

Father Charles  
of  
Mount Argus

Father Christopher, C.P.

FATHER CHARLES  
*OF*  
MOUNT ARGUS

*by*  
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FATHER CHARLES OF ST. ANDREW (1821-1893)

## DECLARATION

**I**N conformity with the decrees of Urban VIII, the author declares that he claims for the miraculous events narrated in this volume no other authority or belief than that which is usually given to narratives resting on merely human evidence, and in no way presumes to pronounce on their authenticity or supernatural character. Neither is it his intention to anticipate the judgment of the Church in his use of the titles of "Saint" or "Holy," which appellations he wishes to be understood in accordance with the common usage and opinion of men.

## PREFACE

ON the 13th November, 1935, His Holiness Pius XI gave a gracious assent to a Decree authorising the setting up of an Apostolic Commission for the Introduction of the Cause of the Servant of God, Charles of St. Andrew, Professed Priest of the Congregation of the Most Holy Cross and Passion, known and revered by the Irish people as "Father Charles of Mount Argus."

This decree, which "has been aptly compared to the finding of a grand jury under the law of England," passes no judgment on the holiness of Father Charles, but simply declares that the competent Ecclesiastical Authorities, after long and serious deliberation, have seen good to inquire still further into the life of this good priest, whom a large number of the faithful has already invested with the reputation and prerogatives of sanctity. This decision followed much diligent enquiry and serious deliberation. Some ten years before, ecclesiastical courts were set up in the Archdiocese of Dublin, where Father Charles had spent the greater part of his priestly life, and in his native diocese of Roermund, before which all were summoned as witnesses who could give information of his life and virtues. In all more than forty witnesses were examined, of whom the majority had known Father Charles, and not a few had lived with him during the last years of his life. The

sworn depositions of these witnesses were later submitted to the Sacred Congregation of Rites, which, after a careful consideration of the evidence, advised the Sovereign Pontiff to permit the Introduction of the Cause.

The evidence, as thus prepared for presentation to the Sacred Congregation, has supplied the greater part of the information used in the compilation of this biography.<sup>1</sup> The only other source of importance is a Diary kept by a priest who was a companion of Father Charles for many years. The Diarist was a Father Salvian (Nardocci), who, in addition to recording many things of Father Charles, played a large and peculiar part in his life. His manuscript, which covers a period of thirty years and fills nearly thirty bulky volumes, is a most interesting and, for our purpose, a most valuable document. Like most Diarists, he was a keen observer of men and things, and shows himself to have been possessed of a critical turn of mind. He had, evidently, a keen eye and little sympathy for the weaknesses and idiosyncrasies of his brethren, and only a few of those who passed under his censorious eye escaped his pen unscathed. Consequently, to appreciate his testimony at its full value, it must be borne in mind that he measured his praise with a sparing and grudging hand, which makes it the more precious for our purpose.

In presenting the information thus made available it has been our aim to observe that juridical sobriety

<sup>1</sup> To spare the reader the inconvenience of referring constantly to footnotes, verbatim quotations of the sources will be made only by exception and in cases in which the importance or nature of the evidence makes it necessary.

which the nature of the work requires. The hagiographer has restrictive responsibilities which do not concern the ordinary biographer. He must write with a cautious pen, and with due deference to the final decisions of the Church, which must not be anticipated. Facts must be recorded without dramatic embellishment or unwarranted inferences, and probabilities be stated for what they are worth. Consequently we have tried to eschew subjectivity as far as that is possible, and to discover the man as he was known to those with whom he lived. Having done our best to that end, we can only hope that our readers will come to know Father Charles as his companions knew him, and find in his life, as they did, an inspiration and an example.

To the many who, by their advice and help, have made this book possible, we return sincere thanks, and hope that they will not consider their labour misspent.



# CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE .. .. .	v
<i>Chapter the First—HOME AND YOUTH</i> .. .. .	i
<i>Chapter the Second—THE CONSCRIPT</i> .. .. .	12
<i>Chapter the Third—THE POSTULANT</i> .. .. .	19
<i>Chapter the Fourth—THE PASSIONIST</i> .. .. .	28
<i>Chapter the Fifth—STUDENT AND PRIEST</i> .. .. .	32
<i>Chapter the Sixth—FIRST YEARS IN ENGLAND</i> .. .. .	41
<i>Chapter the Seventh—ASSISTANT IN NOVITIATE</i> .. .. .	51
<i>Chapter the Eighth—FIRST YEARS IN IRELAND</i> .. .. .	58
<i>Chapter the Ninth—IN ENGLAND AGAIN</i> .. .. .	69
<i>Chapter the Tenth—RETURN TO MOUNT ARGUS</i> .. .. .	78
<i>Chapter the Eleventh—SIGNS AND WONDERS</i> .. .. .	86
<i>Chapter the Twelfth—THE MAN AMONGST MEN</i> .. .. .	99
<i>Chapter the Thirteenth—THE MAN OF GOD</i> .. .. .	108
<i>Chapter the Fourteenth—THE RELIGIOUS</i> .. .. .	117
<i>Chapter the Fifteenth—THE PRIEST</i> .. .. .	127
<i>Chapter the Sixteenth—THE APOSTLE</i> .. .. .	135
<i>Chapter the Seventeenth—LAST YEARS</i> .. .. .	141
<i>Chapter the Eighteenth—LAST ILLNESS AND DEATH</i> .. .. .	151
<i>Chapter the Nineteenth—HIS GRAVE</i> .. .. .	158
EPILOGUE .. .. .	169
APPENDIX .. .. .	173

## ILLUSTRATIONS

	FACING PAGE
FATHER CHARLES OF ST. ANDREW (1821-1893) ..	iii
THE CONSCRIPT (1841) .. .. .	16
THE YOUNG PRIEST (ABOUT 1857) .. .. .	38
ST. PAUL'S RETREAT, MOUNT ARGUS .. .. .	102
FATHER CHARLES OF ST. ANDREW .. .. .	146
THE CEMETERY .. .. .	166
THE GRAVE .. .. .	166

# FATHER CHARLES OF MOUNT ARGUS

## CHAPTER THE FIRST

### HOME AND YOUTH

**T**HOUGH every man be keeper of his soul, and himself ultimately responsible for its welfare, no one is free to refuse the heritage of ancestry, or able entirely to resist the plastic influence of early environment. Inherited influences have much to do with the shaping of every life, and yet more potent to mould or mar a young soul are the first impressions of early social contacts. This being so, a biography, to be complete, must begin with a family history. In our case, this introduction will not occupy much space. The family of which Andrew Houben was sprung were of that class which gives little attention to the keeping of family records or genealogical tables, not having any need to appeal to the past to justify their claim to respectability. All that is known of his ancestry begins and ends with his parents, and can be told in a few words.

In the parish church of Munstergeleen, a small village of Dutch Limburg, two young people, by name Peter Joseph Houben and Johanna Elizabeth Lutyen, were joined in holy wedlock on the 3rd June, 1816. The event could not have been unexpected, so clearly did circumstances point to such

## FATHER CHARLES

a happy consummation. The young people were the children of neighbours, only the breadth of a field and the narrow Geleen river separating the two homesteads. The Houbens owned a small flour-mill and farmed a few acres of land; whilst their neighbours on the other side of the stream were also farmers in a small way, and managed the local oil-press. Some years before the only boy of the Lutyen family had entered a seminary to study for the priesthood, but was advised to abandon his purpose because of excessive scrupulosity. He returned to Munstergeleen, and set himself up as a private tutor, leaving the management and prospective ownership of the family property to his only sister, Johanna. The miller had only one son, Peter Joseph, who would have been much of an age with Johanna: all of which circumstances suggested an alliance which would unite the two families and their properties to the advantage of all. The retrospect permits us to glimpse the "finger of God" in this conjunction of circumstances, for time was to prove that this was indeed "a match made in Heaven."

Both young people brought to the making of their home many excellent qualities of mind and heart. Though natives of Limburg, and therefore most probably of Flemish descent, they were in temperament and character more Dutch than Flemish. Houben was a quiet, hard-working man, of sober disposition and grave manner, who kept himself very much to his own home and affairs. Only those

## HOME AND YOUTH

who knew him intimately realised that his calm and cold exterior covered a tender heart and fretful mind. In his business transactions his neighbours found him to be conscientious to the point of scrupulosity, and those in need or distress never went away from the mill with empty hands. In Johanna, his wife, he found his soul's complement. If he was fretful and scrupulous, she was a strong-willed, sensible woman, who could be severe without being unkind, and kind without being soft. If she had a fault, it was a tendency to excessive rigorism in all things touching morals and duty. Typical of this aspect of her character is an answer reported to have been made to her niece, a nun, who had offered to nurse her during one of her illnesses. "Stay where you are," she wrote, "those who enter a convent should stay in it."

In the course of time God blessed their union with children, ten in all, of whom the fourth was to shed lustre upon their name and home.<sup>1</sup> He was born on the 11th December, 1821, and on the same day, in accordance with local custom, was carried to the church to receive Holy Baptism. Again following the traditional usage of the country, he was given two names, Peter Andrew, the second of which would be commonly used as his distinctive appellation.

The Houbens, although evidently a family of some social standing in Munstergeleen, were not by

<sup>1</sup> Another son, Geoffrey, born in 1828, also became a priest and was Parish Priest of Amstenrade in Holland, when he died.

## FATHER CHARLES

any means wealthy, and must have been hard put to it to make their resources meet the demands of a large family. There would have been no actual poverty, it is true, but there would have been much work to do, and as each child came to a working age, he found his task waiting for him. It would have been a home in which toil and prayer would have intermingled to make life one long round of prayer. The Houbens were people of a deep and lively faith, for whom God and the spiritual world were not just abstractions of theological thought, but realities as near and as present to them as things they handled. Prayer came as easily to them as conversation with one another, and was the natural and necessary accompaniment of their daily toil. Each morning before dispersing about their various duties in the fields or in the mill, the family assembled to ask God's blessing on them and their work, and again at the close of the day, gathered round Our Lady's altar to say the family Rosary. In later years Andrew could draw upon the memory of this happy home to make for the edification and instruction of others a picture of what a Christian home should be, and would "most sincerely thank God for having given us, in His Goodness, such good and virtuous parents."

In this environment of prayerful activity, the first years of Andrew's life passed happily and without event. He would seem to have been a quiet and most unremarkable boy. There are no anecdotes recorded of him, such as usually enshrine the memory

## HOME AND YOUTH

of childhood and in the retrospect of the years take on a prophetic significance. Even those who lived with him could exhaust their recollections of him in a few sentences. "We only know that he was a gentle, upright and pious boy, who lived a holy and retired life, and gave to others the impression of being extremely shy. So far as external appearances go, he lived the ordinary life of the ordinary Limburg boy, nothing remarkable or out of the common being noticeable in him, except that he was unusually pious." They hasten, however, to assure us that there was nothing morose or morbid in his manner or character. Though "he gave to others the appearances of being extremely shy," it may be questioned whether his habitual reserve was not already the attitude of one who lives in thought in another world. Even in his family circle, where there was no occasion of shyness, he still maintained his serious manner, and never was known to join in the games of the other children. When they went to play, he would steal away to the church, and it often happened that when the others were tired of their playing he would still be kneeling at his prayers, completely forgetful of the passage of time, until a messenger came to call him home.

Dull and uninteresting as such a childhood may seem, it was hardly so to Andrew himself. From the very beginning the great Mysteries of Faith attracted and enthralled his mind and imagination to such an extent that he could find as much pleasure in the contemplation of them as other children get

## FATHER CHARLES

from their games and stories of make-believe. Not even the imagination of a Hans Andersen could create a world as wonderful as that in which Andrew Houben passed his childhood and, for that matter, his whole life. Even as an old man he could still speak of heaven and the angels as children prattle of fairyland and its fairy princes. The old man who could conceive "Jesus in heaven speaking with the angels," about a little girl who was to make her First Communion on the following morning, was still living in the world of his childhood.

It must have been a great day in Andrew's life when he was permitted to serve at the altar for the first time. Even then, although only vaguely, the Sanctuary was calling to him, and those who were interested in him began to perceive very clear signs of a vocation to the priesthood. One person who observed him with interest and admiration, and whose influence had no doubt a large part in the shaping of Andrew's soul, was Father Christian Delahaye, then curé of the parish of Munstergeleen. This good priest, it would seem, was a man of strong character and of great, if somewhat violent, zeal. "I will bring my people to heaven, even if I have to drag them there by the hair of the head," was his oft avowed purpose, and his practice was in keeping with his word. He ruled his parish with a high hand and a rod of iron, and thundered from his pulpit with all the vehemence of an ancient prophet. The favourite theme of his preaching was the Eternal Verities, which he treated in the vivid manner of



## HOME AND YOUTH

the time, and it is not too much to suppose that the intensely vivid realisation of the Last Things, which characterised Andrew's piety, came to him from the preaching of Father Delahaye. Like many of his contemporaries, the pastor of Munstergeleen inclined towards the rigorous theological opinions of Jansenism, and Andrew was in his fourteenth year before he was permitted to make his First Holy Communion. On the Low Sunday of 1835, he became for the first time the tabernacle of the Eucharistic God, and about two months later, on the 28th June, was admitted to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation.

The summer of 1835 marks an epoch and a crisis in Andrew's life. He had now outgrown the village school, and some decision had to be made concerning his future. All who knew him realised in what direction his aspirations lay. From earliest childhood the village church had been his "home from home," and his ever increasing interest in all things connected with the altar and the sanctuary showed clearly enough that he had set his heart upon the priesthood. His parents, though fully aware of and secretly approving their son's desire, had prudently enough hesitated to show any sign of approval; for their son's school-reports had shown him to be unusually dull and slow-witted. Torn between desire and duty, they consulted Father Delahaye, who set their doubts at rest with a few words, which time has shown to be prophetic. "This boy," he said, "will become great." Without further delay or

## FATHER CHARLES

misgiving, they set about making arrangements for Andrew to continue his studies.

A few years previously Andrew's uncle had closed his grammar-school to assume the office of Burgo-master ; but in any case the school had outlived its necessity. In 1827 the Holy See had succeeded in negotiating a Concordat with the government of the Netherlands which gave to the Catholics of the kingdom the right to establish and control preparatory seminaries for the education of prospective candidates for the priesthood, and in the succeeding years many of the old Catholic grammar-schools which had been suppressed by the Convention were re-opened. In the town of Sittard, about two miles from Munstergeleen, a preparatory school which in pre-Revolution days had been managed by the Dominican Fathers, was re-established under the direction of a secular priest, Abbé Kallen. It was at this school, in the Autumn of 1835, that Andrew began what was to be for him a long and tantalising labour. For ten long years, morning and evening, and in all sorts of weather, he would trudge those two dreary miles from Sittard to Munstergeleen, until the people of the village would weary of the sight of him and wonder when the miller's stupid boy would finish his schooling or, at least, begin to realise his hopeless stupidity. The more thoughtful among them, while pitying him, would still admire the strength of character, and marvel at the greatness of the purpose, which could have steeled a boy against such an ordeal. Always backward in his

## HOME AND YOUTH

class-work, continually scolded by impatient teachers, outstripped and left far behind by boys that were his juniors by years, failing year after year in his examinations until he had become the standing joke of the school, Andrew still went plodding on with heroic patience. Though every day must have brought him rebukes and difficulties that would have broken the resolution of a less strong-willed boy, he faithfully turned to his books each evening, and sitting at the kitchen-table, with his hands clamped tightly over his ears to shut out the chatter of the other children at their games, he would pore over his books with furrowed brows, as if forcing his dull brain by sheer force of will to understand and memorise the morrow's lessons.

His parents watched him anxiously, and realising the difficulty of trying to study in a crowded and noisy kitchen, set themselves to think out means of providing their son with more suitable surroundings in which to pursue his studies. They decided to build a larger and more comfortable farmhouse, near the old home, which would provide Andrew with the privacy essential for his study and, at the same time, relieve the congestion of their large, growing family. Andrew and one of his elder sisters moved into the new dwelling-house, and to complete the plan, Andrew's uncle, the Burgomaster, was invited to make his home there. As he had been an ecclesiastical student, and for some years a successful teacher of the humanities, it was hoped—if not definitely understood—that he would supervise his

## FATHER CHARLES

nephew's studies. The scheme was further and unexpectedly perfected, when it was arranged that Father Göbbels, who had come as helper to Father Delahaye, should be provided with rooms in the new dwelling-house.

Unfortunately, the arrangement did not work out according to plan. The good Burgomaster was fond of a game of cards, and was not content until he had initiated the young priest into the mysteries of the game. So it happened that Andrew had to grind out his lessons to the accompaniment of the excited exclamations and table-banging of the card-players, while his timid questionings were answered with grunts that were not helpful, or turned aside with bantering remarks that did not encourage. His sister, sitting apart at her knitting and sewing, watched her brother's apparently hopeless efforts to master his lessons, and began to fear that the strain was too great. She spoke to her mother about it, who pleaded with Andrew to have pity upon himself and to give up the hopeless struggle.

"Andrew," she asked, with her hand upon his throbbing brow, "does not all this study make you too tired? Would you not prefer to put aside your books and to help your father? It will be so long before you have finished your studies."

If anything could have shaken him in his resolution it must have been this pleading of his mother; for he would have been more than dull if he could not perceive from it, that while he was bearing the burden, his mother bore the pain of the struggle.

## HOME AND YOUTH

But there was nothing which could turn him aside from the purpose on which he had set his heart. No one realised better than he what difficulties lay between him and his heart's desire ; but he had learned early to put his trust in Him, to Whom all things are possible. For long hours into the night he would kneel at his bedside wrestling with God in prayer for the strength and courage to face another day's drudgery.

## CHAPTER THE SECOND

### THE CONSCRIPT

THE world of Andrew Houben's boyhood was not so small as it has since become. Distances were still measured and covered by paces, and travelling remained a luxury, which only the rich and venturesome might attempt. The vast majority lived their lives within the narrow confines of their horizons, and indeed were well content to do so, for the ways and doings of the great world beyond interested them but little, except when it obtruded itself upon them to disturb the even tenor of their lives. So, in all probability, Andrew, in his eighteenth year, would have known just as much of the world and its ways as he happened to see on his way to church and school, and no doubt, would have been well satisfied to continue in this blissful ignorance, did not Providence otherwise ordain.

Sometime in the early spring of 1840, when he had already celebrated his nineteenth birthday, his uncle, the Burgomaster of Munstergeleen, posted on the village hoarding a royal proclamation warning all young men of the Commune who had reached their nineteenth year, to present themselves at the Stadhuis on the 2nd of March, for the annual drawing of lots. The Napoleonic system of compulsory

## THE CONSCRIPT

military service, first introduced into the Low Countries under the French régime, had been embodied in the Constitution of the new Kingdom of the Netherlands. Each Commune was obliged to supply the royal army with a prescribed quota of able-bodied men, the Communal authorities being left free to decide the personnel of the quota, which they usually did by means of a lottery.

On the appointed day, Andrew presented himself at the *Stadhuis* together with all the young men of his age and, when the lots had been drawn, was amongst the unlucky ones who drew the dreaded "black ball." He was assigned to the First Regiment of Foot, and told to hold himself in readiness for future mobilisation. It was a very anxious and frightened boy that returned home to the mill-house that evening. Terrified by the prospect of two years of barrack life, and perturbed yet more by the thought of having to abandon his studies, and perhaps his vocation, he clung fast to a hope that his parents would take advantage of a privilege which permitted service by proxy, and hire him a substitute. They had done so for his elder brother, when he had been unlucky some years before, and would willingly have done Andrew a like service, if their circumstances had permitted. But the following year was one of many misfortunes for the farming community of the Geleen valley. Frosts and heavy rains destroyed the crops, and the Houbens, in particular, lost the greater part of their livestock in an inundation of the Geleen; which losses evidently exhausted the

## FATHER CHARLES

family purse, already much depleted by the building of the new farm-house, with the result that when Andrew's summons came in the early summer of 1841, there was not the wherewithal to provide a substitute. It was a distressing situation for Andrew's parents, as much as for himself, for they would have given much to spare their sensitive, timid boy the nerve-racking experience that awaited him, and they could have been but bitterly disappointed at what must have seemed to them the frustration of a dearly cherished hope.

On the 1st July, 1841, Andrew set out with a heavy heart for Bergen-op-Zoom, the head-quarters of his regiment. Before leaving, his parents gave him what little money they had to hand as a provision against possible necessity, and what he valued more, a promise that the first money that came to them after the gathering of the harvest would go to purchase his release. His introduction to barrack-life, which took place forthwith, must have been for him a terrifying experience. He was definitely not of the stuff of which soldiers are made, and it is hard to imagine this timid, sensitive boy at his ease in the barrack-room or square, as it is easy to realise what torture he must have had to endure at the bitter tongues of military martinets and the coarse banter of his companions.

His military record, preserved in the regimental archives, describes a short and uninteresting military career.

"John Andrew Houben, born in Geleen on



## THE CONSCRIPT

11th December, 1821, son of Peter Joseph and Anna (?) Elizabeth Lutyen, was enrolled in the First Regiment of Foot on the 2nd March, 1840. The enrollment was made by the Commune of Geleen for the 1840 class of the Reserve.

"He began his active service on the 1st July, 1841, went on indefinite furlough on the 9th October, 1841, and was transferred on the 25th August, 1842, to the Seventh Regiment of Foot as part of the Federal Contingent which Limburg, then a Duchy, was obliged to contribute to the Army of the Germanic Federation. He received his dismissal on the 10th March, 1845, his time of service having expired, and having presented himself personally, in conformity with the regulations of the Ministry of War.

"Concerning Houben's conduct during his period of military service, nothing particular is known: the penal records of the period are no longer extant. It is definite, however, that he was never court-martialled, that he was never in the discipline squad, that he was never charged with desertion, and that he did not leave the service in disgrace; it being usual to note such things in the records."

Another and more interesting relic of the young conscript is a daguerreotype portrait, made for identification purposes, and still preserved in the archives of the Dutch War Office. It shows him to have been a youth of fine physique, broad-shouldered, robust and stalwart, who carried himself

## FATHER CHARLES

with the poise and assurance of a veteran : in fact, so entirely in keeping with the military tradition is his bearing and appearance that one must suspect the artist of not a little idealisation. The martial swagger and bold front with which he has invested the young conscript do not tally with his comrades' descriptions of him. More true to life, though perhaps not true to fact, is the picture given of him in an anecdote of his soldiering days, in which he is represented as terrified out of his wits at the thought of having to discharge his musket with a possible danger to life. The incident is said to have happened on the occasion of some disturbance in Bergen-op-Zoom which the military were called upon to quell. The mob had got completely out of hand, and the soldiers were ordered to open fire. So terrified was Andrew at the possibility of shedding blood that he deliberately mis-aimed, and to such good effect, that he went near to shooting down one of his officers. The anecdote cannot be authenticated, but those who knew Andrew's character, credited it with verisimilitude, and it is, at least, more in keeping with his comrades' recollections of him than the swashbuckling youth of the portrait.

Andrew's comrades evidently regarded him as something of an oddity and very much out of keeping with his surroundings. Nevertheless, they came to admire him, and observed him closely. It was noticed that, at every opportunity, he hurried from the barracks to disappear until the next bugle-call, and they were much edified when it was discovered



THE CONSCRIPT (1841).

*[After a drawing by A. Windhausen, from a portrait of the servant of God preserved in the archives of the Dutch War Office.]*

## THE CONSCRIPT

that he spent all his hours of recreation in prayer before the altar of the local church. Short as was his stay amongst them, his quiet but profound piety made a deep impression on them and, even as old men, they could still remember Andrew Houben, and marvel at the life he had managed to lead in such uncongenial surroundings. "That miller's lad was a good boy," one of them would afterwards tell his children, "when he was not in the barracks, he was in the church, and he received Holy Communion every Sunday morning," and then, after a pause, he would add: "That boy should never have been in the barracks."

Fortunately, his stay there was of short duration. As they had promised, his parents found him a substitute with the first ready money that came their way after the gathering of the harvest, and on the 9th October he was released on indefinite furlough.

This abrupt and unpleasant interlude in Andrew's life, brief though it was and undesired, had yet an important part in the shaping of his career. In the most unlikely place, and in the most unlikely circumstances—in the barrack-room at Bergen-op-Zoom, through a chance conversation with a fellow-soldier, Andrew Houben received his call from God. Amongst his comrades was one Raaymakers, whose brother had joined the Passionist community which had been recently established in Belgium, and it was from this man that he first heard of the Congregation of the Passion, of which he was afterwards to become an illustrious member. The call came

## FATHER CHARLES

at an opportune moment. He could not have lived for three months in a garrison town, or spent a hundred days in the atmosphere of a barrack-room without encountering much that was evil, and to one who had hitherto passed all his days in the shelter of a pious home, and "knew only the two roads to church and to school," this experience must have come as a soul-stirring revelation. Then he would have realised for the first time how little the world knew or cared of all that had been done for it on Calvary. Always he had wanted to serve God, and now, it seemed to him, he had found a way.

## CHAPTER THE THIRD

### THE POSTULANT

**D**ISCONCERTING news awaited Andrew on his return to Munstergeleen. During his absence the Abbé Kallen had been removed from Sittard, and the grammar-school, of which he had been the founder and mainstay, had had to close down. To give the pupils opportunity to continue their studies, one of the assistant masters, a Professor Schyren, had set up a private school in his own home at Broek-Sittard. As might be expected, the furnishings and atmosphere of this make-shift school were anything but academic. With a long kitchen-table for their desk, and their senses constantly assailed by the noises and odours of an adjacent kitchen, the scholars had much to do to keep their minds upon their tasks, but Schyren was an efficient and conscientious teacher, and saw to it that those committed to his direction took full advantage of the opportunities such as they were.

It was in these unfavourable circumstances that Andrew resumed his studies, and with such earnestness that, in a short time, the Professor could report an extraordinary improvement. "It seems," he said, "as if the hand of the Lord had touched him."

