

to mature in retirement his reflections upon that which he has seen.<sup>1</sup> To monks we are indebted for almost all the accounts of the early parts of English history which we possess ; and we are justified in asserting that, had it not been for their labours, the earlier periods of the history of this country would have been involved in obscurity. “*Prisca Ecclesiæ nostræ fabrica et politia absque monasteriologiâ manca est. Monachatus enim olim maxima fuit pars gentis ecclesiasticæ ; et parietes cœnobiales diu sanctitatis et melioris literaturæ fuerunt sepes. Ex illo seminario prodierunt ingentia illa Christiani orbis lumina, Beda, Alcuinus, Willebrordus, Bonifacius, alii, ob doctrinam, et propagatam fidem impense colendi. Absque monachis nos sane in historiâ patriæ semper essemus pueri.*”<sup>2</sup>

*(To be continued.)*

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## SUCCISA VIRESCIT.

A STUDY OF THE BENEDICTINE HISTORY OF THE LAST HUNDRED YEARS.

### III.

*(Continued from page 119.)*

WE closed our notice of Dom Guéranger, the future restorer of the Benedictine Order in France, by chronicling his profession as a monk in the Patriarchal Basilica of St. Paul at Rome on the 26th of July, 1837. During the time of his stay in the Eternal City, the centre of Catholic tradition and feeling no less than of Catholic Faith, he was fully and profitably employed. For it must be remembered that he was there only for a time ; he had not given himself over to the Cassinese monks who serve the Church of the Great Apostle of the Nations, but was there among them to learn by experience the duties, the trials, and may be the spiritual delights, of the religious life, in order that in the uncertain future he might instruct others in the same sacred ways. The future was, indeed, uncertain. Not that Dom Guéranger's large soul was daunted by the prospect of poverty or chilled by the thought

<sup>1</sup> “Schlegel's Lectures,” vol. i., pp. 291, 292.

<sup>2</sup> “Johannis Marshami *πρόπολαιον* ad Monast. Anglic.”

of the still-latent Gallicanism of a large section of the French clergy, not yet by his constant and gentle persuasion brought more into harmony with the Catholic life of other countries, but there were many things to be considered, vital points to be decided upon, before the new monastic colony could set forth for France. With a view to making his plans partake of that success which had marked the work of the monastic propagators of other days, Dom Guéranger gave himself up to the study of the history of his Order, to the perusal of the lives of its greatest Saints, and to the analysis and comparison of the Constitutions of the various Congregations into which that Order had come to be divided. We will borrow the words of the late eloquent Bishop of Poitiers<sup>1</sup> on this subject.

“The first impulse of the new sons of St. Benedict was, and very naturally, to graft the new branch on to the trunk of the Congregation of St. Maurus, modifying, however, its sap by a few correctives. Was it not the tree whose foliage had, a few years back, shaded the Church and Priory of Solesmes, into which the community had so recently entered? But above the plans of men there is the wisdom of the Church, which is expressed by the oracle of the Apostolic See. Gregory the Sixteenth, himself a son of St. Benedict, would have this rising family to seek the principle of its new formation further back and from a higher source. This command was one of Heaven’s own decreeing; and from the moment it was made known to him, Prosper Guéranger, fortifying himself with the twofold power of study and prayers, traverses, age by age, the current of tradition.”

We can easily believe, on the same authority, that the Constitutions which he drew up after such a preparation at the very commencement of their settlement, and which were inserted in the Apostolic Brief for the restoration of the Benedictine Order in France, are instinct with Monastic tradition and life in the furtherance of which his entire energies were to be devoted.

Shortly after the profession of Dom Guéranger, the blessing of the Holy See and its hearty approbation was bestowed on the new work by the Apostolic Brief “*Innumeras inter*” of September 1st, 1837, whereby the Priory of Solesmes was erected into an Abbey, and made the chief house of the new French Benedictine Congregation, which was by the same highest authority declared to be a sharer in the privileges of the Cassinese Congregation and the inheritor and successor of the Congregations of Cluny, St. Vanne,

<sup>1</sup> Funeral Oration of the Right Rev. Father Dom. Prosper Guéranger. Dublin: Duffy, 1875.

and St. Maure, which had not been restored after their downfall during the cataclysm of the French Revolution. Dom. Guéranger himself, by the same document, was constituted Abbot of Solesmes and Superior-General of the Congregation.

