our good Jesus be with you !

I've reached St. Angelo at last, though I was hard put to it on the way, for I had a

bad attack of fever at Palombaro, and felt very weak. However, it passed off, and the journey is over now, and I hope to be able to finish the retreat I've looked forward to so much.

Candidly, my dear brother, I've many reasons for not going to Rome. Here are the two chief ones: firstly the delusion people are under about me; they look on me as a religious of some merit, whereas I know I'm not, and this idea of theirs disturbs me. Then there is the loss of time and dissipation of spirit I shall certainly be exposed to if I go to Rome. Thank God, I don't expect anything from the world, so why waste time over it? As I am crucified to the world and turn my back on it, so I want the world to be crucified to me and turn its back on me. My vocation, in so far as one is competent to judge of such things, lies in mission work and in solitude: mission work that I may live *for* God, and solitude that I may live *in* God. Everything else is vain. . . .

Very affectionately yours,

FR. LEONARD.

Before going further, then, let us see what Leonard was aiming at when he spoke of "solitude" as occupying so important a place in his life. His first efforts in this direction were blessed with complete failure, an almost invariable

sign that "the weakness of God" which "is stronger than men" was at work with him. He had been barely a year on the mission when he asked for and obtained permission to convert one of the houses of the Province into a House of Retreat. Let me at once make it quite clear that such a desire on Leonard's part did not reflect in the least—as some are apt to imagine—on the general level of observance maintained around him. As was pointed out almost a century later, in 1781, by the Franciscan Blessed Leopold,¹ such a demand is far more a witness to existing fervour than an index of laxity, and reflects nothing but credit on the Province that engenders such a movement. Such was true, beyond all question, in the case of Leonard, for the Province he had joined was distinguished for its observance.

The convent chosen for the purpose was that of St. Bernardine at Albenga, and thither Leonard, and those like-minded with himself who had obtained a similar permission, withdrew in the early spring of 1708. At first all went well, and the Bishop of the diocese was delighted, but when summer came the whole community, except Leonard and two others, fell sick, and the external ministry which had emanated from the house, like a beneficent wave of spiritual energy, came to an abrupt end. Things mended slightly with the advent of cooler weather, but not for long. The renewed sickness of the Brethren—attributed to the unhealthiness of the locality—led to the con-

¹ See note at end of chapter.

clusion that Albenga was not suited for the purpose for which it had been chosen. Another house was asked for, and a new foundation at Port-Maurice was decided on. In January, 1709, Leonard sent off two religious from Albenga to take over the new house. Judge of his surprise when they returned almost immediately with the news that they had been driven away by the inhabitants, who had conceived a violent, if inexplicable, opposition to a second friary in the town. Leonard then went to Port-Maurice himself, but with no better success, and the whole scheme had to be abandoned. He returned to Albenga, and remained there till May, when he was sent, with seven others of the Province, to Florence, whither the friars had been summoned by the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosmo III. The following is an unfinished account of this foundation which Leonard himself has left us :

About forty-seven years had elapsed since the servant of God, Bonaventure of Barcelona, had succeeded, despite unnumbered difficulties, in establishing Houses of Retreat in the Roman Province of the Friars Minor, when Divine Providence, ordering all things with gentleness and power, inspired a certain zealous religious of the Society of Jesus, Fr. Anthony Bardiggiani, to give a detailed account of this institution to His Royal Highness, Cosmo III., Grand Duke of Tuscany. This Prince, who had at heart the

spiritual welfare of his people, was so drawn towards this holy Institute as to determine to do all he could to help it. Seeing of what use it would be in his own States, he begged His Holiness Clement XI. to deign to send to Florence some religious of the Order. His intention was to establish them in the Convent of St. Francis of the Mount, situated outside the town, and this he succeeded in doing in August, 1709. A capable and zealous religious, Fr. Pius, was chosen superior, and five other priests and two lay-brothers made up the new community. So far everything had passed off to the entire satisfaction of the saintly Prince. He frequently visited the Convent, encouraging the religious, by the interest he showed in them, to persevere in their holy observances.

Contradiction, however, is one of the characteristics of the works of God, and if the pious ruler showed his delight and satisfaction, others were not wanting who manifested the gravest disapproval, being intolerant of this novel kind of foundation and opposed to any fresh advent of religious. All kinds of malicious rumours were soon in circulation, which were credulously accepted by the people, and caused great unpleasantness for the newly arrived friars. These, meanwhile, after establishing in their Convent the strictest and most perfect observance of the rules of their holy Institute, devoted them-

selves to the spiritual needs of the city. Day and night they offered to God their prayers, watchings, and fastings for all the world and particularly for those who showed most aversion to them, and whose open opposition exercised them in meritorious acts of patience.

However, who does not know that the profoundly religious instinct of the people of Florence—to give them their due—is perhaps unequalled in Italy. Consequently, as soon as the religious, leaving their Convent, began to go out among the people, preaching, instructing, hearing confessions, visiting the sick, seeking out tenderly even the most abandoned sinners—in a word, as soon as they showed the zeal which animated them for the salvation of souls, and their complete detachment from the goods of this world—they soon won for themselves the sympathy and approval of all. Those who at first had driven away the Brothers without pity, when on “quest,” declaring they would never give alms to such religious as they, are now their most devoted benefactors, and the religious themselves have often to ask them to restrain their generosity lest it prejudice the poverty they so dearly cherish. To such an extent have the alms increased that where at one time it was difficult to support ten or twelve, now there are forty-five religious, whose sole resource lies in the

“quest.” Thus has been verified the words of our Holy Father, who used to say: “If the Brethren observe their Rule faithfully, even if but one loaf were left in the whole world, the half would be for them.” This experience has led our religious to cling more and more to the teaching of Blessed Bonaventure, who urged nothing so much as poverty in food, in the adornment of the church, and all the rest, wishing to see everywhere the most complete destitution, without other resource than Divine Providence. Not only do they maintain the rule forbidding them to receive money, or *honorarium* for Masses, or stipends for preaching, but in addition, bent on receiving their poor nourishment from God’s table alone—*i.e.*, by the labour of the “quest”—they have renounced, both by word of mouth and in writing, what the liberality of our Most Serene Prince had assigned them for their keep and other needs. His house is always open to them, but it is only for the benefit of the sick that they ever avail themselves now of his generosity, preferring for the rest, like real poor, to beg their bread from door to door.

It would be quite impossible to estimate the good influence the life of these religious has had and is continuing to have on a population so devout as is that of this city. They are for ever engaged in hearing confessions,

withdrawing men from sin and guiding them in the ways of God. Great especially is the effect they have had on the country people in the neighbourhood of the Convent. Quite a moral reformation has taken place, and hard indeed would it be to find any who have not made their general confession at the Convent of the Mount. The results are visible in a more becoming behaviour in church and greater purity in family life. Many abuses have disappeared, such as immodest dances, which were frequent, and prolonged "soirées," and other dangerous amusements; so much so that a stranger, wishing to give a dance in one of these villages, after scouring all the neighbourhood, could only muster two girls. These good peasants are consequently winning for themselves quite a reputation, and the parish priests are delighted. These latter are not in any way prejudiced by the presence of the religious, for they take no stipends, nor conduct funerals, nor, in fact, make any claims whatever: so that all are working together in perfect harmony to the great benefit of souls. Not a few even have placed themselves under the spiritual direction of the friars, with a view to their own greater sanctification.

Such blessings as these are what God usually confers in those districts where convents of Retreat are founded—*e.g.*, in the Sabine, where the servant of God, Bona-

venture, founded the first ones. The reason is that from the very beginning they have made a point not merely of maintaining religious observance within, but of working with zeal and fervour for the surrounding people outside. Thus did they overcome all obstacles and win all hearts, turning the esteem and veneration in which they were held into instruments for achieving a moral uprising and the salvation of souls.

In these footsteps did the friars of the new Convent at Florence endeavour to walk. After evangelizing the neighbouring population, their zeal has sought wider scope, and they are ardently devoting themselves to mission-work throughout the Grand Duchy. Already they have worked in eleven or twelve towns, besides in several small places and villages, and the apostolate is being vigorously pursued. It would require a volume to recount all the good results achieved—the conversion of hardened sinners, the restitution of ill-gotten gains, the reconciliation of enemies, the abandonment of schemes of revenge. So widespread is their beneficent influence, so edified are the people by the good odour . . .

(Here the MS. breaks off abruptly, not, however, without having shown us something of Leonard's ideals.)

It was at the Convent in Florence that Leonard

saw his father for the last time. Dominic Casanova, now well advanced in years, spent three days with his son, and then returned to Port-Maurice, where, not long afterwards, he died.

In 1715 Leonard was appointed Guardian. Despite the fact that it would interfere somewhat in the mission-work he was ever assiduously engaged in, he accepted this additional charge in the spirit of obedience, and set himself to fulfil its obligations with characteristic thoroughness.

His first step was to consult privately each member of his Community. Having thus assured himself of their unanimous support, he proceeded to draw up a set of rules for the house, arranging the Order of the Day and explaining the duties of the various offices which were held in the Convent. Not content with thus formulating a Rule of Life, and giving, in his own person, a daily example of its observance, Leonard was accustomed every Sunday evening to address his religious in the Refectory, dwelling week by week on the nature of the religious state and the obligations it involves. Well did he understand that mere statutes of observance are of no avail, and that even example is all too often but a voice in the wilderness, but that the spoken word and example together are strong indeed and may move mountains. The energy and eloquence with which he set forth the ideals of the religious life soon came to be noised abroad, and religious of other Orders used to beg the Brother Porter's permission to enter the Convent on Sunday nights, that they

might listen surreptitiously, behind the Refectory door, to Leonard's impassioned appeals.

One might fancy him satisfied and content, living in so holy a house amidst such fervent brethren. But no : his gospel had never been "in word only, but in power also, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much fulness," and he knew whence that fulness and power came ; and so it is that we find him seeking after a yet more profound retirement. *Ecce elongavi fugiens et mansi in solitudine* (Lo ! I have fled far away and dwelt in solitude) : *levavi oculos meos ad montes unde veniet auxilium mihi* (I have raised my eyes to the mountains, whence help shall come to me). In 1716 Leonard, aged forty, is engaged in founding the celebrated Solitude of St. Mary of Incontro,¹ situated in the mountains four and a half miles from Florence. Of this foundation he has himself left us the fullest account, so let me not presume to give it in any other words but his :

The life of retirement, so dear to the servant of God, Blessed Bonaventure (of Barcelona), was far from being opposed to zeal for the salvation of souls, as we have just seen (in the Saint's account of the Florence foundation). He was most anxious that his religious should conform themselves to the spirit of their Holy Founder, of whom it is written *Non sibi soli vivere, sed aliis proficere*

¹ Still used by the friars as a House of Retreat for Missionary Fathers.

vult Dei zelo ductus (Prompted by his zeal for God, he wishes to live not solely for himself, but also for others) ; but he did not mean them to spend all their time in seeking after souls, to the detriment of their own. Rather he wished to see in their houses that happy mingling of the active and contemplative life which our Seraphic Father learnt from Our Lord Himself. Jesus Christ, fleeing from the crowd, used from time to time to withdraw into the desert and to lonely mountains, whence He would again descend to converse with men, thus showing us that in this alternation of the solitary life and application to exterior works of zeal lies the highest perfection to which we can aspire on earth. Thus it was that he wished his religious to withdraw at times into solitude, there to live uniquely occupied with their own sanctification, that, having won to God souls wandering in the world, they might place their own in safety. Twice each year they were to go into retreat, applying themselves seriously, in profound religious silence, to the work of their own perfection. With this end in view he took steps to acquire the Hermitage of Saint Angelo in the Sabine ; and there he founded a little convent to serve as a House of Retreat for his religious, where they might conveniently occupy themselves with God alone.

Such was the sole purpose of the religious

of the Convent at Florence in founding their Solitude, to conform themselves to the idea of Blessed Bonaventure. In August, 1712, they had opened a house at Prato, which became a Novitiate. The two communities, having grown largely in numbers, the more zealous became desirous of finding a spot where they might more suitably satisfy their fervour and practise a life still more austere and a poverty still more rigorous, so that on their return to their convents they might bring to the work of the salvation of souls fresh vigour and zeal.

God was not long in granting their desires, for in 1716 they were offered the Hermitage of St. Mary of Incontro, some five miles from Florence. This spot had been sanctified of old by the presence of Blessed Gerard, one of the first Tertiaries of the Order, who often withdrew there to spend the night in prayer. The mountain is lofty and forbidding, far removed from the noise and tumult of men, awe-inspiring in its loneliness, but, for all that, a place of profound peace. On its summit there is a little church and hermitage, and here, after the necessary authorizations had been obtained from Rome and the Archbishop of Florence, the building of the Solitude was begun on the 2nd of April, 1716. The site had been already acquired a week earlier, on the Feast of the Annunciation, and the religious were already looking

eagerly forward to the time when they would be able to begin there their poor and mortified life. On the night before they were to set off from Florence, to celebrate, early in the morning, the first Mass at the Hermitage, there was a heavy fall of snow. Despite so terrible a difficulty, however, none dreamt of foregoing the pious pilgrimage, and all set forth on foot, treading through the snow as though over a well-trimmed lawn, and singing the praises of God. After their arrival, they discussed among themselves the sort of cells to be built and the character of the other necessary offices, and certainly nothing was proposed except what was in accordance with the most complete poverty and adapted to the austere lives they meant to lead in the Solitude. It was finally arranged that the cells of the solitaries should number eight, and that there should be four guest-rooms for visitors and superiors ; that the cells should be four feet broad and seven feet long and seven and a half feet high, so that one standing inside could easily, by stretching out his arms, touch both walls, and, by raising them, reach the roof. This was to be made of thatch only, and the walls of bare unplastered brick, so that the house might breathe throughout an air of austere poverty. The doors were to be five feet high and two feet wide, and the windows six inches by twelve ; and each cell was to

have two planks to serve as a bed, two feet wide, and a plain wooden block as a pillow, and some blankets as protection against the cold;¹ three holy pictures also fixed to the walls, a death's-head, some spiritual books, a little lamp, and nought besides. The size of the other rooms was to be in proportion with the cells, the whole, as far as size and the rest went, to be modelled on the first convent built by the glorious St. Peter of Alcantara, who aimed only at what was strictly necessary and nothing more ; and lastly, they laid it down that in the future no modification of the buildings was to be allowed. Thus were they to imitate, as far as possible, the holy example handed down by the illustrious Patriarch St. Francis and his fervent companions.

