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Deacidified

## VEN. DOMINIC BARBERI AND THE CONVERSION OF ENGLAND

BY DOM BEDE CAMM, O.S.B.

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Most English travellers who have been to Rome have visited that ancient solemn church on the Cœlian Hill, hard by our own Saint Gregory's, where, under the protection and close to the sacred relics of the martyr brothers, John and Paul, lies the body of another Paul, a saint almost of our own day, so to speak, and one who should be hardly less dear to English hearts than the glorious band of Benedictine Apostles who left that Cœlian Hill and set their faces towards our country thirteen hundred years ago.

A modern chapel, magnificent with its coloured marbles and its columns of Egyptian alabaster (twins to those in the Basilica of the Apostle of the Gentiles on the Ostian Way, and like them the gift of Mehemet Ali to the Pope), contains the tomb of this great soldier of the Cross. Calm and peaceful in death, clad in his black habit with the passion signs upon his breast, his hands clasping the crucifix, he lies there among his children, beneath an altar consecrated by our countryman, Cardinal Howard. In the convent hard by you

may visit his cell, and there may see one of the most touching of the many shrines of Rome. A little recess at one end of the cell contains a humble altar. It has been left exactly in the state in which it was when the saint used to say Mass there during his last illness. The altar cards and crucifix, the paper antependium, the poverty and meanness of it all, affect one more than many a gorgeous shrine. There on the gradine is a poor little picture of Our Lady of Compassion, the *Mater Dolorosa*, with sword-pierced heart, which it is said the saint caused to be painted and repainted till at last our Lady's features wore the expression of heart-breaking anguish which he had seen in contemplation. Here, before this picture, the old man would daily say his Mass ; here, time after time, he was found rapt in ecstasy, and raised miraculously above the ground ; here he was wont to pour out burning prayers for the conversion of this country.

For, as is well known, prayer for England, ardent, continuous, persevering prayer, was a special feature of the sanctity of St. Paul of the Cross. When quite a young man, in his solitude at Castellazo, as he was putting the finishing touches to his Rule, he had a vision of England, once the island of the saints, covered with the mists of heresy. As he knelt before the tabernacle, during a fast of forty days, in the year 1720, it was borne in upon his soul with supernatural force that he must devote his life to prayer for the conversion of England. This inspiration filled his spirit as he drew up the pages of that austere and holy Rule, by which so many souls have been led to the heights of perfection. " Ah, England, England !" he would say to his sons in later years, while tears flowed down his cheeks, " let us pray for England. I cannot help praying for that country ; for as soon as I kneel down to pray the thought of that unhappy kingdom forces itself upon me, and it is now over fifty years that I have been praying for its conversion."

And we have all read of the vision vouchsafed to him in his Roman cell not long before his death. He was found absorbed in ecstasy, and when at last he was aroused, he exclaimed, "Oh! where have I been? I have been in spirit in England contemplating her glorious martyrs. O how I have prayed for that country!" And on another occasion, while saying Mass at the little altar I have described, our crucified Lord appeared to him, and drew aside the veil from England's future. What he then saw he never made known, except that he cried, "Oh, what wonderful things I have seen my children do in England!"

The mantle of St. Paul fell on the shoulders of one of his sons, like himself a humble peasant boy, raised from shepherding the flocks of an earthly master to the pastorate of souls. His burning zeal for the conversion of England was enkindled in the breast of this fervent disciple, where it burned even yet more brightly, if that be possible. This disciple was Father Dominic of the Mother of God.

Like many another of God's saints, this holy man made little impression on those among whom he lived. He never became in any sense a public man; when he died he was but little known, save to a few Catholics whom he had edified by his virtues; he made few converts, and seemed to make little impression on our countrymen. He was poor and uncouth-looking, his English accent was deplorable, he was looked upon with suspicion by many as a fanatic whose independent zeal would but fan the dying embers of persecution; only a few holy and discriminating souls gauged his true worth.<sup>1</sup>

Yet but comparatively few years have passed since his lonely death at Reading, and already the cause of his

<sup>1</sup> Among these was Father Faber. The illustrious Oratorian was once speaking about modern saints. "I think there is at least one saint now living," he said, "and that is Father Dominic, the Passionist." This I have from the person to whom the remark was made.



beatification has been introduced at Rome, where it is making good progress, and already many are the miracles stated to have been granted through his intercession. It is indeed an encouraging thought that this saintly religious, whose whole heart was wrapped up in the cause of England's conversion, who died among us so lately as 1849, may very probably be raised before long to the altars of the Church, that we may invoke him, together with the other apostles and saints of England, to hasten the great work which was so near his heart.