Before leaving the Eternal City for his native land, an acquaintance, soon to ripen into the warmest friendship, had sprung up between the new Abbot and one who like himself was destined to play a great part in the Catholic revival of which France was to be the scene. The Abbé Lacordaire, intent as he was upon the restoration of the Preaching Friars of St. Dominic in France, was naturally attracted towards his distinguished compatriot, whose work had lately met with such signal approbation from the successor of St. Peter, and writing to one of his friends<sup>1</sup> he triumphantly announces that great event:—"We have at last," he says, "an Abbot with mitre and crosier. . . . Solesmes is erected into an Abbey; the Abbot will be for life, and all the future Benedictine establishments in France will be dependent on him. . . . It is a real miracle." Lacordaire travelled back to France with the Abbot and his companions, and was a constant visitor at the new Monastery. In the following year, on his return to Rome, Lacordaire was able, through his intimacy with Cardinal Lambruschini, and by means of a memorial which he presented to Cardinal Sala, to render a great service to the French Benedictines in the difficulties which attended their new foundation. Not long afterwards we find the future restorer of the French Dominicans again at Solesmes, where he spent two months of the summer of 1838 in "studying the Constitutions of the Order of St. Dominic, and ripening his project in solitude and prayer."<sup>2</sup>

The community of Solesmes which had previously existed, so to say, only on paper, began a more real existence with the profession on November 21st, 1838, of the four novices who had shared their Superior's training at St. Paul's at Rome under Dom. Vincent Bini, Abbot of that house; so that, for the French Benedictines, as on so many grounds for their English Brethren, the Feast of Our Lady's Presentation became indeed a *Dies Memorabilis*. The gradual accession of new members to their community, and the consequent feasibility of a more perfect "observance," enabled the monks on Christmas-day, 1846, to introduce the monastic choral office and liturgical books in place of the breviaries, &c., of the Roman rite which they had hitherto made use of. Thus, to the attractions

<sup>1</sup> Madame de la Tour du Pin.

<sup>2</sup> "The Inner Life of Père Lacordaire, O.P.," chap. viii., pp. 175, 176.

offered to the pilgrim or tourist by the interesting old Church of Solesmes and its wonderful life-size sculptures of the entombment of our Lord, the death of the Blessed Virgin,<sup>1</sup> &c., there was added the novelty of the public and very solemn chanting of the Divine Office.

The good fame of its monks and their increasing numbers led the late Bishop of Poitiers, Mgr. Edward Pie, the "Second Hilary," as he has been styled for the virtues and eloquence wherein he resembled his illustrious predecessor, to invite a colony from Solesmes to take up its abode in the old Priory at Ligugé, two leagues from Poitiers, which, since its foundation by St. Martin of Tours in A.D. 360, had undergone many and varied changes. The restored foundation, as indeed it was, was opened on the 25th of November, 1853; three years later (Nov. 18th, 1856) it was raised to the rank of an Abbey by Pius IX., but from one cause or another no Abbot was nominated till November 25th, 1864, when D. Leo Bastide received the appointment from the Superior-General of the Congregation. He continued in office till 1877, when, on his resignation, D. Joseph Bourri was chosen in his place.

The year 1863 was marked by two important events in the history of the French Benedictines. The first was the foundation at Marseilles of a Monastery in honour of St. Mary Magdalen, whose body is believed to be buried in the neighbourhood of that town;<sup>2</sup> the second was the elevation to the Sacred College of Cardinals<sup>3</sup> of the Prior of Solesmes, Dom John Baptist Pitra (March 16th, 1863). The Protectorship of the Cistercian Order and other religious bodies, the office of Librarian of the Holy Roman Church, and a place in several important *Congregations* were an evidence of the high opinion which the learning and talents of the new Cardinal had earned for him. The latest honour bestowed upon Cardinal Pitra was his promotion in 1879 to the Cardinal-Bishopric of Frascati.

It hardly comes within the scope of our present purpose to dwell at any great length on the life and influence of Dom Guéranger, whose work, as we have seen, was so blessed by God. The friendly ties which bound him to the early members of the renewed French Province of the Order of St. Dominic have been already indicated

<sup>1</sup> For an account of these admirable works of art, by unknown artists in the time of Prior Moreau de St. Hilaire (1496-1505), and of his successor, Prior Jean Bougler, see *Description de l'église Abbatiale de Solesmes et explication des monuments qu'elle renferme*. Le Mans, Fleuriot, 1846.

