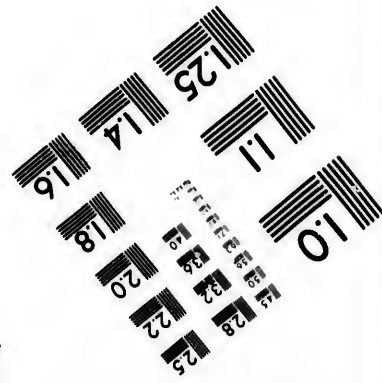
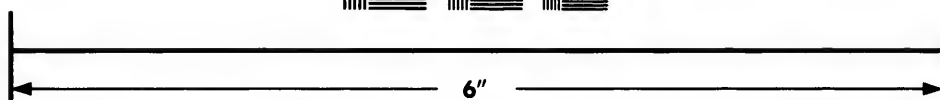
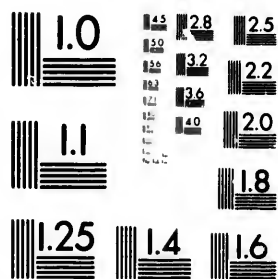


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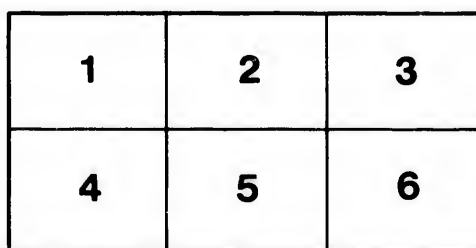
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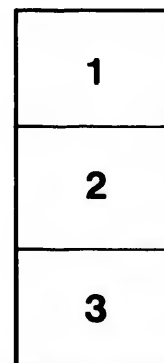
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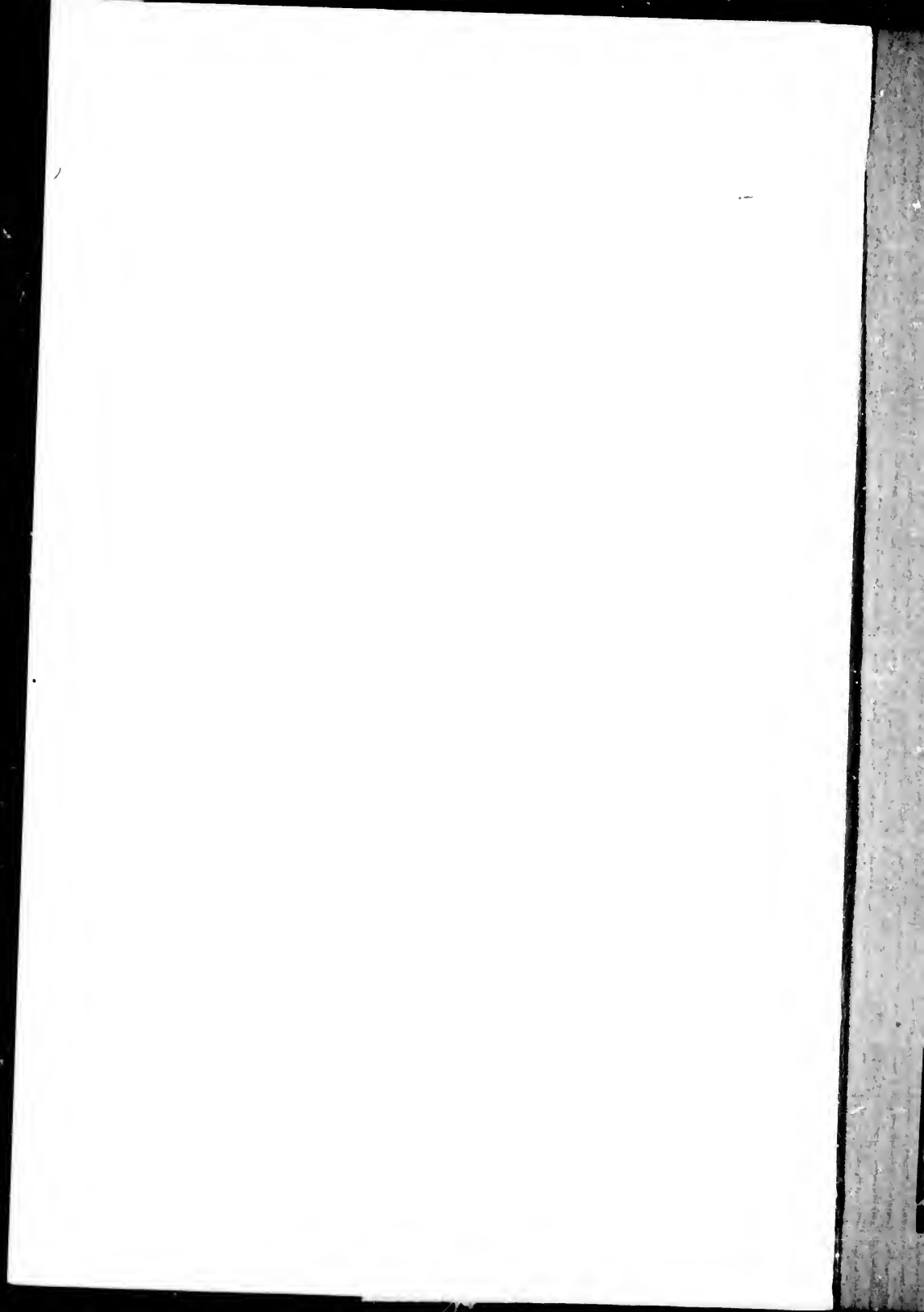
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9.
THE LIFE OF
FATHER LOUIS DELLA VAGNA
CAPUCHIN FRIAR.