It happened that Schyren was a close friend of Andrew's uncle, and for that reason took much more

## FATHER CHARLES

than a teacher's interest in his pupil's progress. In the course of time his interest deepened, through admiration, to an affection that was reciprocated, and it was to him that Andrew first made known the hopes that had been stirring within him since his chance conversation with a fellow-soldier in the barrack-room at Bergen-op-Zoom. His confidence was well and shrewdly placed. Of all his circle of acquaintances, none was better fitted to advise him than his teacher, who himself had studied for the priesthood and, being well read in ecclesiastical affairs, could have told him much about the Passionists and their holy Founder. There were many things, and especially the life-story of St. Paul of the Cross, which must have had for him a peculiar interest and appeal.

Paul Danei, when called by God to found his Congregation, had been, like himself, a young man of no great parts or prospects, and little natural qualification for the work to which he was called, except a great desire to give himself and his life to God. When he was a young man of Andrew's age, it seemed to him that he heard the call from God in the voice of Christ's Vicar, summoning the Christians of Europe to protect their heritage against the menace of Islam, and he offered his services to the Venetian army which was going out to protect the frontiers of Christendom against the armies of the Sultan Acmet III. He was actually in Crema with his regiment, waiting his marching orders, when it was made known to him in prayer that God had

## THE POSTULANT

other work for him to do, though as yet no knowledge was given him of what that work would be. It was only after many years of constant searching after God's Will that the Divine Purpose of his life was made known to him, and then God's messenger to him was none other than the Blessed Mother herself.

"One day . . . in the summer of 1720, as he was returning from Mass and Communion, he was suddenly rapt in ecstasy and saw himself clothed in a long black garment with heart-shaped badge, showing the name of Jesus in white lettering, on the breast. On several occasions the vision was repeated. Sometimes Our Lady appeared wearing this strange garment herself, sometimes offering it to Paul. As he hesitated about the meaning of the apparitions, Mary spoke to him in words that left no room for doubt. He was to found a religious institute in the Church, dedicated to the honour of the Sufferings of her Son, and the garment of the vision was to be the habit of its members."<sup>1</sup>

Many years of heart-breaking trials and labours were yet to elapse, and the young soldier was an old and broken man before he received from the hands of Clément XIV the Apostolic Bull which gave to the Congregation of the Cross and Passion a definite place amongst the Orders of the Church. Under the protection of Mary, its heavenly God-mother, the new Congregation prospered in spite of all that devils and their allies of this world could do,

<sup>1</sup> *St. Paul of The Cross*, by Rev. Joseph Smith, C.P.; C.T.S. of England Publication, p. 11.



## FATHER CHARLES

and when Paul's hour had come, he could number his spiritual children by hundreds, and count on their fervour and zeal to continue the work which he had begun. As part of his spiritual legacy, the dying Founder bequeathed to his children in the Lord a hope, long cherished in his prayers, that one day the Congregation of the Cross and Passion might do something towards the conversion of England. "One day during his last illness the brother infirmarian, entering his room, found him in a state of ecstasy. As he came to himself he exclaimed: 'Oh, where have I been just now! In England, in spirit, considering the heroic martyrs of past days and praying God for that kingdom . . .'. And before he died God rewarded his divine optimism by lifting the veil of the future and giving him a glimpse of a new and resurgent England. One of the last mornings of his life, after celebrating Mass, he was rapt in ecstasy. Afterwards he could hardly speak for joy. 'Oh, what have I seen!' he said. 'My own religious in England!' It was his *Nunc Dimittis*."<sup>2</sup>

Many years passed before Paul's prophetic wish was fulfilled, but his children had not forgotten, and always they prayed that God might hasten the day when their dying father's vision would become a reality. How that realisation did eventually come about is told by Newman in his own inimitable way.

"On the Apennines, near Viterbo, there dwelt

<sup>2</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 31.

## THE POSTULANT

a shepherd boy in the first years of this century, whose mind had early been drawn heavenwards ; and one day, as he prayed before the image of the Madonna, he felt a vivid intimation that he was destined to preach the Gospel under the northern sky. There appeared no means by which a Roman peasant should be turned into a missionary ; nor did the prospect open, when this youth found himself first a lay-brother, then a Father in the Congregation of the Passion. Yet though no external means appeared, the inward impression did not fade ; on the contrary, it became more definite, and in process of time, instead of the dim North, England was engraven on his heart. And strange to say, as years went on, without his seeking, for he was simply under obedience, our peasant found himself at length upon the shore of the very northern sea whence Caesar of old looked out for a new world to conquer ; yet that he should cross the strait was as little likely as before. However, it was as likely as that he should ever have got so near it ; and he used to eye the restless, godless waves, and wonder within himself whether the day would come when he should be carried over them. And come it did, not, however, by any determination of his own, but by the same Providence which, thirty years before, had given him the anticipation of it.”<sup>3</sup>

The “ shepherd boy ” of Viterbo, whom God had so evidently ordained to be the executor of St. Paul’s

<sup>3</sup>*Loss and Gain*, chap. X.

## FATHER CHARLES

wish, was Father Dominic of the Mother of God, who in the early summer of 1840 had established himself and a few companions "upon the shore of the very northern sea." This foundation, made at the Chateau d'Ere, near Tournai, and dedicated to St. Michael the Archangel, was the first Passionist Retreat to be founded outside Italy; for Dominic it was just one step nearer to England. For two years more he had "to eye the restless, godless waves" which separated him from the land of promise; but, at last, the summons came, and he set out to establish the first foundation of the Congregation in these countries at Aston Hall in Staffordshire.

It is not possible to state precisely when Andrew definitely made up his mind to become a Passionist, but it may be presumed that his decision would have been preceded by much prayer and deliberation. He would have consulted his confessor and, although now of an age to act for himself, would have turned instinctively to his parents for their advice and consent. From what we know of these good people, their consent would not have been given without much hesitation and anxious questioning. They were rigid moralists, and both, the mother in particular, seem to have had the usual dread of the stigma with which public opinion brands the "spoiled priest." The incident of her own brother's failure still rankled in her mind and, despite Father Delahaye's prophecy and Professor Schyren's good report, she must have still had doubts as to her

## THE POSTULANT

son's aptitude for the calling he desired to follow.

In the end their consent was given, and Andrew was free to make his application for admission to the Passionist Congregation. When or to whom this application was made there is no means of knowing; but, in the ordinary course of events, the final decision in the matter would have rested with Father Dominic, who was then Superior of the Congregation in these countries, and it is of interest to note that his decision to accept this Dutch boy would have more or less synchronised with his famous visit to Littlemore, to receive Newman's submission to the Church.

Not having yet completed his preparatory course, Andrew had still to continue his studies under Professor Schyren at Broek-Sittard. It was now eight years since he began his course at Sittard, during which time he had seen two generations of school-boys come and go, some of whom would now be near to ordination, whilst he was still far from having even the minimum of knowledge required of the prospective ecclesiastical student. It was a long and heart-breaking struggle, and in its final stage made more difficult still by anxiety for his mother's health. Although a comparatively young woman—she was not much past fifty—her health was breaking, and in the early winter of 1843 gave way completely. All that winter the shadow of death hung heavily over the little home, and early in the new year the end came. His mother's death was the first great sorrow in Andrew's life and, for

## FATHER CHARLES

him perhaps more than the others, a loss that could not easily be outlived. To her he had confided all his hopes and whispered all his fears, and sorely would he miss her in the great trial that now awaited him.

With the ending of the school year of 1845, he finished his preparatory course, and was at last in a position to make his final arrangements for entering the Passionist Novitiate. He communicated with the Superiors of St. Michael's Retreat at Ere, who fixed on the 5th November as the day of his admission. For many years he had looked forward to this day, and now that it had drawn near, he began to show signs of an interior struggle which his family took to be reluctance. He became despondent, and more than usually silent. His elder sister, Sybil, who had taken the mother's place in the home, noticed the anguish which he was at so much pains to conceal, and fearing that the strain would be too great for him, took it upon herself to challenge him. His answer was characteristic, both in its determination and simplicity. "Sybil," he said, "for our dear Lord's sake I would do anything—I would go down alive into the pit." His father also had noticed him, and he too remonstrated with him. "Andrew," he said, "there is no need for you to go into a monastery. There is plenty here for eight, there will be enough for nine." Again the answer was determined, and even savours of a pardonable impatience: "Father, I always said that I would enter a monastery, and now I am going to do so!"

## THE POSTULANT

On his last night at home, when everything was in readiness for his early departure, he went quietly through the house, passing from one room to another, looking long at this thing and that, as if he were trying to photograph on his memory every detail of the little world he was leaving. His sister, the same motherly Sybil, watched him taking his silent farewells, and read for him the thought that was tearing at his heart. "I know what you are thinking," she whispered. "You are thinking that you will never see all these things again!" Andrew did not answer, perhaps because he could not trust himself.

Next morning, after a few words of advice and farewell to each one of the family, he set out, in the company of his uncle, for his new home.

That evening, and every evening afterwards, when the Houben family assembled for their evening Rosary, they added a special prayer that their Andrew might be true to his calling.

## CHAPTER THE FOURTH

### THE PASSIONIST

**I**T is the tenth day of December, 1846. More than a year has passed since Andrew Houben left all things to follow Christ, and now the time is come to set the seal on his Great Renunciation.

Before the high altar of the little monastery chapel at Ere, he lies prostrate and motionless as one dead, his outstretched figure draped with a funeral pall. At the altar stands a priest in vestments, his gold-crusted cope contrasting vividly with the soft black of the outspread pall; whilst another in alb and purple deacon's stole, at a lectern on the Gospel-side of the sanctuary, reads slowly and in a tone of meditation, the Gospel of the Passion according to St. John. A little to the side, yet part of the scene, are two surpliced religious holding in their hands a cross and crown of thorns; and ever and anon a bell tolls slowly and mournfully as for a passing soul.

As scene after scene of the Great Tragedy is recalled by St. John's simple but poignant narrative, the realities underlying the ceremonial symbols begin to appear; even the sobbing bell becomes articulate, and one may hear in its strong measured tones the voice of a resolute will, and in its mournful cadences the sobbing of a human heart taking leave

## THE PASSIONIST

of all human loves. Something of the grandeur of Calvary invests the little scene and casts the red glow of martyrdom around the prostrate figure before the altar. His very posture recalls the Agonising Christ of Gethsemani, but the resemblance will not stay at symbols. The cross and thorny crown are waiting for him, tokens of the burden of pain that will torture and weigh him down, along the way in which he has chosen to walk. Before he can say his *Consummatum Est*, he must in some way share in every pain of the Passion, and be fashioned by pain and humiliation into a living replica of the Crucified Christ.

Already he feels the first pains of the sacrifice, the rest he can, at least in thought, anticipate ; for he has not lived for more than twelve months in a religious community without realising that "it is no small matter to dwell in a monastery or congregation, to live there without blame, and to remain faithful until death."<sup>1</sup> His year of noviceship brought him many hard and searching trials. There were times when his heart ached for the companionship and sympathy of his own, and hours when the future frightened him almost to despair. These moments of loneliness and despondency he could have expected and prepared for ; but there were other trials not so easy to bear. He had been sternly reprimanded for trivial faults, sometimes even when there was no fault at all. When he tried to explain away what

<sup>1</sup> *Imitation*, Bk. I, Ch. XVII, 1.



## FATHER CHARLES

appeared to him a misunderstanding, he was silenced, and always with the same words : *Jesus autem tacebat*. Then, there were disillusionments, many and bitter. His conception of the religious life as one long round of prayer and pious exercises had been rudely shattered when he discovered that it also included such menial tasks as scrubbing floors, washing dishes, and serving as a scullion in the kitchen.

Now he can see a purpose in all these things. He has discovered the secret of humiliation as well as the meaning of that phrase, which silenced all his excuses, in the Gospel story of the Passion. Not once, but many times during his year of noviceship, he had heard that the Passionist "must be truly prepared, for the glory of God, for his own salvation, and that of others, to suffer many things, to be mocked, despised, and willingly to bear afflictions and vexations,"<sup>2</sup> that thereby he may be nailed to the Cross with Christ. In self-sacrifice his life must be consummated. This is the great and holy purpose he sets before him as he rises and goes forward to the altar to make the vows that will fix him with Christ to the Cross.

With his hands clasped in those of his Superior, at whose feet he kneels, and in clear but trembling tones, he vows and promises "to Almighty God, to Blessed Mary ever a Virgin, and to all the Heavenly Court : poverty, chastity and obedience, as also a diligent endeavour to promote, according to his

<sup>2</sup> *Rules and Constitutions of the Congregation of the Cross and Passion.*

## THE PASSIONIST

strength, in the hearts of the faithful, devotion to the Passion of our Lord, according to the Rules and Constitutions of the Congregation of the Discalced Clerics of the Most Holy Cross and Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ." Still kneeling, the cross is placed upon his shoulder and the crown of thorns upon his head, and then, as if to set a seal on what has been done, the holy sign of the Passion is placed over his heart, with this final admonition: "Be thou crucified to the Cross with Christ: in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." Then, this latest son of St. Paul of the Cross, henceforward to be known as Charles of St. Andrew, stands to join his fellow-religious in the singing of a *Te Deum* of Thanksgiving.

## CHAPTER THE FIFTH

### STUDENT AND PRIEST

ON the morrow of his religious profession, Brother Charles began his studies for the priesthood. Normally this would have occasioned his removal to another Retreat; but, owing to the straitened circumstances of the Anglo-Belgian Province, then only in the fifth year of its existence, the Retreat of St. Michael at Ere had to serve as student-house as well as novitiate. Again and for the same reason, the student course had to be shortened as much as possible, and confined to the bare essentials. There was urgent need of priests, particularly in England, where Father Dominic and his few companions were bearing more than their share of the heats and burdens of the day, and still wishing that they could divide themselves into twelve parts to answer all the calls made upon them and seize every opportunity that offered itself. Every post from England brought urgent appeals for "men, and still more men." "I beseech you, send me men," Dominic kept on writing, "good religious rather than learned Solomons; it matters little what talents or learning they possess, provided they be men of virtue and solid interior spirit."

Brother Charles completed the course, thus curtailed and condensed to suit the needs of the moment,

## STUDENT AND PRIEST

well within the appointed time, and to the satisfaction of his Superiors—a fact which his previous record would not lead us to expect. At last, his long years of effort were beginning to bear their fruit. A tedious and arduous apprenticeship had provided him with a technique of study, and a well-developed memory which compensated in great part for his natural dullness, and his eager desire, seconded by a full measure of grace, supplied what else was wanting. “God helps those who help themselves,” the old saying runs, and Brother Charles was an earnest and painstaking student. A note-book of his student days, found amongst his posthumous papers, gives a fair idea of his thoroughness and technique. It is a synopsis of his Philosophical manual, compiled with great care, and arranged in such a manner that the whole matter of each lesson could be seen at a glance and, as it were, photographed on his memory. By these methods and much hard work, he managed to keep abreast of his class-fellows, and at the end of his course was able to pass the tests set him by his Superiors and the Ecclesiastical authorities of the diocese.

His growth in spiritual things was still more remarkable and swift. Already his Superiors and companions recognised in him the beginnings of extraordinary sanctity. They were “greatly impressed by his holiness,” it is recorded, and considered him an “example of devotion, faith and piety.” “He was strict in keeping the rules,” they testify, “simple and friendly to live with, his gentle

## FATHER CHARLES

and sincere disposition, his artless and all-embracing charity, his good spirits and natural gaiety during recreation compelling all to love him." A lay-brother, who was his companion at Ere and survived him by some years, could recall as particularly remarkable "his great gentleness, humility and angelic disposition." "One could knock him down," he used to say, "and his only answer would be a sweet and kindly smile. He was always content with little and the last place, and took everything in good part. If it chanced that he did something amiss, he was instant in asking pardon, and on the first opportunity accused himself publicly of his fault."

Except for this remarkable holiness, which even then was commonplace in his life, there is nothing to record of his student-days, either of interest or importance. His days, like those of every Passionist student, were well filled with work and prayer. Five times each day and once during the night, he joined his brethren in the chanting of the Divine Office, which is the outstanding and cardinal duty of the Passionist's daily life. Each hour is recited at the time suggested by the liturgy of the Breviary; Matins is chanted "in the most still and sacred hour" that marks the birth of another day; Prime by the very "first light of day," and thus, "from dawn to setting sun," the poetry of the Breviary is translated into reality, and the day with all its parts sanctified and consecrated to God.

For the rest, an extract from a letter written by another young Passionist student, later to become

## STUDENT AND PRIEST

famous as St. Gabriel of the Sorrowful Virgin, will serve to describe the daily life of Brother Charles at this period.

"I will now give concisely the horarium for day and night," Gabriel wrote to his brother. "At night, we retire to rest fairly early, and after five hours' sleep, we get up to chant Matins in choir. This chant, which lasts about an hour, is followed by a half-hour's mental prayer. Afterwards, we return to bed, in winter for three hours, in summer for two and a half. In the morning, we rise again to chant the canonical hours of Prime and Tierce. We assist at two Masses, and after having put our cells in order, take a slight collation. Each one then applies himself to his particular work, such as study, hearing confessions, etc. Afterwards, we have spiritual reading for a quarter of an hour, followed by a solitary walk for half-an-hour. We go back to choir to chant Sext and None: then we dine. In addition to the fast of Lent and Advent, we have three fast days each week—Wednesday, Friday and Saturday.

"At the appointed hour, we go to chant Vespers, which are followed by spiritual reading in common for about a quarter of an hour. Again in the evening, there is another solitary walk for half-an-hour. However, on Thursdays and Sundays and on certain feast-days, we spend part of the evening walking in the country. We return to

## FATHER CHARLES

say Compline, which is followed by an hour's meditation, and then supper. During winter, we have recreation for three-quarters of an hour, and for an hour in summer. The day ends with the recital of the Rosary."

Thus, to the time of a well-ordered horarium, Brother Charles' days passed "quickly, peacefully, and happily." His years at Ere provided him with happy memories, which he would cherish to his last days. Often in his later years, when speaking to the younger religious, he would recall his own early years, and the tears would glisten in his eyes as he spoke of his first companions and Superiors. A few times in the year, he had letters from his family, to which he replied, but evidently not as promptly and frequently as they desired.

"Time destroys monuments," his brother wrote, "but your memory will never be erased from our hearts. Nevertheless, I must tell you that they (i.e., his brothers and sisters) complain of your writing so seldom; but even the smallest letter from you, with its moral lessons, nourishes the mutual love of our brothers and sisters, and has already been the means of advancing them to a high degree of holiness."

This same letter, the only one of the period which has been preserved, promised him a visit from his family "at some more favourable time," which evidently did not present itself, for the promised visit never materialised. Another letter,

## STUDENT AND PRIEST

which must have come to him a few months before his ordination, brought him the sad news of his father's death. How he received this news can only be conjectured, and from what we know of him, he would have felt the bereavement keenly, all the more so, since he was far from any who could give him the support of their sympathy, and because it must have brought with it the sense of a bitter disappointment. He must have cherished a hope, as every priest does, that he would have his own dear ones with him when he ascended the altar for the first time to offer the Great Sacrifice for the living and the dead, and that hope was now dashed. Evidently the expenses incurred during their father's illness and death had made it impossible for any of the family to make the journey to Ere, and when the great morning came, Charles could only send them his blessing on the wings of prayer.

On the 21st December, 1850, he was raised to the Priesthood by Monsignor Labis, Bishop of Tournai, and on the following day, ascended the altar, with mingled dread and longing, to offer his first Holy Mass. The star which had appeared to him in the twilight of life's morning, had led him at last to his Bethlehem. The great privilege for which he had striven through so many weary years, was at last his ; and yet, it was with hesitating steps and trembling hands, he approached the altar. Early in his priestly life, and perhaps on this, his first intimate contact with holy things, Father Charles began to show signs of a tendency towards



## FATHER CHARLES

scrupulosity. In later years, under stress of an over-wrought nervous system, this tendency would become more pronounced, and particularly in the celebration of Mass. He never allowed it to take possession of his soul, it is true, but it obsessed him at every moment of his priestly ministry, and to such effect that it may be put down as "his greatest Cross." What exquisite torture he endured from its constant obsession cannot be estimated in words. One who has given many years to the study and direction of the scrupulous describes their suffering as exceeding any "torture capable of being inflicted upon our wincing flesh and aching bone." "Picture to yourself," he writes, "according to the powers of your imagination, the exquisite ingenuity of mediæval prisons, the variety of torture capable of being inflicted upon our wincing flesh and aching bone; reflect upon the capacity of suffering contained in each nerve cell; fathom to its very depths the bitterness of lacerated feelings; think of the overwhelming burden of a heavy leaden day of dark depression. Take all these at their highest; all without alleviation, and what is more, without any hope of relief, for the poor soul is in a desert where no flowers of comfort are growing; or, if we may be pardoned for varying the metaphors, it is in a bath of molten pain; on it are focussed the miseries of the world, burning like fire, corroding like an acid poison."<sup>1</sup> If this be, as the writer assures us, "but a dull picture of the sorrows

<sup>1</sup> Gearon, O.C.C. : *Scruples*, 3rd ed., pp. 47 and 48.



THE YOUNG PRIEST (ABOUT 1857).

## STUDENT AND PRIEST

consequent upon scruples," it is necessary to tax the imagination still further when the unhappy sufferer happens to be a priest, who is called upon many times each day to perform acts upon which hang tremendous possibilities. His knowledge of theology will, undoubtedly, make him realise the folly of his scruples, but not rid him of them; for, like all nervous ailments, they are beyond the control of the will. At times, the afflicted person is sorely tempted to give up the struggle as useless, and only humility and obedience can bring him to the end safely. These two virtues Father Charles had, and in a great measure. When he showed any hesitancy before or during the celebration of Mass, or in the performance of any act of the ministry, it needed only a word from any priest, or even lay-brother, to obtain a prompt obedience.

After his ordination, the young priest remained on at Ere to complete his preparation for the active ministry. It was during this year, perhaps, that he made his first acquaintance with the English language, for there could have been little doubt but that England would be the scene of his first labours in the vineyard, and what that meant he could not but know. Many times during his student-course, and for the last time, just six months before his ordination, he had heard Father Dominic speak of the labours and crosses of the English mission. "Let those who come keep clearly before them that they must be prepared to suffer—and to suffer much," he would say, "derision, mockery, contempt, and a

## FATHER CHARLES

full meal of insult and outrage of every kind ; and, at the end, death, it may be, amid suffering and pain." That these words were not the exaggeration of rhetoric, they could see for themselves in the wasted and prematurely decrepit body of the man who spoke. " Though his years fell short of sixty, he looked like a man of eighty," and always he bore on his forehead the scar of a missile which had been thrown to kill. But yet, England was their spiritual portion. " The cry on all sides," Dominic would repeat, " was that the conversion of England would be the work of Passionists. Ah ! if we had only a really sufficient number of men, filled with the spirit of God, what could we not do ? " ; and then he would thrill them with stories of the great work which he and his few companions had been able to do, " of dozens of Protestants converted in almost all our missions, of thousands of lapsed Catholics reclaimed and brought back to the practice of their religion, and hardened sinners converted by the mere sight of a Passionist on the platform, although they did not understand a word he said."

In the summer of 1849, Father Dominic visited Ere for the last time, and on parting with the community, he answered their hearty " Au Revoir " with a sad smile, and an assurance that they would never meet in this world again. Before another month had passed, they heard of his lonely death at Reading, and it was from his successor, Father Ignatius, that Father Charles received his call to the English mission.

## CHAPTER THE SIXTH

### FIRST YEARS IN ENGLAND

**D**URING his last visit to Ere, Father Dominic, even then too feeble to hold a pen, had dictated a letter to an old friend, the Vicar General of the Diocese of Tournai, in which he gave a brief outline of the progress and position of the Passionists in England.

“Here are some few details about England,” he wrote. “We have three houses in that country: (1) Aston Hall, in Staffordshire; (2) St. Mary’s Hill, in Gloucestershire; and (3) Poplar House near London. In connection with the two first mentioned we have built two churches, now almost finished. Both will be opened in September. The third foundation, near London, is not yet in a settled condition. Lack of resources is the principal difficulty there, but I hope to remain, if at all possible. In the three houses we have twenty-eight Religious, of whom eleven are priests. The majority of these priests are in a position to go out on Missions, and in point of fact, all of them are engaged on missionary work for ten months of the year.

“Up to the moment of writing we have given two hundred and fifty missions and retreats. My own share would be about a hundred. I can

## FATHER CHARLES

assure you that we could do even more good had we more work-men. . . .

“For my own part, I am fully persuaded that I am at the end of my labours. I have finished my course. . . .”

Dominic's sudden death, which took place soon after the writing of this letter, had disastrous results. His successor in the government of the Province, Father Ignatius, did not prove equal to the burden which had so unexpectedly fallen upon him. “A sage in spirituals, the reverse in temporals,” he managed, during his short term of office, to involve the affairs of the Province in such difficulties that it was to take many years to recover the ground lost through his mal-administration and infelicitous ventures. When death intervened, Father Dominic was negotiating the establishment of a new Retreat at Sutton in Lancashire. Father Ignatius not only carried through these arrangements, but actually undertook two other foundations in the same year, one at Broadway in Worcestershire, the other at Cotton Hall in Staffordshire. The Province had now five Retreats in England, all of them with parishes attached, whilst there had been no proportionate increase either in man-power or financial resources. The result was as might have been expected. The priests were taxed beyond their strength to cope with the demands made upon them, and the communities were compelled to exist in the direst poverty.

