CHAPTER XIV

THE AMERICAN MISSIONS

THE UNITED STATES

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, paganism had disappeared—officially at least—from America, since the Indians and the Negro slaves had either been baptized, as in the territories dependent on Spain and Portugal, or entered in the registers of the Protestant ministers in those countries which had, or still were, possessions of the English Crown. In actual fact, a very large number of them, for lack of instruction, practised a crude syncretism, a mixture of Indian or African cults and a form of Christianity reduced to a few devotions in honour of the saints in the calendar. And again, from Mackenzie to Tierra del Fuego, there were still tribes living in a savage state, pushed further and further back by the brute force of European immigration, yet preparing themselves to defend their soil with the energy of despair. The missionaries (there were Protestants among them, such as Roger William) had often stood up in their defence during the previous centuries and they were to continue to do so in the nineteenth.

The evangelization of the North American Indians originated in the old Catholic centres established in the colonies with a European population: Maryland, Louisiana and Canada. Help in the work came from religious, both men and women, who had been dispersed by the Revolution and the wars of the Empire. They sought refuge in the United States, especially in Maryland, where the Toleration Act of 1649 had given Catholicism the right of entry. One of the first to arrive in

1790, a Sulpician, was made the head of the seminary of Baltimore by the vicar apostolic, John Carroll. He trained in it a clergy of truly apostolic spirit. In 1808, when Baltimore became an archbishopric with four suffragan sees—New York, Philadelphia, Boston and Bardstown—Mgr Carroll's task became so onerous that the work of reviving the mission to the Indians was given to the bishop of New Orleans, Mgr Dubourg, who was also a Sulpician. In the meantime, a delegation of Indians arrived from the prairies and asked for the "Black Robes" to come back to them.

A vanguard, composed of Belgian Jesuits, came to Florissant, where they built an establishment of the sort used in Canada during the seventeenth century, with its mill, cattle-sheds and barns. While the novices were there completing their theological training, useful information came in regarding the state of mind of the tribes. In the light of this, Fr Van Quickenborn decided to set out to meet them. He found little more than remnants of the former tribes, sodden with alcohol, nomadic and forced to be constantly on the run westwards as the wave of White immigration swept forward. All, or almost all, of them had heard of the "Black Robes", but, even among those who had been baptized, many had gone over to Protestantism. Two apostles set out to evangelize these unfortunate people. One, Fr Hoecken, went among the Indians of the Forest, the other, Fr de Smet, among those of the Prairie. The latter, "the man with the most influence over the Indian tribes in the whole of the North-West", had few failures except with the Sioux. His apostolate extended as far as the Rocky Mountains where he worked among the Flatheads who had appealed to him to come to them in 1840. He returned among them twice, on the second occasion in 1844 with four Fathers, two brothers and six nuns. These reinforcements made it possible to extend the apostolate to the majority of the tribes, so that by the middle of the century the Rocky Mountains mission numbered some 3,400 converts.

The influence of Fr de Smet and his brethren was revealed

in all its vast range when, in 1870, General Grant inaugurated his policy of peace with the Indians. Those among them who, it was claimed, had joined Protestant bodies although they were Catholics, sent delegates to Washington to ask, in the name of the liberty which was written into the Constitution, for the return among them of the "Black Robes". They eventually obtained what they wanted, thanks to the American episcopate and the Catholic missionary societies of the United States.

The majority of the Negroes in the south, where they were so numerous, were practising Protestants or more or less influenced by a Protestant tradition. The Catholic Church had a duty to come to the help of those who were baptized and to attempt to convert the others. The Mill Hill priests devoted themselves to this apostolate. After establishing parishes in the south, they founded in 1892 the Society of St Joseph (the Josephites) the first missionary institute exclusively consecrated to the evangelization of the American Negroes.

THE EPIC OF THE OBLATES IN THE FAR NORTH

The Oblates of Mary Immaculate were responsible for the apostolate among the Indians of Oregon and Columbia. Fr Ricard came out as a pioneer with six religious in 1847 and founded a mission on the southern point of Puget Bay on the spot where the town of Olympia was later to be built. The Oblates next moved forward into the lower valley of the Fraser River, where they built the missions at Sainte-Marie, Fort Hope, Fort Yale and New Westminster.

But the chief field in which the epic of the Oblates was to unfold was the Far North where, however, it profited by the admirable preparatory work which had already been done by Canadians alone.

The point of departure was an appeal by Lord Selkirk, a shareholder in the Hudson Bay Company, to the bishop of Quebec, Mgr Plessis. He asked him for a zealous and intelli-

gent ecclesiastic to minister to the religious needs of the half-caste trappers and various other workmen who were Catholics. They lived in the extreme south of Winnipeg. The priest chosen for the work, Fr Provencher, received such a promising welcome that the Holy See at once formed the project of using this advance post as a base for the whole of North-west Canada. Fr Provencher became Mgr Plessis' coadjutor. At first he exercised his ministry among the half-castes then, after 1830, he sent some of his priests among the Indians.