PASTOR OF ST. MARY'S CHURCH, TORONTO,

1856 - 1857.

**A Paper read before THE AMERICAN CATHOLIC HISTORICAL
SOCIETY OF PHILADELPHIA, Feb. 29th, 1888.**

BY

H. F. MCINTOSH x

With an introduction by
RIGHT REV. JOHN WALSH, D.D.
BISHOP OF LONDON, ONTARIO.



TORONTO
OFFICE OF "THE CATHOLIC WEEKLY REVIEW."
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(84)

INTRODUCTION.



The Catholic priest is the central figure in the kingdom of grace established by Christ on earth. He is the minister and official representative of Jesus Christ amongst men. A good priest is the best portrait we can have of our Blessed Lord, for the priest is, in the language of the Fathers, another Christ: "*sacerdos altaris Christus*." Like his Divine Master he goes about doing good, reclaiming the sinner, instructing the ignorant, breaking the bread of life to hungry human souls, comforting the afflicted, visiting the sick, helping the poor, protecting the widow and orphan, reconciling neighbours hitherto estranged, bringing peace into families torn by dissensions, and rescuing immortal souls from the servitude of Satan and restoring them to the liberty of the children of God. He begins the care of man at the cradle, he follows him with his holy ministry through all the phases and vicissitudes of life, fortifies him on his death-bed with sacramental graces, blesses the dead body as it is lowered into the grave by holy prayers and benedictions, and even follows the departed soul into the eternal world with the solemn supplications of holy Church and the pleadings and merits of the Precious Blood "which speaketh better than Abel." A good priest is one of the greatest blessings that God in his mercy and bounty bestows on a Christian people. During life his ministry is fruitful in untold blessings, and even after death, his memory, his words, his example, his works, remain to console, to bless, to strengthen and to sanctify innumerable souls. Such a priest was Father Della Vigna, a sketch of whose life is given in the following pages. The writer of this introduction was his immediate successor as Rector of St. Mary's parish, Toronto, and he can never forget the esteem, veneration and love entertained for him by the faithful of that parish. Indeed, he was regarded by them as a saint, and his words, his characteristics and the example of his holy life were treasured by them as memories too sacred and precious to be forgotten. May God continue to bless His Church with such apostolic men. "The harvest, indeed, is great." May the Lord of the harvest continue to send such labourers into His harvest.

† JOHN WALSH,
Bishop of London.

The Palace, London, Nov. 19th, 1888.

FATHER LOUIS DELLA VAGNA.

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



BENEATH ARE DEPOSITED THE REMAINS
OF

THE VERY REVEREND

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 slide 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. Drs. 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 temporally considereth all things Grave-

stones 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 Society 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, Ont., 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 odor of Christ unto God."

Fortunately I have met with a brief biographical sketch of Father Louis, written about the time of his death, and to this I am principally indebted for facts relating to his life previous to coming to Toronto. It is, however, extremely rare, and I have not been able to discover a second copy. The one I have was found by the merest accident in a woodshed in the city of Ottawa and has been kindly loaned to me by a friend for the purposes of this paper. According to this authority, which was, no doubt, inspired by Mgr. de Charbonnel, Father Louis della Vagna was born in the year of our Lord 1801, in the city of Genoa, the chief commercial city of Italy and famous as the birthplace of Christopher Columbus. Although dating back to the days of the Roman Empire, when it was famous as a harbor, and carried on an extensive trade in the products of the Ligurian coast, it was not until the middle of the thirteenth century that Genoa rose to the zenith of its power and wealth. Then the genius and enterprise of its merchants advanced it to the position of one of the greatest and most prosperous commercial cities of the world. It carried on a large Levantine trade even before Venice, with which city, as with Pisa, it maintained a fierce and energetic rivalry. From its beautiful harbor there sailed forth over the unknown seas, in quest of riches and adventure, the ships of the Genoese merchants, and their prestige as

traders and navigators may be imagined when it is remembered that in those days Genoa had almost monopolized the trade with the Black Sea ; had a lucrative trade with India, and held many rich possessions in the East. The city had, after the breaking up of the empire of Karl the Great in the ninth century, constituted itself a republic, presided over by Doges, and the realization of this political independence, coupled with their success in commercial and maritime enterprises, had the effect of giving to the merchants of Genoa that lofty spirit and proud, passionate air of independence, which, it may be said, is their characteristic even to this day. To one of these old merchant families Louis della Vagna belonged, and from his earliest years it was the design of his family that he should, when arrived at a suitable age, enter, as had his father before him, into commercial pursuits. But Genoa, at the time of Father Louis' childhood, had, from its former lofty position as one of the first maritime cities of the world, dwindled down to a place of minor importance. Situated on the Mediterranean Sea, with a fine harbor, one of the most beautiful, as well as one of the safest in the world, with an industrious and indefatigable population, it still, indeed, maintained a certain rank in commerce, but as to political standing or national aspirations its prestige had long since departed. Its former glory had become but as a memory, and there was left to the ancient maritime republic, amid the relics of its past greatness, only the missionary zeal of its ecclesiastical sons and the devotion and self-sacrifice of its religious orders. In these modern times the Genoese could not glory in their martial prowess ; but the apostolic zeal and piety of their monks, and, above all, their solicitude in the education of youth, still emitted a shining light, which shone far beyond the environs of the Gulf of Genoa.

