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EARLY REDEMPTORIST MISSIONS IN ENGLAND AND IRELAND

(1848-1865)

SUMMARY

1. *The Redemptorists Come to England.* 2. *The Parish Missions at Last.* 3. *The Missionary Methods.* 4. *Some Features of the Early Missions.* 5. *Problems of the Early Missions.* 6. *The Missioners.*

While still Rector of the English College, Rome, Nicholas Wiseman was full of schemes for the progress of Catholicism in his native land, where the achievement of Emancipation in 1829 had given reason for hope. He poured out his ideas in letters to friends, such as that to Dr. Newsham, Rector of Ushaw in October 1838.

> What I am most anxious to accomplish is to establish a small community of missioners who, living as a community at home, should go *bini* from place to place giving lectures, retreats etc. in different dioceses, so as to be out several months at a time, and then repose, so that those at home would be engaged in conducting at certain intervals retreats for laymen or clergy in the house [1].

In an expression like that Redemptorists would probably be quick to conclude that the future cardinal was referring to their own institute. It was, however, very unlikely that Wiseman had much if any knowledge of the Congregation of St. Alphonsus; and in any case his description of the missionary life could just as well fit many of the other religious whom he could have come to know during

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[1] Letter of 18th October 1838 quoted by W. WARD, *The Life and Times of Cardinal Wiseman*, London, 1897, I, 266. Wiseman expressed the same desire on other occasions. Cf. J. SHARP, « The Redemptorists in the United Kingdom: The Early Years » in *The Clergy Review*, London, 67 (1982) 383.

his long sojourn in Italy. But it appears that he was not thinking of any particular Order at all. As he developed his plan for Newsham it was clear that what he had in mind was a group of English diocesan clergy. He even suggested that he could easily choose some of the men he had ready to hand in his Roman seminary.

Like more than one of Wiseman's early schemes the missionary band he had sketched out in 1838 remained a dream. It was not long, however, before the Italian Congregations, which may possibly have been his inspiration, introduced their own missions into England. The Rosminian, Father Luigi Gentili, had been in the country since 1835, and in 1839 he preached his first little mission. The Passionists arrived in 1842 and two years later they too began to give missions [2]. The Redemptorists were established in Cornwall in 1843; and it is the development of their early missions which is the theme of the present study.

Material has been found principally in the Redemptorist General Archives, Rome [3]. *Spicilegium* has published studies of two of the most active of the early missioners, Father Joseph Prost [4] and that colourful polyglot, Father Vladimir Pecherin [5]. There are also biographies of the renowned children's missioner, Father John Furniss [6] and of Father Thomas Edward Bridgett [7], more famous for his historical writings than for his preaching, to which he was none the less all his life most warmly devoted. From these sources it has been possible to form a reasonably complete picture of the preachers of the first Redemptorist missions, their activity, their methods and their effect on the people.

Assigning limits to the study has been simplified by the fact that the English province was erected in 1865, so that the twenty or so formative years themselves may be seen as the period when

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2 SHARP, *art. cit.*, 383.

3 Quoted AGR. The material that has been most useful has been the following: *Chronica collegiorum provinciae Anglicae, 1843-1870* (quoted *Chronica*); files entitled Labores Apostolici, which include a *Manuscrit confidentiel* of Father Louis De Buggenoms, one of the pioneers on the English foundations; and the files marked *Defuncti.*

4 *Spic. Hist.*, 8 (1960) 453-485.

5 *Spic. Hist.*, 21 (1973) 165-179; 329-363; 22 (1974) 3-52; 255-271. In this article the Russian spelling of the name has been retained, as in the other articles of *Spicitegium.* He himself signed his letters when they were written in French *Petchérine.* Among his companions in England and Ireland the name seems to have been usually written *Petcherine.*

6 T. LIVIUS, *Father Furniss and his Work for Children,* London, 1896.

7 C. RYDER, *Life of Thomas Edward Bridgett,* London, 1906.

the missions, like the province itself, were becoming established. This limit is all the more convenient, since on 15th March 1865 the Superior General, Father Nicholas Mauron, prescribed a certain formula for reporting Apostolic works [8]. The English mission reports from the beginning, accordingly, were summarised and arranged in keeping with the neat shape of the new prescription [9].

In treating the beginning of the missions in England it is necessary to look also to the work done in those first years in Ireland. It was not until the end of the century that the independent Irish province was erected, and until then the work in both countries was shared by the same personnel. In these early missions it is possible to establish the link that binds not only the English but the Irish as well and for that matter the Australian tradition to the missionary practice established on the Continent during the thirties and forties of last century.

1. THE REDEMPTORISTS COME TO ENGLAND

The introduction of the Redemptorists to England was due most of all to the enthusiasm of Father Frederick von Held, the first Belgian provincial. Already predisposed in favour, he journeyed to Scotland in 1842 when he was invited by Bishop Scott, Vicar Apostolic of the Western District, to discuss a possible foundation. His ardour cooled when he discovered that the harassed prelate merely wanted some men to supplement his own meagre handful of clergy. Disappointed in Scotland, he turned his attention to England and called on the Vicar Apostolic of the Western District of that country, Bishop Baines. They had met previously, when Baines had been in Liège in 1837. This visit produced a more promising offer, the mission of Falmouth in Cornwall [10]. Father von Held eagerly accepted and despatched a small community in June of 1843.

The start in Falmouth was anything but promising. The supe-

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[8] N. MAURON, *Litterae circulares*, Rome, 1896, 90-93.

[9] AGR, *Chronica*, 45.

[10] The beginning in Falmouth has been described by SHARP, *art. cit.*, 384-385. Famouth was called a « mission », a name which was commonly used to designate pastoral districts which we would now call parishes. The name continued even after the restoration of the hierarchy in 1850. In small country districts these missions were frequently established by wealthy Catholic families for the advantage of the neighbourhood as well as of themselves. Cf. D. MATHEW, *Catholicism in England, 1535-1935*, London, 1936, 217-218.

rior was Father August Lempfried, who had accompanied his provincial to Scotland and England in the previous year; and he soon showed signs of an unbalanced mind, which greatly alarmed his young companion, Father Louis De Buggenoms, barely a month ordained. Good Brother Felicien Dubucquoi, for whom the superior had devised an outlandish suit of livery, was more phlegmatic in accepting Lempfried's eccentricities [11]. Left to himself, Father De Buggenoms was able to build up the mission, which had become deplorably run down. After he was joined by Father Vladimir Pecherin in January 1845 there was at last very laudable progress.

Falmouth was an extensive and demanding mission district. Father De Buggenoms speaks of visiting the island of St. Mawes, a journey that always entailed violent seasickness, to minister to Irish customs men and coastguards and journeys as far afield as Truro and even further. With such a burden of pastoral duties there was little time for the two Fathers to devote themselves to the « lectures, retreats etc. » in various dioceses of which Wiseman had dreamed. And that continued to be the pattern of the similar missions that succeeded Falmouth.

On the occasion of the canonical visitation he made in 1844 Father von Held accepted charge of the mission of Hanley Castle in Worcestershire. A beautiful little gothic church with a comfortable residence had been provided by the generous founder, Mr. J.V. Gandolfi, who had grateful memories of a retreat in St. Trond, the Redemptorist novitiate house in Belgium. The land was kindly donated by Mr. Hornyold, the local Catholic squire [12]. The superior of this very typical English Catholic mission appointed by the provincial was none other than Father Lempfried, who quickly showed that he had learned little in his year's experience in Falmouth.

It was left to the second superior, the amiable Father John Baptist Lans, to soothe the spirits so thoroughly ruffled by his eccentric predecessor [13]. Hanley Castle proved to be possibly the

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[11] L. De Buggenoms, *Manuscrit confidentiel.* The foundation in Falmouth is described in pages 3-13 with ample evidence of Lempfried's bizarre conduct. In a note attiched to the manuscript Father Edward Douglas, Consultor General, however, remarks that Father De Buggenoms, whom he knew quite well, « seems to me to take too black a view of things ».

[12] De Buggenoms, *Manuscrit confidentiel,* 13. When Gandolfi succeeded to the Hornyold estate, he adopted that name.

[13] There is an appreciation of Father Lans by T. Livius, *A Brief Memoir of the Rev. Father John Baptist Lans C.SS.R.,* Liverpool, 1887.

most successful of the early Redemptorist foundations, like Falmouth providing pastoral care over a wide area. What made Hanley different was that Father Lans gained a reputation as a wise and kindly spiritual director, who attracted a number of retreatants. Among others two future Redemptorists came to him for counsel, Father Robert Aston Coffin, the first English provincial, and Father Bridgett. Father Lans had, in fact, made himself esteemed for his guidance by the Oratorian community gathered around John Henry Newman in the Birmingham Oratory [14].

Other missions of a similar kind followed, so that it looked as though the Redemptorists in England were being channelled into a parish ministry like their confrères in the United States. St. Peter's, Great Marlow, had been built in 1846 by the wealthy Buckinghamshire parliamentarian, and convert, Charles Scott Murray. He found it hard to provide a priest to care for the district until the Redemptorists accepted his offer in 1848. It did not last long enough for it to gain a reputation such as Father Lans had won for Hanley. The mission of Llanherne in Cornwall lasted barely a year. Really it was as little more than confessor to the Carmelite nuns that Father Prost was sent there with a companion in 1848. In the following year he was recalled to become superior of Great Marlow. A further chaplaincy in Rotherwas had a similarly brief existence [15].