Two lives of Father Dominic have recently appeared, both written by members of his own congregation, the one in Italy, the other in England. The Italian life has already received the warm approbation of His Eminence Cardinal Parocchi, who was the first to suggest the introduction of the cause of beatification, and who says in a published letter that he earnestly desires that it may be widely spread among the faithful of all classes. More than this, it has been honoured by a Brief from the Sovereign Pontiff himself, who has deigned to extol at once the virtues of the humble Passionist and the piety and talents of his biographer. The English life, by Father Pius Devine, has been issued under the auspices of the Provincial, and represents more fully that side of Father Dominic's life which will be of more special interest among us—his labours in the English mission.

Dominic Barberi was born of poor but pious parents at Viterbo, June 22, 1792. His father died when he was only three years old, so that he owed his early training exclusively to his mother. This good woman was a miracle of charity. Poor as she was, her alms were most abundant; like the widow of the Scripture narrative, she may be said to have given her all. Maria Antonia, as she was called, would go to the mill with a sack of wheat to be ground into flour, and return over and over again with only a handful of flour, if any, at the bottom of the sack, so often had it been opened on the way home to give to the poor who begged of her.

Her devotion to our Blessed Lady was so fervent and so confident that she obtained from her the sudden and miraculous cure of a broken arm, which threatened to keep her in the hospital away from her little children.

Thus, like so many of the saints, Dominic owed much to the teaching and example of a pious mother. Like St. Edmund of Canterbury, he learnt from her to practise little mortifications on Fridays and on the vigils of the feasts of the Madonna. A Capuchin friar impressed his childish mind with a deep sense of that heavenly mother's love. "My child," he said to him, "do you love the Madonna? Know that the Madonna loves you a great deal more than even your mother does." The child never forgot this, and all through his life Dominic's great devotion to our Lady was one of the characteristic marks of his sanctity.

His ardour for study was as remarkable as his piety; in spite of many difficulties he succeeded in getting taught how to read; when his mother's death threw him on the world, he was adopted by her brother who treated him kindly, but thought book-learning was quite useless to a young farmer. The boy, however, contrived to get books, and he devoured every one he came across. Although some of these were useless, or even dangerous, he took no more hurt from them than a temporary cooling of his fervent piety. His daily Rosary and the frequent use of the Sacraments kept him from the perils of that infidel and immoral age. He delighted, too, in reading the lives of the saints, and in a Latin Bible which he found in his uncle's house. This he began to pore over with the help of an old dictionary, and in a short time was astonished at the ease with which he succeeded. The lad had, in fact, a genius for study, and was already preparing for a vocation of which he little dreamed.

He was a boy of eighteen when he became acquainted with some Passionist Fathers, who had been driven out of their retreat of St. Angelo near Vetralla by the wave of the French Revolution which had invaded the

country. He chose one of these fathers as his confessor, and soon made great progress in virtue under his direction. This Padre Giuseppe taught him the habit of mental prayer, and from that time the young peasant remained faithful to the habit of spending at least a quarter of an hour daily in this holy exercise. He made extraordinary progress in it, and from the very beginning seems to have been inundated with heavenly favours. It was now that the desire to enter religion took possession of him ; but how was it to be accomplished ? The religious were all expelled from their monasteries, and there seemed no hope of their restoration. In his fervent desire for penance, the young man begged of God to send him sufferings, and his prayer was heard. He fell dangerously ill, and as he lay trembling at the thought of his sins, (though as he admits he was not aware of having ever fallen into mortal sin), he seemed to see himself brought before the Divine Judge, and called upon to give an account of his life. The thought of the Blood of Jesus and the intercession of Mary gave him strength and comfort, but this vision of judgement remained ever afterward vividly impressed on his mind. Though he soon recovered from this illness, he was troubled for a long time by intermittent attacks of fever, and in his fervour the boy would say the *Te Deum* every time that he was seized by the malady.

In 1810 he was alarmed by being called upon by the French military authorities to offer himself to the conscription ballot. For Napoleon, the enemy of the Church, he felt he could not fight ; and in great distress he prayed fervently for deliverance from this peril. While praying he fell asleep and seemed to see his dead mother appear to him, with words of consolation and encouragement. "Fear not, my son, I will never abandon thee," she said ; "thou shalt not go to the war. Come with me." And she seemed to take him to the Church of the Dominicans, and bade him be enrolled in the Confraternity of the Rosary. Then taking him to the



place appointed for the ballot, she seemed to place in his hand a high number, sufficient to exonerate him from military service. This dream made the young man redouble his prayers, especially to the Madonna ; but not content with that, he made a vow to become a Passionist if ever the religious were restored. So confident did he feel that his prayer was heard, that he went calmly and joyfully to the ballot, and, in fact, drew the high number which he desired.