In the midst of this truly religious city, says his biographer, the young Louis, from his earliest infancy, exhibited traits of the most ardent of temperaments. His boyish aspirations were vehement ; and despite of his semi-conventual education, his ambitions leaned rather to the distinctions of the world than the humility of the cloister. It was the lofty

spirit he inherited from his fathers that thus stirred him. His family, as has already been said, was a noble one. Even were he not of the proud, passionate sons of Italy, there was that within him which could not brook control—which prompted resistance. His was that strong spirit, based upon a foundation of deep thought, which, when entangled in the meshes of the world, turns from it with disgust, and fixes its glance on the haven that is alone the true destination of man. It may readily be imagined that a youth of this character should meet with difficulties in early life, which, as in the case of almost all those men who, having betaken themselves to the cloister, have afterwards become distinguished in their order, gradually inclined him to give up the allurements of the world.

As soon as his tender age would permit, Louis was sent to the primary schools of Genoa, in order to learn the rudiments of a sound education. These schools were under the control of that eminent society of men, devoted solely to the education of youth, known as the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Under their skilful instruction and vigilance for the welfare of their pupils' souls, young Louis advanced in knowledge and in virtue. Even at this early period he was remarkable for his studiousness and industry, and it soon became evident that he was gifted with unusual talents, being specially distinguished by the facility with which he acquired foreign languages. He seems even at this early age to have had a predilection for the English language, perhaps, as in the case of another great servant of God (Father Dominic, the Passionist, who labored with such great success in England, contemporary with the subject of this sketch), unsuspectingly inspired by the Holy Ghost thus to prepare himself for his future labors amongst English-speaking peoples. Be that as it may, it is certain he must have applied himself with singular diligence to the acquirement of the English tongue, as we find him at a subsequent period using it with the skill and capacity of a master. This fact is the more striking, since, of all European languages, English is the most unmusical to Italian ears.

It was to his early association, in the city of Genoa also,

that the youth was indebted for that spirit of charity which he exhibited in after life in a most heroic degree. Genoa "the proud," "*la superba*," in the midst of its splendid palaces of black and white marble, did not, like Dives in the parable, neglect the poorer members of the Church. The whole place in young Louis' day teemed with hospitals, asylums and other benevolent institutions, and one of these, in which Father Louis spent the greater part of his leisure hours, was under the charge of the Ladies of the Third Order of St. Francis. The number of indigent persons daily relieved by them, at this one convent alone, did not fall far short of 2000. It was no wonder, then, that a scion of such a city should be ever ready to relieve the distressed, for in so doing he was engaged in the practice of that virtue which had been engraven upon his heart in the walks of his youth—a virtue, moreover, which was increased and developed as he advanced in years, and as he traveled in Ireland and the west of England amongst the poor and distressed.

The religious education of his early years, the sound principles which he had imbibed in season, and the sacred influence of the external evidences of the Catholic religion, by which he was surrounded from his cradle—all these tended to keep him free from the deeper vices of the world, and, as age advanced, to turn his thoughts into the channels of a religious life.

At length, the time having arrived when, according to the designs of his family, Louis della Vagna should enter upon the trials and duties of life, he was placed by his father in a counting-room on the Exchange, where, by his intelligence, ability and probity, he demonstrated the superiority of the judicious moral and religious training to which he had been subjected, over any merely secular system, such as that towards which it is characteristic of this age to tend. For the space of five years he remained at this employment, at first at the ordinary routine of office work, but latterly entrusted with the foreign correspondence, a promotion which his energy and application had earned for him. In this position he first realized the utility and advantage of his linguistic

studies, more especially of his knowledge of English, a language which was then (as, indeed, it is even now) little known or studied in Italy or the adjoining countries. Owing to this fortunate promotion also, he was enabled to acquire a power of expression in that language, without which he might never have extended the influence of his character beyond the precincts of his native city.

Having attained his majority, with an excellent reputation for diligence and discernment—in any walk of life an indispensable requisite to success—he became principal of an extensive banking institution. This of itself proves him to have been no ordinary man, and had it been his vocation to remain 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. He threw himself with all the ardor of his being into the duties and responsibilities of his office, so much so that the passion for wealth and fame took complete possession of his soul. He fell off from the religious fervor of his youth, and almost entirely abandoned the practice of his religion. But this state of things was not to last long. God had designs upon him, other than those of earthly distinction, and in the service of other peoples than his own. In subsequent years often did the good man lament his blindness during these four years. Many a time did he shed bitter tears of repentance over his former indifference, which he had come to regard as a most flagrant crime. His love of Our Lord, and compassion for the sufferings which He endured because of the sins and ingratitude of men, caused Father Louis, as in the case of God's saints, to look upon himself as the "chief of sinners." Although he lived to be fifty-six years of age, he never ceased to lament this temporary backsliding, and the recollection of it gave a tinge of melancholy to all his meditations to the day of his death.

