CHAPTER XVI

THE MISSIONS IN THE NEAR EAST

The lot of the uniate Oriental Christians gave more anxiety than ever to the Holy See from the moment when, in 1821, the year of the rising in Greece, the dismemberment of Turkey began. The interference of the European Powers had brought Turkish animosity to a pitch of frenzy. The most appalling massacres of Christians ravaged the whole East, in Syria (1860), the Balkans (1878), Armenia (1894–6), Adana (1908) and finally, the massacre which lasted from 1915 to 1919 throughout the ruins of the Ottoman empire.

As a general rule, the Turkish Government separated Catholics from Rome by placing them under the authority of patriarchs of the Orthodox Church. Gregory XVI took care at once to provide them with some support by creating, between 1832 and 1839, three Apostolic Delegations to cover the whole of the Near East. At the same time, thanks to the re-establishment of the religious Orders in France, missionaries arrived in sufficient numbers to revive old foundations that had had to be abandoned after the French Revolution. They also established new ones. The Vincentians reopened their college at Constantinople and inaugurated others at Smyrna, Santorin and Antoura.

The Jesuits returned to Beirut in 1839, and then established at Ghazir in 1846, a central seminary open to all rites in communion with Rome. The Brothers of the Christian Schools arrived in 1840, the Daughters of Charity at Constantinople in

1839 and in 1847 at Beirut where they were followed shortly after by the Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition.

This growth of educational foundations was due in large measure to the campaigns of a young Orientalist, Eugène Boré, who had returned from a fact-finding journey to Persia (1838) convinced that to rescue these unfortunate Christians from ignorance and superstition was a task of the utmost urgency. After his own entry into the Vincentian Congregation, of which he later became Superior General, he was able to work directly for the carrying out of the programme he had drawn up.

The Latin hierarchy had disappeared in the thirteenth century after the withdrawal of the Franks. Pius IX re-established it at Jerusalem in 1847 and at Athens in 1875.

Other factors also helped to strengthen the positions of the Latins: the development of the missions in Mesopotamia which, thanks to the Italian Dominicans, stretched from Mosul to Van, Seert and Djeziri; the revival of the old Carmelite missions in Baghdad; the arrival of the Spanish Capuchins at Diarbekir, then at Orfa and Mardin; the establishment of an Apostolic Delegation in Persia, distinct from that in Mesopotamia, which was entrusted to the Vincentians; finally, the increase in the numbers of educational, medical and charitable institutions.

The Orthodox hierarchy had not replied to the invitation to attend the Vatican Council sent them by Pius IX. Hence Leo XIII showed all the more solicitude towards the uniate Oriental hierarchy. He gave them the means to recruit and to train a clergy of quality for each rite. Seminaries were therefore established—in Cairo by the Jesuits for the Copts (1897), at Constantinople (1881) by the Capuchins for all the rites, at St Anne in Jerusalem by the White Fathers for the Melkites, at Mosul (1885) by the Dominicans for the Syro-Chaldeans, at Zeitenlik (1885) by the Vincentians for the Bulgarian clergy. The idea behind these foundations is contained in a phrase which Leo XIII, the Pope of Union, was fond of repeating:

"The East will be converted by the Easterns." At Rome itself, he founded a seminary for the Armenians (1883) and, in 1891, another for the Maronites. He restored the College of St Athanasius for the Greeks and founded bursaries for the Syrians at the Urban College. His letter *Orientalium dignitas* (1894) guaranteed to the Eastern Churches their traditional privileges. A *Motu proprio* (1895) recommended the apostolic delegates to treat the patriarchs with all due deference, to have at least two meetings a year with them and to take care to maintain good relations between the Latin missionaries and the Oriental clergy. With this project still in mind, Leo XIII suppressed in the East the title of prefect apostolic and replaced it by that of mission superior. Further, the Latin clergy were allowed attach themselves to this or that oriental rite as occasion arose.

Benedict XV brought this conciliatory policy to full fruition when, in 1917, he founded the Sacred Congregation of the Eastern Church, thus granting autonomy to the special section for the affairs of the Eastern Church which had been established by Pius IX in 1862 as part of the Sacred College of Propaganda.