The end of this first brief chapter of the English Redemptorist story came in October of 1850. Father von Held, then Visitor of the English communities, was summoned to an important assembly of superiors held in Bischenberg in Alsace. The Congregation on the Continent was facing a number of urgent problems; and Father Rudolf von Smetana, appointed by the Holy See Vicar General beyond the Alps, had summoned the meeting. He was anxious among other things to see that everything under his responsibility was in good order; and Father von Held was for that reason informed that the English missions, or rather little country parishes, were not in accordance with the rule, which did not countenance such permanent cure of souls [16]. In the following year the little communities of Hanley Castle and Great Marlow were brought together in the recently established house of Bishop Eton, Liverpool.

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[14] Cf. *Spic. Hist.*, 28 (1980) 435.

[15] There is a summary mention of these missions in AGR, *Chronica*, 3.

[16] Cf. M. DE MEULEMEESTER, *Le Père Frédéric von Held*, Jette, 1911, 219; C. DILGSKRON, *P. Friedrich von Held*, Vienna, 1909, 264.

2. THE PARISH MISSIONS AT LAST

Falmouth had been the first of the little missions to be relinquished. It was done rather too summarily, it would seem, for the new Vicar Apostolic of the Western District, Bishop W.B. Ullathorne, who continued for some years to resent the move [17]. The immediate occasion for transferring Fathers De Buggenoms and Pecherin was the establishment in 1848 of a house in Clapham, a suburb of London, to which the two men were summoned. Even before the meeting in Bischenberg Father von Held had been hoping for a base from which to develop the parish missions. Clapham seemed ideal. There was at the time little call for regular pastoral care in the district, which was semi-rural, yet convenient enough for travel to any part of the country. The community assembled there in 1848 prepared to take up the work that was already making quite a stir in Europe.

Clapham

The first Redemptorist mission in England was given soon after the Clapham house was founded. The chronicles report: « In the month of December our first mission in these regions was given by three Fathers for a fortnight in the church of St. George's, Southwark » [18]. The brief account goes on to regret that circumstances did not permit enough men to be assigned to the work in such an important district, so that « it hardly deserves the name of mission ». None the less it did show good results « both in the attendance, which was large, and the great number of confessions ».

Father De Buggenoms, who had recently come from Falmouth, was able to add a little detail to this bare narrative. even though when he composed his confidential manuscript in 1865 his memory failed him in the date, which he put as 1849 [19]. The three missioners were Fathers von Held, Pecherin and Francis Ludwig, who had been the first superior in Great Marlow. Father De Buggenoms comments in less favourable terms than the chronicles. « The thing was badly arranged and had no success worth mentioning ». There probably was

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17 Cf. SHARP, *art. cit.*, 388-389.

18 AGR, *Chronica*, 47.

19 DE BUGGENOMS, *Manuscrit confidentiel*, 39.

some problem of available personnel, it must be remembered, because at this time there were no native English speakers in the community. And that is why the second mission, given in « the Spanish chapel », London, in 1849 merited no more than a mention in the chronicles [20].

According to Father De Buggenoms « the first mission properly so called » was given in February 1850 in the pro-cathedral of St. Nicholas, Liverpool [21]. Again it is necessary to question the good Father's memory, as the chronicles record the mission as having been for three weeks in May [22]. Father De Buggenoms had good reason to single out the mission in St. Nicholas, Copperas Hill, since he had been appointed superior, his companions being Fathers Pecherin and Clarence Walworth [23]. The superior has nothing but praise for his companions and reports an attendance of two thousand each evening and « numberless general confessions ». He omits, however, to mention a quite unique feature of the mission recalled by Father Walworth. Since the clergy of the place were anxious about the large number of careless Catholics, the missioners took measures that were a startling innovation in England. They went in procession through the streets, inviting the people to come to the mission.

> « A sodality of young men in their uniform, carrying a banner preceded us. We found a small square or court with an opening from the street, into which we entered and planted our banner. We were soon surrounded by an interested audience, to whom I preached a skeleton of the morning's sermon in the church with such modifications as the circumstances made necessary. [...] My audience was all that could be wished in numbers and in respectful attitude, not only looking up to me, but down at me from tiers of windows on every side » [24].

The initiative is so reminiscent of the *sentimenti di notte* described by St. Alphonsus in his *Esercizi di missione* that one would

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20 AGR, *Chronica*, 48. It was customary to call places of worship other than Anglican churches by the name of chapels. The mission seems to have been given in St. James, Spanish Place.

21 De Buggenoms, *Manuscrit confidentiel*, 39.

22 AGR, *Chronica*, 49.

23 Father Walworth, who a few years later was to join Father Isaac Hecker in establishing the Congregation of St. Paul, has left some account of his brief experience with the Redemptorists in England. « Reminiscences of a Catholic Crisis in England Fifty Years Ago » in *The Catholic World*, New York, 70 (1900) 59-69.

24 Walworth, *art. cit.*, 61.

have at least to suspect that the one inspired the other [25]. Father Walworth was evidently satisfied with the effectiveness of this street preaching, but the practice does not seem to have been much used in future missions, if at all. It is not even mentioned in the report of this mission given in the chronicles.

The year 1850 was a busy one for the Clapham missioners, making up for a period of little occupation in 1849. There were missions in a number of important parishes, St. Patrick's, Soho, in London, St. Wilfrid's Manchester, Formby and St. Oswald's, Old Swan, Liverpool [26]. The reports speak of encouraging results, such as the devotion to Our Lady introduced in Formby, where previously the people seemed « hardly to have heard of the Blessed Virgin », the large number of communicants in St. Wilfrid's and the confessions regretfully left unheard in Old Swan through lack of time. The year was probably of at least as much advantage to the missioners as to the people, since it provided valuable experience in a country very different from Belgium, Holland or Austria.

Late in his life Father Bridgett expressed his regret that he had not been able to give as much time as he had wished to the missions. Among the reasons he gave for that lack was that he had lived so long in Clapham, « which is not as active in the missions as the other houses » [27]. A comparison of the reports of the early years shows that he was not unjustified in that, but even so Clapham's record was by no means one of which to be ashamed, men from its community working with those of Bishop Eton and Limerick, so that there was no lack of occupation. Even of the places evangelised from Clapham the number is impressive enough.

That year 1850, which Father De Buggenoms so rightly saw as the real beginning of the missions, was an important one for the English Catholics. On 29th September Pius IX formally established a hierarchy with new sees to replace the Vicariates Apostolic, an event which Wiseman announced with more enthusiasm than prudence. The new bishops showed themselves from the first ready to have their clergy invite the Redemptorists to work in their parishes. The missions undertaken by the Clapham house were for the most

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25 For a description of the *sentimenti* in the *Exercises of the Mission* see *The Centenary Edition. The Complete Works of St. Alphonsus de Liguori*, New York, XV, 1890, 330-331.

26 AGR, *Chronica*, 49-50.

27 RYDER, *Life of Thomas Edward Bridgett*, 37.

part in the new southern dioceses of Westminster, Southwark and Plymouth. In these parts, especially in the last mentioned, the missioners found that the Catholic population was quite sparse. With a mission in the cathedral at Plymouth the three Fathers were disappointed that the attendance was not greater, though the local clergy were pleased enough to arrange at once for a renewal [28]. In nearby Trelawny two men preached for a week to fifty-four Catholics « scattered here and there » [29]. Interesting works were missions in the Channel Islands of Jersey, Alderney and Guernsey, which were included in the diocese of Southwark. Also in Southwark were the barracks at Chatham, where three missions were preached for the soldiers, who came in such numbers for the first one that they had to be divided into two separate sessions in order to fit them into the tiny chapel [30]. The second one four years later was attended mainly by civilians, the troops failing to respond as well as on the previous occasion, to the disappointment of the missioners [31].

One mission so appealed to Father Bridgett's interests that he sent off to Father Mauron a report brimming with historical reflections, overlooking the usual statistics. It was in Canterbury [32]. The Catholic community of the city, « famous throughout the whole world », was very small, no more than a few hundred. To Father Bridgett and his companion, Father John Schneider, the mission was more like a devout pilgrimage, especially since the parish priest was on such good terms with the Anglican clergy that he was able to borrow the keys of the venerable cathedral and enable his guests to visit the sacred places in quiet devotion. Father Bridgett, while regretting the disappearance of so much of Canterbury's Catholic past, recorded with gratitude that the authorities had willingly allowed the soldiers stationed near the city to attend the mission. A better report than Father Bridgett's, distracted as he was by his history, may be seen in the chronicles, which record that the mission was given to the Catholics of Canterbury, « very few but fervent » [33].

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28 AGR, *Chronica*, 62.

29 *Ibid.*

30 *Ibid.*, 60.

31 *Ibid.*, 71.

32 Bridgett to Mauron, s.d. 1862 in AGR, Prov. Anglica, D Labores Apostolici, VII 1, Quaedam particularia.

33 AGR, *Chronica*, 74.

During the sixties Fathers from Clapham gave missions in the diocese of Hexham which embraced the industrial regions of the north-east. Missions in places like Newcastle, Sunderland and Durham had previously been arranged from Bishop Eton, which in a short time had become rather overwhelmed by its commitments. Also in the sixties missions were undertaken from Clapham in the diocese of Birmingham, whose bishop, Dr. Ullathorne, had long nourished hard thoughts about the Redemptorists who had left Falmouth and Hanley Castle when he was short of clergy. Cardinal Wiseman, too, had some resentment that Clapham seemed to be too much concerned with works for dioceses other than Westminster. So he complained in a long letter to Father Frederick Faber of the London Oratory in 1852, speaking of the missions in Westminster as being « no more than they have done in Birmingham or Manchester » [34]. Wiseman had his gloomy periods when his plans seemed to be too slow in coming to maturity, and it could well have been that which made him overlook the fact that Clapham was really in the diocese of Southwark.