Being at length aroused by the operations of Divine Grace, he suddenly announced his intention of quitting the world. In the seclusion of the cloister he designed, or rather God designed for him, that he should make reparation for his folly; and therefore divesting himself of all his riches, and placing his

banking concerns in the hands of his brother, he entered the Convent of St. Francis of Assisium, and subjected himself to the severe rules and heroic austerities of the Franciscan order. This was in the year 1825, the year of the Grand Jubilee, he being then in his twenty-fourth year.

The order to which Louis della Vagna had thus attached himself was established by St. Francis of Assisium in 1221, in Poggi Bonzi, a town in the grand duchy of Tuscany, and in a place called Cannerio, in the valley of Spoleto. After a succession of years, certain relaxations in the original rules were introduced; but great dissatisfaction being felt by many of the members on this account, a reformation was carried out by Matteo Di Bassi, of Urbino, in 1525. The new branch thus established was called the Capuchin Friars. The members of this order in Genoa maintained the ancient rule with much of its pristine vigor and severity, and it is easy to see, therefore, that, in entering it, Louis della Vagna was in reality crucifying himself with his Divine Master. He was committing himself to the practice of austerities second only to those of La Trappe. But, as previously he had devoted himself to worldly pursuits with that vigor and energy characteristic of his nature, so now he threw himself with his whole soul into the spirit of the founder of his order. At first he was sorely tempted and tried by the recollection of the worldly ease and splendor to which he had been accustomed, but perseverance and prayer at length freed him from these assaults, and left him in possession of that "peace which passeth understanding," and which is ever the blest reward of the true disciple of St. Francis. Like Mary, "he had," in the words of our Lord, "chosen that best part, which should never be taken from him." Year after year, whilst he continued to reside in Italy, he associated the spirit of prayer with the highest degree of activity. In imitation of St. Francis, he spent all the time at his command in according spiritual consolation to the sick, in exhorting sinners to conversion and repentance, and in setting the poor and lowly an example of poverty for the sake of Christ. Though blest with a benign gift of heavenly contemplation in return for the victory he had gained

over the flesh, he was, nevertheless, amongst those to whose wants he ministered, a man of simplicity and sweetness. Having been ordained priest, he continued for twenty-five years to fast and pray, and to fulfil the ordinary requirements of his state under the reformed rule, until he was chosen by his superior to perform another function, one in which the Franciscan Friars have been always eminently successful. After having preached with much profit in the various departments of southern France, he was nominated to the mission of the northwestern coasts of Europe.

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 vigor 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 that city he met for the first time Mgr. Armand François 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 interviews 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 presented, was too well grounded in the virtue of humility to be persuaded that he

possessed the gifts or qualifications which could 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 zealous missionary 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' labor on the missions in England, Ireland and Wales, we have not much information, but we know that 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 nor relaxation. In Liverpool he preached regularly in one of the principal 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 labors 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; he was to fall a victim to another destroyer than the scorching sun of the Indies. Preparations for his 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 labors 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 fervor 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, recognizing God's hand in this, to him, severe trial, submitted without a murmur. What to him, however, was a heavy cross, proved to be to Canada a great gain.

In the autumn of the year 1855 he resumed his missionary labors 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. Here he was received with the same respect as would have been St. Francis of Assisium himself, or St. Anthony of Padua, and the influence which he exerted over 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 labored for nearly thirty years in the diocese of Toronto in various capacities, but latterly as Dean of St. Catherine's, 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 labor-

ious 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 labors.

In the meantime Bishop de Charbonnel was renewing his exertions to secure him for the missions in his diocese. Being repeatedly balked in his endeavors, 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 the influence of the Sacred College, 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 street, now under the pastoral care of His Lordship, Bishop O'Mahony. He accompanied Mgr. de 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 demeanor of Father Louis had an effect upon the assembled congregation such as is not likely soon to be forgotten. 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. Louis della Vigna, 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 into the pastoral charge of St. Mary's church,

which was to be the scene of his labors for the rest of his mortal life. "From that day," says the biographer to whom reference has already several times been made, "until the day of his death, he administered the Sacraments and the spiritual consolations of religion with unremitting care and attention. He was literally day and night with his flock. All day long he sought after and promoted their welfare. He visited the sick, comforted the afflicted, and performed deeds of which, till a further manifestation of Divine Providence, we forbear to speak. Youth, laboring under the ills incident to a residence in miasmatic places, almost deprived of the light of heaven, being moved to repentance, knelt at the feet of the holy friar, and went away with the sweet consolations of religion. It was remarkable, too, that they thought no more of death or material darkness, but seeing, believed. The poor man lying on his sick bed, clasped the hand of the good missionary, was enveloped in his warm embrace, and receiving from him the consolations of the Holy Eucharist, was rejoiced, as Father Louis, who knew nothing about medicine, told him that his illness was but temporary, and that he would in a few days be numbered amongst the workmen of the world—a fact which was verified in less time than that mentioned. To recount his prayers, his exhortations, his multiform duties, while pastor of St. Mary's, is impossible. Suffice it to say that while all the day long he worked and preached, it may be said that all the night long he prayed and wept for the faults of his people, and with the deepest humility, while living the life of a saint, he accounted himself the lowliest Christian amongst them."