These domestic difficulties, however, were only

## FIRST YEARS IN ENGLAND

in keeping with the general situation, for England was being swept by a storm of anti-Catholic agitation, which might at any moment, and in some cases actually did, break into active persecution. The establishment of a Catholic Hierarchy in 1850 had aroused the fear and anger of English Protestantism. The Church in England had at last emerged from the catacombs, and "the Italian mission," which the humourists of *Punch* could, a few years before, dismiss with a contemptuous cartoon, had become a "Papal Aggression," calling for royal attention and proclamations. Petitions were laid before the Queen, setting forth the fears that disturbed thousands of loyal bosoms, whilst others of her Majesty's loyal subjects in many parts of the Kingdom made public demonstration of their feelings by besetting helpless Catholics, burning their churches and waylaying their clergy. Thus, the England which Father Charles found did not promise "pleasure, ease or comfort"; but, as Father Dominic had foretold, "a full meal of insult and outrage of every kind," and much hardship and privation.

It was early in the February of 1852 that he arrived in England, just a few weeks after the publication of a Royal Proclamation, forbidding "Roman Catholic ecclesiastics wearing the habit of their Order, or exercising the rites and ceremonies of the Roman Catholic religion in highways and places of public resort"—a decree which would have affected him immediately, and introduced him to the temper of his new environment. Soon after his arrival he

## FATHER CHARLES

wrote to his family, attempting a description of his journey and new home. The result was most unsatisfactory, as were all his attempts at letter-writing. His collected correspondence has been well described as "letters such as our grandfathers and grandmothers used to write sixty or seventy years ago; like those we ourselves scribbled as children, when, having reached the boarding-school, we wrote in the laboured handwriting of childhood to tell our parents of our safe arrival, giving our impressions in telegram style, without its terseness or pithiness." This particular letter, although most unsatisfactory as a news-bulletin, has nevertheless the interest of a human document, and may serve as a type of all his correspondence.

"You will be all anxious to hear of my welfare, how I am situated in England, and of my journey. My journey from Belgium to England went off well. A Belgian priest accompanied me as far as Dover, whence I travelled alone. My travelling was done mostly by train, which sometimes went under the ground, and one was left in complete darkness. On sea, everything went well, except that I suffered a little from the wind and the rain; but I felt all right after the crossing. We have a monastery near London, where I remained two days, after which I went to Aston Hall, where I remained five days. Then, together with the Very Rev. Father Provincial, I went to St. Wilfrid's, where I am to remain. The monastery is magnificent.



## FIRST YEARS IN ENGLAND

"I am already at home in England and am beginning to speak a little English. Pray for me that I may learn to speak this language; pray, too, for the poor Protestants of England that they may be converted to the true Faith. . . ."

If, as he supposes, his family was anxious for news of his journey and new home, this letter would have told them very little. With so many things of interest to write of, he succeeds in telling little except his new address. For biographical purposes, however, the letter is of interest, because so self-revealing. The simple, unsophisticated mind of the man appears in every word of it, but particularly in that portion in which he attempts to describe what was for him a novel and alarming sensation of being unexpectedly whipped from the daylight into the rushing darkness of a tunnel; and again, in the closing sentences, there is manifest the longing of an apostle, impatient of his own helplessness, and counting the days until he would be able to do something towards the conversion of "the poor Protestants of England."

His brief but laudatory description of his new home was not exaggerated. St. Wilfrid's, Cotton Hall, one of the two foundations acquired by Father Ignatius a few years before, was truly "magnificent." Six years before, the property had been presented by the Earl of Shrewsbury to Frederick Faber to serve as the first monastery of that zealous convert's newly-founded "Congregation of St. Wilfrid of the Will of God." The situation was all that the would-be

## FATHER CHARLES

founder, with his fanciful ideas of monasticism, could wish for. Standing on the breast of a hill which sheltered it from the unkindly north, it looked across a thickly-wooded valley to another hill, crowned by "that old Scotch fir," which would later find a place in one of Faber's hymns. On this gracious site the founder of the Wilfridians set about the erection of his ideal monastery. The Hall was enlarged by additions in the best Gothic style, and a church erected from the designs of Pugin, which the architect himself declared to be "the only perfect church in England, with an east window he could die for." The spacious gardens were laid out with shaded walks, along which the Stations of the Cross were erected, and on the sweeping lawn in front was placed a statue of our Lady "looking down the valley as though blessing it."

While workmen were busy at the building of the church, Faber and his companions were as busy raising up a congregation. "The population, being thinly scattered over the country, was not easily accessible, and a vast field of operation was open, inasmuch as, with the exception of Alton and Cheadle, there was no other mission within several miles. Districts were accordingly marked out and assigned to the Brothers, who each devoted a great portion of the day to a systematic visitation of every house within their limits. The people were invited to assist at the services, and instructed in the more necessary parts of Christian doctrine. . . . During the summer it was Brother Wilfrid's custom to

## FIRST YEARS IN ENGLAND

preach on Sundays in a yard near the house, or under the beech trees in the garden, as the chapel was far too small to contain the numbers who flocked to hear him." The success which attended these efforts was almost phenomenal. "In a very few months there remained but one Protestant family in the parish, and the Protestant church, which stood within the grounds of Cotton Hall itself, was almost entirely abandoned." Even that one recalcitrant family, it would seem, eventually yielded to Brother Wilfrid's persuasive persistence, and soon one of the Wilfridians could announce to a friend the completion of their conquest: "We have converted the pew-opener, leaving the parson only his clerk and two drunken men as his regular communicants."<sup>1</sup>

There were other factors in the situation, however, which seem to have contributed more to this sudden change of heart than Brother Wilfrid's polemics. For one thing, the Lord of the Manor, the Earl of Shrewsbury, was a Catholic, and his influence counted for much in a district where most of the people were his retainers or in some way dependent on him; and again, the hospitality meted out at the Hall to all comers, in the grand old monastic style, together with the frequent social entertainments organised by the Wilfridians, helped not a little to swell the numbers who flocked to St. Wilfrid's. Meantime Brother Wilfrid, who had now been ordained priest, was not altogether happy about his

<sup>1</sup> For this and foregoing citations, see *Life and Letters of Frederick Faber*: Bowden, Fifth Ed., Ch. VIII.

## FATHER CHARLES

new Order. Though everything gave promise of success, he began to feel that his congregation had not the Divine approval which its name implied. After a severe struggle with his feelings and his community, he at length decided to offer himself to the Oratorians, and St. Wilfrid's was left untenanted until offered to Father Ignatius, who gladly accepted a property which was in every way suited for a Passionist Retreat.

On the 13th December, 1850, the Passionists entered into possession of St. Wilfrid's with high hopes for its future. In the following year the first Provincial Chapter of the English Province was held there, and the Capitular Fathers expressed their satisfaction and their plans for the future in the following terms: "(It) is the best establishment which the Congregation possesses in England. The double advantage of the solitude and amenity of the place, together with the amplitude and commodiousness of the building, render St. Wilfrid's peculiarly adapted for study. Some of the young religious have already been called thither and when others shall have been added, St. Wilfrid's will become the Seminary of the Province." These plans had been partially realised when Father Charles arrived there in 1852. A few students had already begun their studies there, and some months later they were joined by others, one of whom bore the name of Charles. To avoid the confusion which would have naturally arisen from this coincidence of names in a small community, the student was permitted

## FIRST YEARS IN ENGLAND

to change his name for that of Paul Mary, under which his memory is still revered.

It would be interesting to know what passed between these two men during the few months they spent together at St. Wilfrid's. Normally they would have had little contact with each other, one being a priest and the other a student; but, as Father Charles had been sent to St. Wilfrid's to perfect his English, it is not unlikely that the former officer of the Guards would have taken his part in the education of his former namesake, whom he would have found an eager, but not very apt, student. Although he acquired in time a sufficiently practical knowledge of English, Charles was never able to master the intricacies of the language. Always, in moments of excitement, he would relapse into Dutch, and to the end his speech and writings were interspersed with mispronunciations and misspellings that betrayed his origin.

After a year at St. Wilfrid's, the Superiors of the Province considered him sufficiently proficient in the use of English to take up the duties of the active ministry, and appointed him to the Community of St. Michael's Retreat, Aston Hall.

It is interesting, not to say significant, to note that his first priestly ministrations must have brought him into contact with the people to whose service his life was to be devoted. Aston and Stone, the scene of his first labours, were situated in the heart of the "Black Country," whither so many of the famine-hunted Irish had flocked for work and a

## FATHER CHARLES

livelihood, and the parish attached to St. Michael's Retreat, Aston Hall, was in great part composed of immigrant Irish. The condition of these unfortunate people could not but touch the heart of the young priest who, himself an exile, could understand their longings and pity their miseries. There is no record of his labours at Aston, but it may be supposed that his apostolic zeal would have much scope amongst the immigrant Irish, many of whom had lost their grip of religion and morality in their "cruel transplantation." Helpless and bewildered in their new surroundings, their simple manners and want of education held up to scorn by those who were glad of their labour, but not of their company, they inevitably herded together in the squalid lanes and back-streets of towns and cities, where many of them succumbed to their environment and became easy prey for busy proselytisers. Not so unfortunate, at least in spiritual things, were those who had found their way to Aston and Stone. From the beginning they had found a good friend in Father Dominic. Out of his scant resources he had fed and clothed them, and when the plague was raging among them, he and his companions had sought them out in the hovels and barns where they were housed, to bring them the consolations of religion. This kindness had not been forgotten, and its memory forged a strong bond between the Fathers of St. Michael's and the Irish of Aston and Stone, which, it may be presumed, was yet more strengthened by the labours of Father Charles.

## CHAPTER THE SEVENTH

### ASSISTANT IN NOVITIATE

WHILE Father Charles was making his first trial of the apostolate at Aston Hall, the affairs of the Province were passing through a serious crisis. The evil effects of the over-rapid expansion of previous years had begun to appear in difficulties that seemed almost insurmountable. The Retreats were all undermanned, and the religious, in addition to being over-worked, were often without the necessities of life. The Superiors at length decided that the only remedy was a greater concentration of the religious in fewer houses and, much against their wishes, found themselves compelled to abandon Aston Hall, the first home of the Passionists in these countries. The Community of St. Michael's was, accordingly, distributed amongst the various Retreats, Father Charles returning to St. Wilfrid's, which was then the Novitiate house of the Province, to assist in the training of the Novices.

This appointment, though carrying with it no jurisdiction and little responsibility, indicates the very high opinion which the Superiors had formed of Father Charles. Besides assisting the Master in supervising the novices, the Vice-Master, as he is called, must be their constant companion during

## FATHER CHARLES

recreation hours, and for that reason must be a religious of edifying conversation and example. During the short time he held this office, Father Charles more than justified his Superior's hopes of him. So thoroughly and with such prudence did he fulfil his duties that the Master of Novices was content to entrust the novices almost entirely to his care ; and Father Salvian, who then held the office, was not a man to be easily satisfied in such matters. " My Vice-Master of Novices," he wrote, " was our good Father Charles of St. Andrew (Houben). As Father Charles took great care of the novices, I let him have the whole care of them except that I heard their confessions and conferences."

The abandonment of Aston Hall had done something to improve the domestic affairs of the Province, but many difficulties still remained. Financial resources were still far from adequate, and the religious in all the Retreats had to endure great hardship and privations. Conditions were particularly bad at St. Wilfrid's. Soon after the Passionists had taken possession of Cotton Hall things began to go wrong and all the hopes which this foundation had augured were dashed one by one. The first calamity was the death of their benefactor, the Earl of Shrewsbury, whose title and estate passed to a non-Catholic branch of the family. This event, besides being a severe loss to the Community of St. Wilfrid's, was, as Father Salvian makes very clear in his Diary, a death-blow to Catholicism in the district. " Then," he writes, referring to the situation as it existed on



their coming to St. Wilfrid's, "then there was a Catholic Lord in Alton Towers, and all these people were his Lordship's tenantry. They liked, of course, to do anything to please their master, who was an excellent landlord, and thought that it would be an excellent thing to belong to the same Church, and worship at the same altar without distinction. . . . Lord Shrewsbury, more than religion, kept them in the Catholic Church, whilst alive ; but when he was dead and the property and title got into Protestant hands, and the good old Catholics were gone from the district, the others who remained (few no doubt) accommodated themselves to the new circumstances, and if they did not openly deny their faith, certainly they returned to what I should call the 'status quo'." But the passing of the "Catholic Lord of Alton Towers" was evidently but the crisis of a situation which had been for a long time developing. From the beginning the relations between the Community of St. Wilfrid's and the people of the district had not been cordial, for reasons which Father Salvian sets forth at length in his Diary.

"The saintly Father Faber and his fervent companions had made a great many converts," he writes. "The good Fathers, in their fervour (and having the means of doing so), gave a great deal in charity to everybody, but especially to those who attended their church ; so much so, that on Sunday mornings, anyone who had been to Communion or even to Mass, could go into the 'big house' and get a nice breakfast, without having the trouble of going to

## FATHER CHARLES

his home for it. Some, indeed, being so far from their home, it was a great act of charity to give them some breakfast. To attract young men to the place and to the Catholic religion, and principally to keep them away from public-houses and other dangerous places, several kinds of amusements were introduced for the Sunday afternoons. . . . Of course the good Fathers did this with the best intention and for a principle of charity, but human nature is human nature everywhere, and people seeing such good things being done by the holy Fathers, flocked in great numbers and presented themselves as candidates for the Catholic Church, and in a short time St. Wilfrid's congregation became one of the most flourishing in the Diocese.

"The first Sunday after our arrival there, some of the people came round to the kitchen-door and asked for 'their breakfast' ! Our poor religious did not know the meaning of this, and indeed were not in a position to feed others, when in reality they had not enough for themselves. The people began to complain, and from the very beginning began to tax us with want of charity and hospitality. They saw and felt that the masters of the house were changed. They had no breakfast and no amusements as formerly. The Catholic religion became too dull for them, hence by degrees they began to get lax in frequenting the Sacraments ; some of them left entirely, without however going back to their old faith."

Thus, deprived by death of their principal bene-

## ASSISTANT IN NOVITIATE

factor, and practically boycotted by the people, the Community of St. Wilfrid's found itself faced with destitution. To make matters worse, the winter of 1854 was unusually severe. The monastery, being without fires, was cold and damp, and meals uncertain and scant. So bad were the conditions that the novices were frightened away one by one, until only one was left; and as the winter of '55 approached, the Superiors decided that they could not ask the Community to spend another winter in such conditions. "There was no alternative," writes Father Salvian, "but to starve or leave the place. We decided on the latter."

The exodus took place on the 8th November, 1855, Father Salvian and his novice leaving for the new Novitiate at St. Saviour's Retreat at Broadway, while Father Charles and another priest were left behind to take care of the parish until such time as the diocesan authorities could arrange to take it over. It was not an enviable task which awaited the two priests. At any time the parish was difficult to work, "the population being thinly scattered over the country," and "not easily accessible," but with conditions as they were, the physical labour of caring for the extensive parish was of little account compared with the task of trying to conciliate a people who were apathetic when not openly hostile. It was a situation calling for great zeal and prudence; and again, the choice of Father Charles for the task marks him out not only as a zealous, prudent priest, but also as a religious whom his Superiors could

## FATHER CHARLES

trust to preserve the religious spirit without any of the safeguards of the religious life.

Although his appointment was necessarily temporary and might be regarded by many as a sinecure, Father Charles entered on his parochial duties with great earnestness, and the few months he was left at St. Wilfrid's were, as his companion would afterwards testify, full of apostolic activity. Each morning was spent in a systematic visitation of his far flung parish, and since most of the people were at least nominally Catholics, no house, no matter how inaccessible, escaped his zeal. During one of these expeditions, he chanced to come upon an old couple who, though non-Catholics, were evidently so much impressed by his earnest appeals that they professed their willingness to receive instruction. For some reason or other, perhaps because of self-diffidence, he entrusted this ministry to his colleague who proceeded the next morning to the home of the old couple to begin their instruction. To his surprise he was coldly received and given to understand that his good services were not wanted. The old man, acting apparently on a pre-arranged plan, took entire charge of the conversation, and with great skill managed to counter all the priest's efforts to introduce the object of his visit ; his wife, the while, maintaining a stony silence. After much talk about many things, and repeated efforts to make the old woman speak, whose silence he felt to be counselled by fear, the priest was forced to retire, leaving the garrulous old man in possession of the field.

## ASSISTANT IN NOVITIATE

The priest concerned, a Father Raymond, himself related this experience as an example of his colleague's wonderful patience and zeal, but assigned no reason to explain his own failure. May it not have been that the cold logic of the controversialist had undone what the fervent pleading of an apostle had almost accomplished? But any attempt to explain this incident brings us sooner or later face to face with the great mystery of Grace and of the Spirit that "breatheth where He wills."

There is no definite record of the duration of Father Charles' parochial appointment at St. Wilfrid's; nor is it easy to follow his subsequent movements. He was for a short time at St. Joseph's Retreat, Highgate, London, but he was a member of the Sutton community when called to Ireland in the mid-summer of 1857.

## CHAPTER THE EIGHTH

### FIRST YEARS IN IRELAND

THE Passionists have a tradition, attested by constant experience, that every new house of the Congregation must be founded under the shadow of a cross. For a time it seemed that their first home in Ireland would belie the old tradition. Mount Argus was already six months in existence and its future big with promise, when suddenly the cross came like a thunderbolt from a clear sky. On the 22nd February, 1857, its first Rector, Father Paul Mary Pakenham, was struck down by a sudden and untimely death, and to many it seemed that all the hopes cherished for the new foundation were laid with him in his grave. But time was to prove how foolish are human hopes and fears, and how wise the ways of God. The future of Mount Argus was to depend, not upon the prestige of a noble name or the efforts of a brilliant mind, but upon the sanctity of the unknown and untalented priest whose coming to Mount Argus must have seemed a sorry exchange for the one whom death had taken. The name of Father Paul Mary would be held in holy memory by all who knew him ; but it was the fame of Father Charles which was to carry the name of Mount Argus through the length and breadth of Ireland and even beyond the seas.

On the Feast of the Assumption, 1856, the Passion-

## FIRST YEARS IN IRELAND

ists entered into possession of their first home in Ireland. For many years Father Vincent Grotti, who was then Superior of the Congregation in these countries, had been endeavouring to secure a foundation in Ireland, and it was only after many attempts and disappointments that he at last succeeded in obtaining the necessary permissions to purchase the property known as "Mount Argus," in the vicinity of Harold's Cross, which was then a sleepy rural village, a good mile from the city boundaries. Except for its situation, which was all that could be desired, the property had little to recommend it; but Father Vincent was a man of large vision, who could foresee the monastery which would soon take the place of the ungainly and pokey private-house, so quaintly described as a "mansion" in the bill of sale. Without delay he appointed a Community to the new Retreat, and entrusted its government to Father Paul Mary, whom he recalled from Rome for that purpose.

From the very beginning Mount Argus seems to have had a peculiar attraction for the people of Dublin. Crowds flocked to the Retreat to seek the ministrations of the Fathers, and very soon it was found necessary to undertake the erection of a church to accommodate the ever-increasing congregations. The building was begun without delay, and was completed in the short space of three months. Another month had scarcely passed when Father Paul Mary was dead.

The Mount Argus which Father Charles saw for

## FATHER CHARLES

the first time on the 9th July, 1857, had little in common with the Mount Argus of to-day, except its name and situation. The dwelling-house, then known as Blessed Paul's Retreat, was an ugly, red-brick building, "looking like a slice taken from a factory and set down amongst trees and green fields," whilst the adjoining church is described as having the appearance of an old school-house. The surrounding district was yet rural and, in the phraseology of the times, "a good step" from the city. In the course of time the present spacious monastery and splendid Romanesque church took the place of the old dwelling-house and barn-like chapel, but for all the time that Father Charles was to know it, Mount Argus retained its rural aspect, and it was only after the coming of the electric trams in 1899 that the city began to encroach upon its solitude.

Father Charles had been the better part of a year in his new home before he wrote to inform his family of his change of address, for which delay he pleaded in excuse a great press of work.

"There are five of us priests here, and five lay-brothers," he wrote. "In proportion to the great number of Catholics, there are in Ireland few priests, and every Sunday I have to say two Masses. Almost every day we hear confessions from morning to night—if we had twelve priests every one of them would have much to do hearing confessions and preaching. One can do much good here in the garden of the Lord. As you know, Ireland is a Catholic country, its population



## FIRST YEARS IN IRELAND

almost eight millions;<sup>1</sup> and for more than three hundred years, the Irish have suffered cruel persecutions, but in spite of all have remained true to the Catholic Faith."

That this excuse was not just a polite prevarication, but a genuine statement of the situation at Mount Argus is borne out by an entry of the Retreat Chronicles for that year, which reads: "The Fathers began to hear confessions immediately after the long service of Holy Saturday, and continued until 2 o'clock in the morning, when, tired as they were, they went straight to the choir to sing the Solemn Matins of Easter Sunday."

Father Charles threw himself into the work heart and soul; and within a short time the popular voice had marked him out as a "man of God" and invested him with all the prerogatives of sanctity. Crowds flocked to him for his blessing; he was called here and there to lay his hand upon the sick; diseases and infirmities which had baffled human skill, vanished at his touch; and the cry went up on all sides that a saint was in their midst. This sudden apotheosis of the hitherto unnoticed priest is not easy to describe or explain with that sobriety which biography demands, but the facts, too well attested to admit of controversy, speak for themselves. In the summer of 1860, when he had been but three years in Ireland, he was made the recipient

<sup>1</sup>Evidently this information was obtained from some out-of-date reference book. The population of Ireland in 1858 had been much reduced by the Famine, and emigration.

## FATHER CHARLES

of honours, usually accorded to popular heroes. Intending to spend a day with a friend among the historic ruins of Glendalough, he found his arrival awaited by the whole country-side. A procession escorted him from the railway station, some miles away, to the parish church where he was made to address the people, and to bless all the sick of the district, who had been carried there to meet him. Similar scenes were to become commonplace in later years; but this deserves particular notice because exemplifying this new phase of his life which began with his coming to Ireland. He had laboured for nearly five years on the English mission without attracting any unusual notice. His Superiors and brethren, it is true, had long known him to be a man of great virtue, but it was his contact with the Irish people which discovered in him that indefinable something that marks out the chosen ones of God. This discovery was in large measure due to the many wonderful favours which God gave through his blessing.

For obvious reasons it is impossible to have first-hand information as to the number and nature of the cures wrought by him during his first years at Mount Argus. The few that have been recorded can hardly explain his universal notoriety, and must be taken as specimens of the great number which have not been recorded. They are remarkable, and perhaps for that reason, had better be told exactly as the witnesses have recorded them.

The first testimony is an extract from a letter

## FIRST YEARS IN IRELAND

written by one of the Community of Mount Argus to a friend, soon after the event—a circumstance which makes the account all the more credible since it excludes any suspicion of special pleading.

“A boy of twelve years of age, who had lost the use of his legs, was brought to me by his mother,” the writer relates, “and I made no delay in calling Father Charles to bless him. When he was engaged in blessing the child, I went to my room to change into my secular dress in order to go to Dublin. And great was my surprise when, on leaving the house, I found the boy walking about perfectly cured.”

This cure would have taken place sometime about the year 1860, as the writer also refers to the new Retreat then nearing completion. The second took place in the year 1861, and was related on oath in the Preparatory Processes by a witness who had it from his mother.

“Father Charles was called to visit a neighbour of ours, called Thomas Doyle, who lived in 23 Lower Ormond Quay. Father Charles came and saw the sick man; but, when about to leave the house, surprised all the members of the family by saying: ‘But there is another sick person here.’ No one had told him that a daughter of the sick man, Johanna Teresa, was also sick with a fever. They were not prepared to bring the visitor to her, as the room was not tidied up, and they tried to persuade him from going to see her. But Father Charles insisted. . . . (The girl) was ill

## FATHER CHARLES

with typhoid, or some other malignant fever, and was so exhausted that Doctor Willis said that if she could not rest and take a little sleep, she would die. She had not been able to sleep for several days. When Father Charles came she was sitting up in bed, but in a delirium. The fever had reached its crisis, and she had refused to take the prescribed remedies. Father Charles placed his hand gently upon her forehead, and quietly pressed her back-wards until she was in a recumbent position. Almost immediately she began to sleep, and when the doctor returned the next morning the crisis was passed, and he declared the patient to be out of danger.

"My mother frequently spoke to me about this event, and always said that she considered it as a miracle. She always declared emphatically that no one had spoken to Father Charles of the sick girl. I was also told that the doctor regarded the cure as miraculous; he was a Catholic. The girl in question was restored to health in the normal way, and lived for many years afterwards."

Another cure, dating from that period, is that of a young girl whose leg the doctors had decided to amputate as the only hope of saving her life. Alarmed and distressed at the prospect, the girl protested, but the doctors were insistent. A friend called in Father Charles, who came and blessed the girl three times. After a third visit the leg was so improved that the doctors agreed to put off the operation for a time, and finally decided that the proposed amputation

## FIRST YEARS IN IRELAND

was unnecessary as the diseased limb had been completely restored to its normal condition.

These cures, though sufficiently remarkable to attract public attention, presuppose rather than account for the reputation for sanctity with which the people invested the young priest who had come amongst them. Though it frequently accompanies sanctity, the gift of healing does not necessarily depend upon the holiness of him who possesses it. God is free to choose His instruments irrespective of their merits, and He did give an unworthy Apostle power to "heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out devils"; but ordinarily, God accommodates Himself to the popular conception, in which the two are intimately co-related. The exercise of the gift of healing pre-requires holiness of life, and the faithful will be scandalised rather than edified, by manifestations of preternatural powers in one whose life does not show him to be a near friend of God. Hence, if the people did flock to Father Charles and credit him with the possession of preternatural powers, it was because they recognised in him "a man of God." No other explanation will meet the situation. He did not seek popularity nor, indeed, had he any of the qualities which make for popularity. His appearance in those days, though imposing, was severe, and his manner by no means ingratiating; he could not, and indeed seldom attempted to preach, nor does he seem to have been much sought after as a confessor and director of souls. But the people called him "the

Holy Man of Mount Argus," and that title explains better than anything else their veneration.

In a short time Mount Argus had become the centre of a never-ending pilgrimage. "People came from every part of Ireland," the Chronicles record, "and crowds of them were continually about the place, and the poor man had not a moment to himself." After some years the physical strain of attending to this constant stream of callers became too much for him, and his Superiors were considering the advisability of removing him to another Retreat, at least for a time, when other reasons intervened to precipitate their decision.