In 1844, Mgr Provencher, then vicar apostolic of the whole of Canada, asked the bishop of Montreal, Mgr Bourget, to send him some of the Oblates who had just gone forward with unheard-of daring, as far as the territories in the neighbourhood of lakes Abitibi and Timiskaming where they had converted a few fur hunters. The local superior considered that this was a rash undertaking and informed Mgr de Mazenod, the superior general of the Oblates, of his misgivings in the following terms: "We are 2,000 miles from the Red River. Communications are extremely difficult. Our men will lead a lonely life full of all kinds of dangers." The answer came—and it was peremptory:

> I cannot understand how you can have been so strangely mistaken in the matter of the Red River missions. Yet it seems to me that I spoke clearly and precisely enough to let it be understood by you that this was not a mere suggestion to be examined and discussed but a plan on which I had come to a decision and whose execution I am entrusting to you.

This memorable summons opened the pages of the epic of the Oblates, in which religious who wanted to obey their founder hastened to play their part. Already during the summer of 1846, two Oblates, one of them Fr Taché, a Canadian but of French stock, had set out; they spent the winter at l'Ile-à-la-Crosse, 625 miles to the north-west of St Boniface. The next year, a new leap forward took Fr Taché as far as lake Athabaska. He was the first Catholic priest to

appear in these regions where he was welcomed by a few Indians with these words: "We have long desired to see you face to face. Take pity on us and teach us how to become good."

After four months spent among these men of goodwill, he had to return to l'Ile-à-la-Crosse, but other Oblates came, some to consolidate the first foundations, the others to push on further towards the polar circle. In 1856, Fr Faraud founded the St Joseph mission in the neighbourhood of Fort Resolution on the Great Slave Lake. In 1858, Fr Grollier founded the Sacred Heart mission near Fort Simpson, after a journey down the Mackenzie. The Oblates were beyond the sixtieth parallel north. One more forward leap and Fr Grollier reached the edge of the Arctic circle at Fort Good Hope. There he laid the foundations of the mission of Our Lady of Good Hope and wrote on May 20th, 1860, to Mgr de Mazenod: "Everyone here thinks that the winter this year has been mild. We haven't had a temperature lower than 48° below zero (Fahrenheit=54·5 degrees of frost.—*Trans.*) Would they think this was not much, at Marseilles?"

During the summer, he chose Fort Norman as the centre for a new mission, St Teresa's, and then he went on beyond the Arctic circle as far as Fort McPherson.

From roughly the year 1860, came a period of settling in and consolidation. It was less spectacular than the daring initial thrusts, but it probably called for greater sacrifices. Three prelates, among others, distinguished themselves. Their combined episcopates cover almost a century. Mgr Taché had guided Mgr Grandin in his early years; Mgr Grandin himself was consecrated a bishop in 1859 at the age of twenty-nine. Mgr Grouard was a pupil of his and he died on March 7th, 1931, at Grouard, the chief town of the Grouard vicariate. It must be noted indeed that these Oblates were such discoverers and builders that their memory is for ever engraved upon the map. Between the Great Slave and the Great Bear Lakes, six

others bear the name of six of these Oblates: Mazenod, Rey, Séguin, Clut, Grandin, Taché. And how many places could be named whose "patron" is one or other of these pioneers who discovered them?

It has been suggested that these were vocations awakened by the lure of journeys by dog-sledge through the blizzards. But the truth is that in the accounts that have come down to us from these apostles of the snows (Mgr Grandin's in particular), we see men who often went hungry, who deprived themselves so as to feed and clothe the Indians, who sometimes coughed up their own lungs, but whose faces shone with joy when, at the meal served for the bishop on his rounds, they could add a white partridge or a rice pudding seasoned with that rarest of products which sugar then was.

They were never discouraged. In 1912, two Oblates of Keewatin, one of them Fr Turquetil, were about to set off for the spiritual conquest of the Eskimos. After four years of entirely unproductive work at Chesterfield, their vicar apostolic had recalled them, when there was a mysterious change and conversions that had been quite unexpected took place. The two religious attributed this to the prayers they had made to a Carmelite nun who had died at Lisieux in 1897 and whose renown as a wonder-worker had reached even their ears. From Chesterfield the hand of grace touched Pand Inlet at Churchill, Azavick at Coppermine. This miracle, when it became known at Rome, was to contribute its share in the canonization of St Teresa of the Child Jesus, patroness together with St Francis Xavier of the missions and the missionaries of the whole world.

While the brutal and pitiless wave of European immigration drove the half-castes and the Indians to the north and west, the Oblates undertook the defence of these victims of oppression. Mgr Grandin, again, endeavoured to "keep them on the path of obedience and duty and to see that they were treated justly".

SOUTH AMERICA AND THE WEST INDIES

In Mexico and South America, the history of the Missions in the nineteenth century is divided into two sections. The first, contemporary with the wars of independence which were to give birth to the South American Republics and put an end to the system of *patronato*, was marked by great upheavals and severe trials. Subsequently, new missions were set up on the basis of concordats concluded between the Holy See and the new States.