To these words of a contemporary I now add such testimony as I have been able to glean from people still living, who either resided in St. Mary's parish during Father Louis' time, or came into contact with him in one capacity or another at St. Michael's palace or elsewhere. Notwithstanding the severity of our Canadian winters, the good monk continued to adhere to the strict rule of his order. He fulfilled, after the example of St. Francis, the canonical hours. He rarely slept more than barely sufficed to sustain nature, and fre-

quently during the silent hours of the night would he rise from his hard couch to pray and intercede for his charge. His bed consisted of a rough wooden box, at the bottom of which were laid a few shavings. This box was one in which a statue of the Blessed Virgin had been packed. The statue, which he had himself brought from France, is now in St. Paul's church, but how it came to be transferred thither from St. Mary's I have not been able to ascertain. The room in which this uninviting bed was placed was uncomfortable and inconvenient in the extreme, and utterly devoid of anything approaching ornament. Here, when not engaged in his active pastoral duties, he lived like a recluse, and he would permit no one to enter his retreat. It was only after his death that the facts related came fully to light. As to his food, it was of the coarsest and plainest kind, and was always prepared with his own hands. He kept no servant or housekeeper until within two months of his death, when he was commanded to do so by his bishop. The only assistance he had until then was that of an elderly lady who lived in close proximity to the church, and who, taking compassion on him, would sometimes insist on performing various little offices for him. On one occasion, observing how coarse and uninviting his food was, she prepared a little toast, and taking it to him begged him to eat it. He took it, but no sooner was her back turned than, approaching the small fire he had made in order to cook his food, he burned the toast until it was as black and hard as a coal, and was in the act of eating it in this state when she returned. He rarely ate more than one fair meal in the day, and meat scarcely ever passed his lips. He observed the holy season of Lent by what is known as the "black fast." He washed his own clothes, and anything in the way of repairs about his house or church he executed with his own hands. The Stations of the Cross used in the church for many years after his death were made by him, so that it is evident he must have possessed some skill as a handicraftsman. From his vow of holy poverty nothing could induce him to swerve. So firmly did he adhere to it that he would only receive contributions in money from his people when commanded to do

so, and when speaking to the congregation concerning the customary dues, he would point to the unadorned walls of the church, and telling them that his vow of poverty prevented him from possessing more than was sufficient for the necessities of life, would add: "But all that you can spare is required for beautifying the House of the Lord." "The virtue of humility," it is recorded, "he practised in the highest degree of perfection." We have already seen how, when, years before, Bishop de Charbonnel first urged upon him to come to Canada, he disclaimed the possession of any talents likely to be of great service to this country. His whole career, in fact, was one of continual self-denial. In conversation he never presumed to press his opinions upon others, and he always preferred to defer to the will of another rather than have his own way. "His garments, his plain and simple demeanor, the subdued tone of his actions, the love which he entertained for the company of the poor and simple, were all so many evidences of a humility which was deeply seated within his breast." Nor was the virtue of obedience less firmly engrafted in his soul. In all his actions he bowed to the slightest will of his superiors. I have been informed by a worthy priest, who had many opportunities of observing him, that he carried this virtue to such an extent, that the winter was far advanced before he permitted himself the comfort of a fire in his house, simply because he had not asked or received permission to do so. It was the month of February before he went to Father Soulerin, C. S. B., Superior of St. Michael's College, and, in the absence of the bishop, administrator of the diocese, to ask if he might have a fire in his house. Father Soulerin, of course, at once commanded him, under obedience, to do so. But this was not all. All the winter through he went about the streets clothed in his coarse habit, and with nothing on his feet but sandals. It does not require a very protracted experience of a Canadian winter to appreciate the heroic self-abnegation of the man who could submit himself to an ordeal of this nature.

As a preacher, though not what might be called eloquent, he was wonderfully persuasive, and his words went to the

hearts of his hearers. The wonderful saintliness of the man became evident as the words came from his lips. When speaking of Our Lord, or of the Blessed Virgin, or of heaven, the angels, or the saints, he would seem to be consumed with the fire of Divine love; his whole body would become animated; and his face become as if in an ecstasy. He was gifted also with a spirit of deep contemplation, and at all times and in all places he wore an abstracted countenance, as if continually wrapt in meditation. He cherished a particular devotion to St. Francis, and on the occasion of his feast, which falls in October, he had a celebration on a grand scale. He had also a great love for St. Anthony of Padua. But his special characteristic, and that which he possessed in common with the greatest of saints, was love for the Holy Mother of God. In her he had the greatest confidence, and he was accustomed to say that he had never asked anything of her in vain.

From Father Louis' conversation, I am informed by a well-known religious who knew him intimately, it was easy to gather that he had been in close fellowship with very holy persons. There was that about him which betokened a deep insight into the spiritual life; and to his profound human learning he added that which is of a far higher order, *i. e.* : a mind well disciplined in the "Science of the Saints."

In this manner was spent the short year of Father Louis' pastorate of St. Mary's church. His life was a continual round of labors, often of the most exacting character, and of severe acts of mortification. He was never idle, and he was heard once to remark that if he lost a moment of time he would consider himself a thief. His time, he said, was God's, and as such, he had no right to squander it. Thoroughly and well did he carry out this, the guiding rule of his life, and when death came to him it found him literally in harness.