It was in fact their own bishop, Thomas Grant of Southwark, who was the most generous of all the bishops in his appreciation of the Clapham missioners. In his enthusiasm he wrote more than once to the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda asking that some word of appreciation be sent to the Redemptorists for the excellent results of missions conducted in his diocese [35]. It is pleasing to note that one of the missions singled out for particular commendation was that one in Canterbury that had so enraptured Father Bridgett. Bishop Grant wrote with pleasure of the seventy soldiers who had swelled the meagre numbers of the civilian Catholics in the city.

The summary made in preparation for the report to the Superior General requested by Father Mauron shows for the years 1848 to 1864 a total of 101 missions and 14 renewals [36]. In addition there were several retreats to clergy and religious. In all this activity it is really impossible to see any difference from the sort of work Wiseman had visualised for his association of diocesan priests in 1838. In the

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[34] WARD, *op. cit.*, II, 116.

[35] Replies signed by the Archbishop Secretary of Propaganda and dated 15th May 1862, 13th March 1865 and 31st March 1868 are preserved in AGR, Prov. Anglica, D Labores Apostolici, VII 1, Quaedam particularia.

[36] AGR, *Chronica*, 86. The renewal was the second series of exercises intended to confirm the good effected by the mission and according to Redemptorist rule a part of the mission programme. On the practice see *Spic. Hist.*, 15 (1967) 126-133; 30 (1982) 410-411.

meantime he had become Archbishop of Westminster, which is explanation enough of his little grumble to Faber in 1852 about the Redemptorists' work in other dioceses.

Bishop Eton

The house of Bishop Eton was established in 1851 precisely as a mission house, replacing the two country missions of Hanley Castle and Great Marlow. Not everyone was satisfied with the change made by Father von Held at the urging of the Vicar General. Among those who complained the first superior himself, Father Prost, who had come from Great Marlow, let his regrets be known [37]. His criticism is understandable enough in that regular parishes in charge of the Congregation had not been unknown in his native Austria [38], and from 1835 to 1842 he had been Visitor to the houses in the United States, where parishes had already become a familiar Redemptorist occupation. He had relished his experience of similar pastoral activity in Llanherne and Great Marlow. In spite, however, of nostalgia of this kind Bishop Eton justified itself from the start as a mission house; and Father Prost would surely have peen the first to admit as much, since he led the first of its highly successful campaigns.

The house was occupied in June of 1851, and in September of the same year three Fathers gave a mission in St. Patrick's, Wigan « with very great success » [39]. It was succeded in the following month by the earliest missions in Ireland, in which two Fathers from Clapham were members of the band of five missioners led by Father Prost [40].

The initiative for the entry of the Redemptorists into Ireland was taken from Clapham. In September 1851 Father von Held and Father Pecherin crossed the Irish Sea, the latter to give a retreat to Sisters in Omagh, County Tyrone, and the superior to visit the distinguished convert, Hon. William Monsell M.P. in his residence at Tervoe near Limerick [41]. Since as early as 1848 there had been nego-

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37 Cf. *Spic. Hist.*, 8 (1960) 471.

38 Cf. *Spic. Hist.*, 12 (1964) 145-184.

39 AGR, *Chronica*, 131.

40 The missions in Ireland are best described in the diaries of Father Prost, who worked there between 1851 and 1854. See E. Hosp, « The First Redemptorist Missions in Ireland according to Father Joseph Prost's Diaries » in *Spic. Hist.*, 8 (1960) 453-485.

41 AGR, *Chronica*, 10; De Buggenoms, *Manuscrit confidentiel*, 42.

tiations for missions in Ireland, and in 1851 at last Bishop Ryan of Limerick had arranged for one in his city. It was to this, the first of many, that Father Prost led his band of five preachers, of whom only the junior, Father Douglas, was a native English speaker.

In some respects this first Irish mission recalled the days of St. Alphonsus and his companions. On their arrival the missioners were shown to the house that had been rented for them, one of the many left vacant after the population had been decimated by famine and emigration during the forties. The day following their arrival, the Sunday, the mission began in St. John's, called the pro-cathedral because the cathedral of Limerick was occupied by the Church of Ireland.

The order of the mission as arranged by the superior was rather as he had himself been initiated in the Tyrol, where his Austrian confrères had made a beginning in 1840. Since his cosmopolitan band could scarcely be expected to be ready for each type of exercise, meditations, instructions, sermons, he arranged the plan in such a way that the preachers more or less specialised in particular works, Father Van Antwerpen, for example, gaining some renown as a catechist [42]. There was such a rush to the confessionals that the Fathers had very little respite. From 4 a.m., when the church was opened each day, until eleven at night, with no more than a break for lunch and a short rest in the middle of the day, there were crowds around each of the confessors. One morning when the church was opened as usual at 4 a.m. it was found already full, since one ingenious and agile fellow had opened a window and let the rest in. Because of this constant crowding the Fathers, with the single inexplicable exception of Father Pecherin, soon found themselves and their clothes full of vermin. The three weeks concluded with a ceremony of planting a mission cross at which Father Pecherin preached a sermon which greatly moved his hearers.

Father Prost thought the mission should have lasted longer, but he hesitated in this first instance for fear lest the exercises be seen as imposing too great a burden on the clergy and their parishioners. He began to wonder, right from this first Irish mission, about ways and means for the missioners to lessen the expense. He and his companions had been profoundly moved by the poverty they encountered; and the superior conceived a lasting distaste for the collections that were made on the occasion. On later missions he

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[42] The mission is described in *Spic. Hist.*, 8 (1960) 461-462.

was to resist the practice, even at times by a little pious subterfuge.

Before returning to Liverpool the missioners spent a few weeks of November in Omagh, where Father Pecherin had stayed before going on to Limerick[43]. The brief mission was said by the Bishop Eton chronicles to have been most successful, particularly in one respect reported to the Fathers some time later. « Many soldiers continued to come to the church every day to say the Rosary and make the Way of the Cross ». Father Prost in his diary remembered a dramatic incident connected with this first mission in Omagh. Father Pecherin had invested with the scapular the father of a young drunkard, then in prison for threats of violence and disorderly behaviour. When the young fellow was released from gaol he seemed to be reformed until one day while at Mass he suddenly stabbed his father, kneeling in front of him. The knife did not penetrate further than the scapular, which was produced as evidence in court during the subsequent trial. The sensation was such that when the Fathers returned some years later for a second mission they were besieged by eager devotees asking to be given scapulars.

For three weeks of April and May of the following year there was a mission in Londonderry given by five Fathers[44]. Father Prost had hoped he had been successful in persuading the elderly parish priest to forego the usual pew rent for the time of the mission; but when he discovered that the shrewd old man had simply substituted another collection, he became the more hardened in his determination to avoid expense to the Catholics of Ireland on the occasion of the missions. In spite of the little disagreement at the beginning, and in spite of a nasty outbreak of bigotry, the superior was delighted with the excellent attendance, especially at the solemnities. For a special blessing of the sick « many were brought from far and wide, even on stretchers ». At the end the old pastor caused to be erected on high ground in front of the church a beautiful cross, « that could be seen from far away ». The chronicles of Bishop Eton, however, regret that through lack of sufficient confessors too many people were unable to come to confession during the mission.

In the following years there were usually larger bands sent from

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[43] AGR, *Chronica,* 131. Father Prost's diary does not give the missions in chronological order, and it is at least very probable that his account of the first mission in Omagh is as given in *Spic. Hist.,* 8 (1960) 472-473.

[44] AGR, *Chronica,* 133; *Spic. Hist.,* 8 (1960) 467-468. The old name of Derry had been changed by James I and the city became, especially in the time of William of Orange, one of the worst centres of anti-Catholic bigotry in Northern Ireland.

Bishop Eton and Clapham for the Irish missions. In Enniskillen, for example, in September 1852 there were six missioners [45]. Father Prost remarked that the parish priest, again an old man, was still living in the penal times. When asked to give a formal introduction to the missioners, the venerable pastor appeared in the sanctuary in his best frock coat and high collar to declare how honoured he was to present the reverend gentlemen and to urge the people to give generously to the collections, which he declared had come to no less than two hundred pounds sterling in Londonderry. The church was large, but furnished with little more than a single wretched altar. Forewarned, the Fathers had brought with them some pictures and other decorations. The people responded eagerly, especially on a day when the Blessed Sacrament was exposed for veneration during one afternoon. Enniskillen was in a district where there were many Protestants. Even these were stirred by the excitement of the Catholics and came to the mission out of curiosity. Twenty of them asked for instruction, nothing extraordinary really, remarked Father Prost, since there were converts on the occasion of nearly every mission, sometimes as many as fifty.