But alas for human weakness ! His piety, instead of being increased by his joy and gratitude, sensibly diminished after his escape. His uncle and aunt were anxious he should settle down and marry, and he allowed himself to drift into an engagement with a young girl of the neighbourhood, who seems to have been good and virtuous, and sincerely attached to him. He was persuaded that his vow was conditional and could not bind him, and to quiet his scruples a dispensation was even obtained. Dominic fell passionately in love, and with the ardour of a southern nature he felt he would sooner give up God and all hopes of eternal happiness than his betrothed. A friendship he had formed with a dissolute young man helped to increase his repugnance to the divine call which still echoed loudly in his ears. He fell ill again, and seemed to see demons preparing to carry off his soul to hell, till at the very moment of their triumph Mary appeared, making intercession for him, and driving away the devils. She seemed to promise her Son that Dominic would change his life ; she would stand surety for him, for he had always been devout to her, and had never omitted to recite her Rosary. Even after this he had terrible struggles to undergo before he could bring himself to follow his vocation. He was, however, greatly assisted by his elder brother, Adeodato, to whom he had confided his secret. This young man desired Dominic to come with him to a hermitage, where some pious men had gathered in those evil days to lead a life of penance

and solitude. At last through his prayers and exhortations grace triumphed. The young girl, in spite of her grief, nobly released Dominic from his engagement, leaving him free to follow the divine call.

His idea was, of course, to become a lay-brother. In his humility he never dreamed of any higher rank. Yet already he had had a divine intimation of the vocation reserved for him by God. Here are his own words, as translated by Father Devine :

Towards the end of that year (1813) . . . I was on my knees before God in my poor little room, praying and beseeching Him to provide for the necessities of His Church, when I heard an interior voice (which only those who hear such can understand) in set words, which did not leave a shadow of doubt as to its being from God. The voice told me that I was destined to announce the Gospel verities, and bring back stray sheep to the way of salvation. . . . I was astounded at such an announcement, and could not for the life of me imagine how it could be verified. . . . I had the intention of becoming a Passionist, but until that interior voice spoke to me, I never dreamt of being a cleric. To be a religious in any shape or form was the summit of my ambition. Then, however, I felt convinced I must be a priest; but how was that to be? All religious orders were suppressed by the French just then, and there seemed not a single ray of hope. A few months passed by, the Pope came back to Rome, and gave the Passionists leave to don their habits once more, I went at once and presented myself to the Provincial in St. Angelo. He received me as a lay-brother, and I was perfectly satisfied, leaving all the rest to the Almighty. I was happy at St. Angelo, where I acted as servant to the community, and where divine favours were very frequently bestowed on me.

About the end of September, or beginning of October, 1814, on a certain day, whilst the religious were taking their refectory, I went for a few minutes into the Church to pray before the altar of the Blessed Virgin, and whilst I was on my knees the thought occurred to me: How was the prophecy of last year to be fulfilled? Was I to go as a lay-brother to preach, and to whom was I to go? China and America came into my head. Whilst I was thus racking my brains, I understood (not by an internal locution as before, but by another mode of interior communication which I cannot explain), that I was not to remain a lay-brother, but was to study, and that after six years I should begin my apostolic ministry, and that I was

not to labour either in China or America, but in the North-west of Europe, and especially in England. The time was not explained to me, neither was the manner in which I was to be sent there. I was so convinced of this being a divine communication, that I should sooner have doubted of my own existence than of its truth. I was sent soon after to Paliano to be received as a lay-novice, and yet I felt that I should notwithstanding become a cleric and a priest.

Thus this remarkable vocation was foreshadowed. And now for twenty-eight long years must he wait before he is allowed to put his hand to the work for which he so ardently longs ; twenty-eight years of discipline and patience, by which the Divine Providence is to fashion him into a worthy instrument for the great work prepared for him. It was not till 1840 that he first set foot in England, nor till 1842 that he began to labour there.

It is remarkable that on his way to Paliano he found Bishop Milner making a retreat at SS. John and Paul on the Coelian Hill. He received the venerable prelate's blessing, and the circumstance sank deep in his heart. He little knew that it was in the Midland District, then ruled by Bishop Milner, that he was to labour hard for souls in the years to come.

At the noviciate house his talents were soon discovered. He interpreted with ease a passage of the Vulgate which the young clerics failed to explain, and it was soon clear that he would do honour to the Congregation as a priest. In spite of some difficulties the change was carried out, and he left the ranks of the lay brethren. It is impossible to describe the ardour with which he threw himself into his studies, after the trying ordeal of the noviciate had been safely and blamelessly passed through. His progress was extraordinary, and at the completion of his studies he was found fit to be a lector, or professor to the young clerics of the Congregation. Thus this ignorant, self-taught country lad became a teacher of philosophy. His ardour for study was only surpassed by his zeal for his own perfection.