On these lines, then, poor and abject, was the building of the Solitude begun. It was completed with the alms of various benefactors, collected by a saintly layman, to whom the Order owes much. On the 23rd of May, 1717, the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, the solitary life was begun. Great was the joy of those first chosen to enter upon it. When, assembled together for a spiritual conference, the Fr. President

¹ Any who have campaigned in France and slept betimes on the ground, with a pack for a pillow, will allow that the bed designed by the friars, though far from ideal, was still serviceable, and the blankets a godsend.

invited them, one by one, to declare their feelings, the Spirit of God so filled the hearts of these pious solitaries that they could not restrain their tears, confessing themselves unworthy of dwelling in that holy place, and regarding it as a special favour accorded them by St. Francis to enable them to observe their Rule with as much perfection as their weakness would allow.

The Constitutions drawn up for the Solitude, although prescribing great austerities, had nevertheless been accepted unanimously, after a secret vote, by the two houses.¹ They were then submitted to and approved of by the Most Rev. Fr. Commissary-General, and received the blessing of the Sovereign Pontiff Clement XI. of happy memory. The Pope was much moved as he read them, for he wholly approved of the spirit they embodied and the truly Franciscan ideal at which they aimed. For the edification of the reader we propose to indicate a few of their essential points.

The purpose of the Solitude being to facilitate contemplation and the life of union with Almighty God, nine hours of the day were allotted to spiritual exercises, including mental prayer and the Divine Office. Such is the general rule, but so great is the fervour of the solitaries that whatever time remains free is consecrated to God. Some prolong

¹ *I.e.*, Florence and Prato.

their meditation or devote themselves to spiritual reading; others withdraw to secluded parts of the garden, the more freely to give expression before God to the fervent aspirations of their hearts; so that for all, this sanctuary is as a paradise upon earth.

Their food consists of salads, vegetables, and fruit. Meat, fish, eggs, and milk in any form are forbidden them, except on the feasts of Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and St. Francis, when eggs and milk are allowed. Apart from these days, they have two courses at dinner, one of salad and one of vegetables, though sometimes the latter is replaced by rice or something similar; and in the evening, except on fast-days, one course of salad or such-like from the garden. However, most days are fast-days, for, like St. Francis, as may be read in the Legends, they keep nine Lents, which leave only fifteen or sixteen non-fasting days each year, and during these Lents the evening collation consists only of bread and fruit.

Every night, without exception, even on the greatest feasts, they take the discipline, saying the usual prayers, but so slowly that it lasts nearly half an hour. They go always barefoot, and sleep, as has been said, on two narrow planks with a block of wood as a pillow.

Whilst staying at the Solitude they maintain a strict enclosure, never going

outside the precincts of the convent, nor writing to anyone except superiors, and that only in urgent cases. Silence is so rigorously observed that, except where it would entail grave prejudice to soul or body, they do not speak at all—not merely to outsiders, for they see none, but even among themselves, except when they go to confession, or at the spiritual conferences, or when they make their “culpa” in the refectory. To avoid occasions of speaking, they use a contrivance affixed to each door, on which are written the names of those few things of which from time to time they might ordinarily stand in need. By a simple system of slips of wood sliding in grooves, they can disclose one or more of their needs, and so draw the Fr. President’s attention. Where this method or that of signs is insufficient, they usually write their communication on a slip of paper, their aim ever being not to disturb, be it ever so slightly, the profound peace of this Solitude.

On Sundays and Thursdays they have a spiritual conference, conducted as follows: After all have assembled there is a quarter of an hour’s spiritual reading. The President then asks each one of the solitaries in turn to give a little spiritual address, and they proceed to communicate to each other all that God has favoured them with in prayer. For solitaries such meetings are of incalculable



value. Their words, plainly and simply spoken, unite together into a source of real edification, and, brought thus into contact one with another, they mutually stimulate the flame of divine charity.

An hour each day is spent in manual work, either cultivating the garden, or at some other useful occupation, but always in the most profound silence. For the rest, they know how to utilize spiritual reading, the Stations of the Cross, frequent ejaculatory prayers, and various penitential exercises, to dispose themselves thereby for contemplation and union with God.

Their scanty nourishment is brought them each week by pack-animal from the Convent of the Mount at Florence. Thus they have no need to busy themselves with temporal concerns. It not unfrequently happens, in bad weather especially, that the Tertiary, entrusted with this duty, fails to succour the solitaries in time; but God has always provided, in ways more or less unanticipated, for the support of His servants. Particularly was this noticeable on the 22nd of December, 1718. An Augustinian friar happened to be staying at the Solitude at the time making his retreat, so that the President was more than ever concerned when the Porter told him the provisions had not yet arrived, and that there was nothing for dinner but some bread left over from the day before. He could,

however, do nothing but commend himself to God and hope for the best. The religious were already reciting in choir the last prayers of None, after which they were accustomed to go to the Refectory, when there was a knocking at the door. The Porter hastened immediately to answer it, and was confronted by a stranger bringing a large supply of provisions and, curiously enough, precisely the same number of rolls as there were solitaries, including the visitor. Being asked for the name of the benefactor who had sent these gifts, the stranger replied that they had but to enjoy the alms sent them for the love of God, without inquiring further; and saying this, he departed and was never identified again. The poor solitaries were much consoled by this occurrence, and strengthened in their resolve to guard their holy poverty more jealously than ever, wholly abandoning themselves into the arms of Divine Providence.

The value of the Solitude to the religious of the Province is beyond all question. They withdraw there in turn, and all are free to remain as long as they wish or as obedience allows. They return to their convents filled with zeal to labour more earnestly for the greater glory of God and the strict observance of their Rules. It is spoken of as the soul of the Province, and regarded as the most efficacious safeguard of observance and

promoter of personal sanctification among the Brethren.

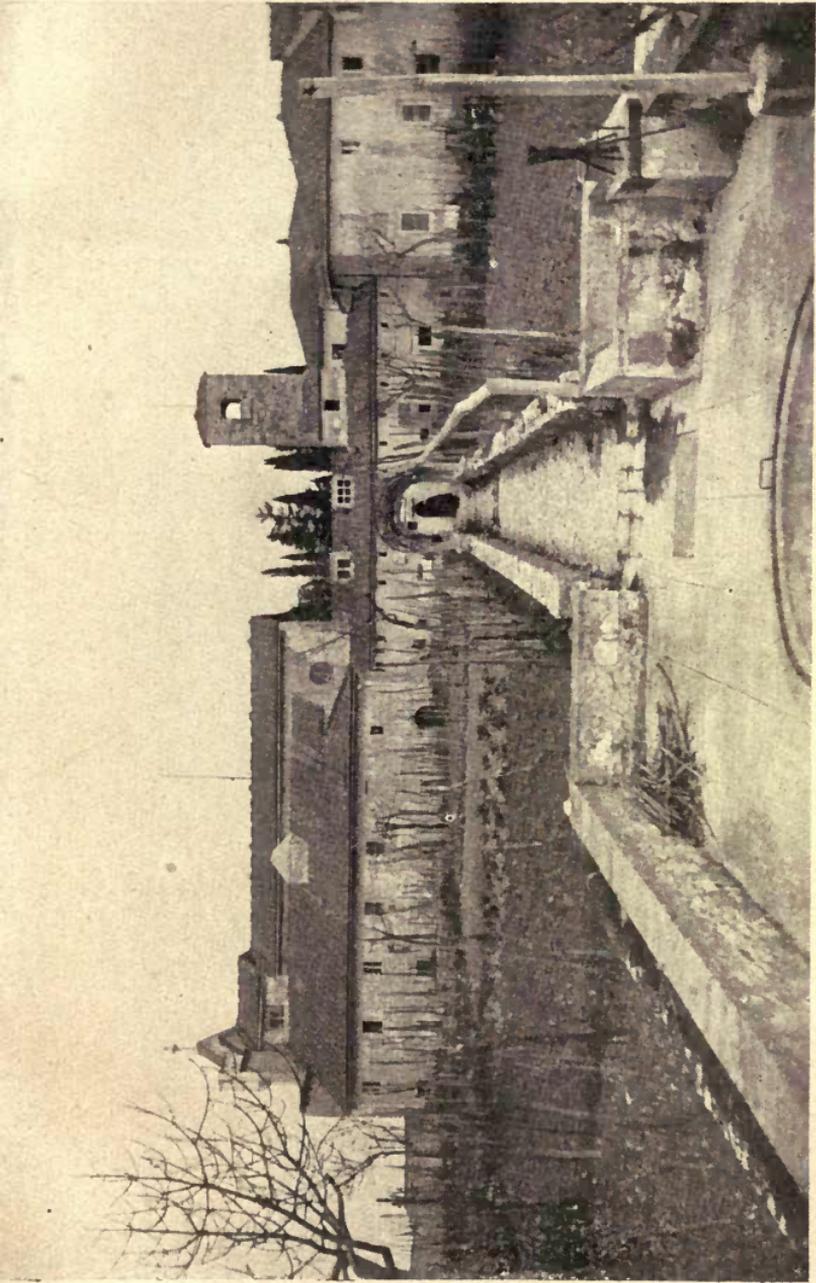
Finally, one must not omit to mention the value of the Solitude to outsiders. A casual visit to this holy spot, the sight of the poverty reigning there, and of the austerities practised therein, has brought tears to the eyes of many, and led them to go away filled with sorrow and compunction at the contrast offered to their own self-indulgent lives. The neighbouring people, who frequent this holy place, have been wonderfully touched and drawn back to God. The President has faculties for hearing the confessions of men, and twice a year religious are sent up from the Convent of the Mount to hear the confessions of women. Many approach the tribunal of Penance, and many are the conversions wrought, and all this without any preaching at all but that of poverty's silent voice speaking from this sanctuary.

But, indeed, it is hardly to be wondered at that simple peasants and poor folk should be thus moved, seeing that persons of the highest rank have gone there to learn the great lesson of detachment from earthly things. The Most Serene Grand Duke, devoted as ever to the glory of God, once visited the place for his soul's sake, with several members of his Court. They could hardly contain their emotion as they visited, one after another, the little cells, and saw how truly the road to

Heaven lay therein. Neither were the Princesses less edified. To satisfy their devotion they too, despite the difficulties of the journey, came to visit this holy spot, and were filled with consternation at the sight of the austere life led therein; yet for them also, as they confessed, the visit did but serve to increase their love and generosity in God's service. Several prelates, apostolic Nuncios, and other distinguished personages, were similarly moved, and openly blessed God for allowing them to see in this sanctuary a fervour recalling that of the first days of the Seraphic Order,

Such is Leonard's famous "Brief Sketch of the Foundation of the Solitude of Incontro," beyond question the best monument he has left us of his own interior spirit and of his views on the apostolic life. Let us not be too ready to brush it all aside as a mere unfortunate relapse into unenlightened mediævalism. After all, that to which it bears witness is of as undoubted necessity now as it was then: the manner of its expression may well differ in these times, but not the underlying truth, which remains immutable from the day it was first enunciated. *Sine Me nihil potestis facere* (Without Me you can do nothing).

It appears that Leonard remained a superior, either at Florence or at Prato—where he received one of his brothers into the Order—for over twenty years. He was only removed from office



INCONTRO : FROM THE SOUTH, SHOWING THE ORIGINAL BUILDING IN THE CENTRE.

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in these parts to be chosen Guardian of the Convent of St. Bonaventure in Rome in 1736, when he was already sixty years old. To his great joy, he was, however, finally relieved of the burden at the Provincial Chapter in the following year, and replaced by his friend and confessor, Fr. Jerome.

NOTE ON BLESSED LEOPOLD, OF GAICHES, O.F.M.

Leopold John Croci, as he was in the world, was born of good peasant parentage near Perugia in 1732. He early showed signs of a vocation to the priesthood, combining piety with the tending of his father's sheep. After studying Latin with his parish priest, he joined the Franciscan Order at the age of nineteen, a few months only before St. Leonard died at Rome. In much his life was a replica of that of Leonard. Ordained priest in 1757, he was appointed Lector, teaching Philosophy for three years and Theology for four. He then entered upon an active missionary life, which, though he covered a far less extensive area, closely resembles that of Leonard, being penitential like his and wonderfully fruitful. He has left us a series of "resolutions," based evidently on those of his predecessor. In 1781 he was chosen Minister-Provincial of the Umbrian Province, marking his term of office by reorganizing the studies, and combining everywhere zeal for integral observance with great charity and sympathy with the Brethren. Towards the end of his term of office, he succeeded, despite some opposition, in establishing, like Leonard, a *Ritiro*, or Solitude. The spot chosen was Monte Luco, near Spoleto. Here, to the end of his days, lay Leopold's *treasure*, and his *heart* at least was there always. The course of his work, both inside and out, was rudely interrupted in 1809 by the

suppression of religious houses consequent upon Napoleon's differences with Pope Pius VII. For several years Leopold had charge of a parish, combining with his new duties, as best he might, the austerities of the cloister. He also managed to continue his missions. Before his death, however, he had the great joy of seeing *Monte Luco* live again. The Community was restored there in 1814, and there Leopold died on the 2nd of April, 1815. He was beatified by Pope Leo XIII. in 1893.

CHAPTER III

At Work Abroad

“Venientes autem venient cum exultatione portantes manipulos suos.”