On Friday, March 13th, 1857, he celebrated the holy sacrifice of the Mass, but, feeling unwell from the effects of the dampness of a newly-plastered wall in the room in which he rested, he was forced to retire for the day. On the day following (Saturday) he grew worse, and towards evening it be-

came evident that his condition was critical. The physician who was called in pronounced his illness to be a severe attack of inflammation of the lungs, brought on, no doubt, by exposure to the severe weather of a Canadian winter. He was immediately removed to St. Michael's Palace, where every possible care and attention was bestowed upon him by the good Sisters of St. Joseph. Notwithstanding their exertions, however, he gradually sank, and on the evening of the 17th of March, the feast of St. Patrick, the glorious Apostle of Ireland, he calmly resigned his soul into the hands of his Creator. The last rites of the Church had been administered to him by Rev. Father Mulligan, who was the only person present when he expired. He seems to have had a presentiment of his death, and was heard several times to predict it. Shortly before this, a well-known physician, a Catholic, had died, and at the Requiem Mass said for the repose of his soul a sermon was preached by Rev. Father Lawrence. When Father Lawrence was about to go into the pulpit for this purpose he was accosted by Father Louis, who had been assisting at the service, with these words: "You are going to preach this man's panegyric now. You will preach my funeral sermon shortly, and *it will be the next one that you will preach*," a prediction which was fulfilled to the letter.

On Wednesday his body was laid out and exposed in the Cathedral, where his parishioners and the people at large were permitted to cast a last look upon him, and to pay that tribute of respect which Catholics never fail to render to the remains of their clergy. St. Michael's Cathedral has been the scene of many remarkable events, but, it is quite safe to say, the scene presented during the two days the body of Father Louis remained within its walls was quite unique in its history. Throughout the whole of Wednesday and Thursday the church was crowded by persons of both sexes and of all ages, who pressed forward with the greatest eagerness that they might touch if only the hem of the holy friar's garment or the bier on which he lay. And so great was the desire of the people to have some memento of one whom they so dearly loved, that, as I am assured by eye-witnesses, the coarse rough

garment in which he was clothed was literally torn from him. Many had the pieces of his habit thus secured made into scapulars, with which they were afterwards invested, and, it seems natural to infer, which they cherished for many years.

Though Father Louis, when not engaged in the active duties of his pastoral office, lived like a recluse, yet his people had seen enough of him to know that he was an unusually holy man. Notwithstanding all his efforts to conceal from them the rigid austerities which he practised, they had more than a suspicion of them. But it was not until after his death that they came fully to know and to realize the extent of his mortifications. When preparing his body for burial it was found that he had worn a hair shirt, and, in addition to this, there was found about his waist, next to his skin, a girdle made of twisted wire, the wire every here and there being bent inwards and cut off as if with a pair of pliers, and the barbs thus formed protruded into the flesh. Of these barbs there were thirty-seven in all, and this ingenious instrument of torture must have been his constant and loving companion for many years, as the skin about the holes thus formed had grown quite hard. A lady, to whom I am indebted for many interesting details concerning Father Louis, had this wire girdle in her possession for many years, and prized it highly as a relic, but it was unfortunately lost on occasion of the house which she occupied being burned down.

After the body had been exposed to the veneration of the people for two days, it was temporarily placed in one of the crypts of the Cathedral. Here it remained for only a month, when, on Thursday, the 16th of April, it was transferred to St. Mary's church and placed in the spot where it was found thirty years afterwards. The funeral cortege left the Cathedral at half-past nine o'clock, and passing at slow and solemn pace through Church and Queen streets, arrived at St. Mary's at eleven o'clock. The Rev. J. M. Bruyere (since created a Monsignore, and who, at the age of eighty years, died only a few days ago in the city of London, of which diocese he was vicar-general) celebrated Solemn Mass for the dead; Rev. Father Lee of Brock being deacon and Rev. Father Mulligan

of the Cathedral sub-deacon. The sermon was preached by Rev. Father Walsh (now Bishop of London), and his concluding words are worthy of reproduction here. "You have this day," he said, "given a splendid proof of the chain of affections and sympathies that links priest and people in the Catholic Church; you have demonstrated that the genius of Christianity reigns amongst you and guides your actions; for Christianity has torn down the wall of separation which formerly divided nations and peoples, making of them but one nation and one people. Your late pastor was a Genoese; he was reared beneath the bright skies of Italy; but he was a Christian priest, and as such you have honored him; thus showing that in our Church there is neither Jew nor Gentile, Greek nor barbarian; thus proving that we are all brothers, as being the children of the Holy Church whose spouse is Christ. We may conclude in the words of the prayer recited in the Mass of this day: 'O God, who hast united various nations in the confession of Thy Name, grant that they who are born again by the waters of baptism, may have the same faith in their hearts and the same piety in their actions.'"

I might fittingly conclude with these beautiful and appropriate words of the Bishop of London, but it still remains for me to add a few words about Father Louis' personal appearance. He is described as being rather below the medium height, and of slight, almost attenuated frame. He was never of robust build, but his constant mortifications doubtless made great inroads upon his constitution and hastened his death. But though small of body, he had a clear eye and a quick, penetrating glance, which, it is said, seemed almost to go through one. His complexion was dark, and he wore his beard long, after the manner of the Capuchins. He was always conspicuously neat and tidy. I have said nothing about the miracles which he is said to have wrought, and which can, I believe, be well authenticated, as it is not my province to deal with such matters. Further, it would not be proper to anticipate the judgment of the ecclesiastical authorities, who will, no doubt, take such steps as are necessary to

preserve what evidence exists on this point, with a view to the introduction of his cause before the proper tribunal at Rome.

