

The Church in Canada.

Under this heading will be collected and preserved all obtainable data bearing upon the history and growth of the Church in Canada. Contributions are invited from those having in their possession any material that might properly come for publication in this department

FATHER LOUIS DELLA VAGNA, CAPUCHIN.

PASTOR OF ST. MARY'S CHURCH, TORONTO, 1856-1857.
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II.

In the year 1850 he bade farewell to his native city, which he was destined never to see again, and sailing across the Gulf of Genoa reached Lyons, where he remained a short time only, and then proceeded in the direction of Paris. He was then 49 years of age, in the prime and vigour of manhood. His constitution, however, not naturally robust, was being gradually undermined by the rigorous vigils and penances to which he had long subjected himself. He reached Paris in the year 1851, and remained for some time in one of the houses of his Order, making preparations for the arduous duties of the mission upon which he was about to enter. During his sojourn in Paris he met for the first time Mgr. Armand Francois Marie de Charbonnel, who had the year previous been nominated Bishop of Toronto by His Holiness, Pius IX. Bishop de Charbonnel was at this time on his way to Rome on the business of his consecration, and taking advantage of the interview which he then had with Father Louis, to whom he was greatly attracted, he expatiated with all the earnestness and eloquence at his command upon the vast field for missionary enterprise which the soil of Upper Canada presented. He besought Father Louis to join him in the evangelization of the new country, and he was the more pressing in his solicitations since Father Louis was so well versed in the knowledge of the English tongue. But the holy friar, though his heart burned within him at the prospect of so rich a harvest of souls as the earnestness of the Bishop convinced him the diocese of Toronto afforded, was too well grounded in the virtue of humility to be persuaded that he possessed the gifts or qualifications which would render him a valuable acquisition to his Lordship, nor could he think of moving to the right or to the left unless in perfect obedience to his superiors. But, undeterred by these obstacles, Bishop de Charbonnel extracted from Father Louis a promise, to the effect that should permission be obtained for him at any future period to depart for Canada, he would do so. At the same time the humble friar made no secret of his desire to undertake such a journey, and to co-operate with the Bishop in the work of saving souls.

Having completed such preparations in Paris as he deemed necessary, he crossed the Channel in 1851, and proceeded to Liverpool, and from thence on his mission to the people of Wales. Regarding details of his six years' labour on the missions in England, Ireland and Wales, we have not much information, but in company with several members of his Order he founded the Monastery of Pantasaph. For two years subsequent to this he performed a series of most fatiguing missions, giving himself no rest or relaxation. In Liverpool he preached regularly in one of the churches for a period of several months, and the crowds that flocked to hear him, together with his remarkable success in bringing people to the sacraments, afford a striking evidence of the power which he wielded over the hearts of men. From Liverpool he extended his labours over other parts of England, and we find him later on repeating his successes in the metropolis of the world, that modern Babylon of sin and misery—the city of London. In 1854 he visited Ireland, and gave missions in Dublin and Cork, accomplishing, as elsewhere, an incalculable amount of good. Returning to his monastery at Pantasaph, he was met with instructions from his Superior to hold himself in readiness for the Bombay missions, the ranks of the Franciscan missionaries in the countries of the East having been greatly thinned by the ravages of fever. Providence, however, had not so ordained, and he was to fall a victim to another destroyer than the scorching sun of the Indies. His preparations for the voyage to the East were completed and he was awaiting marching orders, when, in the

midst of his work, he was stricken down by the hand of disease, brought on by his excessive labours in the United Kingdom. In the meantime the orders he had been awaiting arrived, but, his sickness continuing, another was substituted for him, much to the good friar's chagrin. The affection which he had conceived for Bishop de Charbonnel was enthusiastic, and the desire to join him in the missions of Canada strong, but, to a missionary of Father Louis' zeal and fervour, it was a severe trial to be deprived of the privilege of co-operating, even by a decree of stern necessity, with that glorious cordon of saints who were at that moment planting the standard of the Cross, like the Apostles of old, in the deserts of India, or sealing the faith of Jesus Christ with their blood in the vast provinces of the Chinese Empire. But the good priest recognized God's hand in this, to him, severe trial, and submitted without a murmur. What to him was a heavy cross proved to be to Canada a great gain.

In the autumn of the year 1855 he resumed his missionary labours in England, with undiminished success, and in the spring of 1856 crossed over again into Ireland. On the Sunday preceding the 17th of March, he arrived at All Hallows College, Dublin, that *Alma Mater* of so many Irish missionaries scattered throughout the whole world. He was received with the same respect as would have been St. Francis of Assisium himself, or St. Anthony of Padua, and the influence he exerted upon the young levites of that institution during his brief sojourn amongst them, was of a beneficent and lasting character. His ascetic appearance and great sanctity, of which his face was but a feeble reflection, made a great impression upon all who looked upon him. Among the inmates of All Hallows at that time, was Father Mulligan, whom he was destined to meet not long afterwards in Toronto. Father Mulligan himself laboured for nearly thirty years in the diocese of Toronto, in various capacities, but latterly as Dean of St. Catharines, which office he resigned only a year or two ago, owing to ill-health. He is now in Ireland. Father Mulligan relates that when he saw Father Louis for the first time at All Hallows, he appeared, notwithstanding the laborious nature of his missionary journeyings, and the severe illness from which he had but recently recovered, to be in a good state of health and likely for many years to continue his labours.

In the meantime Bishop de Charbonnel was renewing his exertions to secure him for the missions in his diocese. Being repeatedly balked in his endeavours and finding many difficulties in the way of such a consummation, he at length determined to make application through the Propaganda. The representations he made to that Congregation were of such an urgent and reasonable character, that the Propaganda was induced to interest itself in the matter, and finally, through its influence, Father Louis was ordered to Upper Canada in the beginning of the month of April, 1856. With his characteristic promptitude and obedience he immediately set out for his destination, and such was his diligence, that before the month was out he had arrived in Toronto. On the Feast of the Ascension he made his first appearance in public, at St. Paul's Church, Power St., now under the pastoral care of His Lordship, Bishop O'Mahony. He accompanied Mgr. Charbonnel thither, and sat at his right hand during the celebration of High Mass, and it is related by residents, who were present in the old church (St. Paul's is the oldest Catholic Church in Toronto) on that day, that the devout and recollected demeanour of Father Louis made a deep and lasting impression upon the assembled congregation. At the conclusion of the Holy Sacrifice, the Bishop delivered an impressive sermon, a report of which I find in the *Toronto Mirror* of that date. During the course of his sermon the Bishop said: "I have the happiness to announce to you the arrival amongst us of a holy monk, the Rev. Father Louis della Vagna, who comes all the way from Italy burning with zeal for the salvation of souls. I have known him for nearly eight years; I have sought him for you for the last six; but obstacles continually presented themselves. At length, through the kindness of the Pope and the Propaganda, he is here."

On the Sunday following he was inducted to the pastoral charge of the Church of St. Mary, which was to be the scene of his labours for the rest of his mortal life. "From that day," says the biographer to whom reference has already several times been made, "till the day of his death, he administered the sacraments and the spiritual consolations of religion, with