

## Chapter X.

Rev. Innocent A. Bergroth

Born in Prussia - His parents emigrate to America - His early career - His desire to go as a Chaplain opposed by his bishop - His mission among the Federal and Confederate Soldiers - He is cut off from communication with his bishop - The celebration of Mass in the little Church of St. Peter and Paul in Chokanvoga the morning of battle - His services given to Federal and Confederate alike

Rev. Innocent A. Bergroth  
 Was born at Ageringen, a little village in Rhenish Prussia on the 24<sup>th</sup> of Nov. 1836. In 1842 his parents emigrated to America where they located themselves for a while time near the present town of Fremont in Ohio. In 1848 however they concluded to remove to Michigan, where they purchased a homestead on the outskirts of the Village of Westphalia Chilton County. From here the subject of our sketch was sent in 1852 to St. Vincent's College, Westmoreland Co., Pa. where he finished his Classical studies with distinction, in 1858. His health having suffered in the mean while he was obliged to return home to recruit it, after which he attached himself to the diocese of Vincennes and entered the seminary of the Rt. Rev. Bp. A. Palais at Vincennes in the fall of the same year. At this seminary he remained for one year devoting himself to the study of Theology, exegesis and other kindred studies. At the end of the year however his health made it again necessary <sup>for him</sup> to go further southwards. Having acquaintances in Nashville, Tenn. he went thither, and was adopted into the diocese by Rt. Rev. Bp. Miles, & continued his studies under private teachers, chiefly the Very Rev. J. R. Birmingham V. G. of the diocese, and was ordained Priest on

Sunday of 1860. For the first eight months he was assigned pastor of the German Church of the Assumption in the City of Nashville. Towards the close of the year he was sent to St. Lenn to take charge of the congregation at Knoxville together with the extensive missions attached to the same.

When the war had broken out and hearing that the Catholic volunteer regiments from Tenn, required chaplains, he begged repeatedly of his Bishop to be permitted to go with them, but was refused on the ground that he could not be spared from <sup>the</sup> parish and missions, the more so as already out of the very small number of Clergy in the State <sup>some</sup> had been sent out with the army.

The Bishop therefore charged him to remain at his post, but at the same time to perform the duties of a Chaplain towards any regiment or army that might pass through or be stationed within his district, and who ~~would~~ <sup>had</sup> have no priest with them. The importance of this charge was a serious one, as the entire country, lying between Chattanooga and Bristol, Va, and extending from <sup>Kentucky,</sup> Ky on the north, to Georgia Carolina on the south, were comprised in his mission.

At first, and before St. Lenn was seriously threatened, by the enemy, it was

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easy enough, for the camps of instruction were confined to the principal plains along the ~~roads~~<sup>highways</sup>, and were all easily accessible. But when the invading armies began to draw near the borders, and it became necessary for the C. S. Government to station its troops along the distant mountain passes on the border in most cases, many miles from any ~~to the~~<sup>population</sup>. The Father had a hard time of it. Generally he would start out on a mission Mondays and after traveling on horse-back or otherwise, for a day or so would reach the camps. Here he would remain for one, two, or three days as the case seemed to require, saying mass, hearing confessions, preaching or cheering the "boys" up amidst their many privations, and then he would return again in time to reach home for Saturday where he had the same ~~sort of~~ time of duties to perform again for the members of his congregation. His duties were still ~~kept~~<sup>kept</sup> more increased when the extensive army hospitals began to be established in and around Knoxville principally after the retreat of General Bragg from Kentucky. These hospitals, it was necessary to visit almost every day - a days work in itself. After Father Kealis - the pastor of Chattanooga, was shot

and disabled, <sup>his</sup> ~~his~~ <sup>his</sup> duties became still more arduous, for then he had not only his own mission to attend <sup>to</sup> but also those of Chatham Cooga which reached as far as Bridgeport Ala. . . . Thus far there had been, at least, a constant means of communication between himself and his Bishop in Nashville.

But when the latter place fell into the hands of the Federals he was even deprived of this consolation. From this time forward he had to be his own Bishop in a measure, until the Federals succeeded one and a half years afterwards in occupying E. Tenn. From this time forward he had to perform the same duties towards the U.S. armies camped, doing duty, or lying sick within his district, as he was ordered to do towards the Confederates previously.

Having occasion, and with the permission of the C.S. government, to cross the lines a little before the surrender of E. Tenn, for the purpose of consulting with his bishop on certain points of importance, he returned by way of Chattanooga and reached that place just a few days before the memorable battle fought ~~and~~ <sup>lost</sup> there by General Rosecrans. At the request of the Gen<sup>eral</sup> he remained for the battle, and said mass. The General attending in the little church of St. Peter & Paul on the morning of

The battle.

Having at last reached home again he passed through the siege of Knoxville and General Burnside, and was finally relieved at his own request — his health having given way again — of his difficult charge just a day before the fall of Richmond.

~~Letters of any kind there were none in his district during the whole war~~

He was a good and zealous priest and worked equally in his attendance to the spiritual and temporal wants of the Federal as he had done previously for the Confederate Soldiers.

Like a true Soldier of Christ he believed that his mission was not of the sword, but of the Cross, and that he was bound to uphold this peaceful symbol of man's redemption, in the service of Federals and Confederates alike.

Their bloody conflicts were to him only a source of grief, their eternal salvation his only object and ambition.