Thus lived Father Louis della Vigna, and thus he died, literally "a stranger in a strange land." Yet not a stranger, because, bearing in mind the words quoted above, as a member of the great Catholic family, he was at home amongst his children of the same faith to whom he had ministered. If he was taken away at the very time when the people of St. Mary's were becoming alive to the possession of "the jewel, set in its rich casing of ascetic brilliants," which Providence had placed in their midst, yet, to quote once more the words of the Bishop of London, "his memory has remained amongst them like a sweet fragrance, 'like the good odor of Christ unto God.'"



POSTSCRIPT.

Since writing the sketch of this holy friar's life, which was read before the American Catholic Historical Society last year, and which appeared in part in these columns at the time, I have received from the Provincial of the Capuchin Order in England, a small leaflet, dated April 19th, 1857, and bearing the title: "Who was Father Louis? Read what follows, and then ask, can you be absent from the Chapel on Tuesday, April 21st, 1857?" As it corrects several statements made in my sketch I reprint it in full. The near approach of the dedication services of the new church of St. Mary gives additional interest to this sketch of one who was pastor of that parish more than thirty years ago, and whose memory is still fondly cherished by its people:

"Father Louis, whose friendship so oft sustained us with sound advice, and whose example urged us on to the practice of virtue, was born at Lavagna, near Genoa, in the kingdom of Sardinia, of pious parents, and distinguished family. His early youth was innocent and good, and the recreation of music was the pastime of his leisure hours. Up to the age of twenty, he was no mean adept in the practice of melody, and some pieces of his composition were so worthy of admiration, as to tempt a rival amateur to claim them as his own; but in this trivial circumstance, we find the early dawning of our sainted Father's submissive humility, for having claimed his rights and won his honours, he was ever after restless, until he humbly apologized to his unjust competitor, for having contended with him even in a matter which was his due.

"About this age, our lamented friend was attacked with a painful and intractable disease, terminating in caries of the bones of the arm, and fore-arm; for this complaint he was placed under the most celebrated surgeons of Rome and Italy; he had all the advantages that medical science could afford, but to no purpose. Physicians and surgeons recommended, as the only remedy, amputation of the arm, but Cæsar Sarrucini, (his family name,) objected, and in the religious bent of his disposition, turning towards heaven, he trusted in *Mary* for the accomplishment of his wishes, and bearing his sorrows to the Church he prostrated himself before an image of our Blessed Mother, and with confidence besought 'Our Lady of Dolours,' to obtain the fulfilment of the Divine will in his person, vowing to dedicate himself to religion, in the

event of recovery, but if otherwise, submitting to the will of God. The event proved that Father Louis was another *triumph of the Power of the Prayers of Mary*, for young Cæsar Sambucini recovered, and presented himself to the Fathers Capuchins, to be received as a *lay brother*.

"The Father refused to entertain this proposition. The dignity of his family, and the luxury of the circle in which he was accustomed to move, were more than opposed to the humility and endurance of a poor Franciscan lay brother, but young Sambucini persevered in his request, and adroitly urged, with an innocent simplicity, that his former delicacy, interfering with his classical studies, he was more suited for the lay, than the ecclesiastical state; to which the Superior replied, 'Since you are so humble, we will place you at the head of the list of Novices for the Priesthood, and as obedience is a part of our order, you have only to comply.'

"Once entered into the order, he edified all by his strict practice of poverty, obedience, humility and mortification. The bare boards were his bed, and the discipline, with other austerities, he practiced with a courageous spirit. His repast was often and often the scanty and mean meal that we read of as sustaining the hermits of old, but he walked in the strength of that food, even to the mountain of God. Living thus mortified, and lamenting the wicked indulgence of the world, he wished to oppose the severity of his order to the pampered luxury of a self-indulging people. With this view, in establishing his order in this country, he strove to check its avarice, vain pride, and gluttony by the example of poverty, humility, and self-denial. For this purpose he arrived in England in 1851, and having for six weeks received the hospitality of The Sisters of the Christian Retreat, in Hill Street, Peckham,* and afterwards of Mr. O'Sullivan's

*The Nuns subsequently removed to larger premises, the Manor House, Kennington Lane, where they are still staying:—waiting, however, only the completion of the Convent now building for them in Gordon Road;—in June they hope to return to their first English home—their endeared Peckham! May their presence amongst us be an instrument of blessing to this congregation, and both combined, a glory to Father Louis and themselves. The author of *this Note* looks backward with a delightful but painful pleasure at his interview with the dear Capuchin Father Louis, on the first day of his arrival in Peckham—it was on that occasion the first idea of founding a Franciscan Monastery and Mission in Peckham, through his instrumentality, was agreed on between us; though time rolled on—delays arose—insurmountable difficulties appeared to beset the effort—thank God every subsequent interview, during these years, increased our confidence;—now one has been accomplished in a humble way, still with hopeful prospects,—and, if we deserve it, the Prayers of Father Louis, in a more glorious state, will help us to accomplish the other; though on earth, he was absent in our recent success—and yet he helped us!—he is absent now, in heaven—MAY ALMIGHTY GOD PERMIT HIM TO HELP US MORE.

family, of Denmark street, Camberwell, he repaired to Webb street, where he joined in the labours of Fathers Hodgson and Dolman. His earliest intention, though only known to one, was to retire to Canada, when he had once securely fixed his order in England, according to the Spirit of St. Francis. His ruling idea was, 'Strict observance,' and though circumstances led to his departure before the tree he planted arrived at maturity, still his constant anxiety was that it should be well watered, and deserve from God an hundred-fold increase.