Among the other Irish missions given from Bishop Eton before the foundation of the house in Limerick it is hard to resist mention of the exciting one in Letterkenny in November and December of 1852 [46]. Letterkenny was the residence of Patrick McGettigan, Bishop of Raphoe. The mission was full of incident. Father Prost was congratulating himself on having persuaded the bishop not to have a collection, when he had a rude awakening. The wily old man had stationed the collectors at the gates of the churchyard with the result that a little girl fell and was injured while climbing the wall one night with most of the congregation. On one occasion the irascible bishop was annoyed by some distraction only he seems to have noticed, and he gave a bellow of rage, brandishing his cane, so that the people, who knew his moods well, scattered in panic. Much more agreeable, even to the bishop, was the conversion of large numbers of Ribbonmen, who had been particularly strong in Letterkenny. They were a secret society condemned by Church authorities for their violent Nationalism. The submission of so many of them touched the heart even of old Dr. McGettigan, who wept as he declared: « In all my thirty years as a bishop I have never seen the like ».

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[45] AGR, *Chronica*, 134; *Spic. Hist.*, 8 (1960) 466-467.

[46] AGR, *Chronica*, 134; *Spic. Hist.*, 469-471.

These early missions in Ireland were certainly the most spectacular of the works of the Bishop Eton house, but there was plenty to do in England and even there no lack of excitement. A mission given in Woolton near Liverpool in 1852 with Father Lans as superior is memorable for having been the occasion of launching Father Furniss on his career as the children's missioner [47]. He begged his superior to let him try to control the unruly urchins who were fast exhausting the patience of his companions, and his success was at once so apparent that the children became his preserve in the future. One mission of the same year he must have found an especially happy occasion. It was in Sheffield, his own native city, where he « instructed the children with great success, baptising several of them » [48].

In these early years Bishop Eton was an extremely busy house. For the fourteen years from 1851 to 1864 it was able to report 305 missions and 27 renewals [49]. The work ranged over the northern dioceses, which were largely industrial areas with a Catholic population predominantly Irish, as in Gateshead near Newcastle. When a mission was given there in November and December 1859 the chronicles recorded that the large Irish population had until recently been without either church or priest [50]. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of the newly appointed pastor the mission proved most satisfactory. In November and December of 1856 new ground was broken with the first Redemptorist mission in Scotland, at Airdrie near Glasgow [51]. Of the 9000 Catholics in the parish only a small percentage practised their religion. During the three weeks of the mission, even with the help of the neighbouring priests, many had to be left without confession. By way of consolation twenty-five of the hardheaded Glasgow Protestants were received into the Church. In April of the following year the second Scottish mission was given at Coatbridge, also in the Vicariate Apostolic of the Western District [52]. Its results were similar to those of Airdrie.

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47 T. LIVIUS, *Father Furniss and his Work for Children*, 31-32.

48 AGR, *Chronica*, 133-134.

49 *Ibid.*, 218.

50 *Ibid.*, 173.

51 *Ibid.*, 150.

52 *Ibid.*, 152.

Limerick

The third house founded during the period of our study grew out of that first successful mission in Limerick. The Hon, Mr. Monsell, who had befriended the Fathers from the start, purchased for them the house in Bank Place where the missioners had been lodged. A community was installed there in November 1853 with Father De Buggenoms as superior [53]. The position close to the centre of the town proving too cramped and inconvenient, the superior secured a more suitable site on rising ground called Court Brack, which « not very melodious name » he suggested be changed to Mount St. Alphonsus [54].

With the establishment of the house in Limerick there was a change in the missions. In 1854 the community received a very distinguished new member in the person of Father Bernard Hafkenscheid, who had « the vague title of superior of the missions » reported Father De Buggenoms [55].

Father Prost accompanied Father Bernard to the mission in New Ross in the diocese of Ferns [56]. Since the newcomer, pleading his lack of familiarity with English, was unwilling to preach, Father Prost delivered all the evening sermons, with a lingering suspicion that his every word was being weighed. Maybe there was some basis for his misgivings, since after a term as first provincial of the American province it was hardly likely that Father Bernard not be ready to preach in English; and in fact he showed that he could do so to great effect in the mission that followed shortly after in Cork.

Ireland was introduced to the brilliant oratory of Father Bernard during the Cork mission a little later in 1854 [57]. The large cathedral, though capable of holding 7000, could not contain the huge crowds, so that people listened from ladders against the open

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53 *Ibid.*, 229-230; DE BUGGENOMS, *Manuscrit confidentiel*, 42-43.

54 DE BUGGENOMS, *Manuscrit confidentiel*, 45.

55 *Ibid.*, 44. The career of the great preacher has been treated by M.J.A. LANS, *Vie du R.P. Bernard* (French translation from the Dutch), Tournai, 1882. Father Prost's memory is faulty in saying that Father Bernard had been named Rector of Limerick in 1853. Cf. *Spic. Hist.*, 8 (1960) 478.

56 AGR, *Chronica*, 141; *Spic. Hist.*, 8 (1960) 478.

57 The mission is described briefly by Father Prost, *Spic. Hist.*, 8 (1960) 479-481. His account needs to be supplemented by correspondence and other material in A.G.R.

windows; guards watched in the church each night as the people remained so as not to lose their places in the confessional queues; and old railway carriages were rolled into the square in front of the church to accomodate the forty additional confessors who had to be summoned. Again at the end there was a moving ceremony of erecting the large mission cross. Father Prost ends his reminiscences of the occasion on a sour note, saying that if he had been in charge the mission would have lasted twice as long.

Father Paul Reyners, superior in Clapham, who joined the missioners for the last week, offers what is certainly a less biased picture [58]. There were 18,000 Communions during the mission. To accomodate the crowds all the benches had been removed from the church; and the people were not disappointed, thanks to Father Bernard, thinks Father Reyners. « He preached perfectly in English », and he stirred the people to the depths, especially in the solemnities of Our Lady and the close of the mission. The day of the departure was almost beyond his powers of description. Before the missioners could reach the station their carriage was stopped again and again by the weeping crowds of men as well as women; and then before the train left for Limerick the driver had come into the car, where the weary preachers were settling themselves down, to beg on his knees the holy Fathers' blessing on the journey and to promise with astonishing solemnity and vehemence that he would say the Rosary every day of his life. Father Reyners ended his account by saying how much he envied the missioners who were achieving so much good for souls.

The Limerick chronicler makes some general comments on the Irish missions of the fifties and sixties [59]. He describes rather rhetorically the eager response of the people. From what he says and from later reports one gathers that the scenes witnessed in Cork were by no means exceptional. Of more interest are his remarks on what he calls the necessity of the missions. It amounts to a serious lack of clergy. The chronicler is careful not to blame anyone, but one gathers from some of the actual mission reports that the religious clergy too often were not quite edifying. The parishes in any case were generally too large for the clergy available, one priest usually being responsible for more than 2000 faithful. Missions had for some time

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[58] Reyners to Father Victor Dechamps, Belgian provincial 26th May 1854 in AGR, Prov. Anglica, D *Labores Apostolici*, VII 1, Quaedam particularia.

[59] AGR, *Chronica*, 247-252.

supplied a lack that had been keenly felt by the people, whose faith the writer warmly praised. In Ireland missions were already familiar when the Redemptorists appeared on the scene. Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits, Vincentians, Oblates, Rosminians and Passionists had already entered the field; and yet, concludes the chronicler's note, the labourers were still too few for the harvest.

An extreme example of this sort of spiritual need was encountered in the mission in Ballylongford, Kerry, in February and March of 1858, « a true mission to the most abandoned » [60]. Most of the people had practically lost contact with the Church, so that the missioners found their work in the confessional unexpectedly laborious, « since practically every penitent had to be instructed in the rudiments of the Faith ». At the close the bishop came from Tralee to confer confirmation on six hundred adults.

Another place where the missioners had to deal with « truly abandoned souls » was in Rathkeale in the diocese of Limerick [61]. The people were furious with the bishop, who had just removed the parish priest. This man was very popular, but for reasons the missioners thought did little credit to his pastoral office. He had a reputation for great learning, but he had gained it by articles, lectures and sermons that stirred up nationalist passions; but he had made practically no effort for the spiritual care of the parish. For example, indignantly reported the chronicler, the only time there was Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament was during Holy Week. The mission proved a success, thanks in no small measure to the humble confession made by the political former pastor in a letter to his bishop, which he asked to be read in public to the parishioners.

The tally for the years 1854 to 1864 was rather below that of Bishop Eton, and even of Clapham for that matter, 87 missions and 33 renewals [62]. The work ranged through all the dioceses and the bishops showed themselves most appreciative, even if sometimes in the gruff manner of old Bishop McGettigan of Letterkenny. There was only one case of unpleasantness, and that was in Kilkenny, where the anger of the Bishop of Ossory threatened to put a summary end to the mission [63]. He had been already alarmed by the size of the crowd, when during the sermon on reparation to the Blessed Sacrament the

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60 *Ibid.*, 278.

61 *Ibid.*, 305.

62 *Ibid.*, 312.

63 *Ibid.*, 282-283.

people became so agitated that some benches were overturned and broken in a general movement towards the altar. The bishop hastily interrupted the preacher by giving Benediction and ordering the church to be cleared and not opened the next day. He was appeased and allowed the mission to continue only when the superior explained and begged pardon for the disturbance.

