

The Bishop with 150 wives

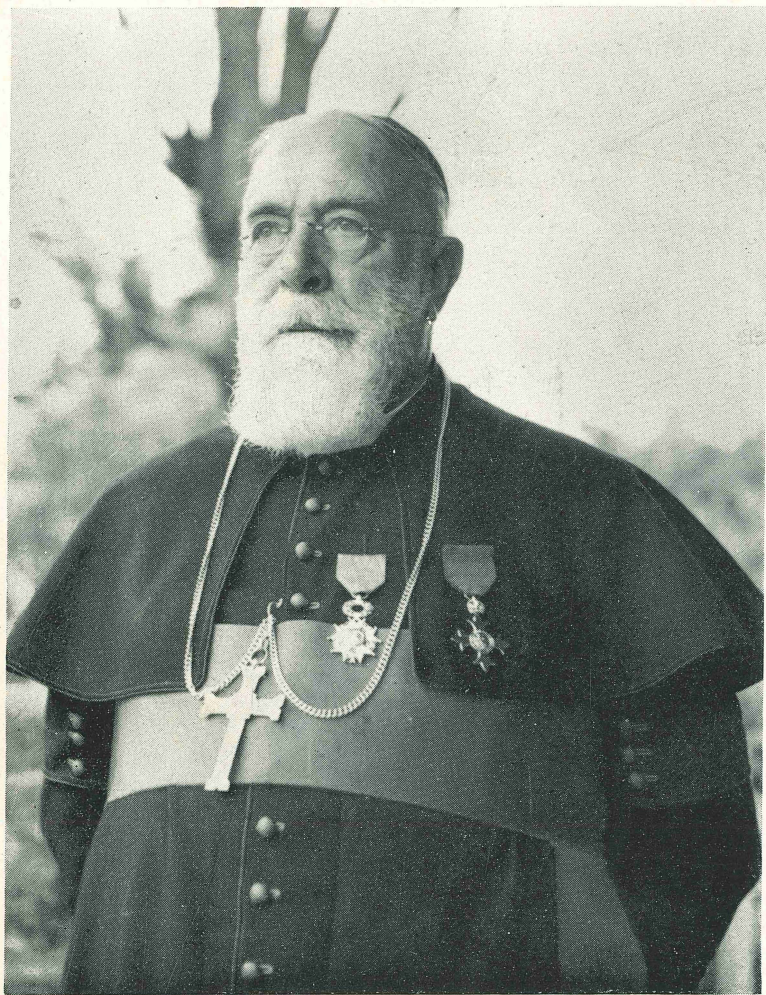
Fifty Years as a Missionary



By
F. X. GSELL

with an epilogue by
ANDRÉ DUPEYRAT

“THE BISHOP WITH 150 WIVES”



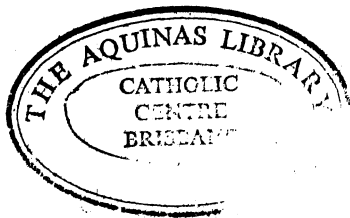
His Excellency, Mgr Gsell, Bishop of Darwin, wearing the decorations of a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour and the Order of the British Empire, the latter conferred by the late King George VI.

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Foreword

The Bishop with 150 Wives was published in Paris by La Colombe in 1954 and called *L'Évêque aux 150 Épouses*. Bishop Gsell is French, but he has lived in Australia the greater part of his life and speaks and writes English perfectly. He dictated his story to an Australian confrère in English. Why, it may be asked, did his book first appear in French? The British publishers cannot answer that question. However, as converts to the charming old bishop's philosophy of life, they can say, simply, it was Providence.

Providence had decided that Bishop Gsell's story should reach his British friends adorned with his gaiety and *esprit*; it should not appear as just another missionary book; and so it passed through the French language.