"The present chapel at Peckham is a monument to his memory. When in Rome, he obtained permission from the Holy Father to collect for the building of a Capuchin Monastery in England. In a few weeks he collected £200 from his admirers in France, where he was generally known, and considerably respected, particularly for his firmness in not yielding to the more violent of the red republicans, who tried by force, and with drawn swords, to eject him from a church in which he was giving a Mission during the days of the revolution, on which occasion he shook the dust of his sandals in the face of the Captain of the band, and triumphing over them, returned to his church, refusing to abandon it, except by order of the Bishop, who sent him to give the retreat. From the King of Naples he also received £100, and with this small fund the Peckham chapel was chiefly built.

"When Lord Fielding presented his church and ground to the order, Father Louis' permission to collect was withdrawn, as being thought no longer necessary, and he, with the other Fathers, repaired to Pantasaph, and from thence he got his obedience to Rome, thence to Bombay, but being overtaken with a severe fever in Malta, on his recovery he received a counter obedience for Canada, where he died on the 17th of March, 1857. To describe the good he did in Toronto would be to write a large chapter in the history of the Church, and the good bishop of that diocese declared 'that he would rather lay down his crozier and mitre than lose the services of good Father Louis.'

"The following appeared in the *Register* of April 11th, as extracts from the Toronto letter:—

"I have the painful tidings to relate to you of the death of our dearly beloved and much to be lamented friend, poor Father Louis, who died on the 17th inst., after a short illness of five days, which he bore with the utmost patience and resignation to the will of his God, to whom his life was dedicated for the past thirty two years. You can scarcely imagine the sympathy which is felt for him, and the manner in which his loss is deplored by all the parishioners of St. Mary's congregation. Never was there a deeper feeling of

regret more manifest by all parties in the city of Toronto, than on the occasion of his death. He died on the evening of our Patron Saint's day (St. Patrick.) Notwithstanding the severity of our Canadian winter, he lived up to his Order, to the very letter, proving to the last his love and his zeal for his beloved Founder, whose example he closely followed up to the last moments of his life, and dying with the crucifix clasped firmly in his hands, like St. Francis. His sickness was brought on by cold, privation, and laborious exertion in the discharge of his spiritual duties, ending in inflammation of the lungs. Medical aid was of no use. His desire was to go to his God; he had done all he could for us, and such were his last dying words to his congregation. His remains were placed in St. Michael's Cathedral for three days, laid out in state (or rather, to use his own words, that of a 'poor Capuchin Monk,') during which time thousands of people of all classes repaired to pay their last tribute of respect, and to kiss and receive some relic of our dear departed Father Louis. I cannot describe to you the general feelings of the people, to see them bathed in tears on the memorable morning of his interment (the 20th instant,)—the large church of St. Michael's was crowded to excess—taking their last farewell of him on earth forever.'

"Father Louis was patient and enduring under insult, opposition, or calumny, he placed everything at the foot of the cross, he followed the example of our Divine Lord, and as he often quoted in explanation of his conduct—'*Semper Tacebat.*'

"He was meek and humble of heart, and zealous for the glory of God. He was rich in merits and ripe for the kingdom of heaven, and therefore God summoned him to his reward, that he might enter into the joy of the Lord.

"But even the Saints sometimes contract a dust upon this earth, that requires to be removed before entrance into heaven. Therefore in the absence of absolute certainty, we are still bound to pray, but if he need not our prayers, they will serve as a thanksgiving for his glory.

"With this view, on Tuesday next, the 21st instant, at 10 a.m., an Office and Requiem Mass will be celebrated for him at the Catholic Chapel, Lower Park Road, Peckham, whereunto all his friends, especially this congregation, should come and evince their gratitude for all the blessings vouchsafed to us, through Father Louis. The Funeral Oration will be delivered by the Rev. A. Dolman."

From the foregoing it will be seen that his name was not "della Vagna," as appears on the memorial tablet in St. Mary's Church, but "de Lavagna," so named in religion from his birthplace in Italy. The Vêry Rev. Provincial also informs me that it must have been in Italy where Mgr. de

Charbonnel first met Father Louis, and not in Paris as stated, and that he was on his way to Canada when he arrived in England in 1851. He remained in England and Ireland until 1856 before proceeding to Canada, in order to perfect himself in the use of the English language. During that time he founded both the Mission at Peckham and that at Pantasaph. At the latter place the ground on which the Monastery is built was given to the Order by Lord Fielding, now Lord Denbeigh, a distinguished English convert, Father Louis first companion in England was one Father Seraphin, a Belgian who died only two years ago.

This is about all that is known of one who has left his mark indelibly on the Church in this Province.