The preacher on the occasion of these dramatic events in Kilkenny was Father Pecherin [64]. His was a colourful character, and he had already been involved in an even more dramatic incident, the Bible burning in Kingstown in 1855 [65]. It is hard to know at this distance exactly what did happen during the mission that gave occasion to the uproar. Very likely it was as Father De Buggenoms, superior of the mission, described it in a letter to Father Douglas. Apparently having grounds for anxiety, he took pains to keep by him copies of Bibles published by Protestants that had been surrendered to the missioners. That did not prevent Father Pecherin's holding a little ceremony for the children at which a few harmful books were probably burned. He was accused of having burned Bibles, an offence against religion punishable by law and was brought to trial in Dublin. The sentence of « not guilty » handed down on 8th December was a triumph for the defending counsel, Mr. Thomas O'Hagan Q.C. [66]. The acquittal was acclaimed with illuminations and other celebrations in Kingstown as a triumph for the Catholic religion.

3. THE MISSIONARY METHODS

Father Prost in his diaries expressed some anxiety about changing methods. After his experiences in Ireland he had « evolved a mission system peculiarly his own » [67]. With the coming of Father Bernard in 1854 he complained about new ways. Another point of view was expressed by the Rector of Limerick, Father De Buggenoms, who declared: « Father Bernard did real service to the community of Limerick by teaching the Fathers the good method of giving missions, for everything to do with the externals, the order of servi-

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64 Cf. *Spic. Hist.*, 21 (1973) 353.

65 *Ibid.*, 333-338, where is to be found the relative correspondence.

66 O'Hagan's address to the jury was published in pamphlet form. A copy published in Hobart, Australia, is to be seen in AGR.

67 *Spic. Hist.*, 8 (1960) 477.

ces, the art of moving the people »[68].

These differing reactions to the newcomer's leadership are explained when one looks at the basis for Father Prost's complaints. He was from the time of that first mission in Limerick deeply concerned at the poverty he had encountered among the Irish Catholics, and it became a continuing preoccupation. The quite general practice of requiring pew rent he successfully resisted, but the equally harsh substitution of a collection, even at the gate of the churchyard, he was rarely able to prevent. In his efforts to spare expense he liked to have the missioners live in a rented house by themselves, after the practice of St. Alphonsus, as he saw it. There they lived frugally with one of their number looking after the provisions. This arrangement worked most satisfactorily in Limerick, where Father Douglas proved a thrifty bursar; but in Omagh the open-handed Englishman, Father Coffin, who replaced the canny Scot, was so lavish with his tips that he caused the missioners some financial embarrassment[69]. In his complaints against Father Bernard it is his managing of the finances during the missions that Father Prost finds most blameworthy, and that is hardly a matter of method. Even his grumbling about the great preacher's being too showy is not to be taken too literally. « He wanted to win credit for the missions, but in my opinion such credit is ephemeral. The best credit comes from the quality of the work alone: this is the credit that endures »[70].

Father Prost had been introduced to mission work on his return from America, when he had been occupied on the missions in the Tyrol from 1842 to 1848. In his activity in Ireland, however, he showed little influence of the Austrian methods of those early years, particularly the tendency to fit as much as possible into as short a time as possible[71]. As he saw it himself, all that he did « was in exact accord with what St. Alphonsus had set down as essential to the success of a mission »[72]. What that amounted to was that he closely followed what was prescribed in the rule as regards the sermons and other exercises of the mission. He took things rather literally, even what he had learned from his reading of the founder's life and letters concerning his practice on his own Neapolitan mis-

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[68] De Buggenoms, *Manuscrit confidentiel*, 47.

[69] *Spic. Hist.*, 8 (1960) 472.

[70] *Ibid.*, 480.

[71] *Spic. Hist.*, 30 (1982) 430-431.

[72] *Spic. Hist.*, 8 (1960) 478.

sions. It cost Father Prost quite a struggle with his conscience, for example, before he could admit that it would be unreasonable to forbid eating chicken in Ireland [73]. Then came Father Bernard and his changes, which appeared to the biased eyes of his predecessor as changes in the sacrosanct ways of St. Alphonsus. « Now with the mission movement at its zenith in Ireland there was to come the inevitable decline ».

These criticisms of Father Bernard may be dismissed as those of his disgruntled predecessor: there was certainly no decline. By 1854 when Father Bernard came to Ireland he was already thoroughly experienced in the missions in Belgium and Holland [74]. His methods were those that had been established at an early date in the vigorous Belgian province by means of mission conferences held in 1844 and 1849 [75]. The basic principle laid down for the missions was that « the great Rules and Constitutions on the missions are obligatory in all parts that have not been formally dispensed » [76]. The few modifications introduced in the Belgian *Directory* gave a rather more austere character to the missions, moderation in the solemnities and a strong emphasis on the preaching and instruction. It was a programme that did not allow anything to distract the people from the impact of a brilliant preacher like Father Bernard.

To see the prescriptions of the rule and the Belgian *Directory* in the framework of regular practice it helps to look at the timetable followed by the missions reported in the chronicles [77]. Confessions began first thing in the morning (*summo mane*) and continued during the Masses and instructions. Breakfast was taken at 9 a.m. and confessions were resumed at ten, continuing unitil 4 p.m., which was the time for the midday meal. In country parishes there were no confessions after the evening sermon, but in the towns they continued until 11 p.m., but only for the men. It is hard to see how this order of the day could have been followed exactly in all places, especially where there was such crowding as had been experienced in Limerick and Cork.

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[73] *Ibid.*, 462.

[74] For an account of his career as a missioner see LANS, *op. cit.*, 149-212. His work in Ireland and England is described in pages 297-299.

[75] The meetings and the resultant *Directory* are discussed in *Spic. Hist.*, 30 (1982) 432-435.

[76] The directives of the Redemptorist constitutions are summarised *ibid.*, 411-413.

[77] AGR, *Chronica*, 248.

What has been said about the methods followed in Ireland holds also, of course, for the work in England, where the beginnings were similarly regulated according to directions coming from Belgium. In 1859 Father Coffin in a letter to Rome explained the reasons for adopting the timetable given in the chronicles [78]. It was the usual practice, he pointed out, to have the midday meal in the afternoon, and that made it unnecessary to take supper, so that it was possible to give more time to the confessions.

An important development in the English missions was the work for children, which is associated with the name of Father Furniss. Father Prost is certainly mistaken when he claims credit for discovering the talents of the great children's missioner in spite of obstacles placed by Father Lans [79]. It had been during the mission in Woolton in 1852 that Father Lans himself as superior had first approved the special attention to be given to the children. Father Furniss had an extraordinary talent for dealing with the peculiar problems of children of all ages: even young men and women in their early twenties often attended his missions. He understood his young hearers, their aspirations, their thinking, their fears in those harsh industrial years of last century. He developed his methods with considerable attention to detail in his booklets, which established the children's mission as a peculiar feature of the English tradition [80].

4. SOME FEATURES OF THE EARLY MISSIONS

One characteristic of those first missions in England and Ireland was the extraordinary enthusiasm they aroused. Such scenes as those in Cork, when it was hard to leave the city for the crowds, were not at all rare, especially in Ireland. The Redemptorists had been given in Limerick the name of « the holy Fathers » and the name remained with them, which at least on one occasion caused red faces. A servant in the convent where the missioners sometimes said Mass during the mission in Londonderry was suffering from some affliction, which she sought to cure by putting on the overcoat of one of the « holy Fathers ». Explanations became necessary when she

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[78] The letter was most probably written to Father Douglas, as there is in his hand an extract translated into Italian in AGR, Prov. Anglica, D *Labores Apostolici*, VII 1, Quaedam particularia.

[79] *Spic. Hist.*, 8 (1960) 481.

[80] The children's mission is described by LIVIUS, *op. cit.*, 51-82.

was suddently cured and spoke of her miracle, because the overcoat, the sacred relic, actually belonged to one of the curates [81].

The mission in Wexford in September 1833 Father Prost regarded as the greatest triumph he had experienced in Ireland [82]. The church was unable to cope with the attendance, and for the closing ceremony it was decided to preach in the cathedral square. Since the weather was threatening, Father Prost had « the saintly Father Douglas » pray for fine weather; and that forethought, he considered, ensured that the function should prove an unqualified success. At least 30,000 filled the square, to say nothing of those on the roofs and at all the windows of the houses and the throngs of small boys perched in all the trees. After that the departure was a public holiday with the shops closed and the people lining the streets and accompanying the missioners' carriage as it moved forward at snail's pace. When the hardy marchers finally tired, no fewer than eighty vehicles, led by the mayor, continued to escort « the holy Fathers ». It could not be allowed to go on, of course, so the missioners stopped, delivered a final address and dismissed the weeping crowd with a blessing.

Scenes of this kind were repeated many a time in Ireland. The crowds, the weeping, the pleas to return were almost routine in the mission reports. It is impossible to compare the English missions with such demonstrations of enthusiasm. The Fathers from Clapham, more so than those of Bishop Eton, had to deal with tiny Catholic minorities like those they found early in Plymouth and Trelawny. A mission in the Welsh town of Bridgend in the diocese of Newport and Menevia is fairly typical [83]. The two Fathers who laboured there in May 1863 reported with satisfaction that there were 290 Communions of people who had come with great fervour from considerable distances. That seemingly insignificant number was in fact a hundred more than the regular count of Easter Communions.

Enthusiasm, even though more restrained, was not lacking in England. There is no doubt that their very novelty aroused interest that was not unmixed with a good measure of simple curiosity [84]. It could be at times quite an embarrassment to the missioners, as Father Walworth remarked of those very first missions given from

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81 *Spic. Hist.*, 8 (1960) 469.