WE come now to those vast external labours which are Leonard's best-known claim to distinction, and which mark him out as pre-eminent in that great line of apostles the Church is ever producing. His work falls naturally into three groups—his missions to the masses, his Retreats to the few, his personal letters of spiritual direction.

His missionary activities strike one at a glance as prodigious, extending over almost half a century. His first mission was preached in 1708 at Ortallo, near Port-Maurice, when he was thirty-two years old, and for forty-three years, till his death in November, 1751, he was constantly engaged in this work.

What may be called his first great missionary campaign was conducted in Tuscany, when, as we saw in the last chapter, he was stationed at Florence. To begin with, he used his own convent church of St. Francis, but, as the fame of the preacher spread, other and larger churches were offered him in Florence itself. After evangelizing the city for two years, he passed out into the country, beginning at the small town of Pitigliano, the reputed birthplace of the famous Pope

Gregory VII. The steward or, if I may be allowed a more modern but expressive name, the billeting officer, attached to the missionary party by the Grand Duke, wrote at this time to his brother at Florence :

I must let you know how lucky Pitigliano has been in getting this great servant of God. He has just finished the mission here, and now we are off to Sorano, to sanctify that place, for it is not only a work of conversion he accomplishes, but of sanctification. Fr. Leonard is a real instrument of the Holy Ghost. His very manner wins all who come in contact with him, even the most hardened. His Royal Highness has done me the honour of attaching me to the Father's service, to look after him, but it is little I can do either for him or his companions. They insist on begging for the little food they take, and when, the other day, I got ready for them a little suite of five rooms, with a bed for the Father and mattress and bed-clothes, he had the lot turned out and got some planks to sleep on instead. I think God must really support him miraculously, for I cannot see otherwise how he keeps going with so much work and such austerity.

Prato was another place to which Leonard directed his steps in 1713, at the special invitation

of the Grand Duke. His services seem to have been needed as much to conciliate the people, who were disposed to resent the new foundation made from Florence, as to turn them to God. But the Saint was well able to cope with this double task, and succeeded admirably.

It would be impossible to give in detail an account of all the missions which, during twenty-two years, Leonard gave throughout the Grand Duchy and in the Republic of Genoa. Let another contemporary account of one of them suffice for this period. It is left us by the parish priest of St. Roch at Pistoia:

How grateful I am that it occurred to me to ask for Fr. Leonard! God alone can say all the good he has accomplished, as He alone can measure it. All the town venerates Fr. Leonard as a saint and a learned preacher, and all have been touched by the fire of his words. He wins his way into the hearts of the most indifferent, and even to those who are accustomed to shut out the truth and listen only to what flatters them. Only those who obstinately stayed away altogether have been able to escape him. The congregations were unprecedented. Fifteen thousand persons are estimated to have taken part in the second Penitential Procession, and almost twenty thousand were there for the Closing and the Papal Blessing. All the confessionals in the churches of the city have been

thronged, and wonderful were the dispositions of the penitents, who showed most remarkable zeal for the welfare of their souls, to the complete neglect of everything else. He has won the esteem of all, and it was with tears in their eyes that they watched him go. Now they are anxiously looking forward to the time when they may hope to see him in their midst again. The most distinguished people in Pistoia, men and women, came to St. Roch at times very inconvenient for them, and in the heat of the day, in order to hear him and go to confession. Many persons even spent the night in the porch of the church. Thanks be to God for deigning to visit us with such men as these. The effect of the mission can be seen in the devotion with which the Stations of the Cross are made now. It is a most wonderful sight to watch the fashionable ladies and gentlemen of Pistoia, so averse, as a rule, to outward demonstrations of piety, making the Stations of the Cross with the greatest fervour and attention, and even kissing the ground ; and this is still continuing, even though the mission is all over.

In 1730 Leonard, aged fifty-three, was asked by Cardinal Francis Barberini, Dean of the Sacred College and Bishop of Ostia, to give a mission at Velletri, and to call to see him at Rome before beginning. He accordingly left Florence in the

September of that year, and, after visiting Assisi and the Convent of St. Mary at Ponticelli, where he had made his novitiate, arrived in Rome by the end of the month, the whole journey having been made on foot.

Whilst waiting for the Cardinal, who happened to be away from Rome at the time, Leonard consented to give a mission to the poor people, who were housed in large numbers at the Hospice of San Gallo. This humble beginning was the prelude to a regular series of missions in Rome, for his eloquence immediately attracted attention, and many of the clergy and nobility came to San Gallo to hear him. The congregation increased daily, till at length Leonard had to abandon the church and preach in the courtyard of the Hospice, people crowding on to every balcony and window to hear him. As soon as he had finished at San Gallo, other and larger churches at Rome were immediately offered him, and his courses of sermons only ceased with the arrival of Cardinal Barberini and his own departure for the long arranged mission at Velletri. This enjoyed all the success and produced all those good results which the Cardinal had anticipated. The people became enthusiastic and flocked in crowds to hear the sermons. At its close, Leonard, anxious to avoid the public ovation which was being prepared for him, had to slip away towards Rome in the early hours of the morning before anyone was up. His next mission was in the large church of Santa Maria de Trastevere, but here again the crowds

were so great that it was impossible to accommodate them all, and many were forced to stand outside in the street.

Meanwhile the Grand Duke Cosmo of Tuscany and his consort, Violante, viewed with displeasure Leonard's prolonged absence, and sent a small vessel to the port of Rome with a pressing invitation to him to return. This he did, with the Pope's blessing and the permission of his superiors, and on his arrival at Florence was greeted by the citizens with lively demonstrations of regard. He then withdrew for several days' complete retirement to the Solitude of Incontro before recommencing his Tuscan apostolate.

Tuscany, however, was not destined to monopolize the Saint's activities. Several Cardinal Bishops who had heard him at Rome, persuaded his superiors to summon him again to the capital, and in November, 1731, Leonard was once more journeying south preparatory to a long series of missions, extending over six years, in the various dioceses around Rome. It was during these courses that Leonard obtained permission to withdraw for a month to the solitary Convent of St. Angelo de Montorio Romano in the Sabine hills, when he wrote the letter to Brother Stephen mentioned in the last chapter. Two or three times also he visited Florence, to attend the local elections and regulate the affairs of the Convent.

In 1736 we find him preaching a mission at Civita-Vecchia. The mission lasted three weeks, and was conducted from the bridge of one of the

ships, several others being grouped alongside. Crowds poured down from the city and mingled with the soldiers and sailors, convicts and galley-slaves, who thronged around the preacher. Wonderful was his success, and special facilities for confession were given the prisoners, who were allowed ashore to visit the missionaries at their lodging. Whilst at Civita-Vecchia, Leonard wrote thus to Brother Stephen at Rome :

Yesterday I preached in the jail : not many there, but the first sermon seems to have touched them, and all went to confession. . . . We went afterwards to visit an English captain, who wanted to see me, on his vessel. We found three or four of them who had assisted at the sermons and seemed disposed to abandon their heresy. Poor fellows, they had been more moved by what they had seen than what they had heard, for they hardly understand the language at all, which only shows that grace is the prime mover in stirring the heart. . . . On the whole the harvest promises well. To-morrow we begin the course for the galley-slaves.

After his brief period of office as Guardian at Rome, Leonard was prevailed on, towards the end of 1737, to return north towards Tuscany and Florence. After a short interval of repose at the Solitude of Incontro—if one may speak in such terms of the life he led there—he began

a third missionary campaign in these parts. It was during this period that he preached a mission in the cathedral at Assisi, and another at Rieti, and others in various cities of the Marches of Ancona, familiar of old to St. Francis. In 1740 he was once more summoned back to Rome by his superiors, and spent the November of that year in preaching. In January, 1741, he gave a mission at Terracina, and then, at the express wish of the newly elected Pope, Benedict XIV., he went off to preach at Gaëta.

Here Leonard met with considerable opposition on the part of the garrison. Gaëta seems to have been a military centre of some note, and just prior to Leonard's arrival great preparations had been made and expenses incurred by the members of the Officers' Club in view of the approaching carnival. The Saint's arrival was looked on as something of a catastrophe, and no effort was spared to cripple his apostolate. Seeing how matters stood, Leonard immediately made it known that he had no wish nor intention to try and stop people enjoying themselves; all he asked was that no active opposition should be raised to those who might wish to attend his mission. Then he began, and, as usual, carried everything before him. All ideas of carnival-keeping faded away before his inspiring eloquence, till finally the very officers themselves joined with the vast crowds who thronged around his pulpit. As he was leaving, Leonard received a visit from one of the senior officers of the garrison, who expressed his

regret, in the name of his comrades, for the opposition they had originally offered to the mission.

After giving several missions in the territory of the Republic of Genoa—whither he had gone at the express request of the Doge, or chief magistrate—including one in his native town of Port-Maurice, which, despite the proverb, was a great success, Leonard was sent, by mutual agreement of Pope and Doge, to preach in the island of Corsica.

For the preceding twelve years or more the Corsicans had been in a chronic state of revolt against the overlordship of Genoa. In 1731 they had offered the sovereignty of their island to the Pope, who had wisely declined the doubtful honour. Since then, after passing successively to France and Sardinia, to the profit of neither, the island had once more reverted, in theory at any rate, to Genoa. The condition of both Church and State in the island had, during these years, become deplorable, and Leonard was really sent on a quasi-political mission, to do what he could to improve the general conditions, both temporally and spiritually. This is made clear from his letters of the period, several of which are addressed to Government officials either at Bastia or Genoa. In addition, he drew up two Memoranda, sketching the state of affairs as he found them and suggesting remedies—one for the Genoese Commissary-General at Bastia, and the other for one of the State Secretaries of the

home Government. All show to what extent political interests were involved in his apostolate.

On this troubled sea, then, did Leonard embark in May, 1744, being now sixty-seven years of age. For him the vital issues were spiritual, the glory of God and the salvation of souls being ever his single aim. His first act, on landing at Bastia, was to say Mass in the Franciscan church. He then had a long interview with the Governor, arranging the details of his missions and gaining additional insight into the state of things in the island. The town of Mariana was chosen for the opening sermons, and thither Leonard and his companions set out on foot.

In this new field of labour the Saint showed more than ever that wonderful capacity of his—already manifested in certain towns of Italy—for bringing peace to warring and discordant factions. His task was no easy one, for, in addition to the natural disposition of the inhabitants, trained up in an atmosphere of constant feuds and sanguinary vendettas, Leonard was known to be himself one of the hated Genoese, and, in fact, a hardly disguised emissary of the Government, which was loathed and detested by every patriotic Corsican. Arrived at Mariana in a state of great fatigue after a most trying journey, he found himself plunged immediately in an atmosphere of suspicion and hostility and party strife. "We want no Genoese here, nor Government agents disguised as missionaries." Such was the spirit

Leonard had to cope with. It was uphill work in more senses than one, but he triumphed as completely over the hearts of the islanders as he did over their rough and mountainous roads.

Mariana pacified, he passed on to Casinga, and thence to Casacconi, preaching everywhere peace and forgiveness, and perpetuating his work by the erection of the Stations of the Cross, a devotion he inculcated unceasingly, as calculated best of all to lead the people to put aside all feelings of rancour and revenge and replace them with the charity of Christ. Everywhere the most wonderful success attended his efforts, not unaccompanied at times with portents which, supernatural or not, tended to drive home his teaching. Thus on one occasion a fierce young man, armed to the teeth, cried out during one of Leonard's lengthy sermons, "When *will* this monk stop preaching peace?" and immediately collapsed in a dead faint and had to be carried off.

At the beginning of each mission his audience, as a rule, resembled an armed host; each group, headed by its chief, kept itself vigorously apart, ready on the slightest provocation to fall on their hereditary enemies, a mere imagined sign of hostility being sufficient to set them flying at each other's throats. Gradually as the mission progressed, the attention of the audience would come to be less concentrated on themselves and more on the tall, spare form of the aged friar preaching, without sign of fear or political reference, the blessings of peace and the power of charity. All

would conclude triumphantly with a general reconciliation and the singing of the *Te Deum*.

A whole series of letters illustrates this arduous period in Leonard's apostolic life. Here is one to the Archbishop-Coadjutor of Genoa, which gives us a good picture of his work and difficulties :

Our missions continue to be blest by God. . . . In every parish we encounter most formidable feuds, but peace and tranquillity gradually come to the top at last. However, unless the administration of justice gets strong enough to stamp out these vendettas, the good we are doing can only be transitory. Still, we work on all the same, and to-morrow our sixth mission begins, here in this commune of Rostino. . . . In order to attend, these poor people have to climb over steep mountains, neglect their affairs, and stop where the mission is being given from morning till evening, since it is out of the question for them to return home and come back again the same day. We preach in the open under the chestnut-trees, the crowds are so great. They will put up with all these inconveniences for eight or ten days, but not for more ; and the needs everywhere are enormous, and far more time is really required.

Everywhere we come up against the most profound ignorance, for during all these recent years² of war the people have had no

instruction whatever. The young men are dissolute, undisciplined, and stay away from the sacraments ; many do not even trouble to make their Easter Duties, and, what is worse, no one thinks of reminding or exhorting them. When I have an opportunity of meeting the Bishops I shall let them know what I think. However, though the work is very exacting, the harvest is abundant, and it consoles us to see how God is being glorified.

As though a mountainous country and a warlike, ignorant population did not constitute difficulties enough, the missioners were constantly harassed by the fear of a general insurrection, and his comrades were far from sharing Leonard's own intrepid courage. The deep-seated unrest was, indeed, not hard to detect, and in a letter on the state of affairs to one of the Government Secretaries at Genoa, in which he asked for a written guarantee that no further taxes were to be imposed, so that he might insert it in a public letter he was preparing, Leonard thought it wise to ask for "a prompt reply, because, if there is an insurrection, my companions, who are dreadfully timid, are all for immediate flight, in which case I shall certainly have to follow them."