A letter appeared in *Saunders's Newsletter*, purporting to come from a prominent Dublin doctor who concealed his identity under a pen-name, in which the priests of Mount Argus, sarcastically styled "the Blessed Fathers of Harold's Cross!", were accused of interfering with the medical profession by advising people to put no trust in its skill. The charge is based on one instance of a girl suffering from inflammation of the eyes. "As she did not derive any benefit from remedies which she had been advised to try," the writer states, "she applied to 'the Blessed (!) Fathers of Harold's Cross.' These gentlemen rubbed her eyes with the 'Relics!', ordered her to take holy water internally, and told her not to go near the doctors." The whole tone of the letter betrays the writer to have been moved more by a spirit of bigotry than any solicitude for the common good, and the fact that he had to seek

## FIRST YEARS IN IRELAND

publication in an anti-Catholic organ is significant. For some reason or other, perhaps because too contemptible to deserve notice, the charge was allowed to go unanswered ; but it would seem that this bitter invective was the reverberation of a campaign against Father Charles then being fomented amongst the non-Catholic element of the medical profession in Dublin. A rumour, which cannot now be authenticated, has it that they approached, or at least contemplated approaching, the ecclesiastical authorities to seek the removal of Father Charles. The matter, though dropped, was not forgotten, and it would have been still fresh in the minds of the ecclesiastical authorities when the name of Father Charles was again brought to their notice, and this time in connection with a matter which was causing great scandal to the faithful. It was his custom to bless water with the relic of St. Paul of the Cross for those who desired it for their friends. The great demand for this blessed water suggested a very profitable line of business to some enterprising and unscrupulous individuals, and soon many throughout the city were doing a brisk and lucrative trade selling water which they labelled and advertised as having been blessed by the "Holy Man of Mount Argus." Needless to say, Father Charles had no part in this unholy trafficking, nor could anyone who knew him suspect him of such a thing ; but the ecclesiastical authorities decided that the only way to end the scandal was to have him removed

## FATHER CHARLES

from Dublin, with which decision his Superiors thought good to comply.

No trace of this incident appears in any of his letters, nor was he ever heard to make any reference to it; but he must have realised that, instead of clearing his name, as he might have in justice expected, the authorities had by their action given the semblance of truth to the whisperings of scandal-mongers; and he would not have been human if he did not feel all the stigma of a scapegoat. In the distance the cloud may seem no larger than a man's hand, but when it burst over him, his soul must have rocked and trembled before the onslaught of the storm; and it needed a strong faith to see his Beloved Master in this strange apparition which came to him walking on the waters, and courage as great to go out to meet his Lord on the storm-tossed waves.

A letter written about this time to a sister who had need of consolation may well re-echo the thoughts and sentiments which had comforted him in his own distress. He exhorts her "to bear her illness with resignation, because it is the Will of God, and with consolation because it is so advantageous. She must not lose courage in her sufferings, and she should recall the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord chastises whom He loves, says St. Paul. Let my sister become accustomed to repeating these words, so sweet, and so meritorious: 'Blessed be God! May His Will always be done! I adore Thy Holy Will! Oh, my God, I thank Thee for this illness, this cross . . .'"



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St. Paul's Retreat,

CHAPTER THE NINTHUS.

IN ENGLAND AGAIN

ON the 3rd July, 1866, Father Charles left Mount Argus to become a member of the community of St. Saviour's Retreat, Broadway, Worcestershire. If he were given a choice, and it is not unlikely that in the circumstances the Superiors would have done so, he would not have chosen otherwise. For one who was physically exhausted and perturbed in spirit, Broadway offered rest and spiritual peace. At his own request, he was given a cell near the choir, and most of his day was spent in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Broadway was then the Novitiate House, and it seems as if he took advantage of the year of quiet that was given him to renew himself in the spirit and fervour of his novitiate days. After a little more than a year of this prayerful rest, he was considered sufficiently recuperated to resume the active ministry, and was appointed to St. Anne's Retreat, Sutton, where he found his old friend of St. Wilfrid's days, Father Salvian, in charge of the community and still writing up his Diary with untiring punctuality. Every movement of every member of the community is faithfully recorded; and for the next few years, the Diary supplies a day by day chronicle of the activities of Father

## FATHER CHARLES

Charles, but with little that is of biographical interest. The following entries, all made during the summer of 1868, are typical of the rest :

*Sunday, July 12th.*— . . Fr. Charles went to Croft to supply for Revd. Fr. Wells. Returned same evening.

*Saturday, July 18th.*— . . Fr. Charles went to Warrington to assist at the Forty Hours' Adoration, which begins there to-morrow. He will stay there until Tuesday, and sing Mass every day.

*Sunday, July 26th. Feast of St. Anne.*— . . Fr. Charles sang the High Mass.

*Sunday, August 23rd.*— . . Went to Rainhill with Fr. Charles after we had said our Masses here, to be Deacon and Subdeacon at Mass of Exposition for the Forty Hours' Adoration.

*Monday, August 24th.*— . . Went again to Rainhill with Fr. Charles who sang the Mass.

*Tuesday, August 25th.*— . . Fr. Charles sang the Mass of Deposition at Rainhill.

*Sunday, September 6th.*— . . Fr. Charles went to Widnes to say the 11 o'clock Mass. He returned to Sutton and preached in the evening.

Evidently, his talent for singing brought him much into demand, both at home and abroad, for the celebration of Solemn Masses ; with the result that he spent few week-ends in his monastery. But in addition to these weekly excursions, he did more than his share in the regular work of the community.

## IN ENGLAND AGAIN

At the end of his period of Rectorship, Father Salvian treats us to a summary of his term of office in which he pays high tribute to the members of the community, but singles out Father Charles for a special eulogy.

"I was fortunate," he writes, "in having a very good community of Religious, always ready for any work according to their condition: the priests in preaching and hearing confessions, attending sick-calls, going on supplies, preaching Charity sermons, and every other sacred duty of our ministry; and the lay-brothers in performing their special duties cheerfully and carefully, so that I had no occasion of complaining of any one."

Of Father Charles, he is more positive and enthusiastic in his praise. Of him, he writes:

"Night and day, he was called to the sick: he administered the Holy Sacraments, remained until a late hour in the confessional, catechised, preached: in a word, the burden of the work fell upon the shoulders of Father Charles."

Meantime, he had not been forgotten in Ireland. Every post brought letters asking for his prayers, and sometimes, sick people made the journey from Ireland. An entry of the Diary under date of April 1st, 1868, informs us that "a poor sickly

## FATHER CHARLES

young man came here from Dublin to be blessed by Fr. Charles. He left Sutton in the afternoon." The letters, he answered at length and with great sympathy. Many of his answers have been happily preserved as precious relics, and, although containing little reference to himself, their very artlessness makes them worthy of quotation as reflections of the writer's soul. One of them in particular is of such beautiful simplicity that it could only have been penned by one who had the mind and heart of a child. It is an answer to a letter from a mother who had written to ask his prayers for a daughter who was about to make her first Holy Communion.

"I was delighted to receive your letter a few days before the Saturday within the octave of Corpus Christi, in which you asked me to pray especially for your dear daughter. I have complied with your request, and asked the other religious to do likewise. I said Mass for her on the Saturday, that is, on the morning on which she was to receive her First Communion. I considered this a debt of gratitude towards your family and you, for the kindness which you have shown to me and to the Order.

"Oh! how grand and glorious and joyful must have been the state of your daughter on that day on which our Divine Lord gave Himself to her soul for the first time. On the night before her First Communion, Jesus in heaven spoke to her with the angels, and on that Saturday morning,

## IN ENGLAND AGAIN

when the sun rose above the hills, the Heart of Jesus was glad because He knew that the day had come when He would give Himself to a child. I hope that she will often say to Jesus: 'I give Thee my heart, and I make it all Thine.' I enclose a prayer for her, and ask that she may say three Hail Marys that I may have a happy death.

"May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be our place of refuge in life, and our greatest consolation at the hour of death."

Generally, his letters are in answer to requests for prayers for the sick, to whom he always and in the first place counsels resignation to the Will of God.

"My prayers have been, and shall be offered with all earnestness for your family, especially for your mother that she may obtain a happy death. It is true that she has suffered for a long time, being obliged always to remain sitting owing to her infirmity. Meantime, we must remember that sickness is often times the mark of God's favour. We have all to carry our crosses; God did not spare even His Blessed Mother from suffering. I will remember your mother in my Masses. Let her repeat ejaculations such as these: 'O my most loving Jesus, not my will but Thine be done.' 'O Mother of God, remember me and pray for me.' Let her be cheerful

## FATHER CHARLES

and have great confidence in God. I hope that God will give her all the graces necessary for a happy death. I hope that the children pray for their parents, and the parents for their children, and good effects will be the result to such a family."

To another he writes in a similar strain :

"I am sorry to hear of your dear husband's illness ; may God in His infinite mercy relieve him. At the same time, I hope you will try and be resigned to the Holy Will of God—resignation to the Divine Will greatly helps to our eternal salvation. Saint Gertrude used to say three thousand times in the day : ' My Jesus, let not my will but Thine be done.' ' My Lord never sends a cross without rewarding it with some favour when we accept it with resignation,' says St. Teresa. I have offered my prayers for him, and I will continue earnestly to pray for him, and also for yourself and dear daughter. You may say all the following prayers every day for nine days :—

' O Mary, Queen of Heaven and earth, and my gracious merciful Mother, intercede in my behalf before the throne of your Divine Son, and obtain for me the grace of ever burning with the flames of His Divine Charity. May the Divine Heart of Jesus and the most pure Heart of Mary be known, praised, blessed, loved, and glorified by all creatures for ever. Amen.'

## IN ENGLAND AGAIN

"Recite also one Our Father and Hail Mary in honour of St. Paul of the Cross.

"May the blessing of Almighty God descend upon you all and remain with you for ever."

Sometimes he is consulted by anxious parents concerning their children's vocations, and he answers with great caution and prudence.

"It is necessary for her before entering religion that she should prepare herself by fervent prayer," he writes to one of them. "Being perhaps a momentary impulse, a little trial may be necessary, and she should be guided by the obedience of her confessor."

Always, however, he is sympathetic and pains-taking even when troubled about trivial matters, as when a mother writes to ask his prayers and advice for a troublesome child.

"If the child is sometimes impatient and cries, put a Crucifix in her hands, and say: Look here, my child, what Jesus Christ has suffered!"

His constant advice to all in affliction was to seek their comfort and strength in meditating upon the Passion.

"... I hope that you are resigned to the Holy Will of God in all that little trouble," he writes.

"The Cross patiently borne for the love of God greatly helps for our salvation. . . . Strive to think every day for a few minutes on the bitter sufferings of Jesus Christ."

One letter, written in answer to a request for prayers for the conversion of a non-Catholic, very

## FATHER CHARLES

near to death, is of especial interest inasmuch as it manifests his confidence in the power of the Cross to touch the hardened heart.

“Kneel at his bedside with a Crucifix in your hands and pray most fervently to the Eternal Father, that, through the Five Bleeding Wounds of His Divine Son, and the bitter Dolours of His Blessed Mother, He may be pleased to convert him, and let him die in the Catholic Faith.”

In all his letters, one can hear the sighs of an Apostle, yearning for the conversion of souls and seeking out opportunities of snatching brands from the burning.

“ . . . There are seventeen novices in this community of St. Saviour's Retreat,” he wrote from Broadway in 1868. “If you know of any great sinners in Dublin, you may tell me by letter, and I will recommend them to the novices to pray for their conversion. . . . I wish to ask you about that dear friend whom you mentioned in one of your letters as not having approached the Sacraments for years, though he seemed well inclined, and came to the closing of the Mission at Mount Argus. Is he converted? If not, I hope the Mother of God,—the Mother of Mercy,—may pray for him, and bring him to a true conversion.”

In no letter that has been preserved is there a trace of any thought of self, except when he asks for a place in the prayers of his correspondents.



## IN ENGLAND AGAIN

Always he is the Apostle, whose only concern is the salvation of souls and the glorification of God.

After six years in Sutton, he was again transferred, this time to St. Joseph's Retreat, London. No information or even memory of the year he was to spend in London has survived; for biographical purposes at least, it is as "a year the locust hath eaten."

## CHAPTER THE TENTH

### RETURN TO MOUNT ARGUS

ON the 10th January, 1874, Father Charles returned to Mount Argus to find Father Salvian again waiting to welcome him and to chronicle his arrival.

*January 10th. Saturday.*—This morning Father Charles (Houben) arrived here from Highgate, having been appointed to this community. Fr. Charles is well known in this city of Dublin as well as throughout Ireland for the many miraculous cures which people say they have received from his blessing them with the Relic of St. Paul of the Cross, and by using Holy Water, blessed with the same relic. Fr. Charles was one of the first Fathers who came to Dublin after its foundation; and left in 1867, when he was removed because of his having become too remarkable for his extraordinary cures. People came from every part of Ireland and crowds of them were continually about the place, and the poor man had not a moment to himself. The consequence was that he got very thin and weak for not taking care of himself. So the Superiors at the advice of Cardinal Cullen removed him from this place. The principal reason why his Eminence advised our Superiors to remove Fr. Charles from Dublin

## RETURN TO MOUNT ARGUS

was that, people were making money by selling the Holy Water blessed by Father Charles. Of course, the poor man never dreamed that people would do such a thing, and make their fortunes selling Holy Water. He was ignorant of it all along."

The news of his return was soon blazed abroad, and the pilgrimage to Mount Argus again began. "More than three hundred people came to be blessed by Fr. Charles, which is the usual number of people coming every day to be blessed by him," the Chronicler notes; and so it was to continue day after day for the remaining nineteen years of his life.

He would have hardly had time to take his morning collation when the first callers would have come, and these were hardly gone when others arrived; but no matter how many came, he had time and patience for all. It was, as Father Salvian so graphically describes it, "up and down the whole blessed day, from morning to night," "going up and down fifty-nine steps, hundreds of times every day." The "fifty-nine steps" were the stairs leading from his cell to the parlours and church, for always it would seem he made a point of retiring to his cell as soon as he had dismissed his visitors. The physical strain of this activity must have been trying, and the time came when the number of callers became so great that the Superiors had, for his health's sake, to intervene. They appointed certain hours when Father Charles would attend in

## FATHER CHARLES

the "Old Chapel" to bless the people, and the Brother Porter was instructed not to call him except to people who came from long distances. This lessened the strain but only a little, for a large number of those who came to see him were from the country, and sometimes from across the seas. Father Salvian instances "several persons who came to Dublin from America and England for his blessing and to be cured of some disease or other."

The scenes which took place in the "Old Chapel" at the hours of blessing were always touching and often the occasion of extraordinary happenings. One who often witnessed them has given us the following graphic description: "It was interesting to watch the procedure which took place at each of these appointed hours, and those who have done so, will not easily forget those touching scenes. The first church, erected at Mount Argus, then stood at right angle to the present edifice along the line now occupied by the gateway of the cemetery. Here the people assembled three times each day to receive his blessing and to hear his counsels and instructions.

"A little before the appointed time, a sombre figure would be seen emerging from the pillared porchway of the monastery, apparently unconscious of his surroundings and the circumstances of time and place. Sometimes, a small group of people would await him, and sometimes, there would be nobody, for the people naturally enough assembled where they were certain of meeting him. But in a

## RETURN TO MOUNT ARGUS

few moments, and as if by magic, people would come in twos and three,—one could not say from where,—and would group themselves around him, the men baring their heads, the women standing in a prayerful attitude.

“Then all would arrange themselves in processional order and begin to make their way towards the ‘Old Chapel,’ but so slowly that the distance which was not a hundred yards took more than a half hour. At every few steps the procession would halt, and Father Charles would exhort them to meditate on some scene from the Passion and make them repeat with him prayers in honour of Christ’s Passion and the Sorrows of His Holy Mother.”

These addresses, though delivered in his halting, guttural English and devoid of rhetorical ornament or artifice, impressed by their very simplicity and the unmistakable earnestness of the man. Some of those who heard them could recall after half a century, not only the words but the very tone in which they were uttered. Generally the theme was the Passion or one of the Eternal Truths, and some notes discovered amongst his posthumous papers, if not his actual preparation for his addresses, will at least serve to give a notion of the manner in which he treated his subjects. The following is a fair specimen :

“The death of the saints is most precious in the sight of God. . . . Solomon and St. Augustine enjoyed all the imaginable pleasures of this world,

## FATHER CHARLES

but withal, they found in it nothing else than affliction of spirit. . . .

"The words which will be said to a dying saint, 'Depart, O Soul, out of this life,' will be consoling, knowing that this life has been spent loving and serving God most fervently. . . .

"We must lead a holy life, if we wish to lead (die) a holy death. . . .

"The Prophet calls the last day of Judgment 'the day awful,' 'the day of terror,' 'the day of wrath.' . . . 1.) The Angels will sing (sound) the Trumpet, etc. . . . 2.) Other Angels will appear with the Sign of the Cross on which Jesus Christ has died, etc. . . . 3.) The Judge Himself sitting in His throne accompanied with Angels, etc. . . .

"How dreadful must it be to have concealed mortal sins in confession, etc. . . .

"How terrible it must be for those damned souls at the first appearance of the Judge. When the Jews came to chain Him, to take hold of Him, at the first word: 'I am Jesus,' they fell all like dead on the ground. What will say Annas, Caiphas, Herod, who treated our Lord so cruelly. The great Judge will first turn to the just, and then to the reprobate.

"Those who have been trampled upon, ridiculed, who have followed Jesus Christ, beared (borne) the Cross with patience, mortified during this short life—how consoling for them!

"We shall all hear the Trumpet, etc. . . .

## RETURN TO MOUNT ARGUS

"The separation here on earth is very painful, but what must be the last separation, a Father to the right, a Mother to the left, etc., etc. . . ."

Meantime, the procession has entered the "Old Chapel," and the people are on their knees at the altar-rails, whilst he, standing before them, has begun to pray in a loud voice. Whilst he prayed, we are told, he was as one suddenly transformed. His usual reserve fell from him, and he assumed an appearance which has been described as "terrifying." His eyes would sparkle, his lips quiver, his whole frame tremble with emotion, whilst his voice became tense and impassioned. The people, kneeling around, listened with startled attention, the words of his prayers burning themselves upon their memory. Simple and sincere as they were, they felt themselves to be in the presence of a man of God, and listening to the Prayer of Faith that has power to save the sick.

His prayer ended, he blessed the kneeling throng, with the Relic of St. Paul of the Cross, first all in general, then each one in turn, and as he moved amongst them, there would not infrequently be a sudden commotion,—a start and a cry, as some poor sufferer found instant relief and thrilled with the joy of new-found health. A girl who brought a blind brother to the "Old Chapel" heard him cry out as Father Charles blessed him, and was surprised to see him come away from the altar-rails with the confident step of one who could see. This same girl, and on the same occasion, was the witness of an extraordinary happening. A man, who had

## FATHER CHARLES

made his way to the altar-rails leaning heavily on crutches, stood up and walked away, leaving his crutches behind him. When he had gone some distance, he hesitated as if in doubt and turned round to recover his crutches. Father Charles told him to go on, and the man did so, but after a time again stopped, and came back. This time Father Charles did not offer to prevent him, but handed him the crutches, saying: "Take them for you will need them." It was as he foretold. This man of little faith never walked unaided again.

When the blessing was finished, many of the people would await to accompany him back to the monastery, and on the way, some of them would seek the opportunity of telling him their troubles and of asking prayers for their sick friends. He would listen with patience and sympathy to all, promise them a remembrance in his prayers, and send them away with a word of comfort. It was perhaps on one of these occasions that a young man, who had come from a distance, asked him for prayers for a brother in danger of death. "Your brother is safe," Father Charles answered, and then, taking the young man a little aside, whispered: "But your soul is in danger." The man took the much-needed warning, made his confession, and returned to find his brother on the road to recovery.

As the years passed, and every day revealed some new wonder, the name of Father Charles became a household word throughout the city and country. Every place his duty brought him, he was met with



## RETURN TO MOUNT ARGUS

crowds, and on one occasion, it is reported, people on passing tram-cars abandoned their journey to kneel at his feet in the mud of the street. Father Salvian gives us a typical instance of these demonstrations of veneration :

*May 1st. Sunday.*—We had a grand procession to-day at four o'clock in honour of our Blessed Lady. Father Charles officiated at Vespers and the Procession, carrying the Relic of our Blessed Lady. It was a wonderful and edifying spectacle to see the people by thousands kneeling on the ground and saying to each other: 'Here is Father Charles!' 'That is Father Charles! May God protect the Holy Saint!' and so on. I myself heard and saw it, being near Father Charles more to protect him from being crushed by the crowd, who would have thrown themselves at his feet to kiss his feet, than to keep the Procession in order."

These outbursts of popular veneration were very trying to Father Charles, and he always seemed greatly relieved when the monastery doors closed behind him. There only was he free from the torture of publicity, for, as Father Salvian insinuates, his fellow-religious, knowing his dread of praise, refrained from speaking of his public reputation. "Though many are the cures and real miracles which take place," the Diary remarks, "we never take any notice of them, and much less Father Charles himself takes any notice of them."

## CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH

### SIGNS AND WONDERS

**I**N one place in his Diary, Father Salvian estimated the number of those who came to Father Charles at three hundred each day—an average which gives an aggregate of some hundreds of thousands for the twenty-eight years he resided at Mount Argus. How many of these received favours from his hands, it is for obvious reasons impossible to state. The small proportion of them which have been made public runs into hundreds, and some of these were so remarkable as to cause a public sensation, and were even commented upon in the public press of the day. He was spoken of in one newspaper article as “the renowned and saintly Father Charles,” who “has performed innumerable miraculous cures upon persons afflicted with all manners of diseases,” and an English Catholic weekly described “the constant pilgrimages of the blind, the lame and the halt to supplicate their cure at the hands of Father Charles Houben, and I am credibly informed,” the correspondent adds, “instances are not infrequent which furnish a practical commentary on the text of St. James: ‘The prayer of faith shall heal the sick.’”

It would be impossible in a limited space, to give anything like an adequate conception of the number

## SIGNS AND WONDERS

and nature of the cures obtained through his blessing. A few of the more remarkable and better authenticated must serve as illustrations of the rest, and these will be told in the exact words of the sworn depositions made in the Preparatory Processes.

The first statement is that of a gentleman who holds an important position in a Dublin business concern:

"I was completely blind," he testified, "as the result of an accident which happened to me when I was four and a half years of age. I was striking a stone with a hammer when some of the splinters jumped and entered my eyes. Up to that time, I had perfect sight and was going to school. I remained blind for eighteen months. I was brought to two or three oculists, who treated my eyes in some way, perhaps with drops, but whatever it was, I remember that it was very painful. I do not know what was the precise cause of the blindness, and there is now nobody living that could give me any information on the point. I suppose that I could distinguish night from day during these eighteen months; but I could not see anything. My aunt and my father often recalled the fact that I was blind during that period, and members of my family as well as others were certain on the point.

"A lady, whom I did not know, told my aunt, who was a Protestant, that she would bring me to Father Charles. This lady did bring me to Mount Argus; I went in a carriage and was

## FATHER CHARLES

helped into the Church. I could not see anything and I thought that I was alone in the Church. I was led to the altar-rails. All that I remember distinctly is that for a moment I saw Father Charles with his hands stretched out horizontally towards my eyes. I did not hear him speak, and I do not know if he touched my eyes or raised my eyelids.

"After that I left the Church, but I do not remember to have seen anything when I went out. Before I left the grounds of Mount Argus, however, I looked towards my left, and saw a cow, and cried out: 'Oh! look, a cow.' The cow seemed to me to be very small, and the field as if it were in a valley, whereas it was actually at our level. The lady who accompanied me was surprised and said: 'Yes, there is a cow there.' I am certain that I saw all the members of my family that evening; and I recall that there was some excitement when I returned home. Two or three months afterwards, I returned to school."

Another witness, who had herself been cured of infantile paralysis by Father Charles, testifies to the following cure:

"In the school of the Sisters of Mercy at Brown Street, Dublin, there was a little girl, called Norah Kavanagh, who up to her ninth year was completely paralysed and dumb. She had been treated without success in different city hospitals. Father Charles, about two and a half years before his death went to visit the family of the little girl,

## SIGNS AND WONDERS

because someone had told him of the desperate condition of the little girl. He prayed over her and then ordered her to get up and walk. To the great amazement of the mother, who was present, the little girl got up and ran across the room, exclaiming : ' It is God Who has cured me,' although up to that time she had never walked or spoken. Ever afterwards she had perfect use of her limbs."

Not less remarkable is the account of a cure given by another witness :

" I believe that Father Charles wrought a miracle in the case of an uncle of mine. This took place in the year 1878 or thereabouts. My uncle was then 32 years of age, and I was about fourteen. I was living in the same room with him, and I have a distinct recollection of what happened. One morning my uncle did not come to his work as usual, and word arrived that he was spitting up blood. I had never heard that he had done so before. The doctor, the famous Dr. Hamilton, came to see him and said that he could not live until night. The doctor did not give any remedy, but simply told my uncle to set his affairs in order and to call the priest. I do not recollect ever having heard whence the haemorrhage proceeded, but it was very copious ; he vomited more blood than one could believe to be contained in the body of a man. My uncle's wife suggested that somebody should go for Father Charles.

" The sick man had received the Last Sacra-

## FATHER CHARLES

ments and was too weak to move when Father Charles came in the afternoon, but he was conscious. I was in the house at the time, but I was not present at the interview between Father Charles and the sick man. Father Charles came into the room where we were all gathered to hear the result, and told us that the sick man would get well. His words set our minds at rest, because we had great confidence in Father Charles.

"Father Charles said that he would visit him again, and did so after two days. Immediately after the first visit the haemorrhage ceased and the sick man began to improve. My uncle remained in bed until the second visit of Father Charles, but after that got up, and continued his work as usual.