The Italian life quotes at length the rule of life drawn

up for himself while a student. We may be permitted to quote a few extracts of this *Orario Spirituale* :

On entering my cell I will make the acts of faith, etc. While making my bed I will say a *Pater, Ave*, and *Credo* in honour of the Sacred Heart, Then I will kneel down and say three *Aves* to the Madonna, and a *Pater* in honour of St. Thomas Aquinas, and then I will set to work at my studies. Immediately the sign is given for breakfast I will leave my work at once (and this I will do whenever the signal calls me to some common exercise, without even finishing a letter) ; and I will go to take it, thinking on my way of my studies. On returning to my room I will continue my work, always directing my intention to God. Every time I hear the great clock strike I will kiss the crucifix, and clasp it to my breast. . . . When the signal for class sounds, I will go at once, and on the way I will reflect that this may be the last time that I shall go before I die ; and I will make resolutions to keep from showing off. I will also say a Hail Mary for the Father Lector, and to be able to learn well. While we wait for the F. Lector I will not speak or make signs, and if others do this I will take care not to laugh lest I encourage them. I will be very attentive to the explanations given, and will never interrupt any one by proposing difficulties, . . . and if any one makes some blunder I will try not to laugh at him. . . . On going back to the cell, I will make my spiritual reading, and before doing so will examine my conscience as usual. I will do some little penance for the faults I have committed, and afterwards will read some pages of the holy Rule, standing up, and imagining that I see before me our venerable Founder speaking to me. . . .

In performing any office imposed on me, I will try not to be in too great a hurry, but to do it quietly as in the presence of God. And when I can help a companion in anything, I will do so gladly even when I am not asked ; and when I am asked I will answer kindly ; or if I cannot do it I will excuse myself, giving the real reason why it is impossible. I will always prefer works of charity to any private devotions, and also to study. . . . At the refectory I will maintain a modest quiet demeanour, always making some acts of mortification, as for instance in the choice of food, and also in my position at the table, etc., and this I will do in every other circumstance. When a plate is put before me I will consider that I am unworthy of it and will give thanks to God ; and then I will imagine that the Holy Child Jesus is by my side, asking me to give Him some nourishment, and so I will put aside for Him the most dainty morsels. I will never eat to satiety, but will always leave off while I am still a little hungry. . . .

When I am reproved by my superior I will at once go down on my knees, and will never make excuses, and I will say a Hail Mary, and offer the Precious Blood to the Eternal Father for him. If the rebuke be public I will say a Rosary for him as a mark of gratitude. I will often recommend myself to the prayers of the other students, and beg them to remind me of my faults, and when they do so I will thank them and pray for them.

He so carefully hid his talents from his companions that they were at the time quite unconscious of his great superiority, as is recorded by his first biographer, who had been his classmate. A beautiful trait of his character was his tender charity. His love for his brethren showed itself in a thousand ways. He made a list of the virtues most prominent in each, and in which he proposed to imitate them. When they were sick he became their slave. His zeal for souls was burning and intense. When ordained priest he would wander about the mountains, and gathering little knots of peasants around him, instruct them in the law of God. He preached once or twice a Sunday, and besides his teaching work as lector managed to learn Greek, French, and English, though in the last-named language he was hampered by having no teacher to tell him the right pronounciation. England and his mission were always haunting him. He hardly ever preached but he exhorted his hearers to pray for our country; his prayers and penances were invariably offered up for the same intention. He communicated his zeal to those under his charge and to many of his penitents.

In 1824 he was summoned to Rome to teach theology at SS. John and Paul. Here his love for England first found opportunities of active zeal. That love had ever grown, until he looked on our country somewhat as a tender mother does on her only child stricken down by a mortal disease. One Palm Sunday during the procession, when outside the door of the church, our Lord gave him an extraordinary sentiment of compassion for the poor heretics of England.

I seemed to see them [he says] outside the church, crying to be let in. Lord, wilt Thou that I cry, that I weep for them? I will cry indeed, but what will my plaints profit if they are without fruit? Dost Thou will that my grief should have no remedy? . . . No, Lord! I adore the secrets of Thy wisdom, but I will not for all that cease from knocking at the door of Thy mercy. I will never be content till I see the whole universe united in Thy breast, but, above all, till I see my beloved England return to the unity of the Catholic Church. Thou, O Lord, hast given me this desire, grant me to see its accomplishment.

When on Good Friday he heard the Lamentations of Jeremias chaunted at Tenebræ, he seemed to hear the voice of England lamenting over her desolation. "Ah," he cried, "alas! it is too true, until now *non fuit qui redimeret.*"<sup>1</sup> Every day at the elevation of the Mass he offered together with the Divine Victim the people of Great Britain to the Eternal Father. This practice he recommended to others.

