

PART THIRD.

No. I.

(Extract from a Letter to Father General Moreau.)

[TRANSLATION.]

NOTRE DAME DU LAC, November 9, 1847.

REV. AND DEAR FATHER:

How short in duration are the joys of this life! Crosses and afflictions of all kinds have multiplied so greatly around us, especially since my return from France, that it seems, in truth, as if the History of our Mission were to be but a long series of trials. I came to America with the desire to suffer; but the bitter chalice for which I had asked was deeper than all my expectations; we have all of us to drink long draughts therefrom. May God grant that we find abundant resignation and fortitude! First, I saw the terrible flames threatening to reduce our College to ashes; later, and on six different occasions, death came to spread mourning in our family; not to speak of the almost countless terrors caused us by dreadful mortal visitations. But a cross more heavy and overwhelming than all others—a cross perhaps never borne by any others of the Congregation—was placed upon us at the very moment when we least thought of it. “How long, O Lord, wilt Thou be angry with us!” This is the second time that I have attempted to write to you,—my eyes are still filled with tears, and my trembling hand can hardly hold the pen. Ah! dear Father, you would understand the desolation of your children were you to think of the many circumstances in which Faith alone is their support, their nourishment and their life. Here, much more sensibly than in Europe, they realize a good, an *all*, which comforts them in every pain and tribulation—an all which moves them willingly to say with St. Paul: *In omni tribulatione nostra superabundo gaudio magno!* But when this all fails, then life itself seems taken away.

Last Sunday—the day before yesterday—the Bishop of Detroit, who had come on Friday, gave Confirmation to fifty persons in the church at Bertrand. His Lordship officiated pontifically, and the ceremonies were as grand as possible. After dinner the pious prelate visited the Sisters, who had come to meet him at the entrance of their grounds, with their fifty little girls in procession, and a ban-

ner at the head. Everything had been prepared to receive the Bishop, not with luxury and splendor, but with a simplicity and propriety that seemed to afford him the greatest pleasure. In the evening I conducted him to Niles, where he had to take the stage that night. I returned to the College somewhat late, but happy at the thought of the beautiful day we had spent.

Next day, about one o'clock in the afternoon, a messenger came to me in great haste. Something dreadful had happened at Bertrand! I immediately started; and when I arrived at the Sisters' House, I found only one present. I inquired of her where the others were, and, with eyes filled with tears, she silently pointed to the church. I went there; and when I entered that sacred edifice, which but yesterday contained so many happy souls, I beheld the Sisters weeping and praying. Their little girls, many of whom had made their First Communion the day before, were there also in tears, and a number of the Catholics of the village. All eyes were fixed on the Tabernacle, the door of which, hanging open, told plainly of the terrible crime that a sacrilegious hand had committed. The ciborium, containing about thirty Hosts, the chalice and a little silver vessel had been carried off. I cannot describe to you the feelings of my poor soul when, in order to assure myself that a sacrilege had been really committed, I put my hand into that same Tabernacle which on the preceding day I had so richly furnished for the ceremony; tears blinded me, and my heart almost died away.

Two days later I had to transfer the Blessed Sacrament from the parish church to the new chapel attached to the Sisters' House, where the Bishop had given permission to keep It, and to say Mass for the Community. During the four years of our sojourn in the village no accident had ever happened. Will you not say, as I myself said at Bertrand and here, that this crime, which has its parallel only on Calvary, was not permitted without some design of Heaven? And, while first viewing it as a punishment for our indifference and our little love, who can say but that He, who once delivered Himself to His enemies for the salvation of man, may have willed to suffer again the same injury for the salvation of some members of the Society? We do not know yet, and perhaps may never know, to what outrage these new Jews have subjected the Sacred Body of the Son of God. But who doubts that He loves us enough to purchase, even at such a price, the return from the vain seductions of the world, the renewal of a faith that had become lifeless, and a charity which the cold breath of Protestantism was gradually reducing to a state of torpidity; finally, that He willed thereby to renew our zeal for the instruction and conversion of a people whose deplorable blindness finds so striking a proof in the sacrilegious act for which we grieve? As for those who were thus guilty, we can say with Jesus Christ Himself: *Pater, ignosce illis, nesciunt enim quid faciunt!*

It was about noon when the Sisters first discovered the sacrilegious theft. The robbers had entered by one of the windows, which they had reached by means of a board; then they unscrewed the hinges of the door of the Tabernacle, after rifling which, they carried off the chalice which was in a box near the altar. A solemn Mass of reparation will be sung here to-morrow; and at this Mass a general Communion will be offered up to the same end, while awaiting what you yourself, Rev. Father, may decide should be done in this matter by the whole Society.

If it be true that God knows how to make even the crimes of men redound to His glory, I have reason to believe that this will serve for the instruction, the amendment and the perseverance of many here, and perhaps, too, in France. As for me, on whom so great an impression has been made, I shall have ever present before me through my whole life the most forcible lesson that can be given in this world. Were it not that so great an outrage had been committed against the Saviour of the world, I would thank God for having given us the lesson. Like a clap of thunder it has struck all hearts in this mission—each one believes himself the culprit, whose little faith has drawn down this punishment. May God grant that this stroke may arouse many a one from a dangerous lethargy!

Your devoted son in J. M. J.,
E. SORIN.

No. II.

ST. MARY'S, October 14, 1857.

MY DEAR DAUGHTERS IN JESUS CHRIST:

I deem it my duty not to conceal from you the sad intelligence that the terrible crisis which has already spread so much desolation over the country has also affected our Community to a frightful extent. Indeed, our material existence is seriously threatened; and were it not for the memory of the wonderful blessings of the past, I would almost despair of the future. But I hope yet that the blessed Hand, which has so mercifully rescued us from danger and necessity whenever every human help had failed, will still support us in this new trial, if we humble our souls in earnest supplications to Heaven, and strive to turn away the anger of God provoked by our sins, and to make Heaven once more propitious unto us in our affliction.

I therefore direct that a crown of Communions be commenced in the Community, and continued until new orders be received; also that the prayer of St. Bernard to the Blessed Virgin—the *Memorare*—together with the invocation to the holy and faithful heart of