

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.

(Condensed from a paper read before the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia, February, 1885.)

I.

In the month of June of last year, while tearing down the walls of the old church of St. Mary, Bathurst St., Toronto, the workmen came upon a stone slab bearing the following inscription:

BENEATH ARE DEPOSITED THE REMAINS OF
THE VERY REV. FATHER LOUIS
DELLA VAGNA, OF THE
ORDER OF CAPUCHINS.
A NATIVE OF GENOA—HE LOVED
POVERTY, OBEDIENCE, CHASTITY—HE
LED A MORTIFIED LIFE AND WAS A
STRICT OBSERVER OF THE RULE OF ST. FRANCIS.
HE DIED ON THE 17TH OF MARCH, 1857.
JESUS AND MARY RECEIVE HIS SOUL.

As the excavations proceeded the stone was removed, and beneath was found the iron coffin in which the corpse had been interred. When the side had been removed the face was seen to be in precisely the state in which it had been buried. Intelligence of this discovery soon spread throughout the city, and multitudes flocked to view the remains. Early in the day His Grace, Archbishop Lynch, accompanied by his Lordship, Bishop O'Mahony, Very Rev. Father Rooney, V.G. (the present pastor of St. Mary's) and Very Rev. Father Laurent, V.G., of St. Michael's Cathedral, visited the chapel in which the coffin had temporarily been placed, and reverently looked upon the face of the priest, who, just thirty years before, had been laid to rest beneath the church over which he had, during one short year of his life, exercised pastoral control. Doctors Wallace and McConnell made an examination of the body and found it to be in a remarkably good state of preservation, there being little, if any, decomposition. It has since been re-interred in the vault prepared for it beneath the sanctuary of the new church, never again, perhaps, to be exhumed until it shall come forth at the last day. Among others, the writer of this paper was privileged to look upon the face of the dead monk, and, having regard to the circumstances of his life, an attempt to record which he has here made, he shall ever esteem it one of the greatest privileges God has permitted to him.

The priest whose body had thus been brought to light was at one time pastor of the church of St. Mary. Many old residents of Toronto remember him well. Although his sojourn amongst them was of brief duration, his character and his work were such as to leave an indelible impression upon all who had come in contact with him. But those who were in man's estate then, and still survive, are old and "full of years," and the children of that day are the men and women of this, so that, should no effort be made to preserve the memory of so remarkable a man as Father Louis della Vagna undoubtedly was, there is some danger of the dictum quoted by Mgr. Seton being found still to contain an atom of truth, i.e.: "There is no antidote against the opium of time, which temporarily considereth all things. . . . Gravestones tell truth scarce forty years." Recognizing, therefore, the necessity of doing something towards preserving to future generations the memory of this holy Franciscan friar, I immediately set about collecting all the information possible having the least reference to him, and when asked to prepare a paper for the American Catholic Historical So-

ciety of Philadelphia, on a subject of my own choosing, I determined to put together what I have been able to glean concerning this man. That his memory is worth preserving, the facts will show. In the words of the Bishop of London, who was his immediate successor in the pastorate of St. Mary's Church, "His memory has remained amongst his people like a sweet fragrance, 'like the good odour of Christ unto God.'"

According to a small anonymous pamphlet published at the time of Father Louis' death, and inspired, no doubt, by Mgr. de Charbonnel, at that time Bishop of Toronto, the subject of this sketch was a native of Genoa, the chief commercial city of Italy, where he was born in the year 1801. He came of one of those old merchant families whose spirit and enterprise raised Genoa to the proud position it occupied during the Middle Ages, the memory of which clings to it even yet. Louis himself was intended by his parents for commercial pursuits, and after he had completed his education under the supervision of the Christian Brothers, he was placed in a counting room on the Exchange. Here by his industry and probity he rapidly advanced himself until, at the still early age of twenty-one, he became principal of an extensive banking institution. This rapid promotion of itself affords abundant evidence of the great talents which he undoubtedly possessed, and had he remained in the world, it is not too much to assume that his career would have been one of great distinction to himself and of illustrious service to his native city. But God had other designs upon him. In his youth he had displayed a great liking for spiritual things, and although, as he became engrossed in worldly pursuits, he fell off from much of his former fervour, he never became actually irreligious. When, however, he had advanced to the position just mentioned, he gave up altogether the practice of his religion and devoted his energies solely to the acquirements of this world's goods. This continued until the year 1825, when, being suddenly aroused by the operations of Divine Grace, he placed all his affairs in the hands of his brother, and announcing his intention of quitting the world, he entered the Convent of St. Francis of Assisium. As formerly he had devoted himself with that vigour and energy characteristic of his nature to business affairs, so now he threw himself with his whole soul into the spirit of the Founder of his Order. Having been ordained priest, he continued for twenty-five years to perform the ordinary duties of his state as a Capuchin monk in Italy and the Southern Departments of France, when in the year 1850 he was ordered to the missions of the north-western coasts of Europe.

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(To be Continued.)

THE BLESSING OF THE GOLDEN ROSE.

It is on the Fourth Sunday in Lent that takes place the function of the "Blessing of the Golden Rose," by the reigning Pope. It is not very certain when this custom first originated, but certainly it was anterior to the Pontificate of Leo IX., (A.D. 1048), and a sermon by Pope Innocent III. (1198) on the subject of the Golden Rose is still extant.

In former times the ceremony was far more imposing than it is in the present day. The Pope, who then resided at the Lateran Palace, after having blessed the Rose, set out in great pomp with his mitre on his head and, bearing the newly blessed Rose in his hand, proceeded to the Church, where was the Station of the day, followed by an imposing cavalcade, including the whole Sacred College. This Station was at the Basilica of "Santa Croce in Gerusalemme," (The Holy Cross in Jerusalem), one of the seven principal Basilicas of the Holy City, which church contains many of the precious relics brought by the Empress St. Helena from Jerusalem, amongst others the title which was placed over our Saviour's Head on the Cross, and which relic is here venerated under the name of "The Title of the Cross."

Having arrived at this Basilica, the Pope pronounced discourse on the mysteries represented by the Rose, its beauty, its colour, its perfume. Mass was then celebrated, and on termination the Pontiff returned to the Lateran still carrying the Rose and followed by the same imposing cortege. On arriving at the portal of the Lateran Palace, if there was a distinguished prince present it was his task to hold the stirrup of the Pope's horse while His Holiness dismounted, and as