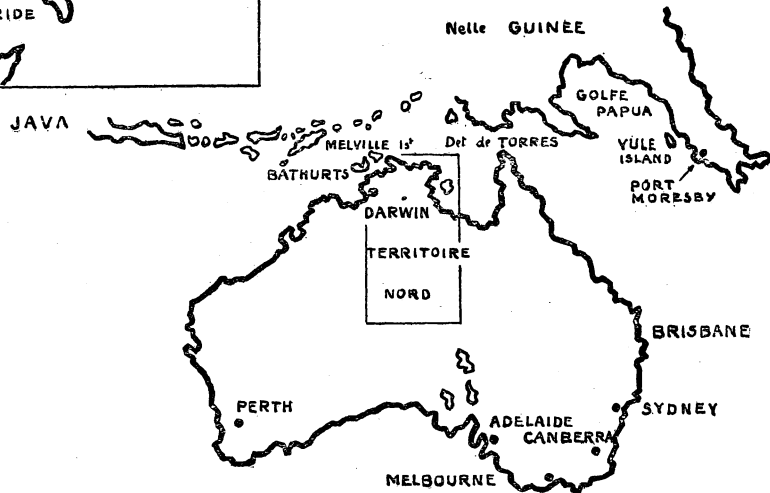
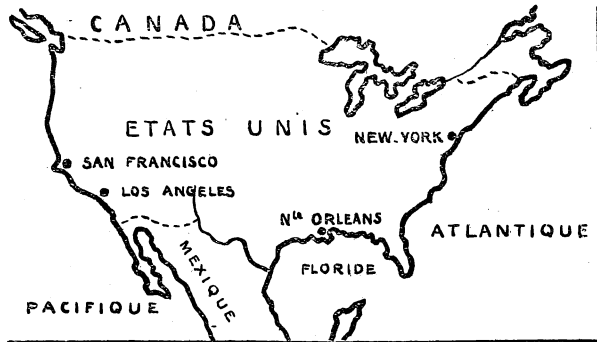
The first attempt to translate the story back into English was not successful: it had indeed become just another missionary book with a limited appeal. However, Providence had arranged that in the London publishers' office there should be one who could read French tolerably and who had travelled through much of Bishop Gsell's diocese in the Northern Territory of Australia. A Frenchwoman turned the French text into literal English, and the one in the publishers' office, armed with the French version, got to work and, it is hoped, succeeded in translating all that makes the book so delightful. Some paraphrasing was necessary for British readers, but the translator, if he can call himself such in view of the work done by the Frenchwoman, quickly fell a victim to the charm and fun in the author. Indeed, he has written to Bishop Gsell asking if he may have a "card" for his Union. God is the Supreme Em-

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ployer in the Bishop's Union. Strikes are unthinkable, of course; but members of this Union who have done their best do expect the Employer to play His part, and they tell Him so.

I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. St Luke 11. 8.

“THE BISHOP WITH 150 WIVES”



Map showing the comparative sizes of the United States, Australia and Northern Territory.

CHAPTER I

Where the Reader is introduced to the Northern Territory of Australia

To picture Australia, with its 8,986,873 people clinging largely to coastal and urban areas, imagine the United States as unpopulated except for the residents of New York City. Spread the bulk of these along the Atlantic seaboard, scattering a few handfuls inland; drop some around Key West and garnish the Gulf shore between southern Florida and New Orleans; then skip over to Los Angeles and deposit the rest.

Figures can speak volumes. The United States offers a better analogy than Great Britain and France in picturing Australia, because the size of the first-named more easily approximates that of Australia. Most people know the United States at least as an immense chunk of land on a map of the world and they know, at least approximately, the comparatively small area covered by New York. When it is known that Australia, roughly of the same area as the United States, can boast a population no greater than a single American city—a monster one, it is true—food will surely be found for reverie and reflection.