To complicate matters still further, Leonard learnt one day, to his horror, that his name was figuring in a forged document, purporting to be issued with his approval, summoning the notables

of Corsica to a reunion at Corte. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the latest Government proposals concerning the political independence of the islanders. Little doubt could exist as to what the upshot of such a meeting would be, and Leonard had to take prompt measures to avert the danger. He was busy in Corte at the time, and he immediately mounted the platform, whence he was accustomed to address the people, and boldly denounced the forgery and those who were responsible for it, calling down the vengeance of God on all who, in any way whatever, continued to foment the prevailing discord. His eloquence won the day, and the threatened upheaval of popular passion was temporarily averted.

Poor Leonard! It was all most desperately wearying, this constant correspondence with the authorities, imploring prompt measures to calm the unrest and check the widespread violence; this incessant preaching, exhorting the good, urging on the slack, threatening the unrepentant; this constant moving about up and down the island; and one feels all the time that he must have suspected, as he plodded over these hilly, rock-strewn roads, that all the great work he was doing was not likely to endure. Was he surprised when Pope Benedict XIV. wrote to him in the following year: "The Corsicans have fallen into worse excesses than ever since the missions; that is why it is not thought opportune for you to return"? Small wonder that after six months of such a life his strength broke down

completely. In November he returned to Bastia in a state of complete collapse. The doctors did all they could for him, but with the rapid approach of winter it was judged necessary for him to return to Italy. The Government sent over a special boat for him, and, after circulating a letter throughout the island, explaining his departure, Leonard returned to Genoa.

When he had sufficiently recovered his strength, Leonard commenced a mission at Genoa. Europe was at this time distracted by the War of the Austrian Succession, in which England, Austria, and Prussia were pitted against France and Spain. In those days Spain rubbed up against Austria in the northern regions of the Italian peninsula, and so Leonard, as he pursued his missionary activities in these parts, found himself preaching to a population harassed by the presence of rival armies. There was, in addition, a conflict going on—a sort of subsidiary side-show to the great war—between Genoa, supported by France and Spain, and the kingdom of Sardinia, supported by Maria Theresa. Such an unfavourable atmosphere induced the Saint to make for less troubled pastures.

In January, 1746, after giving missions at Ravenna and Argenta, he wrote thus from the latter place to Fr. Peter at Rome :

During the thirty-eight years I have been giving missions I don't think any have been so fruitful as these. Help me to thank God

for it all. We shall be here three more days to finish the harvest, and then we go to Massa, in the Diocese of Imola. After an eighteen days' mission there, we shall go on to Ferrara, where Cardinal Crescenzi is impatiently awaiting us. I shall remember you to him. In Lent I shall be giving Retreats to nuns, and shall be able to read your book on Our Lady, for at present I've no time. Everything has to be done in a hurry; I preach three times a day, hear confessions, settle a host of difficulties which are continually cropping up, and so my time goes. I make up a little during the night, but this is a cold place, and that means no light mortification.

After punctuating his external activities by a Retreat with the Carthusians in the Diocese of Ferrara, we find him finally, in 1749, at Rome, engaged in both mission and Retreat work, and giving considerable time to hearing the confessions of those who flocked to him at the Convent of St. Bonaventure.

It was during this period that he accomplished a work, long in mind, of erecting the Stations of the Cross in the Coliseum. The solemn opening took place on the 27th of December, 1750.¹ A little later he writes thus to his old friend Cardinal Crescenzi :

¹ We have ventured, in an appendix, to give a rendering of the sermon the Saint delivered on this occasion.

I am getting old—my voice the same as ever, but my strength far from what it used to be. Yesterday I preached at the Coliseum, where we have put up a beautiful set of the Stations of the Cross. There was a great crowd and great fervour. My voice carried as it did two years ago, but I felt worn out. It is a consolation, however, to see how this Coliseum is no longer a common spot, but a real sanctuary, for it is the most popular Stations of the Cross in Rome.

We must leave to a later chapter an account of Leonard's last missions and death.

Throughout his long apostolic career Leonard was constantly engaged in giving Retreats. We have mentioned his first one, whilst still a deacon, to the convent girls at Rome. Later we find him, on the conclusion of a mission, preaching a Retreat, with excellent results, to the University students at Pisa ; and it was a frequent custom of his, when at Rome, to give Retreats during Lent to lay-people in the palace of one of the Roman Princes. Towards the close of 1749 he gave several Retreats to the laity in the various churches of Rome, preparatory to the Jubilee year of 1750.

It does not appear that he gave any Retreats to the clergy, but he made a practice in his missions of assembling the local clergy together and giving them what he speaks of as a "mystic and moral

discourse." This sometimes developed into a Triduum of Spiritual Exercises. His purpose in all this he expressed on one occasion, when he said: "If I succeed in winning the confessors, the success of the mission is assured."

He was in constant demand for Retreats for religious communities of nuns, and his letters contain frequent references to such work.

Thus in June, 1732, he writes from Viterbo to Brother Stephen: "I am much occupied with these religious—in fact, they won't let me go; I'm with them from morning till night."

Again in August, 1734, he writes from Florence: "Next week I have to go to Prato, as the Brethren there want to see me, and then to the Convent of Visitation Nuns at Marsa."

In March, 1747, Leonard wrote thus to Fr. Peter at Rome:

As for me, I shall read your book during Holy Week, which I am hoping to spend in Retreat with the Carthusians. I shall write as soon as I've finished it. At present I am making a tour of the convents. A lot of good is being done, but it's far more tiring work than the missions.

From Narni he wrote next year to the same Father:

Next week I shall be busy with the nuns. There are five convents here. The scrupulous, one must simply cut short, otherwise one

would never end. However, your protégée will get more gentle treatment; but, believe me, it's the most terribly wearisome work of all.

During his last missionary campaign, before his death, Leonard was in frequent correspondence with the Pope, Benedict XIV., who took a really affectionate interest in the work and welfare of the Saint. Writing from Lucca in May, 1751, Leonard says :

We were prevented from opening the mission as soon as arranged, but it will begin on Ascension Day. Meanwhile, I have been busy with the nuns. As soon as I arrived, all the convents were agog to get me. But how much better things are here than at Florence! here one meets with really saintly religious, and it is due in large measure to the zeal and vigilance of the good Archbishop.

Not a few letters of spiritual direction have come down to us, which show us that Leonard knew how to turn also to good purpose this third powerful, if unostentatious, method of apostolate. Of particular interest is his correspondence with the household of the exiled Stuarts. Here is a letter to the Saint from the son of James II., known in England as the Pretender, and in Italy as King James III.

ROME,
12th February 1735.

A thousand thanks to my dear Fr. Leonard for his letter of the 1st inst. I have been always meaning to write since my late bereavement (the death of his wife, the Princess Mary Clementine), but have had no leisure. However, I did not fail to burn unread one of your letters found, with other papers, under the Queen's pillow after her death.

Your letter was a great consolation. Without doubt she was ready for Heaven, and I trust God will grant her there all her desires. I have a lot to tell you, both on her account and on mine, but am unwilling to put it in writing—besides, my hand still makes writing difficult. Consequently I am very anxious to have a talk with you. Your words are always a help for me and a guide, and, besides, I have some details about the Queen which I feel sure will interest you, as they did me. Let me know, then, when we may hope to see you here.

Many thanks for the prayers said for the repose of the Queen's soul, and for the share you so kindly allow me in your own. In them I have great confidence, and for you always the most sincere regard.

JAMES (KING).

Unfortunately, all Leonard's letters to the Princess Mary Clementine were burnt, at the Saint's

express wish, after her death. There is frequent mention of them in his letters to Brother Stephen, where we constantly read, "Enclosed a letter for the Queen," or "Be so good as to forward, as usual, the enclosed letter to the Queen." If these, however, are lost to us, we still have several to the Duchess Isabel Strozzi, one of the Queen's familiar attendants and friends.

In February, 1735, he wrote to her from Jési, just after the Queen's death:

I write to you in just the same way as I did to the Queen. It pleased me to see the honours that have been paid her. Now you and I must try to profit by her example. The world admires her external virtues, her penitential life, her modesty, her love of retirement, her devotion to duty; but Leonard admires more her interior virtues, her absolute detachment from creatures, her love of suffering, not merely physical—all bodily pain she looked on as a treasure—but far more of spiritual suffering, for it is clear God meant to crucify her outwardly and inwardly as well. Such was the source of her intimate union with God, and of that ardent love which constantly filled her heart, rendering unnecessary all external consolations. Such, above all, was the source of that interior peace of hers, which gave her on earth a foretaste of Heaven. . . . Let us turn to God and try to love Him as she did, as

fervently as ever we can, for the time is short and, as we see, everything around us is fading away to its end. So let us leave all, that we may find our all in God.

Certainly I shall do whatever I can to help you, though my work leaves me little time. Still, to write to you sometimes will be a pleasure, and will remind me of when I used to write to the Queen. . . .

Several subsequent letters to the Duchess, on the Interior Life, show us how Leonard kept his promise. His doctrine is frequently similar to and, no doubt, based on that of St. Francis de Sales, as when he exhorts the Duchess to allow nothing ever to ruffle her peace of heart, or tells her not to worry about *feelings* of love and devotion, or when he bids her aim above all things at sanctifying the little actions of her daily life, that being the truest and shortest road to holiness.

Towards the close of the same year, 1735, Leonard wrote to her as follows :

I want you to be holy. God has great designs for your soul, so do not spoil them by tepidity. Be faithful to God and docile to His inspirations. Live in retirement, recollection, and detachment from the world. If you are really united to God, you will be of all the greater service to those in whose welfare you are so deeply interested.

Again, just after Christmas :

As for ourselves, do not let us fail to be true to God, trying to grow more and more perfect. In the ways of God, he who does not advance falls back, and to advance we must do violence to ourselves and suffer. But it is precisely this ha'porth of suffering that no one wants to spend. We put ourselves to all sorts of inconvenience to satisfy our paltry passions, but when it is a question of overcoming them, we won't move a finger or put up with the least thing. What a miserable state of affairs!

One might prolong to some length these quotations from Leonard's letters to the Duchess Strozzi, but let two more suffice. In March, 1738, Leonard wrote to her from Florence :

I was very much pleased at the good resolution you have taken of following in all things what you know to be the Will of God—that is the perfection and fulness of charity and the fount of all merit. Cling closely to this spirit, and do not let it slip from your heart. Make use of it on those occasions, so frequently recurring, when self-love is wounded. Everything that happens to us, sin excepted, is ordained by the loving Providence of God. May His Holy Will be done, then, whatever our repugnance may be, and

we shall be moving over an ocean of peace. As for distractions, dryness, and such like, these are all more necessary for you than your daily bread. God means you to have them, for He knows that without them you would become a vain little woman, one of those superior, devout people who, beyond measure, displease Him. As things are, however, humbly recognizing yourself for what you are, you will come to please God in proportion as you displease yourself.

Again, in November, 1739, he writes from Palombara:

MADAME,

May the grace of the Holy Spirit dwell in your heart! I envy you your Retreat. The greatest blessing we can enjoy in this world, so it seems to me, is to live united to God in holy solitude. Every touch of the outer world is full of bitterness, full of a thousand dangers, fruitful in complications, whilst intercourse with God is full of sweetness and peace; the soul learns to know herself; she humbles herself and disabuses herself of much, and comes to understand the importance of what is eternal and the vanity of all that passes with time. Fixed in God, she becomes mistress over herself, and acquires great dominion over her passions. Thus does she enter into peace and interior

tranquillity, and finds her sole delight in the perfect accomplishment of the loving Will of God, and everything else becomes distasteful to her.

Thank Our Divine Lord for granting you so precious a gift. Be faithful to Him. Seek Him not outside but within yourself, and the light of Faith will open out to you an abundance of consolation.

As for me, I shall not fail to recommend you to Jesus. I feel it to be my duty, for I earnestly wish to see you holy. Do the same for me. You also can be a missionary, even though alone, by offering to the Eternal Father the Blood of Jesus Christ, that He may touch the hearts of those to whom I preach.

This mission has been blessed by God. To-day we leave for Olevano; that is why I cannot write more fully. There is no lack of work.

I leave you in the sacred side of Jesus, and remain,

Your Excellency's humble and devoted
servant,

FR. LEONARD.

Here is one of Leonard's letters to his own brethren. It is written to Fr. John-Baptist of Varallo, Vicar of the Convent of St. Bonaventure at Rome, and one of the Lectors in Theology there :

SESTRI,
17th May, 1745.

DEAR FATHER IN JESUS CHRIST,

May the peace of Jesus be with you! I have written to the Brother of the "quest" to remember me to the nuns of St. Catherine, and to tell them I shall pray a lot for Sister Dominic, who has done so much for us. If you happen to see the Rev. Fr. Assistant again, give him my kindest regards, and thank him for all the interest he has taken in me. Do your best to sanctify the nuns at Fara, and ask them to pray for me, as I pray for them.

As for the Lent you are proposing to preach at Varallo, for the present I should say, leave it. Try rather to master your sermons and instructions, and you will do twice as much good afterwards. The wars are another reason for my saying no. My dear Father, don't go till all these troubles are over.

I really forget what our spiritual conference was about when we were last together. From what you say I think it must have been on the means I have tried to adopt of keeping myself in that peace of heart without which we are of no use to ourselves nor to anyone else. They are four.

The first is to be dead to the world, to creatures, to oneself, to all that is not God. We must keep our hearts so disentangled from

earthly things as to make no more account of what is not God or does not relate to Him than we would of a grain of sand.

The second is to live in a state of absolute self-surrender in the hands of Divine Providence. We must look upon the events of each day, great or small, pleasant or disagreeable, as so many dispositions of this fatherly Providence, ordaining or allowing things to be as they are, being quite certain that all is for the best, and making for the glory of God and our own salvation.