Yet though he longed intensely to go to England, he would take no steps of his own accord. Long before he had ever met an Englishman, a holy secular priest strongly advised him to ask leave of the Pope to go to England, but he answered that he would not venture on such a step. "I am the son of obedience, and obedience must order me. God will see to the manner of it." In 1830, however, the first gleams of hope dawned on him, through his making the acquaintance of Sir Harry Trelawney, Mr. Ambrose Lisle Phillipps, and the Hon. George Spencer—three distinguished converts whose names and careers are known to all. He was introduced to Sir Harry Trelawney in order to teach him the ceremonies of the Mass, as the old gentleman had at last made up his mind to seek ordination at the hands of his friend Cardinal Odeschalchi. The

<sup>1</sup> He afterwards wrote a paraphrase of the Lamentations called "The Lamentations of England, or the prayer of the prophet Jeremias applied to the same," which was translated by his friend Mr. Phillipps and published in 1831. It is exceedingly touching and beautiful.

friendship that ensued with the other two gentlemen mentioned was one of the turning-points of Father Dominic's life. It was, indeed, through their means that at last the longed-for call to the English mission field came to him. His correspondence with them has been printed as an Appendix to the third volume of the Oratorian *Life of St. Paul of the Cross*. No one can have read it without being deeply impressed by Father Dominic's burning zeal. Father Devine describes his joy very happily :

Father Dominic was in a sort of ecstasy. Father Spencer introduced Ambrose Lisle Phillips to him, and they used to take a walk every day in the beautiful garden of SS. John and Paul, which overlooks the Coliseum. How Father Dominic strove to learn the language ! How he exulted in the prospect of one day seeing the Promised Land ! How he glowed with joy as he thought of multitudes of heretics coming into the Church at his words ! All this we have heard from the lips of Father Ignatius Spencer. He used to describe Father Dominic as radiant with joy when he met his English friends, after he had given class, and how he had a lingering word with them at the door before they departed. . . . The whole Retreat was full of interest in the *Inglesi*. The lectors talked to the students about them. The lay-brothers had orders to be kind to any Englishman who came to visit the place. The brother porter was taught some questions in English which he might put to them ; and if they desired further answers, or seemed interested in the matter, Father Dominic was called to speak to them.

This little catechism of the porter, in its quaint broken English, was not without its effects. Several conversions came from it—a touching instance of how God can use the feeblest instruments to promote His glory.

In 1831 Father Dominic was removed from Rome and sent to make a new foundation in Lucca ; this, though a great disappointment to him, did not damp his zeal. He continued his correspondence with his English friends. He writes to Mr. Phillipps, for instance :

I would like to hear frequently about your health and about the progress our holy religion makes in that island, which is never absent from my poor heart. Ah, who will give me the

wings of a dove to fly thither? . . . I hope. I hope. Oh, happy day! Oh, happy moment! I rejoice in the hope of being one day able to reach it. Oh, dear England! Oh, beloved nation! And when shall I behold thee restored to the loving bosom of our holy mother the Church? Then shall I be able to say, "Nunc dimittis servum tuum Domine . . . quia viderunt oculi mei salutare tuum."

As Father Devine truly says :

We rarely come across anything more affecting in the lives of the saints. How many priests in England tried to hurry her return to the Church? How many laymen were perhaps retarding the work, if not by lack of zeal, at least by lack of diligence! Here is this poor Italian dying for the chance of doing something for those, many of whom were doing almost nothing for themselves.

In 1833 he was called to the General Chapter of the Congregation held at Rome. He then delivered an appeal to the Capitular Fathers on his one great object—a foundation in England. The Fathers were not, however, sanguine as to its possibility, and the question was shelved till the next General Chapter, six years hence. Meanwhile he was elected Provincial of the Province of the Addolorata, and went to take up his abode at Paliano, where he had been a novice. He now multiplied his labours to a prodigious extent. And yet he was all the time suffering from infirmities sufficient to keep any one else in the infirmary.

For upwards of twenty-one years he had to be swathed, and exertion of any kind caused him intense pain. Yet he was never idle. . . . The only dispensation he ever asked for was from the comforts which are allowed to missionaries whilst recruiting their health after apostolic labours.

Father Devine gives a list of fifteen important books, including a course of moral theology and a course of philosophy, which he had composed in twelve years. In all he had written thirty books, besides letters on controversy enough to fill four large volumes, and three courses of sermons.



His missions were all fruitful in good. His preaching was so simple that the poorest could understand it. In 1836 the cholera broke out at Ceprano, and he devoted himself with the most extraordinary zeal to the care of the plague-stricken and panic-stricken people. At last, struck down himself, it seemed as if he would die a martyr of charity ; but God reserved him for greater labours.

