

DIOCESS OF VINCENNES.

Extract from a Letter from the Rev. Mr. Sorin, of the Society of Notre-Dame de Sainte Croix, to the Superior of the same Society in Le-Mans.

Notawassibi, January 22nd, 1845.

“ REVEREND FATHER,

“ I arrive, and I bless Heaven for bringing me back to the midst of my dear neophytes. The savages are in the woods at five leagues from hence; in two or three hours they are to be apprised of my return; they will be with me this very night. I considered it right to inform myself at first of their perseverance; the following is the answer which they made me:— ‘ Father, the change in this tribe has become the subject of all the conversations of the country. Until last winter it was a band of drunkards and robbers, the scandal and terror of all the neighbourhood. Since their baptism, they are no longer the same men: every body admires their sobriety, their honesty, their mildness, and above all, their assiduity to prayer; their huts resound almost continually with pious canticles.’

“ ‘ This sight of the Indians, as they are at present, is for me,’ said to me just now an old Canadian hunter, ‘ a mystery. Would you believe that I have seen with my own eyes those same savages, in 1813 and 1814, giving up to plunder and to the flames, the habitations of the whites, seizing the infants by the feet and knocking out their brains against the walls, or throwing them into boiling caldrons? And now, at the

sight of a *black-gown*, they fall on their knees, and kiss his hand as children would that of a father: they make us blush at ourselves.’

“ Cruelty seems to have been, in fact, the most prominent of their natural inclinations. At the time of the famous *Harrisson* treaty with the Indian nation in 1815, when the president of the Union, after having reproached the chief of the tribe with his former barbarity, had him asked if he would dare again to commit any act of the same kind, ‘ On the first opportunity that I shall find,’ haughtily answered the savage. The army of the United States succeeded, after a thousand dangers, in driving them back into their forests, and finally imposing on them laws; but it belonged only to the ministers of Jesus Christ to change their ferocious hearts, and to make them human, by making them Christians.

“ I have just visited one of their ancient cemeteries. Each grave is still distinctly to be seen. With them were buried their carabine, their tomahawk, their powder-horn, their pipe, and their best dress. According to an old tradition, they asked, when dying, that the plough should not be passed over their bodies. Less happy than their descendants, they were still ignorant that there was anything better to ask of those who survived them. This reflection brings to my mind a recent fact, by which we have been much edified. An Indian widow happened to lose the eldest of her two sons, at twenty-eight leagues’ distance from South-Bend. She sacrificed the little which she possessed, in order to have the remains of her beloved son carried to the cemetery of Our Lady of the Lake. Poor mother! the funeral was thirteen days travelling ere it arrived at the church. The infidel whom she had engaged to render her this service, could not help admiring in a savage woman, such an act of religion.

“ When an Indian has embraced the *prayer*, you would almost say that he thinks of nothing else. Two months ago, one of those whom we have converted, thought he saw me pass in the stage-coach, at some distance from Notawassibi; in two hours after, all the village had flocked from several leagues’

distance, to the place where they supposed that I was to stop. For five whole days, I am assured, they remained there awaiting me, still thinking that I was about to come. Poor savages! would that I had suspected their mistake! To-day I am awaiting for them in my turn, and more fortunate than they were, I shall not be disappointed in the pleasure of seeing them.

"Am I not thus too happy, Reverend Father, to have so fine an opportunity of writing to you, after having sought in vain for a few hours to do so, for five or six weeks back? I am going then, since I have time, to review all our works, to talk with you on our projects, and to confide to you all our hopes.

"I shall not speak to you of the college, which you know; we have already in it thirty-two pupils, who would have sought to no purpose, for more than two hundred miles around, a Christian education. The almost total failure of the crops last year deprives us of having more. I shall scarcely mention our new novitiate, though it appears delightful to all who visit it. It is a great thing that it has been founded in the Island of Saint Mary, which, from the acknowledgment of all who go there, is the most beautiful site that can be imagined. These humble walls, the building of which took but eight days' labour, are as full of future importance as those of the college. It is there that I dwell, with sixteen novices, in a small cell, seven feet by six, more content and happier than ever.