The third is to love suffering, whether interior or exterior, to welcome abjection and scorn and the being cold-shouldered by men. Happiness in Heaven lies in joy ; on earth, in suffering. When we find ourselves getting disgusted with sickness, with being thought little of, with trials, let us turn to Jesus immediately ; His constant companions were contempt, sorrow, and the deepest poverty.

The fourth is not to undertake too much at a time, however good it may all be, but only what our ministry demands, and obedience. Above all never act in a hurry, impetuously, but calmly and quietly ; a self-restraint ought to characterize our words and actions and our whole bearing.

I send you these rules as I wrote them out for myself in my Resolutions. I examine myself on them every day, and find that I've always failed in something. I hope you

will profit by them better than I do. Pray for me.

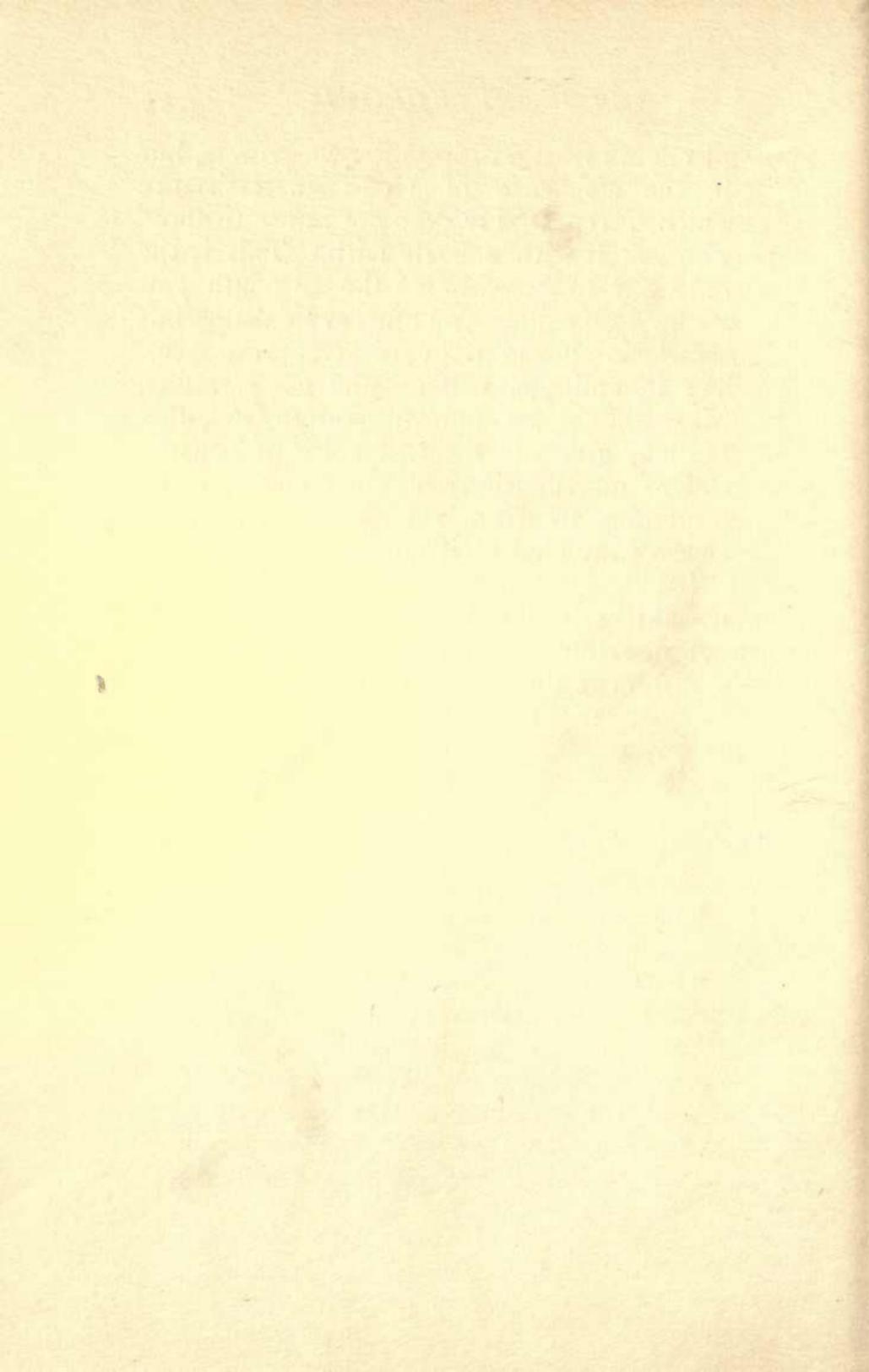
Affectionately yours,
FR. LEONARD.

As a final example of Leonard's spirituality and common sense, let me give a letter, on another subject, which he wrote to one of his own brothers :

To speak quite frankly, my very dear brother, I believe you are under a delusion. You seem to have got into your head the silly notion that it is impossible for you to live chaste. This false principle being fixed in your mind, it follows that at each temptation you immediately give up. It is quite true that without God's grace we cannot live a chaste life, but it is none the less true that God gives His grace to those who try their best. *Facienti quod est in se Deus non denegat gratiam* (From the man who does what lies in him God withholds not grace). Consequently, when a temptation comes, turn straight to God, and He will help you. He has said so, clearly : *Petite et accipietis* (Seek and ye shall receive) ; and with God's help you will keep from sin. Impress, then, on yourself this great truth. Even if all the devils in hell were let loose against you, to lead you into sin, yet, if you don't want to, you won't sin, provided you

place your trust, not in your own powers, but in the assistance of God: an assistance which, I repeat, He does not refuse to those who ask it with a lively faith. This is the only way to get clear of the labyrinth you are in. Of course, you must avoid dangerous occasions and keep guard over your eyes. Try it, and you will see the good results. Meanwhile I recommend you to God, that He may give you the true spirit of penance and of mortification without which it is no easy thing to triumph over so degrading a vice. May God bless you.

With this selection from Leonard's letters of spiritual direction we must conclude our brief review of him as the man of action.



CHAPTER IV

At Work on Himself

“Labor est ante me, donec intrem in sanctuarium Dei.”

IT is always a bold thing to treat of the inner life of a Saint, and but too often the attempt fails to do justice to its subject ; for after all, “No man knoweth the things of a man, but the spirit of a man which is in him.” The most one can hope to do is just to bring into relief those aspects of a Saint’s character which lie away from the main, open currents of his life, but which none the less form an integral part of it.

In the case of Leonard the task is made easier by the fact that, besides his letters, we have also his *Resolutions*, which give us some insight into what manner of man he was.

Two devotions of his stand out conspicuously—that to the Passion of Our Lord, and that to Our Lady. The former found expression in the daily practice, whenever possible, of the Stations of the Cross, and by constant meditation on its mysteries.

I shall meditate night and day on the Passion of our Blessed Lord, but particularly during the Divine Office. . . . In order that the memory of our Dear Saviour may never be effaced from the minds of men, I shall spread this holy exercise of the Way

of the Cross wherever I go. I shall spare no pains to remove all difficulties in order that this holy exercise may be followed with devotion. I shall often give it as a penance, and induce other confessors to do the same ; for if the remembrance of the Passion is deeply engraved on the hearts of the people, their conduct will be holy and their general dispositions better (*Resolutions*, chap. xx).

The erection of the Stations of the Cross became an invariable feature in Leonard's missions. He constantly mentions it in his letters. In his Corsican campaign it was one of the means he most relied on to instil into his fierce audiences the gentler spirit of Christ ; and it was but a fulfilling of a long-cherished dream when he was able, as we have seen, to erect them, each in its own little chapel, in the Coliseum at Rome. Leonard was, in fact, largely instrumental in securing for this devotion the popularity it still enjoys.¹

¹ "We have already said that the greatest development of the Way of the Cross as a popular devotion dates back to the time of St. Leonard of Port-Maurice, O.F.M., being partly due to the immense zeal with which he propagated this practice of piety, partly to the favour which he enjoyed with Popes Clement XII. and Benedict XIV. It was the latter Pontiff who, in 1750, erected the Stations of the Cross in the Coliseum, the great ruined amphitheatre of ancient Rome, and there the exercise used to be conducted processionally every Friday afternoon down to the time of the Italian occupation. Under the influence mainly of the Fran-

Leonard's love for Our Blessed Lady led him, over and above his personal practices of devotion, to do his utmost to procure the dogmatic definition of her Immaculate Conception. We have letters of his on this subject to the Apostolic Nuncio at Paris, in one of which he exhorts that prelate to try and induce the French Court to press the affair at Rome, for "already the Crown of Spain is taking keen interest in the issue. . . . Tell His Eminence Cardinal Fleury that if he wishes to see the world at peace, France happy, heresies overthrown, political difficulties with foreign Powers vanish, he must do all he can to get the Immaculate Conception declared an article of faith."

The Saint then proceeds to outline a plan, subsequently adopted, of convoking "a general council, without any expense, and without the Bishops having to leave their sees. The idea is that all the Bishops, political rulers, and heads of religious Orders, should address in writing to the Pope at Rome their petition for this favour, and there you have a demand from the Universal Church. The idea is taking root and looks promising."

Six years later Leonard was writing on the same

ciscan Fathers of the Observance, the devotion of the Stations spread rapidly from Italy throughout Europe, in the same form, practically speaking, in which it is familiar to us at the present day" (*The Stations of the Cross*, by Fr. Thurston, S.J., chap. viii.).

subject to a prelate in Rome, with much less confidence, however, though with undiminished ardour:

I wish to have this mystery declared an article of faith. Do not draw back in alarm, as though it were attempting the impossible. Imaginary difficulties are precisely what are blocking the most important affair in the world.

After outlining his hopes and the grounds of them, Leonard closes his letter with an impassioned appeal, "begging you to join me and to promise to be unswervingly devoted to this holy mystery, so that, when we are both in Heaven, we shall be able to say, 'Mother, well-beloved, I have pleaded your cause.'"

In chapter xx. of his *Resolutions* we read :

I wish to have the most tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin, in whose hands I have placed the important affair of my eternal salvation. I love her most ardently as a son loves the sweetest of mothers. I want all to love her and show her the greatest respect. Therefore I shall deliver her panegyric as fervently as I can, hoping that all may be filled with love for so great a Queen. Above all, I shall be particularly devout to the mystery of her Immaculate Conception. . . . I shall also honour her as the Mother of Sorrows, thinking of her in her pain and suffering.

We are still, however, but on the fringe of Leonard's inner life. His *Resolutions*—written, we must remember, for himself, and so not necessarily suitable for another—show us clearly to what an extent he was constantly engaged in overcoming that lasting difficulty in the spiritual life, the *wish* to be holy. *Si vis perfectus esse* (if thou *wilt* be perfect); there lies the whole difficulty. If we want to be holy, we shall be, but in most of us, deep, deep down, there is an unvoiced acquiescence in remaining just as we are. This is how Leonard dealt with the question in his *Resolutions* (chap. xxiii.):

I wish to be animated with a practical and lively faith. . . . I purpose having a hope as firm as if I were assured of eternal salvation. . . . I wish to love God unceasingly, and to emulate, if possible, the love of the tender Mother of God. . . . I propose to practise the virtue of religion as continuously as I can, giving to God the worship due to Him, with my lips, my heart, and my body. . . . I purpose practising holy humility, not only by suffering contempt with patience, but even by desiring it and rejoicing in it. . . . In a word, I purpose practising all these virtues, in all their perfection, as the most eminent Saints in Heaven have done. Yet, however good these purposes may be, and however holy these resolutions may appear, if they are not

founded on true and deep humility, if they are not based on diffidence of self, making me see clearly and really believe that I am as far removed from these heroic virtues as Heaven is from earth, and that I shall never be able to practise them as I ought without a special grace from God—for, as our Holy Father St. Francis says, we are nothing more than what our works show us to be—all my purposes and resolutions will only serve to foment vanity and nourish spiritual pride.

Aim high, then, was Leonard's principle, otherwise we shall get nowhere at all.

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was a special object of Leonard's devotion. He wrote¹ a little book on it called *The Hidden Treasure*, in which he laments the widespread indifference to this great source of spiritual energy and life. In the third chapter of his *Resolutions*, he speaks of it thus:

With regard to Holy Mass I shall prepare myself for it as well as ever I can, and for this purpose I shall go to confession twice a day, allowing for this all the time that may be necessary. And if sometimes I cannot kneel at the feet of a priest to confess my sins, either because my occupations will not permit me, or because I cannot conveniently find one,

¹ See note at the end of the chapter.

I shall make a spiritual confession at the feet of Jesus Christ, going through the same acts and imposing a penance on myself such as I might have received had I really been to confession. I shall act thus in order to approach the altar with the greatest purity of heart and thus increase divine grace, which I hope to strengthen more by a single confession than by all other good works, no matter what they may be. When I have sufficient time I shall recite the Psalms prescribed by the Church ; if not, I shall make up for them by interior acts. . . . I shall never say Mass, even on the biggest feast-days, without wearing my hair-shirt, and that will be a constant reminder of the Passion of Jesus Christ. I shall endeavour to be very exact in going through all the ceremonies and in observing the rubrics, making the crosses and genuflections without the least omission. I shall make every effort to appear with an edifying modesty exteriorly, and to be truly recollected within. I shall pay especially great attention to the meaning of the words, bearing also in mind the four principal ends for which this holy and adorable sacrifice is offered—viz., to praise the Divine Majesty, to Whom infinite praises are due ; to satisfy the justice of God for the many sins I have committed ; to thank Him for the many benefits He has conferred upon me ; and to implore His help as the Dis-

penser of all graces. . . . At the Communion I shall excite in my heart lively acts of faith, love, and contrition, and a great desire of being wholly transformed into Jesus Christ ; communicating daily as if, like a dying man, it were for the last time in my life. After Mass I shall make my thanksgiving in the usual manner, reciting the customary prayers.