<sup>2</sup> The Priory of St. Mary Magdalen was erected into an Abbey in 1876.

<sup>3</sup> His title was to the Church of St. Calixtus.

This and other kindred points are touched upon by his panegyrist in the following words<sup>1</sup>:—

“How many servants of God’s cause have come hither seeking light and counsel! It was here that Lacordaire made up his mind regarding his vocation, and collected the materials of his memoir for the re-establishment of the Dominican Order in France. Here it was that were first marshalled the valiant Apostles of the Polish and Bulgarian emigrants, taking for the name of their Congregation that one which so well expresses their aim and hopes — the *Resurrection*. Here it was that Montalembert wrote the ‘Introduction’ to his ‘Life of St. Elizabeth,’ and drew up the original and better plan of his ‘Monks of the West.’ And how many other writers came hither to drink from these ever-open springs of erudition and learning! How many times, amidst the anxieties and confusion of political strife, have not the leaders of the Catholic papers (and amongst them he whom they so justly revere as their leader), have they not, I say, come to this peaceful cloister, seeking and finding rest, and joy of heart, light, and courage! How many that were sick in soul have here recovered health and life; and they that had gone astray, have here returned to the path of happiness, because they had here been guided to that of truth! How many Priests have here had renewed within them the sacerdotal spirit, the love of the Church and the Pope; and have gone back to their work invigorated by conversations which had opened a new world to their thoughts, and given a new direction to their studies! How many pilgrims have trod the road which led them to this spot on the great Feasts of the Church: some regaining the faith or the grace they had lost; others feeling the desire to lead a more fervent life; and all coming to hear the chants, and admire the ceremonies, and see the beauties of the House of God! In a word, with what veneration did not the entire population of the neighbourhood round the Monastery look on that noble and beautiful old man, in whom they saw the friend and *Father* of the entire country.”

If asked by what means the first Abbot of Solesmes acquired such influence, the only answer possible is that his genuine devotedness to the cause of God, His Church, and His earthly Vicar, the perfection of his own spiritual graces, manifested outwardly by his universal benevolence and forbearance, no less than the extent and accuracy of his learning, caused all men to respect him and many to revere him, and gave no just ground for the

<sup>1</sup> “Funeral Discourse,” &c., p. 29.

hatred of any save such as were the enemies of all social order and revealed religion.

The Abbot's learning was shown by many proofs: by his *Institutions Liturgiques*, by his *Liturgical Year*, by his learned and devout "Memoire on the definability of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God," to the great influence of which Pèrè Ravignan, S.J., gives such striking testimony,<sup>1</sup> and which Pius IX., a few days before the Definition of that Dogma, pronounced to be the most convincing treatise that had appeared on the subject; and (but by no means his only other work) the *Monarchie Pontificale*, which has been spoken of as a "wonderful and almost spontaneous production of a theological maturity which has seldom been witnessed."

At length worn out by so many labours, but, Patriarch-like, blessed in his declining years with a numerous family, this Father and Founder of four Abbeys — for the Abbey of Nuns at St. Cecilia's, near Solesmes, was likewise his creation — revered throughout his country, and honoured throughout the Church, the Venerable Dom Prosper Guéranger passed to his reward on the 30th day of January, 1875.

The work which he did still lives on, even though a godless government has, for a time, closed the Monasteries wherein his disciples dwelt, entirely devoted as were those inoffending men to the service of God and the propagation of Christian learning. There seems no conceivable *human* cause at least for the expulsion of the French Benedictines, for they enjoyed but a very moderate share of the goods of this world, and, as they kept no colleges, were less exposed to the jealousy of a government whose real aim seems to have been the prevention of Catholic education. But no exception was made, and the last months of 1880 saw the closing, one after another, of the Monasteries of the French Benedictines, and the dispersion of the hundred and thirty brethren who had therein dedicated themselves to the service of their Maker. Let us hope and pray that better days are in store for Catholic France, the "eldest daughter of the Church."

We will now, in as brief a manner as possible, say a few words about the development of another branch of the Benedictine Order, the Armenian Congregation of *Mechitarists* — which in its own sphere has rendered good services to the Church. Mechitar de Petro, the "Consoler" (as his name imports), was born at Sebaste in Lesser Armenia, towards the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Ami de la Religion. Tom. cx., p. 41, &c.