"Nevertheless, what renders this Isle Saint Mary so dear to us is, not so much its natural beauty, as the inestimable richness of the privileges with which it is endowed. The Archconfraternity has just been canonically erected here for all the Catholics of the country; I was going to add also for the Protestants; and why not? If this association of prayers has for its object the conversion of sinners, cannot each of them say with Saint Paul, *Quorum primus ego sum?* We have finished a few weeks ago a chapel, dedicated to the immaculate Heart of the holy Virgin: Mary has not left it

void of sensible proofs of her protection and love. On the day of the Epiphany, a respectable family of the country (a father and six children), guided by the star of salvation, came to seek at Our Lady's of the Lake their regeneration in the sacred waters of baptism; in a few days after, the mother of this family, yielding also to the sway of grace, asked to enjoy the happiness of her children, by abjuring, in her turn, her errors.

"The remainder of the night would not be sufficient for me, Reverend Father, to describe to you all the pious monuments which I see from this place, collected around the chapel of the holy and immaculate Heart of Mary. What would I not have to tell you, in the first place, of those humble workshops, where so many little unfortunates, without any resources, will find, together with an honourable means of livelihood, examples and lessons which will make of them, one day, the consolation of the Catholic Church, and the honour of society!

"Look a little further, and see those dear little orphans in their asylum. They came to Our Lady's covered with rags, chilled with cold, and dying of hunger! Would you have repulsed them, Reverend Father? and although you should not have had certainty of bread for the morrow, would you not have shared that of the moment with those little starlings?

"Allow me to show you also a thing which God has done in the bosom of this desert, and which I cannot behold, even from this place, without my eyes filling with tears. We are in the depth of the night; the sight will be only the handsomer on that account. — Do you see upon the banks of the lake, which we have so often boasted of to you, do you see those three lights? They are the solitary lamps of the three chapels which the Lord has caused to be raised to his glory by the hands of your children. Does it not seem to you as if you were to hear Jesus Christ repeating, day and night, to our infant community, Fear not, little flock, I will not leave you orphans. Behold, I am with you. *Deliciae meae esse cum filiis hominum.*

"If I had been told, two years ago, when we arrived on the banks of this lake, which were then covered with snow, that the trees around would have given place to all we see to-day; if there had been added, that, in two years, with the same glance one would see shining, in the midst of the darkness of night, those three lamps, lighted before three different tabernacles of the living God, could we have believed it? Now that the results have exceeded our hopes, should we not say with the Psalmist, 'This change is the work of the Most High?' If we had not the chalice of salvation to offer every morning, what could we render to the Lord for the many benefits with which he has loaded us? Yes; were we still more unprovided for, and suffering more, if Jesus Christ is so near us, we are rich enough, sufficiently well guarded. He whose hand feeds the little birds, and who gives to the lilies of the field their dress, knows very well what is necessary for us. For more than three years back, that we are in this strange land, in what have we failed of the daily care of our Saviour Jesus? In nothing, Lord, in nothing.

"It is true, that the delay of the assistance on which we reckoned, joined to the failure of the harvest, has thrown us into great embarrassments; but I would be ashamed to fear. No one shall die of hunger at the establishment of Our Lady of the Lake. Our hopes will not be confounded; our churches will rise up; the impulse being given, it will go on progressing from day to day; the infidels, the Protestants, and the savages, will be evangelised; the name of God, being better known, will be also more loved and blessed in our solitudes.

"And yet, if confidence ought to have failed us, it should have been in the early days of our establishment. Who amongst us has forgotten the long journey from Saint Peter's to Our Lady's, where we travelled over snow not less than five feet deep? The severity of the cold was extreme. We slept on the floor; a single blanket served for three: one of us kept watch, in order to mind the fire, and supply it with fuel during the night. And notwithstanding all our fatigue

and disappointments, our little colony was happy, and no one let a word of complaint escape him. When hunger seized us on the way, we addressed ourselves to Brother Vincent, our steward; then he took a loaf and placed it on the trunk of a tree, and succeeded, after three or four strokes of a hatchet, in detaching from it some slices, which we eat with as much appetite as the most dainty dishes.