I wish all I do from Mass to Compline to be so many acts of thanksgiving for the great benefit I have received, and from Compline to Mass to be all in preparation for this august sacrifice. I am convinced that my greatest efforts in this preparation and thanksgiving should be to bring thereto a pure and humble heart, which, enlightened by a lively faith, will produce acts of interior humility, homage, praise, love, and contrition. As Holy Mass is the most precious treasure we have on earth, I shall hear all the Masses I possibly can.

Of the Divine Office, Leonard says in his *Resolutions* (chap. iv.) that he will look on the choir as the "place of my delight." He arranged for himself a method whereby he allotted to the various parts of the Office some scene in the Passion of Our Lord on which to meditate. Outside choir he took the resolution to recite the Office always on his knees.

Chapter v. is devoted to mental prayer :

As to mental prayer (he writes), I shall make every effort to become quite familiar with it, so that it may be my daily bread. Hence I shall never omit the three hours prescribed for it in our Constitutions, and if I cannot allot this time to it during the day on account of my occupations, I shall make up for it during the night. When the duties imposed on me by obedience prevent me from having the usual time for prayer, or if I am out of the Friary, or on a journey, or employed in other matters, I shall observe strict silence and keep myself in interior recollection, requesting my companion to be good enough not to interrupt me. This is what I purpose doing with the assistance of God, being well aware that without interior grace I cannot be faithful to these holy resolutions.

On missions I shall never neglect my ordinary prayer, and I shall read the subject beforehand. I shall pay attention to the hours given to prayer in our houses, so that I may then recollect myself interiorly and form different acts in my heart, whether at study or employed in other matters, or even preaching. Moreover, having discharged my ordinary duties, whether at home or on missions, I shall employ all the time still remaining in the exercise of prayer. I shall

thus be always speaking to God and remain recollected in His Divine Presence. I shall then form divers interior acts in accordance with what I said above, or by a simple but intimate and loving regard I shall enjoy the sweetness of His conversation. Hence I shall avoid, as much as possible, all company with lay-people, unless I am obliged for grave reasons to converse with them. I shall not trouble myself in the least as to whether they call me rude or impolite for not visiting them. If I am at home I shall remain in my cell or in the choir, and if I am on a mission I shall remain in my room.

The ordinary method of my prayer shall consist in seeking God within myself, usually beginning with some stage of the Passion of Our Lord, particularly the Crucifixion. . . . The great object of prayer being that of keeping the heart continually occupied with the love of God, there is not a better way of obtaining that end than by recollection, silence, and detachment from creatures. . . .

In chapter xviii. Leonard treats of the observance of poverty:

I shall have nothing for my own particular use (he writes), except the crucifix I wear on my breast, my little hand-bag, the case with my sermons in, my writings, my Breviary, my Rule, my hair-shirt, my little cross with

sharp points, my spectacles, my rosary, the two disciplines, the one I use at the community exercise and the one I use at my secret penances at night, a little holy picture of the Immaculate Conception, the framed picture of St. Vincent Ferrer, with which I bless the sick : this is all I shall keep for my own particular use.

Leonard was indeed a model of poverty. He was sparing in everything he used, even the very paper on which he wrote. He used to horrify his companions by writing to cardinals and duchesses on half-sheets of notepaper, but he himself would never worry, and used to remark cheerfully : "They know Leonard is a poor man, so they won't bother to stick at ceremony."

Peace of heart was something on which Leonard laid the greatest stress. We have seen what he wrote to Fr. Peter, and his *Resolutions* on the subject are almost identical. It was something he regarded as vital, knowing well that feelings of bitterness, hostility, and discontent are a great obstacle to good work for souls. Every day at noon he examined himself on it, and realizing that "all anxieties usually spring from a want of humility," humility was a virtue he made special efforts to acquire. In chapter xxi. he writes :

I may lay down two kinds of humility, that of the understanding and that of the will. The first makes me see my nothing-

ness, the second helps me to accept contempt. . . . As to supernatural gifts—being incapable of a single good thought without a new actual grace—I am convinced of the absolute sterility of my poor heart, which is incapable of any good without the special influence of grace. If I look at the number and the enormity of my sins, I see there a bottomless abyss; and what St. Francis said of himself with pious exaggeration, that he was the greatest sinner in the world, I can say of myself with absolute truth. That I cannot, however, convince myself of this without great labour and difficulty is precisely an evident sign, an incontestable proof, of my being the proudest of men, for, having constantly before me so obvious a fact, nothing but pride could blind me and keep me from seeing it. . . . However, to come to practice: I shall keep particular guard over my tongue, never speaking of myself either for good or bad, never mentioning my sermons at Rome, nor the success of my missions, except where it may be necessary to justify the doctrine contained in our instructions and preaching. . . . I should easily succeed in all this if only I could repress my thoughts of self-esteem.

Purity of intention was another matter to the importance of which Leonard was fully alive;

I shall look upon it as a matter of the greatest importance (he writes in chapter xv.) to perform all the actions of the day, not only with some good intention, but with a pure and simple one, so that they may be meritorious before God and agreeable to His Divine Majesty. I see that I must pay the greatest attention to this. In the eyes of God a single act done with a pure and simple intention is of more value than a hundred others done from imperfect motives. . . . Consequently, I shall make every effort, by God's grace, to do all my actions with this pure and simple intention, which consists in trying to do everything to please God, without any other motive at all. . . . At the beginning of each action I shall say, *My Jesus, mercy*, and in so doing I wish to renew once for all this simple and pure intention, looking to God alone, and not seeking, in what I do, anything else except His goodwill and pleasure.

Here is something of what Leonard has to say on his great life-work, the missions :

I shall give myself to this (he writes in chapter xxii.) entirely *ex toto corde*, spending night and day in that saintly employment, always occupied in hearing confessions, in giving advice, in establishing peace, in preaching, yet desirous throughout, not of

following natural inclinations, but the movement of grace, renewing often a pure and simple intention ; and, though at one time I felt a certain distaste for mission-work, now that two Sovereign Pontiffs have assured me that such is the Will of God, and that Benedict XIV. has expressly laid such duty upon me, I consecrate myself whole-heartedly to it, hoping that I seek therein God rather than myself. . . . To give a good example to others, I shall prostrate myself before going into the pulpit to preach, and with my face to the ground, adoring the Majesty of God, I shall make an act of contrition for my sins and faults, and an act of diffidence in myself, being convinced that compunction of heart and the conversion of sinners is the work of the all-powerful arm of God and wholly the effect of grace. Therefore I shall lay no store by my own ability, industry, or learning—rather, full of distrust of my own powers, I shall rise with a real confidence in God, begging Him to deign to touch all hearts and convert all sinners. Then I shall repeat several times, *My Jesus, mercy.*

It is interesting to note that Leonard chose as one of the chief patrons of his missions the famous Dominican preacher, St. Vincent Ferrer. The last chapter of the *Resolutions* deals with what Leonard calls “the safeguard of them all”—viz., the

practice of maintaining himself in the Presence of God.

I am confident (he writes) that if I have God unceasingly before my eyes I shall be faithful in their observance. . . . I shall derive from this Presence of God great modesty in all my actions, words, and behaviour, whether I be alone or in company, on account of the sovereign respect I owe to God's infinite Majesty. I shall never give way to any levity or buffoonery. I shall preserve always a grave and recollected attitude. . . . However, I shall use discretion with regard to times and persons. Thus in recreation with my brethren, whether on a journey or in the garden, or with my missionary colleagues, I shall be affable, cheerful, and gay. With others I shall maintain a grave demeanour, and in order to keep myself recollected, I shall avoid as far as possible the dissipation caused by worldly conversation. Keeping this rule, I shall preserve myself in peace of heart, and it is on this, as I have said above, I shall examine myself daily. To succeed in this I must take a resolution, the last, though, on account of its importance, it ought to be the first—viz., to speak quietly and little, and never to do things in a hurry, but calmly and with great exterior reserve.

Such, then, was Leonard: beyond question austere, reserved, silent; rejoicing, as he says himself (chap. ix.), to lead a poor, religious, penitent life; walking always in the presence of God, so that at times it needed quite an effort to attract his attention; and yet, withal, never morose, never gloomy, but cheerful and gay. "Leave sadness to those in the world," he would say. "We who work for God should be light-hearted."

In much he reminds us of St. Bernard: he had no eye—deliberately, not through lack of taste—for natural beauty, passing through the most gorgeous scenery unmoved. How different from St. Francis, for whom the loveliness of God's handiwork was a straight road to God Himself. Again, his austerities, like those of the great Cistercian, seem to us almost incredibly severe; yet, instead of leaving him—as an austere life is sometimes apt to do—on a cold pinnacle of isolated superiority, we find Leonard, like Bernard, to have been full of sweetness towards those with whom he lived or with whom he laboured, paying due attention to such domestic details as the preparation of the food, dispensations from fasting, and the supply of necessary clothing. There is an amusing postscript to one of his letters from Corsica, in which he reminds his correspondent of the promised supply of winter habits for himself and his companions. They were to be made at the Convent at Genoa, "and if the religious there excuse themselves, saying they haven't got

the cloth, don't believe a word of it ; for, if they want to provide them, they can."

NOTE ON LEONARD'S WRITINGS

Leonard was the author of several devotional works, only two of which, so far as I know, have ever appeared in English—viz., his *Resolutions* and *The Hidden Treasure*. Others are a volume of *Spiritual Exercises*; the *Sacred Manual*, destined primarily for nuns; several short treatises and instructions—e.g., *Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament*, *Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, *An Instruction for Confessors*; and lastly, and principally, his *Mission Sermons*.

Though Leonard will ever live in the work he did and the manner of its doing, and in the example rather than in the writings he has left us—still, the latter merit far more than this passing notice, and it is to be hoped that someone may one day be found willing and capable to render them into English.

CHAPTER V

The End

“Quærite Dominum et confirmamini: quærite faciem ejus semper.”

THE erection of the Stations of the Cross in the Coliseum in December, 1750, was really Leonard's last great work at Rome. In April, 1751, he prepared to go north to give a mission at Lucca. On the 14th of the month, the day before he was to leave, he went to see the Pope, to say good-bye and get his blessing. Benedict XIV., who, as we have said, thought a great deal of Leonard and valued highly his work, ordered him to travel in future in a carriage and no more on foot, and told him, moreover, that he would look for his return to Rome in November. A few days later the aged friar—he was seventy-four years old—arrived at Florence, and was greeted by priests and people with the wildest enthusiasm. It was several years since they had last seen him, and his fame had been ever spreading. Crowds gathered round his carriage striving to kiss his hand, and even to make off with fragments of his habit.

After spending some days in visiting, at the Archbishop's request, several communities of nuns in the neighbourhood, Leonard withdrew to his convent, hoping to steal a few days' peace before

the commencement of his mission. He soon found, however, that his days were almost wholly occupied in attending to the crowds who were constantly asking to see him. Peace and quiet being imperative, he had to place himself out of their reach, and so fled away to that home he loved so dearly and with whose spirit he was so deeply imbued, the Solitude dedicated to Mary, high in the hills, Incontro. It was his last visit. On the 5th of May he left it for Lucca, never again to return.

Leonard had hardly begun his mission before he suddenly collapsed. He found himself absolutely incapable of any mental application at all, and had to cancel several of his sermons. Fortunately, he became strong enough, after a few days, to preach again, and the mission was resumed with all his old fire and energy. It was a stupendous success. The great Cathedral of St. Martin was filled to overflowing, and it became necessary to preach in the open. It was Leonard's last great passionate outburst of ardour for the salvation of souls, such as had burned within him throughout the long years of his missionary life.

From Lucca he passed on to several smaller places in the neighbourhood, preaching everywhere eloquently and with fruit. He then commenced a series of missions in the mountainous country around Bologna. Here Leonard found himself confronted by a spirit of open hostility, several persons of local importance turning his words into ridicule, and even going so far as to

endeavour to keep people from going to confession to him.

It is seldom in the life of Leonard that one has to chronicle an unsuccessful mission. These round Bologna, though far from being failures, certainly did not achieve anything like the usual results. This may have been due in some measure to his own failing powers and lack of concentration ; but twice before, in the course of his apostolic career, a somewhat similar setback was experienced. Once, when preaching in the Sabine, the mission had been seriously crippled by some public shows and games, which, by an irony of fate, were being held simultaneously in the open space fronting the missionary's own lodging. Still more vexatious to the ordinary person was what happened on another occasion, when Leonard and his companions were politely but clearly given to understand, before the mission had even begun, that they would be conferring a pleasure all round if they kindly withdrew altogether. Such unaccountable behaviour very naturally made his companions most indignant, but Leonard, quietly remarking that this was only a fitting readjustment of the balance—so much previous applause being undoubtedly bad for them—started to leave immediately, and his colleagues could do nothing except go with him.

Leonard was accustomed to spend much time and labour over the composition of his sermons, not hesitating even, as he freely confessed, to borrow, and often verbatim, from others ; but

during these last missions of his it was noticed that he was far more occupied in rereading his *Resolutions*, written more than thirty years back at Incontro, than in anything else. On being questioned about this, he simply replied: "These *Resolutions* are what are necessary for me now." In October he wrote to Monsignor Belmonte, one of the Pope's chamberlains: "If it please God that I reach Rome, you will all, no doubt, be satisfied; but, if I do, I shall never leave it again, for the old ship is breaking up and can't hold out much longer."

At the beginning of November Leonard starts his journey Romewards, his last journey. He stays first at Ferrara, spending a few days with his old friend the Cardinal Archbishop Crescenzi. From Ferrara he goes to Bologna, and then to Loreto, which he reaches on the 20th. The people turn out to meet him, the Governor offers him lodgings in the palace; he thanks them, but prefers the Convent of the Brethren. Next morning, after Mass, he presses on to Tolentino. He arrives at sunset, and lodges once more in poverty with his own, rather than in luxury with strangers. That evening the friars all remark on his gay spirits. He leaves early, and makes for Ponte della Travè, where, half dead with cold, he celebrates Mass, breakfasts off dry bread, and presses on. At seven that evening he is at Casa della Nuova. Resting by the fire, he is overcome with a fit of trembling. "You've got the fever, Father," says his companion, Brother Diego. "I



CONVENT OF ST. BONAVENTURE, ROME.