82 *Ibid.*, 474-477.

83 AGR, *Chronica*, 78-79.

84 Cf. SHARP, *art. cit.*, 391.

Clapham. « The parishioners who ought to be present were crowded out to make way for outsiders who had no special claims on the parish » [85]. There were so many of the curious and the devout attracted from all parts that too often the results reported did not really represent the effect on the places missionised. In England the missions were much more of a novelty than in Ireland; and that very fact was to some extent an obstacle to the good that might be effected.

A later generation of Redemptorists would have depended on the number of confessions as one of the best gauges of the mission's effects. But these early reports do not number them in their statistics, giving rather the number of Communions often, as in the case of Bridgend, in comparison with the usual number of Easter Communions. It can hardly be doubted, though, that the confessions indicate the measure to which consciences were stirred in the course of the mission. For that reason the scenes of long queues, such as those at Limerick and Cork and many another of the Irish missions, are eloquent testimony of the good achieved. Perhaps even more eloquent is the exhausting toil of Father Furniss and his too few associates laboriously and with admirable patience and devotion taking the large numbers of children twice through their confessions before the General Communion. Instances like these, which very rarely appear in the chronicler's records, are what gives a truer picture of the first English and Irish missions.

There is one feature, regularly repeated, which was an altogether distinctive characteristic of these early missions, the conversions, which usually are mentioned in the reports. No doubt it was largely due to that novelty that attracted people to the missions, especially in England. The reports of conversions to the Catholic Church included in the statistics indicate that there was usually a significant number of non-Catholics at the missions There was never provision made for polemical or apologetical preaching in the themes of the missions, so that it seems that those who came out of curiosity were attracted by the Catholic preaching they heard. That is how Father Prost accounts for the Protestants who came to the mission at Enniskillen [86]. Expecting to hear something controversial, they came along and heard instead instructions in Catholic doctrine and exhortations to purity, temperance and the Christian virtues, with the result that twenty of them

[85] WALWORTH, *art. cit.*, 60.

[86] *Spic. Hist.*, 8 (1960) 467.

asked to be allowed to become Catholics.

The totals for each of the three houses of our period are intriguing. The Clapham missions, given largely to parishes of small Catholic populations, resulted in 326 conversions to the Faith during the years 1848 to 1864. The Limerick house with its more spectacular missions between 1853 and 1864, preached mainly in Catholic districts, had a total of 192 converts to report. The interesting community is Bishop Eton, whose missions were for the most part in the industrial regions of the north and the midlands, with some few in the equally intensive industrial area about Glasgow in the Western District of Scotland. Between 1851 and 1864 the tally of converts on its mission book was no fewer than 5332. Certainly Bishop Eton had the greatest number of missions to its credit, but that of itself does not account for the huge difference in the impact of its missions on non-Catholics as compared with that reported by the other houses. Whatever the reason for the difference, the results of Bishop Eton contributed substantially towards the impressive total of the three houses of 5850 conversions to the Catholic Church in those early years of Redemptorist missions in England and Ireland.

One would have to wonder if perhaps the large numbers of converts reported after the missions, as many as fifty at times, according to Father Prost, were not too summarily admitted for the sake of the records. The regular formulae by which these converts are recorded by the chronicler, « renounced their heresy », « were received into the Church » or something similar suggest that the whole process of examination, instruction and reception was completed during the weeks that the mission was in progress. And that conclusion is confirmed by the account of the mission in the large parish of St. Vincent's, Liverpool [87]. The chronicler regretted that among the 8000 parishioners only 1848 came to Communion during the mission, « and among them were the Protestants converted to the Faith ». There is evidence, however, that the Fathers did have firm views on the need of adequate instruction. During a mission given in Longton in the Birmingham diocese in April and May of 1863 the Fathers found their work made all the more demanding by the necessity of instructing not only the converts of that occasion but also a number of adults received by a previous parish priest without sufficient preparation [88]. The demanding timetable of the mission given

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[87] AGR, *Chronica*, 146.

[88] AGR, *Chronica*, 78.

by Father Coffin allowed little time over from the long hours in the confessional, so that it would seem that those who presented themselves to the Fathers were either instructed by them during the free time before the evening sermon or were directed to the local clergy.

It is clear at any rate that conversions to the Catholic Church were an important feature of the early missions. In this they were different from the usual experience on the Continent. In his *Directory of the Missions* published in 1877 Father Coffin, superior then of the English province, gave regulations concerning the instruction and reception of converts on the occasion of the missions [89]. His directions have been followed by the provinces of Ireland and Australia which derived from these early foundations. Later records, however, in no place show numbers that even approach the five thousand entered in the books of Bishop Eton during those first years.

5. PROBLEMS OF THE EARLY MISSIONS

There are circumstances of these early missions that are worth some little emphasis. They illustrate the condition of the Catholics in the middle of last century and in so doing enable one to make a better judgment of the Redemptorist contribution to the Church's development.

One thing that must have made the Clapham community's work hard and humanly speaking unrewarding was the fewness of Catholics in their regions in the south, and even more so in the west. Father De Buggenoms was horrified at his introduction to the tiny flock he had to tend in Falmouth, a town of some 7000 inhabitants. At the one Mass on the Sunday after the Redemptorists' arrival there were no more than six or eight persons present [90]. During the next five years hard work by himself and Father Pecherin built up the poor little parish, but never to more than an insignificant minority in the town. We have seen the small and scattered communities missionised in Canterbury, Plymouth and Trelawny. A not infrequent note in the Clapham mission reports spoke of people as being *perpauci sed ferventes*. One report is worth seeing in full, as it tells of a parish mission in what one would have expected to be a quite populous district. It was in Penzance, where two Fathers from Clapham prea-

[89] Father Coffin's *Directory* is described in *Spic. Hist.*, 30 (1982) 435-436.

[90] DE BUGGENOMS, *Manuscrit confidentiel*, 6.

ched in March 1859. Their report ran: « The Catholics of this parish are scattered widely — up to fifteen miles' distance. They are almost all converts to the Faith, and many of them have declined from their first fervour. Among them the mission had better results than the parish priest had expected: about 150 came to confession » [91].

The missions given from Bishop Eton were almost all to larger congregations in the industrial areas of the north and midlands, where the Catholic population had been swelled by immigrants from Ireland. The still harsh working conditions of the people in those parts are plainly reflected in the reports. There was ignorance of religion, especially among the children, and there were frequent sad cases of drunkenness. Among the confraternities established to consolidate the good done by the missions temperance societies figured largely in the Bishop Eton books, as do instances of families ruined by drink among the distressing cases the missioners tried to rectify.

As in Ireland the missions from Bishop Eton often had to deal with problems created by the secret societies. They may well have been even more troublesome in England. The Ribbonmen we have met in Letterkenny were commonly known in England as the Hibernians. The Fathers from Bishop Eton met them in Sunderland, a typical enough parish of the industrial north. The Catholics numbered about 10,000 out of a total population of 90,000. The mission was described by Father Leo Van der Stichele to his provincial, Father Swinkels [92]. His narrative gives a good representative account of the harm done by the societies and at least one way of dealing with them.

« There were in the city many members of a secret society widely propagated in Ireland and England, known as the Hibernian Society and founded originally for the mutual protection of Catholics against the Protestants, especially the Orangemen, who hate them with all their hearts. They are divided into bands, each with its chief and officers, and they nourish a violent hatred. They give themselves to fighting, robbery and drunkenness. These people pledged themselves not to come to the mission. When the bishop was informed, he sent word at once to proceed without delay to issue the first of the canonical warnings against one of the ringleaders with a view to pronouncing a formal excommunication. The guilty man came at once and submitted to the conditions imposed by the bishop. He accordingly renounced the society from the pulpit in the

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91 AGR, *Chronica*, 64.

92 Letter of 23rd March 1859 in AGR. Prov. Anglica, D *Labores Apostolici*, VII 1, Quaedam particularia. The houses in England and Ireland were since 1855 part of the province of Holland and England.

presence of two thousand Catholics. His example struck the party with terror, and practically all of them came back to the Church ».

That mission in Sunderland must surely have been one of the most dramatic ever given by the Redemptorists in England or Ireland. The chronicles in a terse report give impressive figures [93]. The number who renounced the Hibernians after their leader so publicly submitted amounted to 250. The final note adds that ninety Protestants were converted.

Occasionally the missioners were confronted with local conditions that made their work all the harder. Cases like the extreme Nationalist parish priest of Rathkeale were not uncommon in the diocese of Limerick, as Father Prost soon discovered [94]. There were other problems, as appeared to the three Fathers who went from Bishop Eton to a mission in Douglas, Isle of Man, in 1854 [95]. The aged and sickly parish priest was quarrelling with his people. As a consequence the church was in a ruinous condition and filthy as well, and the people so demoralised that it was only in the last week that some few began to show a little interest in the mission. The report ended philosophically with the hope that a later occasion would benefit from the apparently wasted effort.

The Irish missions, naturally, were not without their dramatic incidents. One that attracted attention even on the Continent was the interesting case of the Emly bull and the war of the three-year olds and the four-year olds [96]. It was a matter of a deep seated feud kept alive by long memories and bitter resentment of past injuries. There had been at some time in the distant past (nobody could say precisely when), a famous bull in Emly. The people had argued about its age — three or four years. Voices were raised and the two parties came to blows. Inevitably before long there was bloodshed. That led to revenge, and that in turn to renewed assault. By the 1850's it had become serious enough to cause Archbishop Leahy of Cashel to

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93 AGR, *Chronica,* 165.