Officially, the missions to the Indians had disappeared in Bolivia in 1815, in Chile in 1817, in Ecuador and Peru in 1824 and in Mexico in 1833–4. But they had left behind a whole mass of foundations which still arouse the admiration of tourists today. And they could also take pride in the fact that they had improved the standard of living of the tribes by acclimatizing food-producing crops and domesticated animals from the old world.

Nor were the missions entirely abandoned. If the apostolate to the Indians was able to continue for a time, the credit was due to the Franciscans, Capuchins, Dominicans and Augustinians who stayed on the spot, and to the Missionary colleges of the Propagation of the Faith, founded in 1686, and reorganized in 1797. In them, masters of proved worth trained a missionary *élite* in an atmosphere of deep spirituality and did not neglect the study of the native languages.

In this transitory period, while nothing took the place officially of the missions of the *patronato*, certain religious distinguished themselves. An example is the Franciscan Andrew Herrero. In 1835, after launching an appeal to the whole Order of St Francis, he brought to Bolivia twelve Italian Franciscans. He returned a little later with eighty-three missionaries who established colleges and restored mission work among the Indians in Peru, Chile and Bolivia. But they were not numerous enough to keep the missions in being and quite soon they found themselves obliged to confine their ministry to the

established Christian communities. In 1842, Colombia appealed for Jesuits, but expelled them eight years later. The Dominicans returned to Peru as did a few Jesuits to Paraguay. The place which South America acquired in the missionary movement owed its importance, towards the middle of the century, to the fact that the Far East continued to be closed and the harbours on the Pacific coasts were ports of call for the increasingly large numbers of missionaries on their way to Oceania.

On the debit side must be placed the political instability of the new States, the continual threat represented by their anti-clericalism and the uncertain status of the missions and the missionaries, who were without an organization to replace the *patronato* system.

Both Pius VIII and Gregory XVI had wished to avoid humiliating these young republics, full of the memories of the foundations made under the old monarchies, by imposing on them a missionary code. Gradually, concordats came into operation under Pius IX. There was a paragraph guaranteeing State financial aid for the evangelization of the Indians which, as such, was to be organized by Propaganda. It was on this basis and with varying fortunes that the apostolate to the Indians recommenced. And the Indians themselves had not fallen victims to former massacres in any great numbers, since today their descendants represent more than half the population of Ecuador, Central America and Bolivia (where they number 60 per cent).

In 1847, at the request of the Government of Chile, Pius IX sent twelve Italian Capuchins to evangelize the Indians of Arauco. These missionaries were followed by Capuchins from Bavaria. The mission is in a flourishing state today. During the same pontificate, in 1855 and 1856, two parties of Franciscans arrived from Italy to undertake the same work among the Indians of the Argentine.

In the West Indies, after the vicariates of Guadeloupe and Martinique had been attached as suffragan sees to the

Bordeaux diocese, and those of the Windward Islands to the diocese of Port of Spain (Trinidad), only the Caribbean Sea mission depended on Propaganda, which entrusted British Guiana to the English Jesuits, and the missions in those areas of Guiana and the West Indies under Dutch administration to Dutch Redemptorists and Dominicans.

In Brazil, after 1860, the Franciscans evangelized the Indians of the interior, the Capuchins those on the coast, and the Dominicans those of Upper Araguay from 1880 onward. The revolution of 1889 restored their freedom to the religious Orders and some of Don Bosco's Salesians arrived in Matto Grosso in 1890 (in 1910, they were to settle on the Rio Negro), Holy Ghost Fathers at Teffe in Amazonia (1897), Fathers of the Divine Word among the Coroados Indians and the Botokudi, German Franciscans (1903) at Santarem among the Mundurucu, Italian Capuchins among the Indians of Parana and São Paolo, Belgian Benedictines on the Rio Branco, and in 1911, French Dominicans at Conceiçao on the Paraguay river.

In Peru, three prefectures apostolic were founded in 1899: Saint-Leon of the Amazon, Ucayali, Urumbamba of the Mother of God. The first Augustinians arrived in 1900.

Salesians arrived at the southern tip of South America in 1879; Leo XIII sent them when the Argentine Government asked him for religious to instruct and pacify the Patagonians. They were very unwelcome at first but subsequently their success was sufficient to allow them to extend their work as far as Tierra del Fuego. It was in this group of islands, separated from the mainland by the straits of Magellan, that Mgr Cagliero devoted himself with exemplary charity to the Fuegians whose race was well on the way to becoming extinct.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the north and centre of Patagonia became a vicariate and Tierra del Fuego a prefecture apostolic. And what a thankless task the Salesians have undertaken in this region!

Since by the end of the nineteenth century the political situation in Colombia had become stable, various institutes

settled there: Augustinians and Recollects in 1890, de Montfort Fathers in 1903, Vincentians in 1905, Claretians in 1908, Carmelites and Jesuits (the latter had been expelled in 1850) in 1918 and priests from the Burgos seminary in 1920. These apostles, most of them from Italy and Spain, were helped by priests trained in the seminary of the Foreign Missions at Yarumal (Colombia), which was founded in 1927. In 1928, the Colombian State granted an official status to the missionaries, on condition that they civilized scattered and backward groups and made them fit to take their part in the life of the nation.