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can't say," replies Leonard. He then finishes some Office, has a light supper, and goes to bed. He is troubled with a racking cough, which keeps him awake. At one he rouses the Brother and asks him to light the fire, as he can't stop in bed any longer. The fire lit, he crouches by it. The Brother asks him how he feels. "Bad," replies Leonard; and Diego augurs ill of a reply which years of incessant toil, fatigue, and often sickness, had never yet wrung from him. At daybreak they move off towards Foligno. Here, despite his companion's protestations, Leonard, though with the greatest difficulty, says Mass, for "a single Mass is worth more than all the wealth of the world." They rest at Foligno the remainder of the day, and on the next start for Spoleto. The guide loses his way, the carriage—for Leonard must needs obey the Pope and not go on foot—gets stuck fast, and he has to get out and walk through water and mud till the carriage can come up with him. He reaches the Convent of Spoleto in a dying condition, but must say his Office, which he does, two of the Brethren helping him. They beg him to remain, but he excuses himself, saying the Pope wishes him in Rome before the month is out; and so leaves next day for Civita Castellana. Early the following morning, the 26th of November, he starts on the last lap, his impatience to reach Rome increasing as he nears the city. His strength seems to revive, and he discourses at length with Brother Diego on spiritual things. Then: "I know I must die

soon." Diego hopes it may not be so. "No; it's quite clear to me I'm near the end. However, I shall not cease to pray to God for you, Brother Diego, for I have always loved you."

The sun has just set, after the briefest of winter days, when Leonard and Diego reach the Convent of St. Bonaventure. With difficulty is the Saint lifted from the carriage and borne straightway to the Infirmary. His first thought is to notify the Pope that, in obedience to his wishes, he has reached Rome. He asks for pen and paper that he may do so himself, but is restrained by his confessor, who assures him it is being already done. Hardly have they got him to bed when he makes his Confession and asks for Holy Communion. The Community assemble, and he receives the Viaticum, pronouncing clearly the acts of Faith, Hope, and Charity. Later the doctor arrives, and prescribes a fortifying hot drink. Leonard receives it gratefully from the hands of the Infirmary: "How can I ever thank God enough for allowing me thus to die in the midst of my Brethren!" At nine o'clock Monsignor Belmonte arrives from the Pope, and spends a few brief moments with the dying Saint. On his departure Leonard asks to be alone, and all leave him, save the Infirmary, who remains within call, listening, with the door ajar, to his fervent acts of divine love and devout invocations to Mary. A little later he is anointed, and before midnight is face to face with God, dying without pain or struggle.

The body was set out in the Infirmary, where crowds from every class of society came to visit and venerate it. For the solemn Mass of Requiem it was transported to the choir, and finally buried in the Chapel of St. Francis, where it remains to this day.

Leonard was beatified by Pope Pius VI. in 1796, and canonized by Pope Pius IX. 1867.

Sancte Leonarde, ora pro nobis.

APPENDIX

*Sermon delivered by St. Leonard on occasion of the erection of the Stations of the Cross in the Coliseum at Rome.*¹

PRECIOUS metals, rich seams of gold, are laid bare only with difficulty, in delving into the entrails of the earth, but stones of real value must be sought for on the rocky crests of high mountains. To convince you of this truth, come with me to Mount Alverna, and gaze upon our glorious Patriarch, St. Francis of Assisi. Occupied solely in seeking for the precious pearl of evangelical perfection, he was at a loss to know,

¹ As I write this sermon of St. Leonard it is borne in upon me strongly how inadequate such a translation must be as a sample of his preaching. Leonard was not a "pulpit orator"—*i.e.*, as I understand the term, one whose sermons were literary masterpieces, as those of Bourdaloue and Massillon and others. He was essentially a popular preacher, the value of whose work lay less in what he said than in the way he said it. His sermons are invaluable to preachers as guides to a simple, earnest, and straightforward treatment of the subject-matter, but beyond that, so it seems to me, they represent only the channel whence his great influence passed out, and not its source. This lay in Leonard himself. I append this translation, then, for its historic interest, as having been preached on a great occasion, and as an example of the Saint's simplicity and clarity of treatment, rather than of his missionary powers.

in the midst of the privations of his austere poverty and the rigours of his great penitence, to what exercise of piety he should, by preference, devote himself. One day, as he turned over in his mind various thoughts on this subject, he was suddenly rapt into ecstasy, and, in the fervour of his burning love, found himself transformed into Jesus Crucified; that is to say, he received in feet and hands the sacred wounds of the Saviour. This Seraph, then, in human form, understood that he was to seek no other treasure than Jesus Crucified—that his one occupation for the rest of his life was to think of Jesus Crucified, to live crucified, and to impress on the hearts of men a sweetly sorrowing remembrance of Jesus Crucified.

This saving remembrance of the Passion of our Divine Redeemer is precisely the heavenly pearl with which I hope to enrich your souls by the erection of the Stations of the Cross, which is to take place in this wonderful amphitheatre. When paganism was still dominant, this ground was the arena whence hundreds and thousands of Christians won the palm of martyrdom, and whence, glorious and triumphant, they took their flight towards Heaven. Admire, then, dear brethren, the touching object here offered to your piety—namely, the adorable blood of Jesus Christ, shed so abundantly on the road to Calvary, and mystically mingled here with that blood of the martyrs which has consecrated this famous Coliseum. Thus, in proportion as this place was of old profaned by the

abominations of the pagan, so henceforth will it be sanctified by the pious veneration of the faithful. Nay, more, I hope that, thanks to the interest of Our Holy Father the Pope, who, in his great piety, has himself had these Stations set up, we shall see this amphitheatre, of old one of the wonders of the world, becoming in our own day one of Rome's greatest sanctuaries.

Rejoice, then, dear brethren, rejoice; and listen now to what I have to say to you this evening. I shall be short, but I shall speak to you with a full heart. Let us begin.

FIRST PART

A treasure, great and precious though it may be, is only appreciated in proportion as it is known. Hence it is that many amongst you do not value as you ought the Way of the Cross. Treasure immense though it be, it remains for the most part hidden and unknown; for the very Blood Itself, of infinite value, which Our Saviour shed in such abundance, is known but little and appreciated less. Allow me, then, in this simple and homely instruction, to show you briefly how this exercise of the Way of the Cross is most excellent in its origin, most profitable in its results, and very easy to practise.

To convince you of its excellence, suffice it to know that the Way of the Cross is simply a pious representation of the sorrowful journey which Our Lord made, all covered with blood, from the

Pretorium of Pilate to the place of His burial ; and since Our Divine Saviour traversed this way bearing on His shoulders the heavy burden of the Cross, with which the treachery of the Jews had charged Him, we call it the Way of the Cross. And if you would know why we meet therein with so many stations and crosses, each of which offers us a fresh subject of sorrow, understand that each *station* represents one of those hallowed spots where Our Suffering Saviour was obliged to stay awhile and rest. These points are called *stations* from the Latin word *stare*, to stop ; and since from the house of Pilate to the tomb our Saviour stopped fourteen times, twelve times in life and twice after His death, we distinguish fourteen Stations of the Cross.

“What a beautiful idea!” you will exclaim ; “but to whom, then, do we owe this holy exercise ?” You would know this ? Ah, well, it was an idea of the wonderful Heart of Mary, ever Virgin. Yes, it was the most holy Virgin who first thought of this pious devotion of the Way of the Cross. She herself practised it and handed it down to her faithful servants. It is what she said herself to St. Bridget. “Know, my daughter,” she told her, “that during all the time I lived after the Ascension of my Divine Son, I visited every day those holy places where He suffered, where He died, and where He showed forth His mercies.” Now, I ask you, as good Christians, does not this one motive, this knowledge that the Way of the Cross was invented, not by any one

Saint or other, but by the august Mother of God—does not this motive alone, I ask, suffice to win your hearts and enkindle your fervour? Can you not take a resolution to practise it as often as possible, seeing that the Blessed Virgin practised it every day? Let us add that Adricomius, a writer of great authority, not merely attributes to the Blessed Virgin the origin of the Way of the Cross, but asserts, moreover, that it is this pious practice which has given birth in the Church to the custom of having processions, and always with the Cross at the head. He bases his assertion on a pious and ancient tradition; and, indeed, there are many things in the Church which we know only by tradition handed down from father to son. . . .¹ What say you now, dear brethren? Is it enough to make you acknowledge the singular excellence of the Way of the Cross? May we not say that it is, as it were, the mother of all devotions, since it is the most ancient of all, and the most holy, the most devout, and the most excellent? Justly, then, does it merit pre-eminence over all the rest. In the depths of your hearts, then, pronounce sentence in its favour, crying: “How precious a treasure! Oh, how precious a treasure!”

The faithful of the early Church knew this treasure well, and appreciated it. Moved by the example of the Blessed Virgin, who daily practised the exercise of the Way of the Cross, they showed such zeal in visiting night and day the holy

¹ The Latin text of Adricomius is here omitted.

stations of Jerusalem that they excited the wrath of the pagans. The latter, unable to endure the sight of such *crowds, thought to stop them by setting up on the summit of Calvary a statue of Venus, and over the Holy Sepulchre a statue of Jupiter, hoping that the Christians would be turned aside from visiting these holy places for fear of being taxed with idolatry. These infamous statues were later destroyed by St. Helena, and the spots, consecrated by such august memories, restored to their rightful place of honour. However, as time went on, the charity of men grew cold. The Holy Land, moreover, fell into the power of the Mussulman, and it became increasingly difficult to visit the *stations* with the requisite reverence. But in 1322, thanks be to God, Robert, King of Sicily and Jerusalem, conceived, by Divine inspiration, the pious plan of entrusting the guardianship of the Holy Places to the Friars Minor. Hence it is that the Sovereign Pontiffs have reserved exclusively to us the privilege of erecting the Stations of the Cross, and attaching thereto the indulgences which have been granted to them. One may call this a tacit compensation for all that our religious have had to endure in the Holy Land. Barely had they taken over the guardianship of these sanctuaries before they thought of re-establishing once more on the holy mountain the exercise of the Way of the Cross. Having received from the Sovereign Pontiffs a great many indulgences in favour of this pious

practice, they set themselves to propagate it throughout the entire world. So well have they succeeded, in our own time especially, that we may say that every town has become a new Jerusalem, every hill a Calvary, and every sanctuary a Way of the Cross, so few are the places where they have not been erected. Men have at last opened their eyes, and now acknowledge that, among all the practices of piety, this is the holiest and most useful and most excellent of all those which are held in honour in the Church of God. Allow me, then, in admiration at the untold prodigies of excellence found in the Way of the Cross, to exclaim once more: "How great a treasure! Oh, how great a treasure!"

If the excellence of this devotion makes it most acceptable to us for its own sake, the advantages it procures us should make it doubly dear. The blood shed by our Divine Saviour in His sorrowful journey to Calvary, is it not the source of all good? Let us, then, affirm unhesitatingly that the Way of the Cross is salutary for the living, be they just or sinners, salutary for the dead, and salutary, in fine, both for time and eternity.

And, firstly, what occupation more pleasing for the soul in grace than to pass from one cross to another, from one station to another, drawing from each mystery a spiritual consolation which rejoices her heart and gives her a sensible foretaste of Heaven? Indeed, make trial of it when sad

thoughts trouble you and dark days are upon you; pass over the Way of the Cross, and lo! the clouds will fade quickly away and a clear sky shine down on you.

But more salutary far is it for the sinner. According to the common teaching of the Fathers, it is the thought of our Saviour's sufferings that calls down upon us every grace, whilst it is from base forgetfulness of so great a benefit that all our falls come and all our sorrows. It is even by endeavouring to efface from our minds the remembrance of the Passion of our Saviour that the Devil hopes to drag us down to eternal ruin. This was once revealed to a holy soul. Being rapt into ecstasy, this faithful servant of God saw the devils holding a sort of council in the depths of Hell, and discussing amongst themselves the most efficacious means of destroying souls. One, more clever than the rest, suggested that the best means of destroying the whole Catholic world would be to lay low all the crosses, and thus bring it to pass that men should think no longer of the Passion of the Son of God. This dastardly advice was greeted with applause by all the wicked spirits, and they are adopting it in practice only too well. Set yourselves to meditate on death, judgment, Hell, and eternity; the Devil sleeps on unmoved and heedless; but meditate on the Passion of Our Saviour—that is his nightmare, his torment—all Hell bestirs itself to raise obstacles in your path. An experience extending over many years has led me to remark

that every time there is question of erecting anywhere the Way of the Cross a hundred objections are raised immediately in order to obstruct so great a good. Here in Rome, even, was there an entire absence of all murmuring? Few, thanks be to God, very few, but still some remarks have been heard against this Way of the Cross in the Coliseum. And whence does this malign influence come? Do not be surprised when I tell you it is the Devil, who knows the Way of the Cross to be a precious source of holy thoughts and devout meditations and salutary resolutions, and in consequence foresees therein many a defeat for himself. Sinners, seeing these Stations and pondering on the mysteries they represent, are indeed touched, and become converted and turn back again to God. Every parish priest bears witness to this, all exhort their people to practise often the Way of the Cross; and they soon notice a great change for the better and more inclination towards good. Try it for yourself, my poor sinner, try it for yourself; learn to love this holy exercise, practise it often, and you will see how your heart will change.