His humility shone out more brilliantly than ever when he was Provincial. He was sometimes taken for a mere lay-brother, and thoroughly enjoyed the humiliations the mistake brought him. If he saw a priest waiting for a server to begin his Mass, he would quietly put on a cotta and perform this lowly office with the greatest joy. Nor was he bereft of a strong sense of humour. Once, when a penitent, a poor scrupulous creature, came to confession, and told him she had fallen in love with one of the missionaries, he soon perceived that she meant himself :

“ Where is your place in the church ? ” he asked her.

“ Right at the back, father.”

“ Well, next time, my child, go up to the top, and look the missionary well in the face, and I promise you won't have any more scruples of that sort ! ”

He was, indeed, singularly plain and unattractive-looking. Another time, when giving a retreat to a community, he said :

“ During the retreat you are all collected and silent, and it is nothing but ‘ Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, ’ and that is well, and as it ought to be. But as soon as the retreat is over it is, ‘ As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. ’ ”

At last, after interminable negotiations, a foundation in England was arranged. Mr. Phillipps was to give a house in Leicestershire. But Father Dominic was not among those appointed to go. Still he did not despair. The project fell through, and a foundation was accepted at Ere, near Tournai, in Belgium. But even for this Father Dominic was not chosen. Nevertheless, he said

confidently to his companions, "You will see; I shall be sent." And so it was. The Superior who had been chosen begged to be let off, and Father Dominic was appointed in his place. At last he was on his way to the north-west of Europe! This was in 1840.

But, alas, in what state did this longed-for summons find him! He was worn with pains, with labours and illness, and more fit, as his companion writes, to be sent to a hospital for incurables than to a home or foreign mission. There was no delay. He started off early next morning, on muleback, and his brethren who saw him shook their heads and thought he could not reach Rome alive. . . . He was so feeble and tortured with pain that two big young men had to lift him into the saddle, and then to support him on each side over the rugged stony pathway until he reached the high road to Rome.

It was from Ere that he wrote a letter to the professors of the University of Oxford, in reply to a Latin letter written by Dalgairns, which appeared in the *Univers* in April, 1841. Father Devine gives this remarkable document in full, as an appendix to his work. It will, we hope, some day be reprinted as a tract and widely circulated. It is a magnificent appeal to follow the divine call to the Catholic Church, and it answers the difficulties and objections raised by Anglicans in the most masterly way. We can allow ourselves but one extract:

Your sighs and the longings of your hearts for that dear country you love so much have pierced my heart through. If that country, so little known to me, is so dear to me, how dear ought it be to you to whom it gave birth! Dear England does deserve a sacrifice. If one single soul deserves that we should endanger life for its salvation, how much more does not an entire nation deserve—and a nation so great, so renowned, and so deserving? Tell me then, dear brethren, what is the sacrifice you would wish me to make for you? and, trusting in God's assistance, I will make it. I wish God would grant me the favour of giving my life for your conversion! . . . Since, however, I cannot shed my blood, permit me to shed my tears. I believe those tears will not be unacceptable either to your God or to yourselves.

In 1840 he paid his first visit to England, arriving on an inauspicious day—November 5—when all England, so to speak, was dancing round bonfires and reviling the Catholic religion. But, though warmly welcomed at Oscott, he did not make a long stay, but in the next year he returned for good. He arrived on October 7, 1841, and next day wrote from Oscott, to Mr. Phillipps, a letter which is now preserved as a relic in our monastery of Erdington :

I am here in England again—come here to stay, and I hope to work all the days of my life for the glory of God and the salvation of the dear souls redeemed by the precious Blood of Jesus Christ.

When, seven years later, he lay down to die on the platform of Pangbourne station, he had, indeed, accomplished a mighty work. Little in appearance, perhaps, nevertheless he had reaped a harvest, ay, and sown the seeds of yet another, the effects of which are not yet fully seen. That little band of converts received at Littlemore on October 9, 1845, was not that a harvest for which a man might well have spent a lifetime of prayer and penance? Was it a mere chance that it fell to his hand to gather in those souls and herald thus the birthday of the Second Spring? He wrote himself of this crowning act of his ministry, "This I consider an ample reward for all I have suffered since I left Italy; and I expect that the results of such conversions will be incalculable." May it not, indeed, be said that the conversion of John Henry Newman was the greatest event of its kind that has happened since the Reformation, and it is not likely that the future holds in store for us a greater? And if a conversion is chiefly and necessarily the work of God's grace in answer to the intercessions of Catholics, shall we be wrong if we attribute to Father Dominic a far greater share in this unique conversion than appears, or can appear, on the surface?

Nor is this all that Father Dominic accomplished.