94 *Spic. Hist.,* 8 (1960) 465-466.

95 AGR, *Chronica,* 142.

96 The fortnight's mission in Emly, archdiocese of Cashel, in October and November, 1862 is vividly described in newspaper cuttings in AGR. Prov. Anglica, D *Labores Apostolici,* VII 1, Quaedam particularia. There is a clipping from *The Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator* of 13th November 1863, published on the occasion of the renewal preached a year after the mission. There are also copies by hand of the Paris daily, *Le Monde* of 13th November and 14th December 1862. Our account of the feud and the mission which healed it is taken from these two accounts.

call in the Redemptorists to deal with the troubles. Between 1856 and 1862, the year of the mission, the fighting had claimed no fewer than twenty lives.

« After a few weeks », reported the French daily, « the missioners considered that their work was done ». The Fathers announced to the people assembled in the church that two thousand young men had promised solemnly never again to take part in the old quarrels and never again to raise the cry of « three-year old » or « four-year old ». And then the whole congregation was asked: « Do you wish to hold to this agreement »? All replied thunderously that they did, and the long-standing feud was over. The amazing success was reported in *The Times* of London. The venerable pillar of common sense solemnly declared: « It is impossible to give too much praise to the Catholic clergy: it has delivered the district from an evil worse than plague or famine » [97]. The comparison was apt, since the frightful memory of the famine of the forties and its harsh consequences was still fresh.

The renewal a year later, reported in the Limerick paper, was the occasion for confirming the peace achieved in Emly. In the closing sermon preached by Father Henry Harbison there was the impressive ceremony of reconciling five young ruffians who had tried to reopen the old wounds. The long years of murder were finally over, and the farewell message of the archbishop was read in the church before the missioners left the parish. « The people, ever grateful, thank them. I, their pastor, thank them, and may the Pastor of pastors grant them that blessing which He pronounced to His faithful servants, that where He is they also may be ». It was such a thorough success that it is probable that apart from dusty newspaper files no memory remains of the bitter factions raised by the Emly bull in spite of the many lives they cost.

6. THE MISSIONERS

The reports of the early missions very rarely give the names of the preachers, so that there is a certain impersonal atmosphere in their accounts. The few individuals who from time to time are mentioned by name add a breath of life to the otherwise routine statistics. The men we now mention were singled out for reasons that made them to some degree exceptions; but their distinction was

[97] The quotation is taken from the report in *Le Monde* of 14th December 1862.

obviously itself an important factor in the reputation that the missions generally enjoyed.

Father John Van Antwerpen's early death occasioned a certain amount of reminiscence. Father Prost tells how the missioners in Strabane had shed tears when the news reached them in 1855 [98]. Father Van Antwerpen had been born in Eindhoven in 1822 and took his vows as a Redemptorist in 1841 after his novitiate had been interrupted for a considerable time by the delicate state of his health. Ordained in Wittem in 1848, he was sent at once to Great Marlow in England, where he was joined by Father Prost, until 1851, when the two went as the first members of the Bishop Eton community. His mission experience was gained on the early campaigns in Ireland. There, as Father Prost remembers, he gained distinction at once for his instructions. « People used to say: Anybody can thump the pulpit and speak sternly, but the instructions of good Father John require not only talent but good theological study as well » [99]. The account of his career written after his death dwells on one work not otherwise recorded, the seemingly improbable one for the slight, delicate young man, a mission to the soldiers stationed in Londonderry in 1852, which he conducted « with great success » [100].

Father Van Antwerpen was the central figure in an incident which evidently made a great impression at the time and, it must be suspected, became enhanced by its being made part of the mission folklore. After the mission in Enniskillen there was the regular crowd pushing and thronging about the coach in which the Fathers were leaving. Suddenly there was a shock. A lad of thirteen or so who had been running about the carriage fell, and a wheel passed over his body before the vehicle could be stopped. Father Van Antwerpen jumped out and was raising the boy before anybody else could lend a hand. The young fellow was found to be not only unharmed, but even his clothes were unmarked by the coach wheel. The bystanders at once declared that they had seen him crushed apparently to death until « good Father John » took him in his arms [101]. Whatever the event has to witness to the sanctity of the missioner, or the confusion of the crowd about the carriage, it added a further note to the

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[98] *Spic. Hist.*, 8 (1960) 477. A short account of his life is given in AGR, J Defuncti, *Necrologia, 1855-1869*, 1-12.

[99] *Spic. Hist.*, 8 (1960) 475; *Necrologia*, 6.

[100] *Necrologia*, 7.

[101] *Necrologia*, 8-9.

great deeds done by the « holy Fathers ».

There is no doubt that the name that dominated the story of these early missions is that of Father Bernard Hafkenscheid, or Father Bernard to give him the simpler name by which he was known among his English speaking hearers. Appointed superior of the missions in Ireland, it was that country that profited most from his preaching during the two years he gave to that work. As has been said, the first Rector of Limerick, Father De Buggenoms, had some resentment at his vague title of superior of the missions, while Father Prost was inclined to be critical.

The first time Father Prost was able to see his new superior in action was in Cork in 1854. He complained that Father Bernard « depended much on arousing the emotions of his hearers » [102], whereas he was himself convinced that it was more important to depend on sound arguments. An eyewitness account of the closing sermon in Cork shows the sort of thing Father Prost was criticising.

> « No sooner had Father Bernard begun preaching than loud cries of assent began interrupting his sermon, so that at times he appealed to his audience to remain calm. When, however, towards the end of his sermon and in the midst of its most moving part, he suddenly fell silent, standing there in the pulpit with his hands raised towards heaven as if in ecstasy, the effect was indescribable, as nothing could be heard but the sobs and cries of the people: even the bishop and the priests wept » [103].

It was a feature of Father Bernard's peaching, as his biographer emphasised. His matter was solid, as was to be expected of one who had shown promise of a career as a theologian, but on the missions everything was for the sake of converting the people. And it was characteristic of Father Bernard that he was not satisfied until the congregation was moved to tears [104]. No doubt there was a strong touch of the theatre in that description of his closing sermon in Cork, especially that statuesque pose at the end that occasioned the final indescribable scene when not a thing could be heard but all those sobs and cries. Father Bernard could well afford to be theatrical. He was a tall man with a strong frame and a presence that commanded attention. Canon Lans offers more than one instance of his

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[102] *Spic. Hist.*, 8 (1960) 480.

[103] *Ibid.*

[104] LANS, *op. cit.*, 149-154, gives a brief summary of the style of Father Bernard's mission preaching.

consciously using that appearance and his powerful, flexible delivery in order to gain that control over his hearers' emotions he considered so important. During that same mission in Cork after he had preached on the duties of parents and retured to the sacristy the bishop embraced him and said: « Ah, Father Bernard, you show us how to do it » [105].

From the scanty information that has reached us it seems probable that the mercurial Russian, Father Pecherin, had some of Father Bernard's talent for theatre and no small measure of his eloquence as well. Father De Buggenoms, who was his superior both in Falmouth and in Limerick, wrote in his praise.

« During the three years he was with me in Falmouth I always got fresh delight out of listening to every one of his sermons, which was not the same when I was with him in Clapham and later in Limerick, even though he was always listened to with eagerness by others. He never preached as well as he did in Falmouth, because there he always had a week to prepare, and because, realising his knowledge of St. Chrysostom, whom he had read from childhood in Greek, I purchased for him the works of this holy Father and they were his usual reading all the time he was in Falmouth » [106].

It is only fair to say that Father De Buggenoms does less than justice to his companion of so many years. He does, though, draw attention to the scholarship and diligent preparation that went into Father Pecherin's preaching, at least in his Falmouth days. Like Father Bernard he had his appeal to Irish emotions, which his superiors did not always approve. His rector in 1859 complained that he stirred up the people too much, getting them to cry out for mercy [107]. The scene of confusion during the sermon of the *Amende* in Kilkenny in 1858, with the people falling over and breaking the benches, is worthy of Father Bernard at his most theatrical, but for Father Pecherin on that occasion at least he had an effect he had not foreseen [108]. In any case, if he was looking for theatre as a missioner he had already experienced enough of drama in the Bible burning incident in Kingstown.

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105 *Ibid.*, 297.

106 De Buggenoms, *Manuscrit confidentiel*, 15.

107 Letter of Father Jan Roes, Rector of Limerick, to Father Douglas, 3rd March 1859 published in *Spic. Hist.*, 21 (1973) 353.

108 *Ibid.* The incident is mentioned with an explanatory note showing that the confusion was due to a misunderstanding.

Of the other missioners one of whom we have a contemporary account is Father Henry Harbison, the preacher at Emly when the great feud was finally pacified. He was a priest of the archdiocese of Armagh when he appeared at Omagh during the mission there in 1851. He was so impressed by what he saw that he at once asked to be received into the Congregation. Father Prost sent him to make a retreat in Bishop Eton, after which he settled affairs with his archbishop and went off to Belgium for his novitiate [109]. Professed in July 1854, he soon rose to prominence among the English Redemptorists. Appointed to the house in Limerick, he at once gained the confidence of his rector, Father De Buggenoms, who appointed him superior of the missions, the position which had been filled with such distinction by Father Bernard a short time earlier [110].