"The doctor came a little after Father Charles' visit, and confessed his amazement that the man was alive and well. The sick man had never another haemorrhage and died as the result of a cold in 1885."

On many occasions Father Charles showed himself to have been endowed by God with a knowledge of the future, and many witnesses have come forward to testify to his possession of this gift and to the remarkable fulfilment of his prophecies. The most notable of these testimonies is that of a prominent medical practitioner, whose future Father Charles made known to him when he was a boy. At the time he was studying for the priesthood, and was actually in the Passionist Juniorate, then attached to Mount

## SIGNS AND WONDERS

Argus, with the intention of becoming a Passionist.

“One morning,” he relates, “during the time he was confined to bed as the result of his accident, I decided to ask him if I would be a Passionist. I very much wanted to be a Passionist, and asked him: ‘Father, shall I be a Passionist Father?’ He was most emphatic in his answer: ‘No, not a Passionist, but a doctor.’ I was very much troubled, but determined to go on. A year afterwards I was chosen to go to the Novitiate in Worcestershire; but after a space of six months, during which time I continued in my determination to be a Passionist, I was told by the Superiors that I must leave. The words of Father Charles could not have had anything to do with this decision. I went away, and tried to return to Mount Argus as an alumnus; but I was not accepted, although the priests seemed anxious to have me back. At the time there was no possibility of my becoming a doctor and the thought never entered my head. I then tried to enter the Diocesan Seminary at Clonliffe, but did not succeed because I had not the money to pay for a place there. Then my uncle died and left me a good sum of money, and then for six months I was employed in my aunt’s factory, during which time I was happy enough; but afterwards I decided to return to Dublin to continue my classical studies.

“One day one of my old teachers of Mount Argus, a Mr. Campbell, with whom I was now studying, came into my room and said: ‘You

## FATHER CHARLES

should present yourself for the entrance examination to the College of Surgeons.' I told him that I did not think myself capable, but he insisted, so I did the examination, and obtained the second place.

"At this point I again tried to enter Mount Argus, but the Fathers advised me to continue my medical course. I had no desire, however, to become a doctor. I had a horror of blood; and besides, my father—who was a parsimonious man—would not have been willing to pay the fees for my course. As a compromise I decided to become a chemist, and it was this man who urged and finally decided me to become a member of the medical profession."

Perhaps the most remarkable of all, and for many reasons, are the depositions of that famous Sister of Charity, Mother Mary Arsenius of Foxford, who attributed not only her health but her success in her great work to the prayers of Father Charles.

"My first meeting with Father Charles," she relates,<sup>1</sup> "was on the 19th March, 1873, in our Convent at Mountjoy Street. It was the great feast of the Orphanage dedicated to St. Joseph. I was Mistress then and, as such, always supplied for the Rectress when she was otherwise engaged. On this particular day she was entertaining visitors including Mother Camillus Sallinave, who came to celebrate the children's feast.

"There was a ring at the hall-door. The

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Gildea: *Mother Mary Arsenius of Foxford, passim*:



## SIGNS AND WONDERS

Portress came to me saying: 'A priest and a Brother from Mount Argus are here, and want to see the Orphanage.' When I met the two religious, I recognised Father Charles. The lay-brother came forward and bowed, saying: 'This is Father Charles of Mount Argus, who was passing by and wants to see the Orphanage.' This brother always accompanied him, and he was never known to go anywhere without him. Then I said to them (whilst opening the door of the chapel): 'This is our chapel.' Without saying a word, Father Charles went straight to the Communion rails, knelt down for some minutes, oblivious of everything except the Presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. His head was bent low, lost in God.

"After some time he slowly rose, returned from the rails, and came with me to the infirmary. There were sick girls and children in the room. He went to each and blessed them, putting his hands on their heads.

"Then I knelt down and said: 'Father Charles, I want your blessing badly, as I have an open blister on my throat for the last three years to relieve the incessant pain in my head.' He then put his hands on my head and blessed it. I took the blister off that night and did not renew it."

Their next meeting was to be also accidental and most opportune. It took place about three years later when Mother Arsenius had been entrusted with the heavy responsibility of making a new foundation in

## FATHER CHARLES

Ballaghadereen, and was actually making preparations for her departure.

"I was in St. Vincent's," she states, "when Mother General sent me the word that Father Charles was in the hospital. He had just made a wonderful cure of a patient in St. Laurence's Ward. The man was twenty-eight years from the Sacraments. He suffered terribly from a most painful disease. When the terrible agony came on he used to curse, and had to be put in a small ward, called St. Luke's, off St. Laurence's Ward. The poor fellow was induced by the Sisters to sing a hymn or a song instead of cursing. Father Charles cured him. The miracle was spoken of by everyone. There was wild excitement through the hospital. I remember accurately the very spot where I met him on the stone stairs coming down from the ward. I said to him: 'O, Father Charles, I was longing to see you! I have got a big cross since you last saw me. I am to go as Superioress to a new foundation in Ballaghadereen, and feel, neither in body nor soul, fit for it.'

"He put his hands on my head and said in his foreign accent: 'Ballaghadereen, Ballaghadereen, Co. Mayo. Yes, you will go there, and be strong enough in mind and body, and do a great deal for God's glory in the West of Ireland.' To this blessing I attributed the grace given me to carry the three crosses in store for me, and the strength I got to face the hardest six months of my life which intervened before the Ballagha-

## SIGNS AND WONDERS

dereen Foundation ; for I became much better and was able to do much heavy mental and physical work afterwards."

How much Mother Arsenius did "for God's glory in the West of Ireland" has already been told in the story of her life. A woollen-mill, that gives employment to hundreds, orphanages and schools, sprang into existence at the touch of this remarkable and holy nun. Once again the two were fated to meet, and this time under the shadow of death.

"The intense worry of her mission in Ballaghaderreen," writes her biographer, "produced continual headaches, and at times as many as thirty leeches had to be applied to relieve the pain. She became seriously ill in 1884. The local doctor diagnosed her internal trouble to be most serious, and tests made by Dr. McVeigh, her old friend in Mountjoy Street, confirmed that opinion. When he informed the Mother-General that an operation was a matter of urgency, she sent a telegram to Mother Arsenius, ordering her to make the necessary arrangements, and asked Dr. McVeigh to accompany her to Dublin. When she arrived in Mountjoy Street Convent, everything had been settled for the operation ; but Mother Arsenius said to Mother Loyola : 'I believe if Father Charles (the famous Passionist) would come he would cure me.' The doctor said : 'She has more faith in an old man like Father Charles than in us.' Dr. McCormack, the Bishop, who was present, replied : 'Well, if she has, I cannot

## FATHER CHARLES

help it. She believes in Father Charles' prayers, and he cured her before. Even if she consents to the operation, can you guarantee she will be cured?'

"They replied that they could not. Some days passed. The doctors still urged the operation. She determined to appeal again to the Bishop and began a letter to him. She had barely finished the letter when she felt the sight leaving her eyes, and she became unconscious. The Sister who was on duty rushed out of the room, exclaiming that she was dying.

"Sister John Gaynor and Sister Aloysius Kerins hurried to Mount Argus in a cab for Father Charles. He coldly told them that they should let the good nun go to God. Eventually they prevailed on him to come to Mountjoy Street Convent, where they found the Sisters reciting the *De Profundis* and other prayers for the dying. The Thaumaturgus knelt beside the unconscious form, applied a relic to her, and said some prayers. Slowly but surely signs of returning vitality began to manifest themselves to the utter astonishment of every one in the room. Within a few weeks she was ready to return to Ballaghaderreen, where prayers for the repose of her soul had been publicly recited on Passion Sunday. Dr. McCormack went specially to Dublin on the receipt of a telegram notifying him that she was dying. The Mass he said in her room was not for the repose of her soul, but in thanksgiving for her miraculous recovery."

## SIGNS AND WONDERS

Mother Arsenius was still alive in 1928, and able to repay her debt of gratitude by bearing good testimony to the holiness of him who had snatched her from the very jaws of death.

At the risk of being tedious, one other cure must be given because of the remarkable circumstances which attended it. The witness was a young man of twenty at the time, and his recollections of the incident were clear and vivid. His mother was suffering from puerperal fever, and her condition pronounced to be hopeless by three doctors—Surgeon McArdle, Doctor Davey and Doctor Burnside. The twenty-first day, the crisis period of the fever, had already passed without any sign of improvement, when her son went for Father Charles. As the young man explained the condition of his mother and the nature of her ailment, Father Charles seemed suddenly to become very agitated. He began to walk up and down in front of the monastery, all the time muttering as if he were speaking to, and trying to drive away, some unseen presence. After a time he turned to the young man and said: "Send away your cab and go home. Your mother will get better." That night the fever began to abate and, although she had not taken any food or sleep for nearly a month, the woman was able to be up and about again in nine days. Doctor Burnside was amazed and, although a Protestant, had no hesitation in declaring the cure "a miracle."

While all these wonderful things were occurring, and his fame as a thaumaturgus was being carried

## FATHER CHARLES

through the length and breadth of the country and even across the seas to America and Australia, Father Charles still remained the same simple, humble priest, in nowise affected by his public reputation. He never spoke of anything that occurred, and in the monastery, it was understood that to speak of him as a thaumaturgus or even to refer to any of the miracles attributed to him would cause him such embarrassment that charity demanded silence. Consequently, as Father Salvian notes: "though many are the real miracles which take place, we never take any notice of them, and much less does Father Charles himself."

## CHAPTER THE TWELFTH

### THE MAN AMONGST MEN

ON his return to Mount Argus in 1874, Father Charles was not much past his prime and, it would seem, yet robust and active ; but a series of photographs, taken at intervals during the following years, shows the advance of old age to have been swift and premature. His earliest biographer gives us a pen-portrait of him as he was before sickness and age had set their marks upon him : " He was tall, of a strong, well-built, muscular physique, but attenuated, and towards the end of his life, stooping. His face rugged in outline, and sallow in complexion, bore traces of firmness of character. The forehead was wide, the nose prominent, and the lustre of his hazel eyes reflected the inward beauty of his soul." Though not by any means handsome, his appearance was always impressive and his features, when touched by emotion would lose their rugged severity and his eyes sparkle or melt in the sympathy of joy or sorrow. " I can never forget," a witness declared, " the wonderful smile which lit up his face as he spoke some word of comfort to a poor sick boy. He seemed transfigured and even beautiful, although ordinarily he was by no means so."

His comportment in public was marked by great

## FATHER CHARLES

reserve and even timidity. He avoided meeting people as much as possible, selected the most secluded and solitary part of the monastery grounds for his walks, and even in the monastery walked with the least possible noise and always close to the walls of the corridor as if he feared to be in the way of others. One who lived with him during his later years, when he was bent and twisted with feebleness and pain, has given us a pathetic picture of the old man arriving in choir for one of the Community observances.

“How well and with what pleasure I can recall his deportment as he entered the choir for the chanting of the Divine Office. Carrying in his left hand his biretta, which he would hold up near his face, he would thrust the fingers of his right hand deeply into the holy water stoop, and with them would sprinkle his forehead. Then, in a measured pace and while making the sign of the Cross, he would make his way to the centre, his body almost bent in two. By reason of his injury he could not genuflect without a support; hence, he would go towards the altar, place his hand upon the lowest step, and bend his knee, whilst his lips moved in prayer. Then raising himself with his right hand, and making a graceful reverence towards the Tabernacle, he would make his way to his appointed place in the choir-stalls.”

Generally, when moving about the monastery or in the grounds, he was so absorbed in prayer and his eyes so occupied in contemplating his Crucifix



## THE MAN AMONGST MEN

that he took no notice of those who happened to meet him; but he graciously acknowledged every salute of which he was conscious, and returned every greeting with a kindly smile. This habitual pre-occupation with the things of another world gave an impression of aloofness which was often misunderstood by those who met him casually. In recreation hours amongst his own brethren, he was simple and affable as a child. Although not possessed of a keen wit, he could relish the witticisms of others and enjoy the friendly teasing of his companions. Ordinarily the students took their recreations apart from the priests, but on certain feast-days all recreated together, and on these occasions Father Charles would invariably be found in the midst of the students. His conversations with them were usually of a pious nature, and as he had a large stock of stories from the Lives of the Saints, he could generally succeed in keeping their interest. Sometimes the more frivolous amongst them would, for the sake of teasing him, endeavour to introduce some mundane topic, but the old man was always equal to the occasion. With remarkable dexterity and without seeming to correct or even resent the interruption, he would recall the conversation to spiritual things. On one occasion someone reminded him of the story in which he was alleged to have endangered his officer's life. He listened with evident enjoyment to the student's particular version of the incident, but when pressed for a statement as to its truth, he merely smiled, and then began to tell his listeners

## FATHER CHARLES

of the trials and hardships of a soldier's life and to compare the iron discipline of the barrack-square with the sweet and considerate rule of the cloister. Only once did he show any sign of displeasure, and that was when a young priest questioned him in a frivolous manner about his power of working miracles. His reproof was curt and severe, and made such an impression on the offender that, even after the lapse of many years, he could still recall not only the actual words but even the smallest of the accompanying circumstances. "I commenced to tease Father Charles about what people said of his miraculous powers," he relates, "and asked him jokingly if he really performed miracles. 'He Who made you,' he said, looking into his cup of coffee, 'made me'."

All this continual teasing, although done in a spirit of fun, served its own good purpose. It broke down his natural reserve and discovered in him many of those amiable foibles and human touches that make the whole world kin. He had a good singing voice, and his love for music amounted almost to a passion. The sound of music, and particularly of a military band, was one of the very few things which could attract and keep his attention. If he happened to be walking in the grounds when a military band was passing, he would stand, listening intently, until the last strain had died away in the distance. During recreation-time on feast-days, he would sing for the Community when requested, but always something of a religious nature; and sometimes, at the request of the students, he would



Photo]

ST. PAUL'S RETREAT, MOUNT ARGUS.

[Army Air Corps.

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St. Paul's Retreat,  
Mount Argus.

## THE MAN AMONGST MEN

lilt the Dutch National Anthem, beating out the time with his hand. "The animation which he displayed on these occasions," one of them recalls, "was truly marvellous in one so old and feeble. For the moment he would seem to regain all his old spirit. Carried away by his recollections, he would forget the feebleness of age, and return in thought to the days when he went marching with musket on shoulder and pack on his back to the music of this soul-stirring song."

Although he was, as far as political sympathies count, as one without a country, he retained to the end a strong attachment for his native Holland. He seldom spoke of it; but, always when he did, there was a note of longing in his voice and a far-away look in his eyes. On one occasion he happened to come upon a picture of "A Dutch Landscape in Winter," in a house to which he had been called. The owner of the house had a large collection of pictures, most of them copies of the Old Masters, but Father Charles had eyes only for this picture, and every time he visited the house he would spend some time looking at it, and examining every detail. It was of little artistic merit, but for him it was the only picture in the collection, bringing him back across the years to the home and country of his childhood.

Deeper and stronger still was his attachment to his family. His life-long separation from them, though borne with resignation as a condition of the vocation which he freely accepted, was none the

## FATHER CHARLES

less hard to bear. In the correspondence which passed between them one can sense the heart-ache of an exile, and how much it cost him to have to put off and finally refuse their impatient demands that he should come to see them. "What does it matter where we are on earth," he writes on one occasion, "if only we are reunited with Jesus and Mary through all eternity?" and on another occasion: "Our separation is not for long. We shall see each other again in heaven. For this we must hope. Amen." Once, when they were more insistent than usual, he answers at greater length, and this time in a tone of finality: "I have been for a long time pondering over this long journey by land and sea. After so many years, I can scarcely speak my own language any more, and it would distract me too much. I hope, therefore, to see you all once more in heaven in company with Jesus and Mary and all the saints."

This constant refusal to visit them, though evidently misunderstood by his family, did not cause any estrangement or lessen one whit their love for him. "Time changes monuments," one of his brothers had assured him many years before, "but never will any of us forget you," and they were true to their word. Throughout all the years they kept up a regular correspondence with him, to which he as faithfully replied. His letters to them, all of them precious preserved, display a loving and anxious interest in the welfare of his family. At the festive seasons he never fails to send them his

## THE MAN AMONGST MEN

greetings, and at the beginning of the New Year prays "that the Heavens may open and shower down upon you an abundance of blessing: that God may preserve you from all evils of body and soul, and in the end of this mortal life lead you to the happiness of heaven, where the years never end, but never-ending happiness and peace prevail: these are the wishes I offer you all." Someone of them is married, and he hastens to congratulate and advise: "I wish you, dear brother and sister, much happiness in your married state. If God blesses you with children, I beg you to bring them up in the fear of God, to pray morning and evening, to say the Rosary in the evening, and to take special care of all that concerns their spiritual welfare." One of them is ill, and he writes to ask that he be kept informed of the progress of the illness, even by telegram if necessary, at the same time exhorting the sufferer to "bear her illness with resignation, because it is God's Will; and with consolation, because it is for her good." When death casts its shadow over them, he shares their sorrow and consoles those who remain. "I heard through your letter of the early death of our beloved brother, who was always so good, so thoughtful, and so kind to all. This death has given you all much cause for sorrow. But I heard with joy that his life was exemplary. Let it be our consolation, then, that it was God's Will to let him die a holy death, after having received the Last Sacraments."

News that his nephew is about to enter a Religious

## FATHER CHARLES

Order gives him great joy, and he writes at once : " To my great delight, I hear that you desire to embrace the Religious Life. I am of the opinion that you are really called to this state, and in order not to be negligent in such a matter, it is better not to wait too long. It is necessary then to pray fervently and without ceasing. Every good and perfect gift comes from on high, from the Father of all Light ; live, then, in the fear of the Lord, and fly everything that can even in the smallest way be offensive in the eyes of God, Who is All-holy and sees all things."

Sometimes, but not often, he asks for news of his old neighbours and friends of his boyhood days. " Is my dear god-father, John Andrew Lutyen, dead or still alive . . . and William Pelters, the friend of my dear dead brother, John Peter, and Leonard and Gerard Donners, the tailors, and M. Calcen, who was long ago the Director of the College at Sittard, and M. Schyren of Broeksittard . . . ? " He shows little concern about the lesser things of life and the temporal affairs of his family. Seldom does he mention them in his letters, and when asked for advice about business matters, his answer invariably is : " I will pray about it." Once only does he speak of himself and his work, and then with evident reluctance : " You ask me what I do here," he writes. " My occupations are : saying Holy Mass every day, preaching, hearing confessions and blessing the people."

But sooner or later, in every letter he wrote to

## THE MAN AMONGST MEN

them, he returns to the thought and the hope that was ever uppermost in his mind: "Although it may be that we shall never see one another again in this world, we must hope to meet again after this life in heaven, if we have lived well." In the desire of this happy consummation, his love for them found its satisfaction, and every day, as he frequently assured them, he prayed to find them all again in God. Dearly as he loved them, he would not for their sake or even to satisfy the cravings of his own heart, turn aside from the straight and narrow way that leads to their Eternal Home and his.



## CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH

### THE MAN OF GOD

**I**T is rarely that a public reputation survives the scrutiny of intimates, and the possibilities of such an eventuality are very much decreased when the man is a religious, who must live under the constant and close observation of many eyes, and have his every word and action measured against a standard which demands nothing less than perfection. The religious who can come through such a test with the reputation of a saint has well deserved the title.

The Community of Mount Argus had no doubt as to the sanctity of Father Charles, and many of them have testified on oath in the Preparatory Processes to their belief that he had reached a very high degree of holiness. Most remarkable and valuable testimony of all is that of Father Salvian, who was always so critical, and in this case made it his business to be particularly observant and critical. Usually he speaks of the "saintly Father Charles," and in one place states that "it cannot be denied that poor Father Charles is truly a living saint."

It is never easy to describe or to assess holiness ; in this instance it is particularly difficult because of the extraordinary reticence of the man in all things concerning his spiritual life. Except his confessor,

## THE MAN OF GOD

he took nobody into his confidence, nor did he ever commit to writing anything of an intimate nature. It was only rarely and by accident that he revealed his inner self. Consequently our knowledge of his spiritual life must be superficial, and depend entirely on the observations of his companions.

The characteristic features of his sanctity, according to Father Salvian, were "his simplicity, humility and recollection in God," which in the Diarist's estimation were "such as our Holy Father, St. Paul of the Cross, would desire in his religious." His "recollection in God," as described by Father Salvian and many others, was indeed remarkable even in the annals of hagiography. Habitually his mind was absorbed in God to the exclusion of all earthly things. In moving about the monastery, and even in the cab when on his way to visit the sick, he was so occupied in prayer that he became unconscious of his surroundings. Frequently the Diary refers to him as being "constantly wrought up in God," and describes him as going about with "his eyes always closed, never seeing what is going on before him, being constantly wrought up in prayer; and, if spoken to, he seems not to understand what is said." This unconsciousness of his surroundings occasioned many embarrassing situations, and once, according to the Diary, went near to having serious consequences:

"*Wednesday, 16th February (1887)*—Poor Father Charles had an accident which might indeed have been rather serious but that his guardian angel

## FATHER CHARLES

protected him. He fell into a hole about six or seven feet deep. The plumbers, who are at present repairing the water-pipes, had taken up a trap-door and left it open. Poor Father Charles, who is always wrought up in God, did not see the danger, and down he went straight into the hole. He complains only of a little pain and the fright he had."

Another entry again emphasises his constant pre-occupation with spiritual things, but in a more pleasant setting :

"*Monday, November 4th (1889)*—This being the feast of St. Charles, the Patron Saint of our saintly Father Charles, Father Rector gave a glass of wine to the Community. Poor Father Charles could scarcely induce himself to come down to be present at our drinking his health and wishing him many happy returns of the day. Being called upon to give us a song, after repeated requests, he sang a sacred song in German. Everyone knows what a beautiful voice he has, and if the song is a sacred one, he puts his heart into it and you see at once that his thoughts are in heaven. After the singing, he would have run away but that he was requested to stay, and was as lively as could be, speaking, of course, about his holy Patron."

In making his way about the monastery, he walked slowly, with his eyes fastened on a little Crucifix which he carried in the palm of his hand, and with his lips constantly moving in prayer and whispered

## THE MAN OF GOD

ejaculations. Sometimes, however, he would be seen to stand for a long time, gazing intently at a picture or something else, as if lost in thought. "He gave me the impression of being constantly in the presence of God," one of them states. "This world has no interest for him, except in so far as it reminded him of God and Eternity. Once, when I had occasion to go to the kitchen, I found him standing and gazing into the fire; and when I approached, he began immediately to speak of hell." Another remembers that frequently after the early night-fall of a winter's day, he would be seen standing at a window from which he could see the brick-works, which were situate at the back of the monastery, the furnaces of which would at night-time fill the sky with a red and angry glare. For a long time he would stand there lost in thought, "and if anyone came near him, as I, who often did so, well know," the witness continues, "he would point towards the furnaces with his finger and say: 'Look,' and then, after a pause: 'Oh! the sufferings of the damned, and I deserve them all for my sins! O God, be merciful to me a sinner!' and again, after another pause, he would exclaim, whilst striking his breast: '*Hic seca, hic ure, sed parce in aeternum*—Wound and burn me here, but spare me in eternity!'"

His reticence concerning his spiritual experiences makes it impossible to say what thoughts and visions held his mind so close during these long hours of contemplation, but there is good reason to think

## FATHER CHARLES

that he was at times favoured with visions of heavenly things. "I can never forget one ecstatic moment so deeply was I impressed by it," wrote one of his brethren. "It took place in the refectory. It is our custom to read from the life of a Saint or some other spiritual book during meal-times, except on the evening of a fast-day, when only a collation is taken, which was the case on this particular evening. Everything was as usual: the meal was being taken in silence, in which one could hear the whispered ejaculations of Father Charles. Then suddenly he started up from his seat with unusual agility, threw down his napkin and, holding his left hand over his heart and his right arm outstretched, cried out in a loud voice: 'Mary! Mary!' For a time he remained motionless and rigid as a statue, gazing the while towards a point in the ceiling. Naturally, we all looked towards the point indicated by his eyes, thinking to see something there, but we saw nothing. Nevertheless, we felt that something extraordinary was taking place, and all were overcome by a feeling of reverence. For some moments he remained in an attitude of ecstasy, until called back to himself by the voice of the Superior: 'Father Charles, Father Charles, you are disturbing the Community!' He then sat down and resumed his supper as if nothing had happened.

"Naturally this incident, because so unusual, made a deep impression on me, and I can recall it as vividly as if it had only happened yesterday. I firmly believed, as did all who were present, and for

## THE MAN OF GOD

my part, time has not altered my conviction, that he saw that which it is not given to us to see. This incident, apart from the impression it made and the interest it aroused in all present, has this additional value," our informant concludes, "that it helps to form a true estimate of his sanctity and of his habitual state of interior recollection. If, in the full presence of the Community and during the most prosaic act of the common observance, he could be so carried out of himself and be so forgetful of all his surroundings, what must have been his ordinary state when alone in his cell with God?"

The other features of his sanctity singled out for special notice by Father Salvian, and commented upon in all recollections of him, were his remarkable humility and simplicity. Though constantly surrounded by an atmosphere of veneration, he still considered himself to be "full of sin." "So many confessions, so many communions, so many Masses, and yet so full of sin," he would say, and then add in a voice full of the anguish of doubt: "Shall I be saved? Shall I ever see Heaven?" With a sincerity which none could doubt, he would marvel at the fervour of others, and in particular of a convert priest who made a retreat in Mount Argus. "I saw him in that room," he would say, "reciting his Office while tears of devotion streamed down his cheeks. Oh! the fervour, the holiness of that convert is extraordinary," and then, uncovering and bowing his head, he would add: "*Parce mihi peccatori, parce Domine!*—Spare, O Lord, spare me,

## FATHER CHARLES

a sinner !” These outbursts of self-reproach were without even the suspicion of ostentation or insincerity. On this point all the witnesses are emphatic and in such agreement, that the testimony of one may serve for all. “He had no desire to impress others, and I am of the opinion that he was entirely indifferent to what others thought of him. He never stopped to consider what others thought of him, for his thoughts were wholly with God.” Only a great simplicity could have made such manifestations appear spontaneous and sincere ; and simplicity would seem to have been the distinctive characteristic of his piety and his character.