He reintroduced into England the wearing of the tonsure and the religious habit; he gave the first regular mission preached in this country, inaugurated the first outdoor procession of the Blessed Sacrament, revived devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and sowed many another seed of which we now reap the harvest, so say nothing of his founding among us a flourishing Province of his religious Congregation.

The difficulties he had to contend with were immense. Even the Oscott students laughed at his quaint appearance, and mimicked his broken English; and most English Catholics looked with suspicion on his foreign innovations. He had to undergo a veritable martyrdom before he could found his mission at Stone. Yet he triumphed over all these obstacles by the sheer force of his sanctity. The boys gave up throwing stones at him when they observed him picking them up and kissing them. If his sermons provoked laughter by their quaint blunders (he once said in a retreat "without face it is impossible to be shaved," meaning "without faith it is impossible to be saved"!), his very aspect powerfully touched the hearts of the most hardened sinners. He lived a life of extreme mortification, his labours would have worn out a constitution of bronze, while he was suffering cruelly all the time from hernia and other complaints. The people instinctively gave him the name of *the holy father*.

Here is the account given by Mgr. Searle, then a divine at Oscott, of Father Dominic's appearance:

He looked very passable in the habit. He was not handsome, nor was he tall. He was short, and rather stout of body, and his voice was squeaky, but he had an eagle eye, picked up English wonderfully, and could blend sarcasm and irony in the most simple and apparently harmless observation. In

<sup>1</sup> There is, we believe, some doubt as to this point, for this honour is claimed also by the Fathers of Charity. As a matter of fact, F. Gentili and F. Dominic began this work almost simultaneously, and we may be content to leave the honours divided.

secular clothes he was a holy show. His coat was not made in any style known to English tailors; it was neither clerical nor secular; it fitted nowhere; and where it might fit it was wrongly buttoned. . . . The comical twinkle of his eye when he told a good story, and his grave demeanour when he spoke of heaven made him seem a compound of all that was humble and sublime in human nature. When he came to see us in recreation he amused us immensely. When we went to him to confession, or to have our vocations decided, we came away in admiration. Altogether his appearance was so far from elegant that the students called him "Paddy Whack" among themselves. He possessed marvellous sway over us all, and could do what he liked with us.

Father Dominic's first home in England was Aston Hall, near Stone, in Staffordshire. He was received very badly, for the priest whose place he took had been little worthy of his sacred character, and in his anger at having to make room for the Passionists had prejudiced his small Catholic flock against them. They received the holy missionaries with jeers and insults. But this was nothing to the treatment he received in the neighbouring town of Stone, which with unwearied zeal he soon undertook to evangelize. When the Protestants of the place first saw the bare-foot missionaries in their strange habits passing through their streets, they were roused to a fury of bigotry. In this they were encouraged by their ministers. "Father Demoniac" was the mildest name they applied to the holy Passionist. Not content with jeers and abuse, his appearance was the signal for a shower of stones and mud. He was regularly hooted out of the town; but he never failed to return. At last he conquered by sheer force of meekness and sanctity. He began to say Mass in a room in the Crown Inn, on Advent Sunday, 1842. This was the mustard seed from which the present splendid mission sprang. He is said to have prophesied the future success of the work whose foundations he thus laid amid obloquy and persecution, and to have told his hearers that one day a fine church and a spacious convent would take the place of his humble chapel. He soon began to give missions and

retreats all over the country. His first effort in this direction was at Lane End in Staffordshire in March, 1843.

Father Dominic was not pleased with his first appearance on the platform, and the local priest was disappointed. On the second evening he thought he had failed egregiously as he came to the sacristy, and just then he found himself mistaken. A big, strong Irishman came in, threw himself on his knees, the big tears rolling down his cheeks, and amid sobs and sighs asked the missionary to hear his confession. Father Dominic said 'yes,' of course; but before beginning the confession he asked him what part of the sermon struck him so forcibly, or how was he moved to such extraordinary repentance.

"Your reverence, the whole sermon strack me all of a hape. I did not understand more than a few words of it, and don't know from Adam what furrin language you were talkin'. But I saw you stretch out your arms, and yer voice had something so kind in it, that I said to myself, "Though I am the biggest blackguard in the whole church—more shame to me!—that holy man won't scould me, and I'll make my confession to him."

This was the beginning of the fruits. Other conversions followed, and when the week was over Dominic saw that his vocation had found a platform indeed.

In April 1844 he opened a chapel in Stone, built from the designs of the great Pugin. But his time was very largely filled with missions and retreats. He used to travel about with a huge trunk, which became the subject of various adventures. On one occasion it was mistaken by the porters for another, and when he came to open the portmanteau he found that it contained a lady's ball dress, while his own which had nothing in it but his habit, sandals, and a crucifix, had been carried off by the lady! The exchange could hardly have been a more awkward one for either party.