The long report of the Emly renewal in 1863 given by the Limerick newspaper lets one see something of Father Harbison's style as a missioner; and he appears to have been a particularly good exponent of the ways that had been so effective for Father Bernard [111].

« The preacher gave a word of advice. His clear, strong, mellow-toned voice made the words *Sin no more, Sin no more* so resound through the church, within and without, that everyone could see they found a warm response in every heart. He dwelt with fervour and energy upon the necessity of keeping their promises against intoxicating drink. Most of the vices of the poor Irish people, he said, proceed from drink, and especially the sins which accompany factions and all secret combinations ».

From that introduction the report went on to the missioner's warning against renewing the feud, « lest something worse happen to you ». He declared that should such a thing unhappily occur, Emly « would be a scandal to Ireland and to the Catholic world » and there would inevitably follow new murders, new cries for vengeance, « the prison, the gallows, the felon's grave ».

This closing sermon, heard even by the many people who could not find a place inside the churchyard, concluded with the public reparation of the scandal given by the five young ruffians who had tried to revive the old factions. The parish priest called out the names of the offenders, who rose from their places and entered the sanctuary

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109 The vocation of Father Harbison is related by Father Prost in *Spic. Hist.*, 8 (1960) 473.

110 De Buggenoms, *Manuscrit confidentiel*, 48.

111 The newspaper clipping is in AGR, Prov. Anglica, D *Labores Apostolici*, VII 1, Quaedam particularia.

there to be challenged by the missioner to beg pardon for their dishonourable conduct. At the end they raised their right hands and declared: « We promise with God's assistance never again to belong to or take part in the factions called three-year old or four-year old, never again to name these words by way of challenge, provocation or reproach, and never again to encourage those who do so from other parishes ».

It could not be said, of course, that such scenes were frequent in the eearly msisions, even in Ireland; but it is true that the circumstances have a strongly Irish flavour, and they were very ably exploited by Father Harbison, the young leader of the missioners from Limerick.

It is an altogether different setting that one finds on turning to the man who arguably contributed more than any other individual to the reputation of those early Redemptorist missions, the great friend of the children, Father John Furniss [112]. He was born in Sheffield of a devout and fairly wealthy Catholic family in 1809. Always sickly, his gaunt frame and sallow complexion won from his schoolfellows the name of Black Jack, which remained with him through his seminary days. Ordained for the Northern District, he worked for half a dozen or so years before ill health compelled him to travel abroad in search of a cure. Returning to England in 1847, he made the acquaintance fo the Redemptorists and was accepted among them in spite of the still precarious state of his health. Professed in 1851, he was plunged almost at once into the hectic mission programme of the newly founded Bishop Eton. It was on his third mission, at Woolton in March 1852, as we have seen, that his talent for work with children was discovered, and from that time he devoted himself more and more to this activiy with which his name has become inextricably linked.

When one looks at the children of his time, one is in the sort of world that lives still in the pages of Charles Dickens. It was only a matter of a few years since migrations during the forties had flooded the cities of England with Irish families in flight from the great hunger of those years. These were the Catholic children who so moved the compassion of Father Furniss, especially in the industrial north, where the harrassed clergy struggled desperately to cope with the sudden increase in their previously meagre parishes.

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[112] Information concerning Father Furniss is drawn from Livius, *op. cit.*

« There had accumulated a vast multitude of children and young people, who had grown up without any of the associations which belong to a Catholic country, without education, with hardly any religious instruction, who had never been prepared for the sacraments and perhaps had never once been taken to Mass. Many of these had been employed from quite a tender age in workshops, factories and employments of various kinds from morning to night; many little girls went very early to service, or minded babies while their mothers were at work; whilst a large number of children were waifs and strays about the streets, seeking to pick up a precarious living by going on errands, and to get here and there a penny the best way they could » [113].

In his efforts to improve the condition of these « rude and uncivilised » youngsters, as one priest called them, Father Furniss aimed at making then into self-reliant little Catholics, since there was so little help available to them in the schools or even in their homes. For this purpose one of the most important means he used was to introduce them to the sacraments. At a time when the English clergy still insisted on deferring first Communion until the age of fourteen, it was only at the cost of much opposition that the missioner held to his way and pepared for the sacraments all who came to his missions from the age of ten upwards. His children's missions, once he began to specialise in them after 1855, became concentrated courses in knowledge and practice of the Faith — a daunting programme for even the most robust.

Father Furniss was never strong. Tall and emanciated with only the merest wisp of grey hair and always stooped and somewhat ragged in appearance, he must have presented a strange sight to the children. They always spoke of him as an old man; and during one mission the rumour circulated and was believed that his age was no less than a hundred and seven. On another occasion, while he sat in the confessional, as he did for hours on end, he took out his false teeth. A little girl who came in and saw them on the ledge ran screaming from the church.

This was by no means the usual reaction to the « old man », no matter how strange his appearance. He had a magic with the children. When they arrived at the church for their instruction or sermon, no matter how early they came, they would find him sitting on the platform that served him as pulpit, waiting to greet them and exchange a few words. It must have been exhausting, as must have been more so the interminable work in the confessional, especially as

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[113] *Ibid.*, 43.

he insisted on hearing the children's confessions twice before admitting them to their Communion.

The magic attested by so many was a true genius for understanding the children and making himself understood by them. Everything he taught them was put in simple language and copiously explained and illustrated by his examples whose fund was inexhaustible. It is possible to have some idea of his ways with the children from his books and hymns. Those hymns were not easy to compose. One of his confrères, who helped him with the *Children's Mass,* which for so many years survived his memory, recalled how hard it had been to satisfy Father Furniss. He insisted on simplicity to the extent that the hymns semed to his somewhat fastidious assistant to be no more than bald statements in rhyme. And even the rhyme had its problems, since the missioner would never permit inversion or any expression the least unusual [114].

Father Furniss's biographer has done a useful service in gathering numerous witnesses to the effectiveness of the children's missions. The magic worked over and over again with the « rude and uncivilised » children. It was as Father Livius summarised the results.

> « Father Furniss revealed to the children, so to say, another world, about which they had hardly thought before. He brought them into this spiritual world, the land of Faith, which through his graphic instructions and discourses he made a reality to them and peopled for them with Jesus Christ the Redeemer, His Blessed Mother, the Angels and Saints, and on the other hand, with the devil and his wicked spirits » [115].

After an early career from 1851, engaged for the most part in the large missions in Ireland, Father Furniss concentrated from 1855 on his work for the children. By September 1864 his work was ended and a year later he was dead. It was a short career, but it included over a hundred missions, almost all of them for the childreen. Among the statistics given by Father Livius one recurring note speaks eloquently of the type of children to whom he preached. For each mission there is given the number of baptisms, no fewer than 75 at Staleybridge in July 1859 [116]. The dedicated ministry of this remarkable character is best described in the way Father Livius sums up his achievement, « to change them, by a moral influence over their minds

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[114] *Ibid.*, 67.

[115] *Ibid.*, 89-90.

[116] *Ibid.*, 178.

and hearts from being mere little materialists and creatures of feeling and sense to become spiritual and pious, alive to the invisible things of God and the eternal world » [117].

In May 1865 the province of Holland and England was divided, and Father Coffin became the first superior of the English province. From its beginning it had a solidly established tradition of missions inherited from the Continent through men like Fathers Prost, Pecherin, Van Antwerpen and most of all Father Bernard Hafkenscheid. By 1865 the Redemptorists and their preaching were able to rely on men from their own parts, leaders like Father Henry Harbison and talented missioners like Father John Furniss. The work so thoroughly grounded was continued under Father Coffin. During the years that followed the reports continued to recount the eager throngs at the confessionals and the conversions as well as so many other features familiar from the beginning. Later in the century there was an interesting development, the « General Mission » or the « Simultaneous Mission », as it is variously called in the chronicles. Campaigns of this kind in sereral churches of a single town were conducted by Redemptorists in Liverpool in 1869 and before the end of the century in Bradford, Cork, Manchester and Limerick, with a Simultaneous Mission in thirty-one parishes of London in 1894 in which Redemptorists collaborated with other institutes [118]. These really spectacular missions do not belong within the limits of our study: their mention, however, shows how thoroughly the early Fathers laid the foundations of the English missionary tradition.

In 1877 Father Coffin issued a *Directory of the Missions in the English Province of the Most Holy Redeemer* [119]. He spelled out the methods gathered from those who had taught their ways to the new province together with what had been learned by English experience since 1848. These new features included care of converts, a peculiarly English provision it seems, prudence in disposing of harmful literature, a lesson well learned in Kingstown in 1855, and preaching the Way of the Cross, a function which had attracted crowds even of adults to Father Furniss's missions. These directions continued to be followed until well into the present century by missioners not only in England but in Ireland and Australia as well. Father Coffin's

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[117] *Ibid.*, 90.

[118] These mission reports are collected in a special file in AGR, Prov. Anglica, D *Labores Apostolici*, VII 1, Quaedam particularia.

[119] Cf. *Spic. Hist.*, 30 (1982) 435-436.

Directory is a bridge beteween the later history of the missions in these lands and those first brilliantly successful missions outside Italy. From the mission in Hagenau in Alsace in 1826 [120] by way of Belgium and Holland England had received a tradition whose efficacy had been thoroughly tested by experience.

[120] Cf. *Spic. Hist.*, 4 (1956) 280-339.