"Farewell, Reverend Father; accept the assurance of the respect, gratitude, and devotion, of your dear family of Our Lady of the Lake. Bless them from the bottom of your paternal heart: this is the ardent prayer of your affectionate son,

"E. SORIN."

In another account, the same Missionary gives the following details concerning the savages under his spiritual direction:—

"The greater part of the neighbouring savages are of the *prayer*, that is to say, Catholics. It is only twelve years since they have been converted, and although they have had much to suffer on the part of the whites, I do not know that a single one of them has forsaken the religion. Although naturally lazy and indolent, once that they are instructed, they show themselves zealous and ardent for the practices of the Church: the only thing which they appear to have at heart is to be good Christians; trade, the riches or pleasures of the present life, seem to make no impression on them. Provided they can gather a few ears of maize, kill a few roebucks, or some wild cats, and then come to salute the *quaniale* (black-gown), they are content.

"They are commonly of a tall, and even majestic stature. Their present character seems to me to be very mild; and yet I am aware, that, ten years ago, they regarded no more the life of their comrade than that of their horses. According to de-

scriptions; deserving of credit, which several persons have given me of them, these same savages which I find so good at present, were given to the most frightful cruelty. I heard lately speak of an Indian woman, who, for a slight injury, had coolly seated her sister on a block before her, in order to cleave her head, at her ease, with a stroke of a hatchet.

“To barbarity, they joined an incredible superstition. Sometimes, in the depth of winter, those men, so haughty and cruel, were so frightened by a dream, that in the fear of having displeased the *Great Spirit*, they imposed on themselves the severest penances, as, for example, to mount to the top of a lofty tree in the forest, and to remain there without eating or drinking, during two or three days, until a new dream came to acquaint them that the wrath of the Master of life had passed away. Then they descended, resumed their muskets, and the first game which they met, was to pay the cost of a feast for the whole neighbourhood, which it was not allowed the hunter to taste of. It was the second piece of game which he shot, that was to satisfy his hunger. Since the light of the Gospel has shone upon them, they have become as mild, as humane, sometimes even as pious, as the best Christians in Europe. Robbery is unknown amongst them, as well as lying; they are ignorant likewise of the greater part of the vices of the civilised people.”

Statistics of the Catholic Church in the United States in 1845, addressed by his Lordship, Dr. Purcell, Bishop of Cincinnati, to the Members of the Central Councils of Lyons and Paris.

Ohio, March 10th, 1845.

“The Catholic Almanac of this year, will, no doubt, have already informed you, that there are now in the United States, without comprising Texas, which is to be annexed to us, 21

dioceses, and a vicariate-apostolic, 675 churches, and 592 chapels, 572 Priests engaged in the Missions, 137 Priests in the colleges and seminaries, 22 ecclesiastical institutions, 220 ecclesiastical students, 28 colleges and higher schools for youth, 29 religious communities, 94 Catholic benevolent Societies, and a Catholic population estimated at 1,300,000; perhaps it may be even much beyond this number.

“The comparative statistics show results which are not less interesting, for they exhibit the continued progress of our holy Religion in this country. Thus, in 1835, there were in the United States 13 dioceses, 14 Bishops, 272 churches, 327 Priests, 12 ecclesiastical seminaries, and 9 colleges; and in the year 1840, we counted already 16 dioceses, 17 Bishops, 454 churches, 482 Priests, 18 ecclesiastical seminaries, and 11 colleges; finally, in 1845, there are 21 dioceses, 1 vicariate-apostolic, 26 Bishops, 675 churches, 709 Priests, 22 ecclesiastical seminaries, and 15 colleges, without speaking of the increase of the communities of women, and schools for young ladies.

“This calculation will show you, gentlemen, that your generous gifts do not fall on a barren soil, and that the faithful of our dioceses are disposed to enter into rivalry with their brethren in Europe, with that country so eminently Catholic, which bestows abundantly, for so many years, its alms with a piety above all praise.”