However, though the trunk left home comparatively empty it generally returned filled with offerings of the most miscellaneous description. He took whatever people gave him, and brought it home to the community. Books, potatoes, teapots, boots, whatever might come to hand, were equally welcome. His despair when, on another occasion, he lost this precious

trunk, was only surpassed by the joy with which he welcomed its safe return. He knelt down on the platform and embraced it before all the passengers, crying: "Oh, my dear thronk, my sweet lovely thronk, how many years have we been together, and how many journeys have we made! How many miseries have we shared, and how many rejoicings have we had together! The chance did separate us, but it was in an honest country. The English are honest. They give their own to the poor and to the stranger."

His simplicity makes us smile, but it was the simplicity of the saints. His love for holy poverty was so great that he once travelled from Birmingham to the Belgian house at Ere almost without food. The whole journey cost him the sum of threepence over his actual fare. He often called at a presbytery and asked for a sack or a mattress on which to pass the night. He gloried in humiliations and in sufferings. He would not even ask for any of the Fathers he had most loved in Italy to be sent to help him in his work, "lest the comfort of a friend he could confide in might lessen the poignancy of the cross he had to endure."

The reception into the Church by Father Dominic of Newman and his companions in 1845 has been already mentioned.

In 1846 he accepted a foundation at Woodchester, which, however, was afterwards abandoned, and in 1848 he was summoned by Bishop Wiseman to London. This was the beginning of the now flourishing Retreat of St. Joseph at Highgate. It was first begun at Hampstead. Father Devine recounts to us the history of these foundations, and we must refer our readers to his pages.

One of his greatest consolations was the reception of the Hon. and Rev. Ignatius Spencer into his congregation. This holy man had already as a secular priest inaugurated a most zealous and widespread crusade of prayer for the conversion of England. He had been Father Dominic's friend at Rome, he had been the first

to summon to England, and to welcome him on his arrival; and now in December 1846 he came to knock at the Passionist's humble door and ask to receive the habit of St. Paul of the Cross. We can imagine the ecstasy with which Father Dominic embraced his old friend. He was ready now to sing his *Nunc Dimittis*. His great work was left in good hands, and he knew that God had blessed it. This and the conversion of John Henry Newman were the two bright gleams of joy in Father Dominic's long way of sorrows.

For, as he once had written:

Ah! my God, my God, how much I have to suffer! Although I have been preparing for imaginary trials for twenty-eight years, I find I was not half well enough prepared for the dire reality. The will of God alone keeps me up. I am here because God so willed it from eternity. Blessed be His Holy name! This is all the comfort I have.

Such was the humble priest who lay down to die, almost alone and deserted, on August 27, 1849. Like St. Francis Xavier, whom he had chosen as his special patron, his dying eyes rested longingly on the mission-field in which he would fain still have laboured, that mission-field so dear to him, for which he had given up home, and friends, and country, and now was to lay down his life.

His funeral was a triumph, and his incorrupt body now reposes beneath the high altar of St. Anne's Retreat at Sutton, in company with that of his great disciple, Father Ignatius Spencer.

The little church he built at Stone is now preserved with loving care by the daughters of Margaret Hallahan as a shrine which is itself a relic. When, as we humbly trust, the Church shall raise him to her altars, that little chapel in the garden of the Dominican convent will become a place of pilgrimage. Already God has glorified his servant by several miracles, which have been examined into by the sacred Congregation of Rites. His Holiness Pope Pius X, by a decree dated 14th



June, 1911, gave him the title of Venerable, the first step towards canonisation.

This brief sketch of Father Dominic's career may well be concluded by the quotation of a few of his spiritual maxims :

I will ever endeavour to hide myself in Jesus Christ, so that my life may be that of Jesus, my honour that of Jesus, my joy that of Jesus. I will never put any limitations to the obligations I owe to God. I will never be satisfied with anything I may have done for Him. What I cannot do by my own labours, I will make up for by desire, and in all action I will always do what I know to be more pleasing to God.

In all my prayers and in the holy sacrifice of the Mass I will keep England before my eyes in order to recommend her to God ; and specially will I do so at the consecration. I will ever remember that God is wont to make use of any sort of person, however vile or abject, to do great works for Him ; but that He never employs the proud.

I will imagine that on my shoulders lies the burden of the salvation of all men, and therefore, I will never cease night or day praying God for them.

*Note.*—The writer must express his obligations to the two biographies alluded to in the text, that by P. Luca di San Giuseppe (Genova, Tipografia Arcivescovile, 1897), and that by F. Pius Devine (Washbourne, 1898), and must refer his readers to these interesting works for further details of F. Dominic's holy life and labours.

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