<sup>2</sup> In 1676. The modern name of his birthplace is *Sivas*.

After his elevation to the priesthood and his attainment to the Doctorate (Vartabiet) in the Armenian Church, he settled at Constantinople in 1700, and there, with some companions, gave himself up to the education of the children of the Armenian residents in that city. Driven thence by the arts of the Patriarch of the Schismatical Armenians, he removed to the Island of Modon, in the Peloponnese, where, under the protection of the Venetian Republic, he could prosecute his work in peace. There he built a Church and Monastery, and obtained the approval of the Institute from Clement XII. (1712). On that Pontiff giving him a choice between the Rules of St. Basil, St. Augustine and St. Benedict, Mechitar chose the last-named; and after a due examination of the constitution was named Abbot of the new Congregation.<sup>1</sup>

In 1715, the Monks were again obliged to remove, in consequence of the destruction of their Convent by the Turks who in that year took possession of the island of Modon. They found a final resting place at Venice, where, by the kindness of the Senate, they were put in possession of the Island of Lazarus, and resumed, and have to this day continued, their labours in behalf of their Church and race, (1717). This Mechitarist Congregation possesses several small educational and missionary establishments among the dispersed Armenians; about twenty of its members now reside in Constantinople, where their Mission was commenced in 1702; a second large and independent Abbey numbering at the present day about sixty religious, clerical and lay, was established, first at Tergeste (1773) by nineteen Monks of the Venetian House, and finally at Vienna, where the Emperor Francis I. bestowed upon them the old Capuchin Monastery of St. Ulric. This latter establishment contains at the present day about sixty religious, clerical and lay, and is noted for its excellent College, its vast Library and Museum, and the perfection of its printing press. Like the Monks of the English Congregation, its members are bound by oath to give their services for the spiritual good of their countrymen, whenever called upon by Superiors. The dependencies of the Viennese Province include three Monasteries and as many Colleges for the reception of Armenian youth.

The Mother House at Venice has not been less prosperous. Besides the small Monastery of St. Anthony, at Elizabethpol in Transylvania, which was founded in 1720, it has during the present century established a house at Karrassu-Bazar in the Crimea,

<sup>1</sup> The Benedictine Rule had already been introduced into Armenia, and this fact may perhaps have influenced Mechitar's choice.

(1820); another in Paris, the Moorat College, founded by an Armenian gentleman of that name; and, lastly, a Hospice in Rome, as the residence of the Superior-General of the Province. The members of these various Houses are, like their brethren at Vienna, engaged in educational or literary work; while others are sent to the various Armenian Missions in Constantinople, Smyrna, Trebizond, Erzerum and Tiflis. The disciples of Mechitar, at the present day, include three Archbishops, three Abbots, sixty-six Doctors of Sacred Theology, and nearly two hundred Monks.

*(To be continued.)*

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## THE GREGORIAN MARTYRS.

THE trials and sufferings of our Catholic forefathers, three hundred years ago, have recently engaged the attention of the public. Hopes are entertained that the Holy See may bestow the highest honour of the Church upon our English Martyrs, and by adding them to the glorious roll of Saints who have shed their blood for the faith, make manifest to the Catholic world their constancy and fidelity. Amongst those Martyrs are sons of St. Gregory's, and if we look with interest and pride on the children of Alma Mater who have signalized themselves in the senate, the bar, or the army, in literature, art, or science, with what admiration and reverence should we not regard those who have displayed here the highest phase of Christian heroism, and are now crowned in heaven with the Martyrs' crown. It will then be in unison with the public feeling of the present day, and cannot but be gratifying to the readers of the "Downside Review," if we record in its pages the acts of those who, trained within the walls of St. Gregory's, have suffered for the faith.

St. Gregory's was founded in the year 1605, in the reign of James I., hence no Gregorians suffered under Elizabeth; and although soon after its foundation Priests were ordained and left the Monastery for the English Mission, it was not until the great struggle between Charles I. and his Parliament that a Monk of St. Gregory's was executed. In the reign of James I. and the early years of Charles I. we find them in prison, and enduring the sufferings and trials to which Missionary Priests were exposed; but the unwillingness of Charles to shed blood for religion lessened