Even as an old man his manner and conversation was that of a child, and many years of experience of men did not destroy the trustful innocence of childhood. Guileless himself, he could not suspect guile in others, and was always a ready prey for any who wished to deceive him for their profit or pleasure. It is recorded that one of the Community with a bent for practical jokes, used to send him to the room of another old priest, notorious for his irascibility, to ask him for his blessing. Always Father Charles would go, and each time come away more surprised than embarrassed. It was also noticeable that he manifested a predilection for children and, although generally reserved in his manner, he lost no opportunity of speaking to young people, with whom he seemed to be at his ease.

The same childlike simplicity marks his spiritual life. His spiritual reading books were few and of

## THE MAN OF GOD

that kind which appeals to the imagination rather than to the intellect, Lives of Saints being prominent amongst them and—most thumbed of all—a copy of that highly imaginative and vividly illustrated publication, *Hell Open to Christians*. What spiritual thoughts appear in his letters and papers are expressed with a simplicity that is almost childish, and his habit of using material representations, such as the red glow of the furnace in the night-sky and other things, to aid him in his meditations would seem to suggest that his conception of spiritual truths did not differ much from that of a child.

It was this childlike simplicity that beautified a character that was otherwise uninteresting, and that so endeared him to his brethren in religion, as it was this same simplicity in spiritual things that made him so dear to God.

Variety is the mark of all God's handiwork. No two things in creation are exactly alike; each smallest thing has its distinctive peculiarity. The same variety beautifies the world of Grace. Each creation of Grace has something in it that distinguishes it from all others, and these distinctive marks are as subtle and as definite as the qualities that distinguish man from man. If we attempt to mark out from amongst the many virtues of Father Charles, the distinctive quality of his sanctity, we are at once confronted with his simplicity. Simplicity is, of course, the necessary accompaniment of sanctity, but his simplicity has its own peculiarity, inasmuch as it was not the consequence of holiness but rather



## FATHER CHARLES

its beginning. Early in life, he began to know and love God, and that first knowledge and love remained unchanged through the years. As an old man, he could still speak and think of God and spiritual things as he spoke of them when a child.

By nature and by grace, he was one of the "little ones," whom Christ so loved, and to whom He gave a prescriptive right to a place with Him in the Kingdom of Heaven.

## CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH

### THE RELIGIOUS

**I**T was a poet playing at being a monk who described the religious state as the sweet bidding place of "silence and sacred rest, peace and pure joys." These things there are, and in plenty in the religious life, but in no place in this world can joy and peace find a sweet bidding-place, and one who had grown old in a monastery has said that "it is no small matter to dwell in a monastery or congregation, to live there without blame, and to remain faithful until death." (*Imit. I, xvii, 1*). The cup which Christ offers to those who would be of His company is of "vinegar mingled with myrrh," and only those who have tasted and drunk deeply of it can know its bitterness. It is not the hardships incidental to the religious life, which constitute its difficulty. Hardships there are, indeed, but not greater or more numerous than in any other state of life. The real, essential, and paramount difficulty of the religious state is the voluntary renunciation of liberty which it demands. Liberty is our nature's last and dearest right; its loss is the sorest hurt that a man can endure. That this renunciation is made freely does not make it any the less painful to endure. No act of a man's will can change his nature, and human nature is essen-

## FATHER CHARLES

tially impatient of restraint and resentful of domination. The religious, of course, will have motives to inspire him and the Grace of God to support him in this constant self-repression and renunciation ; but an inspiring motive, though it makes an end desirable, does not make it any the easier to attain; and grace, while it enlightens the mind and strengthens the will, does not stifle the cravings of nature or ease one whit the pain of sacrifice. It follows that the renunciation of self-dominion, entailed in all the vows of religion, but more specifically in the vow of Obedience, is the real sacrificial element of the religious state, and the touchstone by which the life of a religious must be judged.

It may be said without hesitation that the most wonderful feature in the exterior life of Father Charles was his absolute and complete repression of self. Not only did he submit always and cheerfully to the behests of obedience, but he was never known even to express a wish to have things otherwise than his Superiors had ordered them. Only once do we find him expressing a wish, and then, it is by way of humble request. A small legacy has come to him at the death of some member of his family, and he writes to the Father Provincial for permission to devote the money to the celebration of Masses for the relief of the Souls in Purgatory.

Perhaps, it was just because of his proved obedience that the most distasteful duties and the hardest work seemed always to fall upon him, but it mattered

## THE RELIGIOUS

not how uncongenial or difficult the duty, he set about it as if he had chosen it for himself, and always gave of his best to the doing of it. And there were occasions, it would seem, when it was not easy for him to comply with the commands of his Superiors and he could have pleaded valid reasons to excuse himself. In his later years, when he was so weak and feeble that, in the opinion of Father Salvian, he was not really able to officiate in the Sanctuary, he never complained when "appointed to say public Masses or to act as Deacon at High Mass every Sunday." Many of his brethren have testified that they never knew him to fail in obedience, and have given it as their considered opinion that he had attained to perfection in the practice of this virtue, submitting himself to all and any who took it upon themselves to exercise authority over him. When he had occasion to go far from the Retreat, a brother was usually assigned him as his companion, whom Father Charles treated with all the deference and respect due to a Superior. He asked "permission from him for everything he did, as if he were his Superior. He went so far as to ask him what time he should rise in the morning, the hour at which he should celebrate Mass, and when he should take his meals."

The crucial test of his obedience, however, was his submission to a member of the community—none other than our old friend, Father Salvian—who, for some reasons known only to himself, elected to act as his Director, and carried out his

## FATHER CHARLES

self-imposed duty with a severity that amounted to tyranny. On the slightest pretext, and more often than not, without any reason whatsoever, he would correct and lecture Father Charles, even in the presence of the Community. These corrections were administered with such a show of authority and his vigilance was so relentless, that it came to be believed amongst the community that he was acting under instructions from the Higher Superiors. No official confirmation of this belief has ever come to light, nor is there any notice in the Diary of his ever having been given such a commission, which leads one to believe that he was acting wholly on his own initiative. However that may be, it is certain that Father Charles had no knowledge of any such arrangement, and could only regard these humiliating lectures as manifestations of a peevish temper. As a matter of fact, it would appear from the manner in which he received them that he did regard them as unauthorised, and even ridiculous, without however showing any signs of resentment or impatience. "The reputation of his (Father Charles') sanctity having reached the ears of Father General," wrote one of the community, "he was anxious to meet him and make his acquaintance. The meeting took place on the occasion of one of his Visitations, and he professed himself profoundly impressed by his spirit of prayer and the intimacy of his union with God. Before returning to Rome, he commissioned Father Salvian to watch Father Charles closely and to take note of everything

## THE RELIGIOUS

extraordinary in his life, and also, if the occasion offered itself, to put his virtue to the test."

"I must confess," the writer continues, "that at times, he tried his patience to the point of making him lose it, if that could be done. Continually he corrected, scolded and humiliated him in the presence of the community. But Father Charles never showed any resentment, nor sought to excuse himself or give any explanation, but stood silent and penitent, having the appearance of one who had committed some monstrous crime. If perchance he did speak, it was only to repeat in a tone of self-reproach: 'Poor old Charlie.'

"One such occasion I can clearly recall, because of the amusement it occasioned. Father Salvian corrected him before all the students, with a great show of indignation, for some trivial or rather imaginary fault, but broke off suddenly in the very midst of his tirade and went stamping away. Then, we, who had been interested spectators of the scene, were surprised and amused to see Father Charles tap his forehead with his finger, whilst indicating with a nod his departing tormentor. There was nothing of resentment in the gesture, because he was smiling pleasantly at the time, but rather a playful hint that he had serious doubts as to the sanity of Father Salvian, and, taking all things into consideration, his doubts were not altogether unwarranted."

The same spirit of exact and prompt obedience characterised his observance of the Holy Rule.

## FATHER CHARLES

Here again, he permitted himself no exemptions, even those which he might have lawfully taken. Though he was being continually called to the church and parlour, he yet managed to be present at all the community observances ; and, although it necessitated " going up and down fifty-nine steps hundreds of times every day " as Father Salvian was careful to note, he returned to his cell every time that he was free to do so, just because the Rule so directed. Even when so weak that " he should not have been allowed to say the Office at all " in the opinion of Father Salvian, he still continued to rise for the night observances until positively forbidden to do so by his Superiors.

His observance of poverty went even beyond that required by the Rule. His habit, though always carefully clean and neatly arranged, was generally worn threadbare, and patched to the utmost. When his Superiors insisted that it was past its use, he always asked for one that had been cast-off by some other member of the community. His secular dress was obtained in the same manner, without any regard for size or shape, with the result that the rare occasions on which he appeared in his ill-fitting and strangely assorted walking-out attire were eagerly looked forward to, and as thoroughly enjoyed by the younger members of the community. " It always seemed to us," writes one of them, " that Father Charles in secular dress was an absurdity. He wore a large cape, a silk hat, and carried an umbrella, all of which appeared as old as him-

## THE RELIGIOUS

self, were badly shaped, creased, and very badly worn. As he made his way along the corridor near to the wall, watched by all the concealed observers, he could not fail to notice how interested all were to see him so wonderfully transformed. But he took it all in good part, and his dear old face would beam with the most jovial of smiles."

Amongst the writings found in his cell was a sermon, "On the End of the Religious." Clearly not of his own composition, and in all probability never preached by him, he had evidently transcribed it for his own use, and may be taken as a fair indication of his notions of the Religious State. The text is: "You are not of the world," and the main theme is the separation from the world that is necessary for the perfection of the religious state. "God has called me to the Religious state," it begins, "in order that I may live therein separated from the world, disengaged from the world, crucified to the world, and absolutely dead to the world." Another may have written these words, but Father Charles lived them. His unworldliness was remarkable even in one who was known to be so holy. He seemed to have no interest in anything except the salvation of souls and the glorification of God. He rarely read the newspapers, and during recreation time, talked only of spiritual things. Seldom does he make any reference to current events in his correspondence, and then only when the interests of the Church are concerned. His comments on these occasions show him to have possessed a keen



## FATHER CHARLES

appreciation of the significance of events together with a large vision which enabled him to see the designs of God working through the machinations of men. When the whole Catholic world was perturbed by the violence being offered to the person of the Sovereign Pontiff by the followers of Garibaldi, he was able to write calmly and wisely of the situation.

“Regarding the persecution of our Holy Catholic Church, I am of the opinion that, by means of all these persecutions, Catholics will become more steadfast in the Holy Faith, and will be thus encouraged to fulfil more faithfully the duties of their state, will be brought to esteem more the value of the faith, will be more grateful for so great a benefit, and will thank God Almighty that He has caused them to be born in the bosom of a church which the greatest kings of the earth have regarded and esteemed as their Mother. I would recall the words of our Holy Father the Pope of Rome. Faithful children of the Church remember constantly these beautiful words spoken in 1870 by His Holiness Pius IX: ‘The grand army of the Pope are the souls who pray. With this army, every obstacle will be overcome.’ ”

A priest, who made a prolonged stay in Mount Argus for the express purpose of observing for himself the saintly life of Father Charles, thus put on record the result of his observations: “It was my privilege to pass some weeks at St. Paul’s Retreat in company of the Fathers and Brothers of the

## THE RELIGIOUS

Passionist Order, and of the Most Reverend Dr. Murphy, Archbishop of Hobart, Tasmania. As I heard much of Father Charles, not alone in distant Australia but also in the various parts of Ireland that were visited subsequent to my return from the Colonies, it was with feelings of the deepest interest that I took up my abode in the monastery hallowed by his presence. The manner of life, the mode of action, and the equanimity of disposition of this son of St. Paul of the Cross were diligently observed by me. Deeply edified by the sight, I could not refrain from noting the signs of extraordinary sanctity that were abundantly manifest. The words of the Queen of Saba soon recurred to me when my eyes had seen and I had proved that scarce one half of his sanctity had been told me. Then indeed, it was mine to congratulate the Religious of St. Paul's Retreat for their happiness in being always near him. The crowds constantly in evidence to seek his blessing, the requests for a share in his prayers constantly coming from all climes, and the gratitude evinced for a favourable response to his orisons—all bespeak the unusual. If perfection be attained by the careful and regular discharge of the ordinary duties of our respective states, then truly, may Father Charles lay claim to its possession—for his observance of the Holy Rule was such as to remind an observer of St. Aloysius Gonzaga."

Before entering religion, Father Charles had professed his readiness "to go down alive into the pit, for our dear Lord's sake," and his life, as a

## FATHER CHARLES

religious, was fully in keeping with the spirit of that declaration. By a life of self-sacrifice, he consummated the oblation he made on the day of his Profession, and plumbed the depths of that "pit," into which he professed himself so eager to descend for his dear Lord's sake.

## CHAPTER THE FIFTEENTH

### THE PRIEST

**I**T was said of Andrew Houben by those who knew him as a boy that "he knew only two roads,—the road to school and the road to Church." For him, both roads led to the Altar on which he would one day stand as a Priest of God. When at last he did ascend the Altar to offer the Holy and Awful Sacrifice, he had achieved his life's ambition. So great a place did the celebration of Holy Mass hold in his life, that he appeared to live from Mass to Mass, and that day was for him no day that did not begin with the celebration of the Holy Mysteries.

For many years of his life, he managed to conceal from all an ailment which must have caused him intense suffering, but he could not conceal, it would seem, his anguish when prevented by circumstances from offering Holy Mass. According to Father Salvian, this was for him "the greatest trial." Reporting an indisposition resulting from an accident, he writes: "On Wednesday last, Father Charles broke his leg. It is not expected that he will be able to get out of bed soon, which for him is the greatest trial, on account of his not being able to say Mass." How well the Diarist realised his colleague's feelings in this matter is borne out by

## FATHER CHARLES

a letter written by Father Charles to his brother about this same time. "I must tell you," he writes, "that to my great misfortune, I broke my leg on the Wednesday of Holy Week. I suffered great pain for three weeks and four days," and then adds, marking the date on which he resumed the celebration of Mass as a day worthy of remembrance: "On the 29th May, Mary's month, I began again, thank God, to say Mass."

His preparation for Mass occupied many hours, beginning in the early hours of the morning—how early none could say. "It is impossible to assign any limits to his preparation, because it is impossible to say at what hour of the morning he arose," is the opinion of one of his companions; but it was generally believed that he spent the three hours, which intervened between Matins and Prime, in making his preparation, and that in his later years, when forbidden to rise for Matins, he began at half-past-four, or even earlier. However that may be, it has been attested by many that no matter how early one happened to enter the choir in the morning, Father Charles would always be found in his place, absorbed in prayer.

His demeanour and comportment, whilst at the Altar, was something which, once seen, could never be forgotten, and all recollections of him bear witness to the impression which the fervour of his celebration made on all who were privileged to attend and assist at his Mass. "To be present while he offered the Holy Sacrifice," we are told,

## THE PRIEST

"was to see a man dominated and animated by the most powerful emotions that can influence a human being. It was to see a man agitated almost to trepidation by the feelings of reverential love and fear that struggled within his breast. It was, in fine, to see a man who realised, as much as man may, the tremendous nature of the office which he was called upon to fulfil."

"He did not celebrate Mass in the church for two or three years before his death," our informant continues, "except on Sundays, when the majority of the Fathers were absent giving missions. These occasions were not welcomed, at least by the greater part of the congregation, as he was very slow in celebrating, and in his last years, often took as much as an hour to finish his Mass. Indeed, if left without assistance, he would exceed the limits of an hour. During all the time I knew him, he seldom celebrated without shedding tears, but more abundantly on the Feasts of the Passion when he said Mass with unusual fervour, pausing long over every word. At times during the Mass, there would be prolonged pauses during which he appeared lost to all around him, and tears would come trickling down his face so that he would have to use his handkerchief."

"When he celebrated in the choir, we students took it in turn to serve him,—a duty which we regarded as a privilege, even though the student to whose lot it fell, would still be serving him when the others had already made much progress in their

## FATHER CHARLES

day's work. When, by reason of the feast or some other motive, he was more fervent than usual, the pauses would become more frequent and more prolonged, the Mass would proceed so slowly that there was danger of its occupying an altogether unreasonable time. On these occasions, someone would whisper: 'Go for Father Salvian,' this being the only remedy available to those of us who had not yet reached Holy Orders. Word would be sent to Father Salvian, who would come at once to the choir, and putting on a small stole, would kneel at the foot of the altar. The effect was electric. Not a word would pass between them; but Father Charles understood well the purpose of this strategy, and would proceed with proper haste under the reproachful eye of his mentor.

"After a time, however, he would be again overcome by some overpowering emotion. Everything around him faded and vanished and he was alone with God, forgetful of all else. But Father Salvian is insistent and will not let him forget his presence, but brings him back to himself by a gentle touch on the shoulder.

"Certain prayers and words in the Liturgy of the Mass had a powerful appeal for him. One such word, which I cannot forget, was the word *impressam* (stamped) of the third prayer in the Mass of St. Paul of the Cross, which concludes thus: *et Tuam Sanctissimam Passionem cordibus nostris impressam*. (May Thy Most Holy Passion be stamped upon our hearts.) At this word, he

## THE PRIEST

would strike his breast with such vehemence as to give the impression that he desired that the Passion should be, in some way, stamped upon his heart."

After his Mass, he retired to some quiet corner of the Church to make his thanksgiving, his favourite place being a corner of the organ-loft, where he knelt without support on the stone-floor. Here he would remain in meditation and prayer until summoned by his bell to attend the first of the day's callers. It was, perhaps, during one of these hours of intimate communing with his Divine Guest that the thoughts came to him which appear in a letter to his brother, the Curé of Amstenrade.

"During these holy days of Christmas," he wrote, "I meditated on the priestly state; and when I thought of the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the ardent wishes and desires with which the Saints of the Old Law expected the coming of the Messiah, the Redeemer whom God in His Mercy had promised to man, fallen and condemned to hell, and how the Saints of the Old Law did not cease to send up to heaven their sighs and prayers to hasten His coming, (I could not help thinking) how, had they the happiness of seeing Him, they would,—what would they not have done to give thanks to the Divine Saviour? With what fervour would they not have sought to make known their love? With what zeal would they not have thanked Him for all the favours and graces which He had come to bring them? . . .



## FATHER CHARLES

"What can I, miserable man, give to the Divine Redeemer for these so great and innumerable favours—so great that they cannot be told—which, for so many years, I have received from His mercy?

"This consideration will urge me to thank God with greater fervour, always to please Him more, and to do and to suffer everything for His love and for His greater glory."

His great reverence for the Mass extended to everything that pertained to its solemnity, and, in particular, to the Sacred Liturgy. Usually, he was given a prominent part in all the liturgical services, and his rendering of the sacred music was full of reverence and feeling. He sang as he prayed, with all his soul in every syllable, and to hear him sing the *Dies Irae* of the Requiem, was to realise as never before, the soul-stirring pathos of that wonderful hymn. "It seemed," writes one who often heard him, "as though his whole soul went out from him into that marvellous harmony of sound and sense. Sometimes, it must be admitted, his feelings would lead him to over-accentuate a word or phrase, and his powerful voice would be heard away on its own, above the others, and out of time and tune. This invariably happened during the singing of the seventh verse, which reads :

*Quid sum miser tunc dicturus*

*Quem patronum rogaturus?*

*Cum vix justus sit securus.*

(What shall guilty I then plead?

## THE PRIEST

Who for me will intercede,  
When the saints shall comfort need?)

"This verse was for him full of meaning, voicing as it did his sense of profound humility and unworthiness, as well as that dreadful feeling of uncertainty which arose from mistrust of his own weakness. But his hopes would revive and go soaring aloft on the voice of song when he chanted those words so full of hope for all poor sinners :

*Qui Mariam absolvisti*  
*Et latronem exaudisti,*  
*Mihi quoque spem dedisti.*

(Thou didst Mary's guilt forgive,  
Didst the dying thief receive :  
Hence doth hope within me live.)

The climax came in the second line of the third last verse, which reads :

*Oro supplex et acclinis,*  
*Cor contritum quasi cinis :*  
*Gere curam mei finis.*

(Suppliant in the dust I lie,  
My heart a cinder, crushed and dry :  
Help me, Lord, when death is nigh.)

"Always, without exception I think, at these words, he struck his breast with great force as if he desired by his action to give effect to the words and to reduce his heart and his whole being to dust and ashes before the Infinite Majesty of the Almighty God."

His deportment, on this and on all occasions, our informant hastens to assure us, though strange and

## FATHER CHARLES

unusual, was so free from all suspicion of ostentation, and so full of the fervour of simplicity, that it tended to edify rather than to distract. "His whole deportment during a Requiem Mass," he writes, "was deserving of notice because it was edifying and not easily forgotten."

Humble as he was, and self-effacing in his manner, he had yet a keen sense of the dignity and power of his priesthood. In treating with others, he seemed to forget everything else except that he was a priest. Those who came to see him he received and dismissed with a blessing, and in writing to his family, he invariably substituted for the usual good wishes his priestly blessing: "May the Lord Almighty and Merciful bless and protect you all; and may His blessing remain with you always, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen." He had a deep reverence for the same dignity and power in others, and never failed to treat his brother priests with the greatest respect. During his last illness, when every word cost an effort, and every movement great pain, he would always try to arouse himself when a priest came into his cell, and would not allow him to leave until he had received his blessing.

## CHAPTER THE SIXTEENTH

### THE APOSTLE

**A**LTHOUGH by training and vocation a missionary priest, Father Charles never conducted a mission and rarely preached a formal sermon. The truth is that he could not preach, and could only regard himself as a failure in what was for him as a Passionist the main business of his life. He felt this failure keenly, and frequently in his letters, we hear the sighing of a soul that would do much for the conversion of sinners, but must content himself with praying. "Three weeks ago, I read in a newspaper that a Protestant gentleman was converted to the Catholic Faith," he wrote to one of his friends. "I think that in Holland there are still more than two million Protestants, but I do not know exactly their number. Be so good as to write to me how many there are ; I feel myself urged to pray for the conversion of Holland." Again, it is the spiritual welfare of his dear Irish that concerns him. "Here in the city of Dublin and its suburbs," he writes, "there are many thousands of people who neglect even their annual confession and communion. I wish with all my heart that you would have the charity to pray and to say some Rosaries in the evening with the intention of the conversion of these great sinners, and have

## FATHER CHARLES

the goodness to assist at some Masses and to offer some communions for this intention. I am terrified at the thought that in this great city, God is so often offended and so often crucified by such great sins. Ah! pray that sinners turn to God."

But many waters cannot quench charity, and Father Charles found many ways of working for God in souls. Those who came to him seeking relief from ailments of the body did not always find it, but none of them went away without a word of advice or warning about their spiritual welfare. It was his invariable custom, before blessing the people, to speak to them at length on the instant necessity of attending to their souls' salvation. These addresses, though not wholly written out, were carefully drafted, and many of them have been found in skeleton form amongst his papers. Their main theme is the malice of sin, which to him was "the monster of the world." "There is a monster in the world which cannot be seen," he would say, "neither in the streets of the town nor in the fields: where then is it? It is in the souls of many persons. That great evil is mortal sin." "Sin," he tells them, "ought to be feared more than anything in this world, because he who commits a mortal sin becomes the enemy of God and does all in his power to destroy his God." He asks them to imagine what their feelings would be, if they saw someone "taking a Crucifix in his hands and trampling it under his feet," and then tells them that one "who commits a mortal

## THE APOSTLE

sin does something far worse." Once in his anxiety to have them realise the enormity of sin he oversteps the limits of theological exactitude and tells them that "a man who commits two mortal sins is more wicked than the devil."

Then he remembers that he is speaking to Irish Catholics, and calls upon the nation's glorious traditions of self-sacrificing fidelity, to shame those who were lax in the fulfilment of their religious duties. "Oh! happy we," he exclaims, "in this Catholic country, which although persecuted for three hundred years, still has shown herself faithful to God in that only true faith, which came down from the Apostles to us. But still there are many in this our metropolitan town, many of our separated brethren who look upon us with contempt; they imagine that we are the deceivers and you the deceived. My dear brethren, they have not received the true light of the faith. Should we not thank God for this great benefit, the whole of our lifetime. God has given us this true faith in preference to so many millions, but, unhappily, even in this country, so loved by God, how many live as badly as if they had not faith at all; they neglect their yearly confession, their Easter duties. They are, as it were, out of the Church. Perhaps none of them is here present, but if there should be, I have the greatest concern that they will not delay any longer their great obligations."

He never tires of this one theme. Time after time, he returns to it, striving to give to the people

## FATHER CHARLES

that holy horror of offending God which possessed his own soul, but always he is careful to warn them against the further and greater evil of concealing a sin in confession. "A sin concealed in confession will be written in the Blood of Christ," he tells them, and then to give the sinner hope reminds him of Mary, the Refuge of Sinners. "The soul that has committed so many mortal sins, to whom can she turn her eyes, to the Eternal Father Whom she has so long despised? to the Son, Whom she has so many times crucified? or to the Angels who are always ready to lift up their sword to punish the sinful soul? or to the saints, who participate in the glory of God in heaven? To whom then must she turn? Ah! to the Mother of God, Mary, the only refuge of sinners." To all, he recommends devotion to our Blessed Lady, and compares those who neglect it to "those foolish virgins who had no oil in their lamps," for he "who has no devotion to the Mother of God has no part in the Kingdom of Heaven." But their devotion, he reminds them, to be real and efficacious must be interior, and inspired by "a willing desire to do what the Blessed Virgin has done." "Devotion," he explains with St. Augustine, "is to imitate what has been admired. We should love and serve the Blessed Virgin, and imitate her virtues. She ought to be our book, our model, our Mother."