But the value of the Way of the Cross does not end here. The Precious Blood, shed by Our Divine Saviour during His sorrowful journey to Calvary, does not only serve to soften the hearts of even the most hardened sinners: it serves also to relieve the poor souls in Purgatory. When we apply to these poor souls the many indulgences granted by the Sovereign Pontiffs, we

quench the expiatory flames of their abode of suffering, or, at any rate, diminish their force. To be convinced of this truth, it is enough to read the Brief of Our Holy Father of the 30th of August, 1741, which shows clearly his zeal and special love for this holy devotion. Not content with confirming the ordinances of his predecessors, and the privileges accorded by them, he goes on to exhort the parish priests to introduce this profitable exercise into their churches. To set all obstacles aside and dissipate any doubts that may have arisen, he has reissued the declarations of the Sacred Congregation, adding a tenth paragraph of his own, in which he makes his own feelings clear. Thus all is established now beyond question, and there is nothing we could wish for further. You will find this Brief, translated so that all may read it, as well as the Declarations of the Congregation, in a little work, recently printed in Rome, on the Way of the Cross.¹

As regards the number of these indulgences, all I may say is that they are many indeed, some plenary and others partial; but the Sacred Congregation forbids the publication of any definite or certain number. All one may affirm is that whoever makes the Stations of the Cross devoutly, in a place where they have been canonically erected, gains the same indulgences as if he visited personally the Stations on the *Via Dolorosa* at Jerusalem. Remember always that we can only

¹ By St. Leonard himself.

gain *one* plenary indulgence a day (except in the Jubilee year) *for ourselves*; apply, then, one to yourselves and the rest to the souls in Purgatory. That this application may hold good, make it at the beginning of the exercise, or, at any rate, before the end.

Rejoice, then, my dearly beloved, rejoice in your hearts, since every day of the year you can win so great a treasure of indulgences. And, note well, these indulgences are free, perpetual, and entail no special obligations; to gain them it is not necessary to go to Confession and Communion; it is enough to be in a state of grace and to fulfil the conditions laid down by the Sovereign Pontiffs. These conditions are three. The first, as I have said, is to be in a state of grace. If ever you should find yourselves in a state of mortal sin, make an act of contrition, and continue to practise the Way of the Cross: it will win for you from God the light and grace you need to rise up out of that miserable state, or at least it will serve to relieve the souls in Purgatory if you apply the indulgences to them. The second condition is to go from one Station to another, except where it may be physically or morally impossible. It is not necessary to genuflect before the Cross; a simple inclination will suffice. The third embodies the very essence of this holy exercise; it consists in meditating on the Passion of Our Lord. This is the real reason which has led the Sovereign Pontiffs to extend and popularize this salutary devotion. They see

in it a means of introducing amongst the faithful, almost imperceptibly, the practice of meditation, which is the source of all good. The Sacred Congregation has, however, made it clear that, for the less instructed, a simple reflection on the Passion will suffice, in which they endeavour, as best they may, to compassionate with Our Lord in His sufferings. The recitation of an *Our Father* and *Hail Mary*, and an act of contrition at each Station, are counselled but not imposed as an obligation. You see, then, how easy it is to practise this holy exercise; all we need is to meditate a little on the Passion of Our Lord, and say an *Our Father*, *Hail Mary*, and an act of contrition at each Station.

If all I have said so far still leaves you indifferent to so great a good, allow yourselves at least to be touched with compassion for the souls in Purgatory. Ah! if a ray of heavenly light could but draw aside the veil from your eyes, you would see these suffering souls hovering around each Station, with upraised arms imploring you: "*Have pity on me! Have pity on me!* In pity for us, make the Way of the Cross—for me, your father; for me, your mother; for me, your friend." Is there one here whose heart is so hard as not to be softened and moved with compassion at so sorrowful a cry? As you deliver them from Purgatory, so do you insure yourselves against Hell.

The indulgences we may gain are a motive, quite fitting indeed, for leading us to practise

frequently the Stations of the Cross, but the main purpose of this so touching devotion does not lie there. The Blood of Our Divine Redeemer is not merely salutary for the living, be they just or sinners ; not merely salutary for the dead, to whom we may apply It by indulgences ; but much more is It salutary, in time and eternity, by the virtues and merits and great increase of grace It enables us to acquire, and the very special satisfaction we may procure thereby to the Heart of Jesus. Jesus Himself once revealed this to one of His servants. On the latter asking constantly and with great devotion what homage he could render which would be most agreeable in His eyes, Jesus Christ appeared to him with a cross on His shoulders and said : "My son, help Me to carry this cross, by making the Way of the Cross and meditating constantly on My sorrowful Passion. Thus you will procure for My Heart a most sweet satisfaction." Is it surprising, then, that all the Saints have thought so highly of this noble exercise? St. Bonaventure says that there is no practice of piety more efficacious for making us holy than the Way of the Cross. Without quoting innumerable other witnesses—for fear I should overstep the limits of time I have set myself—let me conclude with a thought from Blessed Albert the Great. Listen attentively, and when the Devil inspires you with repugnance for the Way of the Cross, recall this thought. He says that we gain more merit by a single meditation on the Passion of Jesus Christ—consequently

by making *once* the Way of the Cross—than by fasting every Friday of the year on bread and water ; that we merit more in making the Way of the Cross than by taking the discipline to blood several times ; that we merit more in making the Way of the Cross than in reciting the entire Psalter ; that we merit more in making the Way of the Cross than by going bare-foot on pilgrimage to the shrine of St. James of Compostella. So speaks this great doctor.

And now, what say you? Are you not ravished at the sight of these treasures of grace and virtue and merit offered you in the practice of this holy exercise? Well, then, repeat from the depths of your hearts: "How precious! how immense a treasure!" Or, better still, let each one of you, deep down in your own souls, take this holy and salutary resolution: "Henceforth my most cherished devotion, the one I shall love above all others, will be this holy exercise of the Way of the Cross," and conclude with St. Paul: *Let me not glory, save in the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ.*

SECOND PART

How brilliant is a pearl of great value when set in a golden ring! The Way of the Cross, as we have just seen, is a pearl of great value, a heavenly pearl. How brilliantly, then, will it not shine when set up in this wonderful amphitheatre, in this venerable relic of antiquity! But

why is it that this ancient monument is so admirable? Is it on account of the Roman Emperors who set themselves to make of it the most majestic and splendid edifice in the world, as being destined to be the scene of their barbarous and unholy pleasures? Is it because ten thousand Jews enslaved by Titus were employed in its construction, or because ten million Roman crowns were spent on it, or rather, as Cassiodorus remarks, a veritable river of wealth poured out upon it? Is it on account of the magnificence of its architecture and the nicety of its execution, which are such that, as Martial thinks, it surpasses by far all other wonders of the world? Must we sing its praises on account of the immensely flattering oracle pronounced upon it which we find recorded in the *Collectanea* of Venerable Bede? Listen to it: *As long as the Coliseum remains, so long will Rome remain: when the Coliseum falls, Rome too will fall; and when Rome falls, then will the whole world crumble away.* Is it, then, on account of such praises as these, and many others, lavished on this Coliseum of ours by illustrious men, that we must pronounce it so admirable and so worthy of veneration? No, dear brethren, no. What is it, then, that makes us exalt to the skies this wonderful and stupendous monument? It is the precious blood of so many hundreds and thousands of martyrs, devoured by wild beasts, torn asunder by the hand of the executioner, consumed by fire, or in a thousand other ways, tortured and immolated before God. This blood so pure, this

is what makes the Coliseum admirable in our eyes and worthy of veneration ; this is what has bound together the Faith of Rome ; and this it is which will establish the Holy See more immutably than ever in this capital of the world.

To inflame your hearts with loving devotion towards the holy martyrs who here shed their blood for Jesus Christ, let us dwell on their numbers, their nature, their constancy.

As for the number, you can judge of it by the witty and profound reply which the Pope, St. Pius V., once gave to some who asked from him relics ; he sent them to gather up the soil from the Coliseum, all saturated as it is with martyrs' blood, alluding thereby to the vast number of those athletes of Jesus Christ who, by their blood, consecrated this amphitheatre. One of the most famous was St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, who, if not the very first, was at any rate one of the first, and deserves, by reason of his glorious deeds, to be called in some sort the proto-martyr of the Coliseum. Such was the constancy of this illustrious confessor of the faith that, writing to the faithful at Rome, he begs them not to seek by their prayers to hinder his triumph. This had happened to other Christians, whose bodies, thanks to a Divine interposition, had been respected by the wild beasts. *For fear*, he wrote, *they dare not touch my body, as happened to other martyrs.* He wished to be ground as wheat by the teeth of lions ; and such was indeed his fate, for his ardent wishes were fulfilled to the letter.

Other martyrs of whom we have unquestioned record are St. Eustachius and his companions, St. Bibiana, St. Martina, SS. Abdon and Sennen, two hundred and seventy-two soldiers, St. Vitus, St. Modesta, St. Sempronius and his companions, and a crowd of others whom it would be too long to name. I shall confine myself to two others, of whom the first was the architect himself of this marvellous monument. According to ancient documents it appears that this was a pious Christian called Gaudentius. Pagans maliciously pass his name by in silence, but he merits special mention and praise, less on account of his genius, which has left so lasting and glorious a monument, as on account of the palm of martyrdom won at the hands of the cruel and ungrateful Vespasian. The other is the last of the martyrs who hallowed this spot with their blood, the holy Solitary St. Almachius. This saintly hermit, hearing with what profusion human blood was being poured forth in this Coliseum, left Palestine and came to Rome. At a moment when the amphitheatre was filled with spectators he burst forth into the midst of the gladiators, and with a boldness born of sanctity lifted up his voice in condemnation of such pagan cruelty. The Prefect Alipius, who was present, ordered him to be put to death, and, as Baronius tells us, the command was immediately executed. It was after this that the Emperor Honorius passed a strict law putting a stop altogether to these sanguinary gladiatorial shows.

Tertullian, who flourished in the third century, relates something which gives us an idea of the vast numbers of martyrs who perished in the Coliseum. He tells us in his *Apologeticus* that the pagans were accustomed to attribute to the Christians whatever evil befell their city or empire. Did any calamity occur—a famine, a war, an earthquake, the plague, the flooding of the Tiber, or such like—straightway the pagans would gather in the streets, crying: *The Christians to the lions! The Christians to the lions! (Christiani ad leones! Christiani ad leones!)* Picture to yourselves how these unfortunate Christians must have suffered during so many years. But why call them unfortunate? Happy rather—a thousand times happy! The one thing I envy in those ancient times was the ever-recurring opportunity of becoming a martyr for Jesus Christ. Dear brethren, if we cannot be martyrs indeed, let us at least to-night be martyrs in desire. Let us at least imitate those Saints and servants of God who, filled with devotion for the holy martyrs, professed a sovereign veneration for this holy spot, visited it often, and obtained herein most signal graces. St. Philip Neri, apostle of Rome, and devoted to the holy martyrs, was not satisfied with honouring them by often passing the whole night through in the catacombs of St. Calixtus, under the Church of St. Sebastian; he often visited as well this Coliseum of ours, which he held in great esteem. One day, as he was meditating here in this holy place on the glorious lot of the martyrs

who merited so great a grace, he was assaulted by the Devil, who came to tempt him under the form of an evil woman. The Saint immediately made the sign of the Cross, and, invoking the aid of the martyrs, completely triumphed over the enemy. St. Ignatius Loyola, Founder of the illustrious Society of Jesus, experienced also the protection of our holy martyrs, to whom he had a great devotion. The mother-house being, at the beginning, in a state of great penury and lacking in the most indispensable things, it happened one day that an unknown person offered the procurator, here in this very Coliseum, an alms of a hundred golden crowns. St. Camillus de Lellis, bowed down with grief at not being able to be ordained priest at St. John Lateran, on account of some oversight of his Bishop, found great consolation in drawing near to the Coliseum, for a happy inspiration came to him, through the intercession of the holy martyrs, showing him how the obstacle might be removed.

And you, dear brethren, what can you do? Is not your fervour reawaking to-night? Would you remedy the difficulties which weigh down your families? Come to the Coliseum, make with devotion the Way of the Cross, and rest assured that you will find therein a remedy for all your woes. And now allow me to close this discourse with the expression of a wish. May it please God that what happened in the case of a great servant of God, Dom Charles Tommasi, uncle of His Eminence the Cardinal,

of happy memory, may also happen with me! His devotion to the holy martyrs led him to oppose a bull-fight which it had been proposed to hold in the Coliseum. Not merely did he succeed in stopping it, but he published also a little work called *A Brief Notice on the Amphitheatre of Flavian, consecrated by the Precious Blood of Innumerable Martyrs*, whereby he excited in Rome a great devotion to the holy martyrs, and rendered the Coliseum more venerable than ever in the eyes of the world. May it please God that my poor words may have a like effect! And wherefore not? Tell me, dear brethren, if these holy martyrs, these servants of God of whom we have just spoken, were to come back amongst us and to see what you see now—the Coliseum enriched with so noble an ornament, the Way of the Cross—what acts of fervent thanksgiving would they not offer up to Heaven! With what zeal would they not come to visit the *Stations*! And you, I repeat, what do you mean to do? In what way will your fervour show itself this evening? How can you possibly refrain from blessing God for having opened to you so straight a road and easy to the conquest of Heaven? Come, then; let us altogether bless the Lord; and not in your hearts only: no, no, I shall not be content with that, but we must bless Him aloud, with a voice that all may hear. Repeat, then, all of you, after me: *Blessed be God! Blessed be God!* Repeat it, I say, repeat it: *Blessed be God!* Some of you seem ashamed

to bless God: I am surprised. Now, once more, all of you, men and women: *Blessed be God!*

NOTE.—This is really the end of the sermon. As printed in the various editions of the Saint's works, it is followed by a brief exhortation to the men present to enrol themselves in the *Society of True Lovers of Jesus and Mary*, whose principal function was to make the Stations of the Cross processionally on Sundays and Fridays; and finally by a few practical observations calculated to insure order and reverence during the Way of the Cross which was to follow the sermon.

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DEVAS, DOMINIC, B. 1888.

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