Another subject on which he would seem to have frequently spoken is the practice of recalling the Presence of God, the neglect of which he considered

## THE APOSTLE

to be the reason of so many faults and misery. It is to their constant remembrance of the Holy Presence, that he attributes the constancy and fortitude of the Apostles and early Christians in their trials. "The presence of God," he tells them, "is as the shadow which accompanies us wherever we go. From morning till night we perform so many actions; let us endeavour to do them for the love of God. If we do our actions for the love of God, then we act for the object which we love, namely, God; and at the same time, we will remember the presence of God."

A man of prayer himself, he could not but be an apostle of prayer. In his correspondence, as well as in his addresses, he insisted on its necessity, and counselled its practice. A young missionary priest came to him for his blessing and advice before leaving Ireland for some foreign mission. All the time, Father Charles spoke to him of the necessity of prayer, and his last words as he bid him farewell, were: "Pray always, for prayer is most necessary." When writing to his own family, he keeps reminding them not to neglect their morning and night prayers and the family Rosary in the evening; and one of his last letters to them, is almost wholly taken up with a lecture on prayer. To those who came to him for consolation, he invariably recommended the practice of prayer, and would give them suitable prayers written out by himself on small pieces of paper. Many of these prayers were copied from Manuals of Devotion, but there is good reason to



## FATHER CHARLES

think that some of them were of his own composition. One, in particular, bears the stamp of originality and is characteristic of his piety. It is a prayer which he wrote for a little girl about to make her First Communion, who has ever since recited it as part of her preparation for Communion : "Sweetest Mother of God, lend me your heart to place the little Infant Jesus in it. Praise, adore and love Him for me, as you can do it much better than I. Amen."

What fruits his apostolate bore, only God and His angels know ; but it may well have been that he, who had power over the ailments of the body, was able to touch and heal many a sin-scarred soul, and give it back its life of Grace.

## CHAPTER THE SEVENTEENTH

### LAST YEARS

FATHER CHARLES was already an old man many years before he had reached the Psalmist's "three score and ten." A life of ceaseless activity and austerity had taken heavy toll of his health and strength, and brought on the feebleness and ailments of old age before their time. He had even then been ailing for many years, but as he never complained, it was only when his ailments and broken health became noticeable that we have any record of it. About twelve years before the end, the Diary begins to make frequent reference to his indispositions, the first of which was the result of an accident. While on his way to visit some sick person, the jaunting-car on which he was riding collided with another vehicle. Father Charles tried to jump clear, but his leg was pinned beneath the upturned car, and badly bruised and fractured. It was some weeks before he was able to be about again, and even then, his leg was far from cured. He walked with a slight limp, which became more pronounced with the years, and the bruises never completely healed.

This accident marks the beginning of many years of suffering. Henceforward, he suffered continually from toothache, violent pain in the head, accompanied by dizziness. His body began to shrink and

## FATHER CHARLES

his face to show signs of the ravages of pain. His Superiors, noticing his failing strength, became concerned for him, and several times, during the next few years, forbade him to rise for the night observance, and sometimes, in order to give him a rest, prevented him from attending to the people who came to see him. These restrictions, however, were never of long duration. Generally after a short time, the Superiors yielded to the pleadings of the people, some of whom would have come from long distances, and Father Charles would be allowed to return to his labours.

An entry in the Diary for the 4th August, 1884, reports him to be on the verge of a complete collapse.

“Poor Father Charles is not well at all,” Father Salvian writes, “and should not be allowed for some time to get up for Matins, or even to say the Office at all, being extremely weak and suffering from a constantly recurring dizziness in the head. When he says Mass, he trembles and shakes as if he were affected with the ague. He should not be put down for public Masses, not being really able; but the saintly man never complains when he is appointed to say public Masses or to act as Deacon at High Mass every Sunday. It is wonderful how he can stand the going up and down fifty-nine steps hundreds of times every day to bless the people who come to him in crowds. Many are the cures and real miracles which take place, but we never take any notice of them, and

## LAST YEARS

much less 'does Father Charles himself. Every Sunday after the last Mass, and again in the afternoon after Vespers, he goes into the Church and blesses with the relic of St. Paul of the Cross at an average of seventy or eighty people, in addition to those whom he blesses in the parlour. The fame of Father Charles' holiness is spread throughout Ireland, England and Scotland, and even America. Several persons came to Dublin from America for his blessing and to be cured from some disease or other. Enough at present about Father Charles, but for the future I intend to take notices about him as they will be interesting for the Chronicles."

Faithful to his promise, the chronicler returns to his subject a few days later :

"Father Charles was very ill the whole day," he writes, "being tormented by sickness of the stomach and lightness in the head. There is no mistake the poor dear Father is getting weaker and weaker every day, and unless he is sent away from here even for a fortnight or a month, we shall lose him. Like a saint he never complains and never tells anyone what he suffers, only that we find out from the way he walks and the appearance of his countenance. After the evening service, as I did not see him, I went to look for him and found him as sick as could be. I brought him to his room and put him to bed. The Father Vicar ordered him to obey me, and so he did without delay."

## FATHER CHARLES

This illness kept him to his room for nearly a month, during which time, Father Salvian himself was appointed to attend those who came for the blessing, and the Diary for these few weeks reveals a very tired and exasperated man. He complains of being "over-worked" and "unnecessarily troubled," and it is with evident relief he chronicles the return of Father Charles to his duties.

These few weeks of enforced rest seem to have done him much good and for the next few months, he was able to resume all the community observances. The improvement did not continue, however, and an entry in the Diary towards the end of the year notes that "Father Charles, being again very weak, has been prohibited to get up for Matins, or to come to the Choir for Prime." But the crowds still continued to come, and all day long, he was "going up and down the fifty-nine steps" in answer to summons from the church and the parlour. The little strength that was now left him soon gave way under the pressure of this constant activity, and after a few months, he was again threatened with a complete break-down. Medical advice prescribed a long rest and a change of residence that would ensure it, so his Superiors sent him to Holy Cross Retreat, Belfast. Their plan did not work out as they intended. His fame had preceded him to Belfast, and the news of his arrival there brought crowds to the monastery, who would not be satisfied until they had seen him and received his blessing. During the three weeks which he spent there, he

## LAST YEARS

was even more busy than he would have been in Dublin, and when he returned to Mount Argus, Father Salvian could not notice much improvement.

*August 11th, Tuesday.*—Father Charles and Brother Michael returned home from Belfast. Father Charles had been sent to Belfast for the benefit of his health which was bad. The saintly man seems a little better, but, in my opinion, not much. I fear that if the poor Father is allowed again to bless the people who come here from every part of Ireland and England, he will get as bad as before. During his absence, I was appointed to bless the people and I was not left a moment to myself. There was a constant up and down the whole blessed day from morning till evening. I dare say that every day more than fifty or sixty people come for the blessing, and on Sunday more than a hundred. However, I made a regulation on this point and fixed the hours when I would go down to the old chapel and bless all who were there. In particular cases, I went down to the parlour and blessed them there. If Father Charles is put under obedience to do the same, I think that it will answer very nicely, without distress. The Porter should not call him except at these hours."

It may be presumed that the chronicler was not content with merely committing these suggestions to writing, but would have made representations to the Superiors, and probably lectured Father Charles on the matter. His lecture and representations

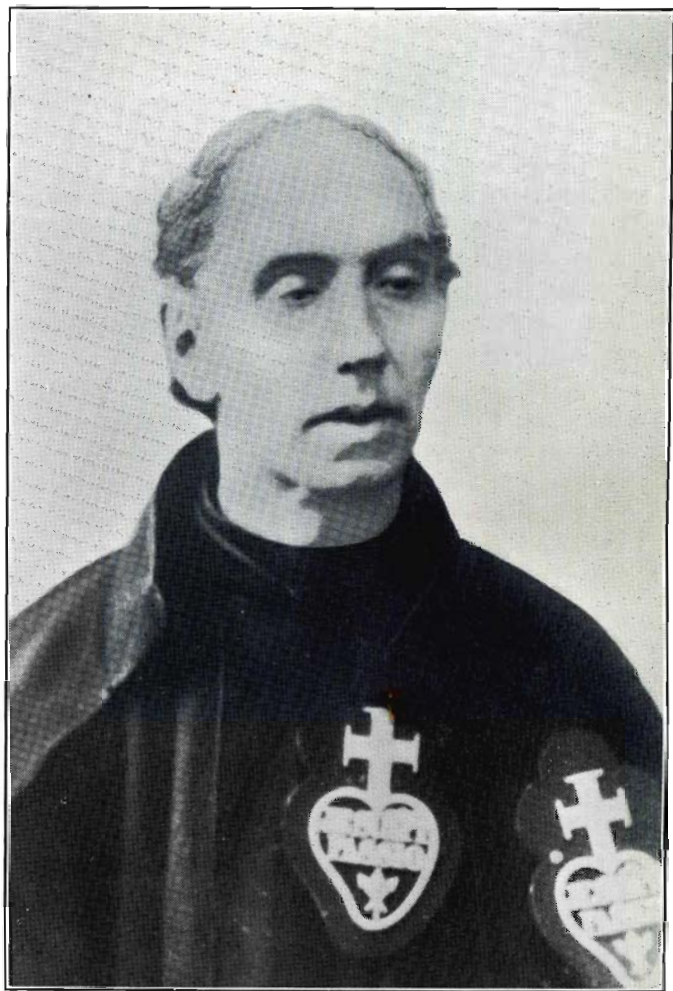
## FATHER CHARLES

alike went unheeded, and twelve months later, he is still harping angrily on the same string.

*July 17th, Saturday.*—Father Charles is almost the same. The poor old man is constantly called down to the parlour and church to bless the people ; but if he attended at a fixed hour, say two or three times in the morning and as many times in the evening, he would not have to go down almost every half-hour the whole blessed day. I have proposed this to him several times, but he must have his own way."

Undoubtedly, if the preservation of his health was the only thing that mattered, Father Charles would have been well advised to fall in with these suggestions ; but his charity constrained him to place himself at the disposal of all who needed him, and what Father Salvian counselled as prudence may have well appeared to him as selfishness and neglect of duty. If he did turn a deaf ear to the advice and expostulation of his colleague, it was to follow the example of Him Who would not turn the people away when they came to disturb Him at His prayer, and rebuked the over-prudent Apostles who would send the children away without His blessing.

None knew better than Father Charles himself how much his failing health was being over-taxed by this constant activity ; but as is evident from a letter written nearly five years before his death, he felt that the " night " was fast coming on, in which no man can work, and he was determined



FATHER CHARLES OF ST. ANDREW.

*[From a group taken a few years before his death.]*



## LAST YEARS

to "work while it was yet day." The letter, in which he gave expression to his forebodings of the approaching end, was written to his family under date of 15th July, 1887.

"I have delayed a long time before answering your last letter," he writes, "for which I humbly ask your pardon. The reason why I have not answered sooner is that I am kept very busy in the monastery, and for other reasons such as the following.

"I am an old man now, and am afraid of death. Every day I pray to obtain, through the mercy of God and the intercession of His Mother, a good death. Sixty of our Religious have died in England and Ireland since I came here from Belgium, and I see how necessary is prayer in order to practise all the virtues perfectly. The Lives of the Saints show us that prayer was their chief occupation. Even King David, who was burdened with the business of a great kingdom, tells us that it is prayer that has inflamed his heart with such great love of God and heavenly things, and we can marvel at it in his psalms.

"How greatly has God loved men! He did not spare His only Son, but abandoned Him to death, even to the death of the Cross. Jesus Christ exhorts us to pray, but in what manner? Ask, seek, knock.

"It is for this reason that the Lord has said: Watch and pray that you fall not into temptation, Let us listen to the words of Thomas à Kempis:

## FATHER CHARLES

‘My Son, you cannot ever in this life be free and without fear, but as long as you live, you will have need of the spiritual weapons, because you live in the midst of enemies who assail you on every side.’

“‘The combat is continual,’ says St. Bonaventure, ‘and it is for this reason that we must pray during our whole life.’”

Of all the letters he ever wrote, this is perhaps the longest, and certainly the most self-revealing. Its overcrowded sentences and abrupt transitions of mood and thought reveal a soul that is beset by fears, doubts, and temptations, yet clings fast to hope in a merciful God and the power of prayer. He feels that death is near, and he is afraid, not so much of its physical distress or bitter separation as of its awful issue. He had little that death could take from him, and he had suffered too much to fear a little more pain, but he trembled at the thought of Judgment. He had lived too near to God all his life, not to have realised how perfect one must be, even to hope for that Vision of Splendour before which the purest of the angels must shield their faces; and he, in his own estimate, was far from perfect. “After so many confessions, so many Communions, so many Masses, I am yet so full of sin,” he was often heard to say, and with such evident distress that there could be no doubt as to his sincerity. Frequently during his life, he showed signs of being troubled by temptations. While in the refectory and even in the Choir, he would be

## LAST YEARS

seen to start as if confronted by some fearsome apparition, and he would call on Mary with a cry of fear. During his last years, these temptations became more insistent and more intense. On one occasion, the brother who went to call him, found him lying on the floor of his cell, where he had evidently spent the whole night. When questioned he would only say: "Temptations, temptations!" Another time, Father Salvian heard strange noises and excited exclamations coming from his cell, and, on entering, found him trembling and exhausted. No one, except perhaps his confessor, was able to discover the nature of these temptations, but a sentence found amongst his writings permits us to presume that he had practical and even real experience of the Evil One. "There are five persons in this cell," he wrote, "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, myself and the devil."

Against these temptations and fears, he sought comfort and hope in the thought of God's great Love and Mercy. In one of his last letters, he recalls that St. Paul declared God to be "rich in mercy." "He has called Him the Father of Mercy and of Grace," he writes, "but never the Father of Justice or severity." He would do what he could "to practise all the virtues perfectly," and for the rest, depend on prayer. This, which he had called "the chief occupation of the Saints" he made his during these years of waiting. Those who lived with him during these last years give what must be our last picture of him. It is of an old man, almost

## FATHER CHARLES

bent in two, making his way slowly and painfully along the corridors, his face gaunt and even cadaverous, his eyes fixed on the Cross clasped in his wasted and twisted hands, his lips ever moving in prayer. "Whenever I saw him, moving so slowly while his face twitched with pain," relates one who saw him often, "I thought of Christ on the Way of the Cross."

## CHAPTER THE EIGHTEENTH

### LAST ILLNESS AND DEATH

**W**HEN the community assembled for Vespers on the Vigil of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, it was noticed that Father Charles was not in his place. Soon after the beginning of the Office he arrived, but walking slowly and with an effort that was evidently costing him great pain. When he took no part in the singing, it was clear to all that he must be very unwell. He himself must have felt that he had reached the end of his strength, and sometime that evening, he wrote a letter to one of his family which he seemed to feel would be his last.

“ 7th December, 1892

“ MY DEAREST SISTER,

“ I have received your letter of the 1st December. I, John Andrew Houben, renounce all that of which you already know. I give to all my family full powers. I hope that I have made myself understood.

“ Pray for me. I pray much for you all. Give my greetings to the Reverend Father Gobbels and his Vicar. May the Almighty and Merciful God bless you and protect you all ; and may His blessing remain with you always in the

## FATHER CHARLES

name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

"I am and remain in the sweet Hearts of Jesus and Mary,

"Your affectionate brother,

"FR. CHARLES OF ST. ANDREW,

"Passionist."

Though the purport of the first part of this letter is not quite clear, it would seem to have been a reiteration of his last Will and Testament which he had made on the eve of his religious profession, just forty-six years before. The last sentences, however, read very like the farewells of a dying man; and such they were to be. They were the last words he ever wrote.

Next morning, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, he said Mass and attended to his duties throughout the day as usual, but Father Salvian noted that he seemed "to be very poorly and extremely weak." The complete break-down came on the following day. It was Friday when the special devotions in honour of the Passion and the Chapter of Correction are held in the Choir after Vespers. "Father Charles was present," the chronicler notes, "but he was scarcely able to walk into the Choir." "At supper-time," the Diary continues, "he was missing from his place in the refectory, and the infirmarian went to his room to find out what was the matter. At first, he would not answer, but said he would be all right in a few minutes. When

## LAST ILLNESS AND DEATH

the infirmarian asked him the cause of his difficulty in walking, he answered that he had a pain in his leg. The brother asked to see the affected leg, and behold, found it very much inflamed with a large sore. Of course he ordered him to stay in his room. I was there and we both requested him to lie down on the bed, but he promised that he would do so by-and-by. Supper was brought to his room, but I heard afterwards that poor Charles took very little."

When the Brother infirmarian went to his cell the next morning, he found his patient lying prostrate on the floor, fully conscious but unable to move. As he had all the appearances of a dying man, a priest gave him absolution, and a doctor was summoned, who immediately pronounced his condition hopeless. The old wound on his leg had become gangrenous, and had poisoned his whole system. That evening, after Vespers, the Father Rector administered to him the Last Rites of the Church in the presence of the Community. It was a touching ceremony, and those who were present could never forget the ecstatic fervour with which he prepared himself to receive the Holy Viaticum. "He struck his breast and repeated aloud an act of Contrition, and his heart burned with such love for Jesus in the Holy Sacrament, that he appeared as one who had entered upon the dawn of a day that would have no night." At the end of his Diary for that day, our chronicler notes that "this very day is the anniversary of Father Charles' profession which

## FATHER CHARLES

took place at Ere in 1846, and to-morrow is his seventy-first birthday, he having been born on the 11th December, 1821."

After he had received the Last Sacraments, he seemed to rally a little, and despite the doctor's verdict, the brethren began to have hopes of his recovery; but as the days passed, even the most inexperienced could see in his wasting body the gradual but certain approach of death. Everything that kindness and medical skill could suggest was done to alleviate his pain, but still he suffered much. Day by day, Father Salvian records the progress of the illness, and marvels at the sufferer's wonderful patience. "Dear Father Charles is going on suffering, truly like a saint, and it is of the greatest edification to the whole community," he writes under date of December 14th; and again on the following day: "Father Charles continues to be very ill, and suffering very much, but no complaint escapes his lips. He speaks to no one except when a priest goes to see him, he always asks for his blessing."

Though death always seemed very near, it delayed long in coming. The few days of life, which the doctor gave him, dragged out into weeks, and every day his suffering increased as the fatal disease gained possession of his body. The members of the community, assisted by a trained infirmarian, kept a constant watch by his bedside, the students taking it in turn to attend him during the night. Their love for the old man combined with a natural curiosity made them particularly attentive in obser-



## LAST ILLNESS AND DEATH

ving his every word and action, and it is mainly on their recollections that we are dependent for the story of his last days. "To us students," writes one of them, "fell the privilege of watching at his bedside during the night, and it was, in truth, a labour of love." "What an example of patience he gave us during those nights and days! What prompt obedience to our smallest desires! What modesty he displayed, and at the cost of so much pain, lest he might give to any the smallest shadow of offence."

His constant pain prevented sleep, but sometimes he would fall into an uneasy doze, and always on awaking, he would kiss the Crucifix which he usually kept in his hands. When awake his eyes were fastened upon the Cross, and his lips moved constantly in prayer. He seemed unconscious of all that went on around him, and despite the distraction of his pain and the continual coming and going of visitors, he contrived to maintain an habitual state of recollection. He seldom spoke, and then only as much as courtesy demanded, but as one of the students noted, "his obedience to the infirmarian was always most prompt, no matter what inconvenience it cost him to conform to his directions. If he was told to take a little sleep, immediately he composed himself as best he could; if ordered to put his hands under the coverlet to protect them from the cold, or directed to lie in some particular position, he obeyed without a murmur. He suffered much from a burning thirst which had to be assuaged

## FATHER CHARLES

by frequent draughts of a specially prepared cordial, but if it was suggested to him to abstain from this for a time, he showed himself content, and offered his suffering to God as a sacrifice."

Knowing how much he missed the Mass, the Superiors arranged to have the Holy Sacrifice celebrated in his room on Christmas morning. "When one of the Fathers told him that he was coming to say Mass, his eyes filled with tears of joy, and he began to count the hours to that happy moment, when he would have the opportunity of assisting once again at the offering of the Clean Oblation. With loving care he supervised the preparation of the temporary altar, and even gave advice as to the arrangement of the vestments and the furnishings of the altar. He answered all the responses and followed every part of the Mass with ecstatic attention. When the solemn moment of the Consecration arrived, a great change came over him. He was as one who saw our Lord and Saviour not under the lowly Sacramental veil, but face to face, as He really is."

After Christmas he began to sink more rapidly. On Christmas Eve, Father Salvian reports him to be "neither better nor worse"; but a few days later he notices a marked disimprovement: "Dear Father Charles gets worse every day, but his patience in suffering is indeed marvellous." On January 3rd he was "worse still," and the Diary notes that "the poor sick man has lost the power of speech and the sight of his eyes. He cannot swallow any

## LAST ILLNESS AND DEATH

food and seems to suffer very much, but no word of complaint ever escapes his lips."

The Community were now in hourly expectation of his death ; but, as often happens in such lingering illnesses, the end came unexpectedly and unperceived by those who were watching him. " There was no agony, not even a movement of the muscles. He just fell asleep, and only the passing sigh told the watchers that the end had come." His death was in full harmony with his life—quiet, solitary and unremarkable.

His dead body was clothed for the last time in the holy habit, and laid out as the Passionist Rule prescribes, on a bare board, the forehead sprinkled with ashes, the head resting upon a brick. " His features remained unaltered," an eye-witness reports, " but a youthful freshness shone from his face, whilst his hands, white as marble and joined upon his breast, still clasped the Crucifix which had been his inseparable companion in life."

It was the 5th of January, 1893.

## CHAPTER THE NINETEENTH

### HIS GRAVE

"FATHER CHARLES is dead!" Quickly the sad news spread through the city on that early January morning, and within a few hours newspaper placards had appeared on every hoarding announcing the "Death of Father Charles of Mount Argus" as the main item of the day's news.

The first to know of his death outside the monastery were those who attended the early Masses at Mount Argus, to whom Father Salvian made known the sad news. "I told some of my penitents of the death," he writes, "and also a policeman who was hearing Mass in the church. He advised me to send a note to his officer and he would send some of his men to guard the body and control the crowds when the deceased would be brought to the church." The suggestion, evidently, was not adopted, but its foresight was amply justified. When the remains were carried in solemn procession from the monastery to the church that evening, the church was filled to overflowing, and when the coffin had been placed on a catafalque before the high altar and uncovered, the people pressed forward eagerly to touch the hands and feet of their dead "saint." "The respect of the Irish for a priest, whoever he

## HIS GRAVE

may be, is really remarkable," Father Salvian wrote that night in his Diary, "and their respect and veneration for our dear saintly Father Charles had been extraordinarily manifested on every occasion, but on this occasion it was indeed more than I can express in words."

The next day, "from morning until late in the evening," he records, "there was a continual procession of hundreds, or rather thousands of people come to see their dear Saint, as they called him. The whole day, but especially in the evening, the spacious church was filled with people, and two, or sometimes even three or four of the religious had to be near the coffin to protect it from the people, and to take from their hands, rosaries, handkerchiefs, etc., and touch the body with them and give them back to them as relics." So it continued during the three days that the body remained in the church.

"From the early morning of the Feast of the Epiphany," runs another report, "there was at Mount Argus a constant concourse of people, an immense pilgrimage of mourners who wished to take a last look at the body of Father Charles. In the beginning the people were permitted to touch the body, but very soon it became plainly evident that steps would have to be taken to control this extraordinary veneration, because such was the eagerness of the people to have some memento of the departed, that they did not scruple to tear off pieces of the habit in which the body was clothed. To prevent such untoward happenings it was found

## FATHER CHARLES

necessary to post a number of religious around the catafalque to protect the body and to touch it with the objects of devotion which were handed to them for that purpose by the people. The number of people who came on Saturday was greater even than on the previous day, and when the church had been closed for the night, many who could not come during the day kept a prayerful vigil without." All this time the weather was such as to make the journey from the city to Mount Argus a real hardship. "It was extremely cold," Father Salvian notes, "and raining and snowing." It was still bitterly cold and raining heavily on the next day, Sunday, but still the crowds came, and at times the church was so filled with eagerly pressing throngs that many of the confessionals around the walls were crushed as if they were made of matchwood. At the evening service, when special prayers were offered for the dead priest, the crowds overflowed into the grounds, where thousands tried as best they could to follow the service within, while the rain beat down upon them and the ground on which they stood was ankle-deep in mud.

When the remains were carried to their last resting-place on the following morning, the church was "full to overflowing, and the adjoining grounds one dense mass of people." "Never before within living memory," runs a newspaper report, "has there been such an outburst of religious sentiment and profound reverence as was beheld around the open grave of Father Charles. As the coffin was

## HIS GRAVE

lowered into the grave, every eye was wet with tears, and loud and general manifestations of the most sincere regret went up from the multitude present, who clustered round with heads uncovered to take a last look at the coffin which enclosed the remains of a most exemplary and beloved priest."—(*Evening Telegraph*, January 9th.)

By none was his passing more lamented than by his brethren in religion. If the people had lost a friend, they had lost a presence which had made heaven seem very near to them. For a long time Mount Argus did not seem the same without him, so much had he become part of the place and of their lives. Always they expected to see him come shuffling along the corridor, his white head bent low over his Crucifix; but as the days passed and his place in the choir was filled by another, they realised that Death had taken their Saint. "No one seems to want to pray for his soul, but rather to invoke him as a Saint," the Rector wrote to the Houben family; and none seemed more convinced of his sanctity than his brethren in religion. "When the body of Father Charles had been taken from his cell," writes Father Salvian, "there was a general plunder of things belonging to the deceased, but the Father Rector ordered that everything should be brought back to be kept as relics at the disposal of Father Rector himself." Yet more remarkable is Father Salvian's account of the next address of the Rector to the Community.

"Wednesday, 18th January (1893).—Father

## FATHER CHARLES

Rector gave the examen this evening, and the object of his discourse was about the virtues of Father Charles ; how his name and sanctity were well known throughout the whole of Ireland and in other places ; how people took Father Charles to be a saint, and a great many of them had experienced the efficacy of his prayers. All too true. His name is held in benediction by all, and even Protestants speak highly of our dear deceased."

Meantime the people, having recovered from the first shock of their grief, began to realise that their friend was not dead, but only sleeping. Though the heart that pitied and the hand that healed were mouldering in the grave, the love that throbbed in that heart and the power that was in that hand could not be destroyed by death. They believed him to be near to God, and more powerful now than he had been while on earth to obtain Divine intervention in their favour. Scarcely a fortnight after his death, Father Salvian notes that a "great many people came to visit Father Charles' grave throughout the day," and as the months and years passed, the pilgrimage to the grave increased until the Superiors of Mount Argus thought it prudent to interfere and to close the graveyard to the public. Even then many came and, under cover of the night, made a surreptitious entrance to pray at the grave and carry away portions of the clay as relics for their sick friends. When at last the graveyard was opened again to the public, the pilgrimage began anew, and



## HIS GRAVE

now hundreds come each day to pray at the grave.

Devotion to the dead priest was not confined to Dublin and its neighbourhood. Amongst his fellow-countrymen in Holland, but in particular in Munstergeleen, where his old mill-house soon became a shrine to his memory, and amongst the soldiers of Bergen-op-Zoom, his memory was held in holy reverence and his intercession invoked. Even in Italy the appearance of a small brochure giving an account of his life, aroused interest and made many devotees of his cause. In the Benedictine Convent at Veroli, near Rome, there was a nun—Sister Maria Magdalena Moranti—who had been an invalid for twenty years and had undergone so many operations that there was scarcely a part of her body that was not marked with the surgeon's knife. To ease her pain drugs were administered, but the time came when these began to lose their effect and the doctor forbade her to take any more. She was so ill and her poor body so covered with festering sores that she was unable to move hand or foot, when a Passionist, who happened to be visiting the Convent as extraordinary confessor, advised her to pray to Father Charles. That day, together with the other nuns, she began to pray to this priest, of whom she had probably never heard before, and in a few days the festering wounds had disappeared and the invalid was so far recovered that she was able to leave her bed.

Many like favours are reported from many places. From Holland come the following : A man suffering from a serious disease of the eyes was told by a

## FATHER CHARLES

specialist, a Dr. van der Meer of Maastricht, that his ailment would probably end in blindness. At the advice of a friend the man made a novena to Father Charles, through which he obtained relief and improvement. A boy of nine, whose kidneys, lung and heart were affected, was stricken down with fever. His distracted parents, fearing the worst, put a picture of Father Charles under his pillow, and their little boy was playing in the street again a few days later, completely cured.

The numbers of those in Ireland who have received favours through the intercession of Father Charles, is past enumeration. Many of these are of a minor nature, though to those concerned they meant much. Positions have been obtained by those who had almost lost hope of ever finding employment again ; financial and domestic disasters have been averted through his intercession ; and many suffering from ailments that baffled medical skill have been restored to health after invoking his help. Of these the following are a few of the best authenticated :—

In the year 1893, a few months after the death of Father Charles, a lady living in Leix was afflicted with a violent pain in the left ankle. When the best local doctors had failed to do anything to relieve the constant pain, she was sent to a Dublin hospital to be attended by one of the most eminent surgeons of that city. He treated the affected ankle for some weeks without any amelioration, and finally decided that it would be necessary to operate. When he suggested removing the foot the young lady's parents

## HIS GRAVE

objected, so he contented himself with opening the ankle and scraping a bone which he found to be diseased. The operation, evidently, was far from successful. "The pain was as great as before the operation," the lady herself deposed in her evidence before the ecclesiastical court, "and I had to take morphia for six weeks. On one occasion I heard the surgeon tell the Sister that 'it was only a matter of time,' which I understood to mean that I would not be cured. One day two young doctors came to examine me, and went away shaking their heads. Afterwards the Sister recalled this incident, and said that the doctors meant that my case was hopeless." Some time afterwards the surgeon suggested another operation, but said that it would be better that she go to stay with some friends in Dublin for some time in order to get sufficient strength for the second operation. She decided to follow his advice, but before leaving the hospital she had a visit from a friend who, having heard of her affliction and desperate condition, asked her if she had ever heard of Father Charles. "I said that I had," the witness deposes, "and then she told me that he had cured her mother . . . and added that she had a piece of his habit, which she would send to me if I so desired. I said that I would be very pleased and she brought it to me before I left the hospital. She also told me that I must say five *Our Fathers* and *Hail Marys* every day for the rest of my life in honour of the Passion and the Order of the Passion to which Father Charles belonged. She applied the small

## FATHER CHARLES

piece of the habit to my foot, and then went away, bringing the relic with her. Soon afterwards my friends came to bring me away. My foot was at that time encased in plaster of Paris. I cannot say that I remember having felt any result immediately after the application of the relic; nor can I remember if the passage from the hospital to my friend's home caused me much pain. But after a short time I was able to walk with some difficulty, and after three weeks I was able to walk to the hospital. No doctor came to see me while I was at my friend's house. I had still my ankle in plaster of Paris when I returned to the hospital. I have no remembrance of having any pain during those three weeks or on my way back to the hospital, although I have a distinct recollection of the intense pain I had suffered before. The surgeon came to see me on the very day on which I returned to the hospital. Having taken away the plaster, he exclaimed: 'This is certainly a miracle. The foot is perfect, and you can leave the hospital at once. If you want a certificate I will give it to you'." The lady herself, firmly believing that she had been cured miraculously through the intercession of Father Charles, continued to say the prayers prescribed by her friend, and has never had any return of her ailment or felt any the worse for it since.

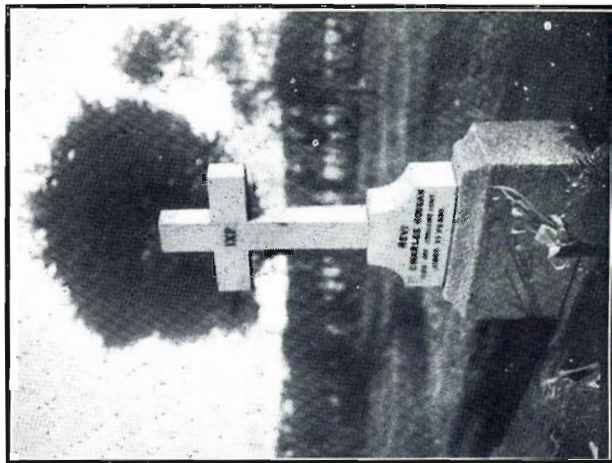
Another lady, well advanced in years, received a compound fracture of the thigh, for which the doctors could do little on account of her great age. She made a novena to Father Charles, after which she was so



Photos]

# THE CEMETERY.

*The large Celtic Cross is the people's tribute to the memory of three great Passionists—Father Charles, Father Paul Mary, and Father Sebastian. Father Charles's grave is to the extreme right of the first window*



# THE GRAVE.

[V. Co. Ltd.

## HIS GRAVE

much improved that she was able to walk to Mount Argus, although the doctors had told her that she would never walk again.

A young boy, having contracted diphtheria, was taken to hospital, and after some time word was sent to his father that death was imminent. The father came to the grave of Father Charles, prayed there for his little boy, and took away some clay, which he placed upon the boy's forehead in the hospital. He then began a triduum in honour of Father Charles, and the boy recovered completely.

A girl, engaged at business in the city, had suffered for some time from an abscess on the drum of the ear, which, in addition to rendering the ear useless, was very troublesome because of the continual flux of nauseous matter. She visited many doctors, who treated the ear without any result. At last she made a novena to Father Charles, and on the last day there was a great discharge of matter, after which the ear never troubled her any more, and her hearing was perfectly restored.

A young man was afflicted with a severe form of skin disease, which the doctor said could only be cured by a course of treatment which would take at least two years. He visited the grave of Father Charles to pray for his cure, and in a short time all traces of the disease were gone. The doctor was greatly surprised at the sudden recovery.

Not less numerous, although for obvious reasons more difficult to record and authenticate, are the spiritual favours obtained through the intercession

## FATHER CHARLES

of Father Charles. Particularly numerous are the extraordinary conversions of hardened sinners, of which the following is an example. A man, who had been for many years away from his religious duties and who had apparently lost his faith, refused to see a priest, although he knew himself to be near death. Having done all they could to persuade him, his friends began to pray to Father Charles. After some time the dying man of his own accord asked to see a priest, and died reconciled to God.

But the greatest and surest test of the people's faith in the power of Father Charles is the constant pilgrimage to his grave. No day passes that does not bring hundreds to the little graveyard at Mount Argus, and the fact that these people come with such persistency and spontaneity may be taken as a certain indication that their faith in the intercession of the dead Passionist has not been belied by experience.

## EPILOGUE

IT is now nearly half a century since all that was mortal of Father Charles was laid to rest, but his spirit still lingers around the places that were sanctified by his presence and are hallowed by his memory. The generation which knelt at his feet and felt the touch of his hand has passed with him, but still the pilgrimage to Mount Argus continues, and children of another generation now kneel at his grave and speak to him in prayer as to one who is still near to heal and comfort them.

"A good life hath its number of days; but a good name shall continue for ever."<sup>1</sup> Many attain to high degrees of holiness in life who are not remembered in death; it is only the few, even among the saints, whose names continue for ever. Sanctity is essentially unobtrusive. Not at the street-corners and to the sound of trumpets, but in the secrecy of the closed chamber, with none but God to see, does holiness thrive and flourish. Even the God-man Himself lived for half a lifetime as a village tradesman, and no one seemed to discover in Him the holiness of His Godhead. When sanctity does become public it is through an act of God: only He can set the light upon the candlestick to shine before men.

<sup>1</sup> *Ecclesiasticus*, xli, 16.



## FATHER CHARLES

The sanctity of Father Charles was most certainly that of "the closed chamber." Whatever reputation he had among the people was not of his own seeking or of his own making. Even had he the ambition, he had not the qualities which make for popularity. In the ordinary way of things, his place would have been among the great multitude of the unknown ; but God ordained that his name should continue for ever ; and only God, whose power is not conditioned by the capabilities of its instruments, could have so transformed this simple and untalented man. Untalented he undoubtedly was, and simplicity was the characteristic element of the man and his piety. Even as an old man he had still the unspoiled heart and mind of a child, and his practice of piety was characterised by a naive conception of spiritual things and little devices that savoured of the simplicity of childhood.

There is an incident in the Gospels which suggests a reason God should have so favoured this childlike man, and set him as a light to shine before men. The disciples came to Jesus, saying : " Who, thinkest Thou, is the greater in the kingdom of Heaven ? And Jesus, calling to Him a little child, set him in the midst of them, and said : Amen, I say to you, unless you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of Heaven."<sup>2</sup> May it not be that God

<sup>2</sup> Matth. xviii, 1-4.

## EPILOGUE

has again "set a child in the midst" of us, to remind us that "whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of Heaven."

It will have been noticed and, no doubt, remarked as strange that it was only when he came to Ireland the sanctity of Father Charles was discovered. For two periods of his life, covering more than twelve years in all, he laboured on the English mission without attracting any attention; but on his coming to Ireland he was almost at once proclaimed by the people a "man of God." Sanctity, it is true, does not depend on environment, but it needs a congenial atmosphere for its manifestation, and even the Saint of Saints was without honour in captious Nazareth. But, again, it must be remembered that holiness only makes itself manifest when and where God wills; and it would seem that in the Divine scheme Father Charles was sent to the Irish people.

At all events his coming amongst them was strangely opportune, and could easily be construed as a sign from heaven, by a people who had then much need of some assurance that God had not abandoned them. It was the darkest hour of Ireland's history. A nation that had been stricken with famine and plague, was still bleeding slowly to death. Ireland's enemies could congratulate themselves that "the Celt was going with a vengeance," and venture a prophecy, which was for them a hope, that the day was near "when an Irishman would be as rare in Ireland as a Red Indian on the shores

## FATHER CHARLES

of Manhattan." It was in this dark hour, when all human hope had failed them, that Father Charles came as a messenger of Mercy to relieve their misery and strengthen their faith in God.

May we not hope that death did not end his mission, and that he, who so loved the Irish people, will continue to be their ambassador in the Courts of Heaven?

ST. PAUL'S RETREAT,  
MOUNT ARGUS.

*Feast of Our Lady's Dolours, 1937.*

## APPENDIX

### CURES WROUGHT BY THE PRAYERS AND BLESSING OF THE SERVANT OF GOD

**T**HE following are summary accounts of a number of cures attributed to the blessing of Father Charles.

The selection has been made with due regard to the credibility and authenticity of the reports, many of which have been already tendered as sworn evidence in the Preparatory Processes, whilst the remainder have been taken from witnesses who are prepared to substantiate their statements on oath.

1. Mrs. Lynam, 54 Haddington Road, Dublin, got a paralytic stroke, which her doctor, Surgeon Wheeler, diagnosed as fatal. At her request Father Charles was brought to bless her, after which she showed signs of improvement. After a third visit from Father Charles, she was so far recovered as to be able to leave her bed and move about the house. The doctor, although a Protestant, declared her recovery to be miraculous. She lived for another sixteen years.
2. Another lady, a Mrs. Quinn, was stricken with paralysis. Her son went immediately to Mount Argus for Father Charles. The Servant of God said he could not then leave the Retreat, but brought the young man into one of the parlours, and asked him to kneel down whilst he prayed for his mother. When the young man returned home, he found that his mother was recovered. The man declares that the prayer which Father Charles recited was so impressed on his memory that he never forgot it from the moment he first heard it.
3. Mary Elizabeth Butler testifies that as a little girl she received an injury which broke the drum of her left ear,

## FATHER CHARLES

rendering it useless and painful. She was examined independently by five eminent doctors (whose names she gives), all of whom declared that her injury was incurable. She was brought to Father Charles, who blessed her, and on returning to her doctor he found, on examination, that the drum of the ear was completely healed. Although he did not know that the girl had been to see Father Charles, he declared her recovery to be miraculous.

4. Dr. Marmion, Dungannon, testifies that one of his patients, who suffered from cancer of the nose, which he judged to be incurable, was completely healed after she had been blessed by Father Charles.
5. In the year 1887 Laurence O'Toole, who was then a young boy, received a serious injury to his leg while at play. He was taken to Baggot Street Hospital, where the doctor, Surgeon Fitzgibbon, declared that it would be necessary to amputate the leg in order to save his life. His mother refused to give her consent and, taking him from the hospital against the advice of the Matron and medical staff, brought him to be blessed by Father Charles. After being blessed the boy recovered, and after forty years was able to state that he had never had another pain in his leg.
6. Mrs. Harriet M. Linden testifies that in the year 1882, when she was fourteen years of age, she was struck down with a severe form of rheumatic fever, which the doctor said might become chronic, and that she would be confined to bed for at least six months. At her own persistent request Father Charles was sent for. He came, prayed over her, placed his hand on her head, which brought instant relief from her pain, which had been severe. As soon as Father Charles had left she felt so well that she jumped from her bed and ran round the room. Her doctor, a Protestant, was surprised at her sudden recovery, and said: "A greater power than mine has been here."
7. Mrs. Kathleen Mildred Ness also testified that her sister,

## APPENDIX

who suffered from disease which baffled all medical skill, was brought to Father Charles. Before blessing the child, he asked the mother if she would consent to give her daughter to God in the event of her being cured. The mother consented and the child became well. When the girl grew up she announced that she had decided to enter a convent. The mother, who had other plans for her future, at first refused her consent, but when she remembered and understood for the first time what Father Charles had said, she gave her consent although much against her wishes.

8. A lady named Ryan relates that as a child she contracted a disease of the eyes for which two eminent doctors, Sir Francis Cruise and Dr. Fitzgibbon, could find no remedy. The last named declared the right eye to be already completely destroyed, when she was brought by her aunt to Father Charles. He told them to make a novena in which he himself would join. On the ninth day all traces of the disease were gone, and the sight of the right eye was completely restored. The doctor confessed that he could find no explanation for what had taken place except that a miracle had been worked.
9. Another boy, James McEvoy, contracted a disease of the eyes, which rendered him completely blind. After being twenty-one weeks in this condition, he was led to Mount Argus and, on being blessed by Father Charles, was cured instantaneously. He had never any further trouble with his eyes.
10. While playing with some companions a boy, called Edward Jarvis, got a fright which had the effect of paralyzing him. Doctors having declared their inability to do anything for him, he was brought to Father Charles, by whose blessing he was restored to normal health. His two companions died from the effects of the fright.
11. The following is an extract from the "Annals of High Park Convent, Dublin," which gives the particulars of a cure wrought there by Father Charles in the year 1866.

## FATHER CHARLES

"Anthony entered in Drumcondra in 1856 . . . Some time after her entrance she was afflicted with a running in the cheek, which was a subject of much pain to her, especially as her companions frequently signified their repugnance to being near her on account of it. One day a Passionist Father (Father Charles of St. Andrew), a holy man who had the reputation of being a saint, visited the Asylum. Anthony immediately desired to get his prayers, saying that she felt that he would cure her, for which purpose she placed herself on her knees at the door by which he must pass, and begged his prayers. In effect, she was cured, the sore healing up, and she was never troubled by it during the two years she lived afterwards."

12. A woman, called Dunne, suffered from a diseased bone in the arm, which the doctors had treated for a long time and without success. She was blessed by Father Charles, and from that time her arm ceased to trouble her.
13. A family, by name of O'Hanlon, received two remarkable favours through the prayers of Father Charles. The mother was cured of a serious illness which occurred after childbirth, and a daughter, who suffered from a troublesome skin-disease, was healed instantaneously. After she had been blessed, no traces of the disease remained, except the little particles of diseased skin which adhered to her clothing.
14. A boy received concussion of the brain from a fall at play. A Protestant doctor was called in, who said that he could do nothing, but that there was "a man at Mount Argus who might be able to do something." The boy was carried on a stretcher to Mount Argus, and was completely restored to health by the blessing of Father Charles.
15. A girl, suffering from some disease of the leg, was told by her doctor that an amputation was necessary to save her life. Father Charles was sent for, and after one visit the leg was completely cured. The doctor, on examining

## APPENDIX

her leg some time afterwards, said that "no doctor cured that leg."

16. A girl, who had been suffering for some time from an abscess on her side, was told by her doctor that the ribs would have to be cut away, as they had become diseased. Moreover, he warned her that if the wound healed on the surface, nothing could prevent death. After she had been blessed by Father Charles, the abscess healed and she was completely restored to health, much to the surprise of her doctor.
17. John O'Reilly, a boy of eight, had suffered much for two years from the effects of an injury to his leg and spine, for which the doctors could do nothing. He paid ten visits to Father Charles and, after the tenth visit, his ailment left and never returned.
18. A girl, who had been attending the Eye and Ear Hospital for two years for some disease of the eyes which rendered her blind, was brought to Father Charles. On her return home she was so far recovered as to be able to go for a walk by herself.
19. John Barrett, a boy of eight, was afflicted with the falling sickness. He was blessed by Father Charles and had never another recurrence of his ailment.
20. A girl was afflicted with a disease of the eye which took the form of a large growth covering the whole eye. When medical skill had proved powerless to help her, she was brought to Father Charles. The growth immediately began to disappear, and the eyes became perfectly healthy.
21. Another girl, who had been suffering intense pain from some ear trouble, went to Father Charles to seek relief. He told her that she must have a tooth extracted and, when she explained that the doctor had said it would be fatal to have the tooth removed, he still insisted that the tooth must be taken out. She followed his advice and obtained immediate relief from her ailment.
22. Francis McCann, when a boy, received an injury to his foot which the doctors declared must be amputated.



## FATHER CHARLES

- His parents brought him to Father Charles, by whose blessing the boy's foot was restored to health.
23. A girl, who had received a compound fracture of the arm, was brought to St. Vincent's Hospital, where all possible was done for her but without success. After she had been blessed by Father Charles, her arm was completely cured to the surprise of the whole medical staff. Dr. Tobin, who attended her, declared that no earthly power could have set her arm right again.
  24. A lady from Castlebar reports that her daughter, when seven years of age, contracted a disease of the eyes, which rendered her partially blind. Local medical skill having failed to give the child any relief, she brought her to a Dublin eye specialist, a Dr. Benson, who diagnosed her trouble to be constitutional and incurable. Before leaving Dublin she decided to bring the girl to Father Charles, who told her that she might go home and that the child would get better. The interview took place on Tuesday, and on Friday she was able to return home with the child completely cured.
  25. While attending a sick man, Father Charles was asked to bless the sick child of one of the neighbours who was a Protestant. He did so and the child got better. The whole family became Catholics afterwards.
  26. A Miss Kathleen Corr, of Glasnevin, brought to Father Charles a girl friend, who had been under the care of doctors for many years, and had to be constantly attended by a nurse. After having been blessed by Father Charles she was completely restored to health. At the same time, she herself was threatened with a complete breakdown in health; her appetite was gone, and the doctor feared consumption. While her friend was being blessed it occurred to her that she should ask to be blessed too. She did so, and from that time, her health began to improve and never afterwards gave her any cause for concern.
  27. Daniel Smith of Little Bray had received medical treat-

## APPENDIX

- ment for chronic head and earaches, without obtaining any relief. He was blessed three times by Father Charles and completely cured.
28. A Mr. O'Driscoll testifies that his father had a paralytic stroke which deprived him of the power of speech and rendered him so helpless that he had to be fed with a spoon. He went for Father Charles, who came and blessed the paralysed man. Mr. O'Driscoll happened to be absent when Father Charles arrived, but when he returned home, he found that his father had recovered his former use of all his members. The man never felt any of the effects afterwards, and lived to the age of eighty.
  29. A boy, called Richard Hempton, who suffered from eye-trouble, was told by a doctor that one of his eyes would have to be removed. His mother brought him to Father Charles, and on his way home the boy suddenly recovered his sight. He had never any further trouble with his eyes.
  30. A man, called Owen McDonald, testifies that his cousin was dying of typhoid fever in Richmond Hospital. When all hope had been abandoned by the medical staff of the hospital he came to Mount Argus to bring Father Charles, although it was then past midnight. Father Charles said that he could not come then, but that he would pray for the sick man. McDonald returned to the hospital immediately, and was met by a nurse who told him that the sick man had got an unexpected and sudden change for the better. On making enquiries, he found that the improvement had set in just at the time he was speaking to Father Charles. The sick man was eventually restored to normal health.
  31. A little girl, living in the vicinity of Mount Argus, was very ill and given up by the doctor. One day Father Charles happened to be passing as the doctor was leaving, and at once came in to ask if there was anyone sick. On being told about the condition of the little girl, he prayed

## FATHER CHARLES

over her, and on leaving said that he would call on his way home. When he returned the little girl was standing in the doorway to greet him, as well as ever she had been.

32. Another man, living near Mount Argus, was stricken with paralysis and had been unable to move for three months when his wife went for Father Charles. He came immediately and accompanied her back to the house, repeating all along the way: "A stroke, God bless us!" He prayed for some time over the sick man, and then left, but he had hardly left the house when the man got up and walked about. A Protestant gentleman, who lived in the neighbourhood was in the habit of calling each evening to enquire after the patient. When he called this evening and had been told what had happened, he said: "That man is a saint."
33. Anne Murray reports that as a child she suffered from spasmodic croup—a complaint from which three of her brothers had already died. While being carried to Mount Argus by her mother she had a very bad seizure, and when they arrived at Mount Argus had all the appearances of being dead—so much so, that some who saw her told her mother that she was dead. Father Charles asked the mother if she really wished the child to get better, and then prayed over her for a long time. The child got better and had never another recurrence of her complaint.
34. A boy of seven, who then lived at Cavan, was suffering much from a diseased bone in his foot, which was supposed to be tubercular. He was brought to Dublin to be treated by Sir Dominic Corrigan. The nurse brought the boy to Father Charles, who took the boy in his arms, blessed him, and said that he would never be troubled by his foot again. The boy was cured immediately and permanently.
35. A little girl, suffering from sore eyes, was brought by her mother to Father Charles, who told the mother

## APPENDIX

that one eye would get better. As he said, one eye did get better, but the other became completely blind.

36. Joseph Jones reports that as a boy he suffered from spinal trouble and was not able to move except by the aid of crutches. Father Charles happened to see him one day as he passed the house, and came over and blessed him. He told him to say one *Our Father* and three *Hail Marys* in honour of the Holy Cross. The boy did so, and afterwards was able to dispense with the crutches, eventually becoming a strong and active man.
37. Another boy, called Keenan, was told by doctors that he would have to have one eye removed to save the other. His parents brought him to Father Charles, through whose blessing both eyes were restored to perfect health.
38. A lady from Mitchelstown reports that her mother was suffering from very serious heart trouble, and her life was despaired of. She had heard of Father Charles, but being unable to go to Dublin, she wrote and asked him to pray for her mother. He answered immediately saying that he would bless her mother from Mount Argus, and that he would hold the relic of St. Paul of the Cross towards Mitchelstown. The mother was completely cured and lived for forty years afterwards.
39. The same person relates the case of a woman who came to Dublin to be operated on for a serious tumour. Before going into the hospital, she came to Mount Argus and was blessed by Father Charles. Afterwards when the surgeon examined her, he could not find any trace of the tumour and told her that an operation was unnecessary. Her own doctor, on learning what had happened, declared that he could not understand.
40. A girl, called Agnes Kearney, was suffering from blood-poisoning and phlebitis, her condition according to the doctors being hopeless. Father Charles was brought to bless her, and before he left the house, she was able to

## FATHER CHARLES

get out of bed completely cured. Her doctor, on being questioned, could not account for her recovery.

41. Another girl, suffering from paralysis, had been undergoing treatment in the Orthopedic Hospital for some time without showing any signs of improvement. She came to Father Charles, who told her that she would get better, but that some tragedy would befall another member of the family. She recovered in time, but two years afterwards her sister was killed by the explosion of a gun.