Dry for long months of each year, tough in aspect if strangely beautiful too, and disproportionate in a variety of ways, that part of the great island continent of the Southern Hemisphere called the Northern Territory of Australia covers a surface of 523,620 square miles with a depth from north to south, of 1000 miles and a breadth, from east to west, of 700 miles. To the north lies the Arafura Sea, subdivided into the Timor Sea in the west and the Gulf of Carpentaria in the east. This vast land has only 50,000 inhabitants: 5,000 Europeans, 25,000 aborigines who live in the various "reserves" and a balance of half-breeds

and Asiatics. This country is devoted largely to cattle raising, an industry which, in future days, may be regarded as an extravagant use, in many parts, of highly fertile soil capable of supporting a large population when scientific water conservation is organized. Today, enormous herds of cattle may be met being slowly driven to the scattered markets. In addition to a conventional trade in cattle hides, the buffalo, the crocodile, the snake, and the opossum help to swell a not unimpressive turnover in rarer skins. There is, in addition, considerable trade in mother-of-pearl shell and in actual pearls, more important before the last war, when the pearl-bearing areas of the comparatively speaking shallow seas of the Territory coast bore fleets of Japanese and Filipino pearling luggers competing with those controlled, or worked, by Australians.

In 1906 the Northern Territory formed part of the State of South Australia. It was not until 1911 that its administration was formally transferred to the Federal Government whose centre is, of course, Canberra. The Minister for Home Affairs became the Minister for the Northern Territory, and Port Darwin, on the Clarence Strait, became the local capital and the seat of the Administrator for the Northern Territory.

Darwin, so blessed geographically, can hardly fail to grow in importance, a growth somewhat accelerated by the development of air travel; and although its isolation from the rest of Australia and the undeveloped possibilities of its hinterland have delayed what might be called a normal growth in a new country, there is little doubt that the Darwin of the future will be a large and gracious city. As it is, the market gardens lovingly cultivated by the Chinese on the town's outskirts provide a green belt, while cultivated tropical shrubs and flowers tended by the inhabitants add a cheerful air. A telegraph line which was established as long ago as 1872 still serves to connect the town with the city of Adelaide, the capital of South Australia, far to the southward. A narrow-gauge railway line which has taken an unconscionable time in building paused for many

years at Pine Creek, only 150 miles to the south; but more recent years have seen something of a spurt and the line now runs to Birdum. A friendly little train plies to and fro twice a week right into the "Red Heart" of Australia.

A commodious harbour where, incidentally, the difference between high and low tide is quite extraordinary, allows ships to berth at a short distance from the shore; and Darwin is a port of call for an occasional liner and, more often, for cargo ships not only from other Australian ports but also from Europe, on the one side, and from more eastern ports on the other.

Darwin's population almost equally divides itself between Europeans and Chinese. In its way, and according to its scale, the townsfolk enjoy a standard of living comparable with other Australian towns of the south. Inevitably, like all tropical towns, Darwin enjoys the attention of diligent flies by day and more sharply annoying mosquitoes by night, to say nothing of other annoying winged insects; but, on the whole, the level of health is high and epidemics are rare. There are only two seasons, neither of which may be accurately labelled as winter and summer: they are called the Wet and the Dry, adjectives which define with enough accuracy to save breath being wasted on nouns. Thus it is that from roughly December to April heavy, and sometimes fierce, warm winds come from the north-west with steady rain which can continue for days; while from April to November, the season of the south-east trade winds, little rain may be expected, allowing everything to become very dry. However, the south-east trades tend to be cooling and refreshing.

If my story is to be clear, it will be necessary to outline briefly those events which marked the first penetration of Catholicism into this part of northern Australia. As early as 1848, the Papacy divided Australia into provinces and dioceses, and this Northern Territory became the Diocese of Victoria, called after a small town or settlement well to the east of Darwin. Although two bishops were appointed in succession, the Most Reverend

Joseph Serra and the Most Reverend Rosendo Salvado, both Benedictines, they were prevented from taking possession of the diocese. However, the tenacity of the Church is only equalled by its patience and, in good time, Bishop Brady, of Perth, sent Father Angelo Confalonieri, a graduate of the Propaganda College in Rome, with two Irish "lieutenants". Unhappily, the boat they were travelling in was shipwrecked in Torres Strait and both Irishmen were drowned. Only Father Angelo reached Victoria.

With a zeal worthy of the fathers of the early Church, Father Angelo laboured in possibly the most difficult mission field in the world: in fact, with no care for himself, he wore himself out and died at his post. He was buried with military honours and, indeed, so greatly was he admired and loved, that the garrison went into mourning. Let us hope that history will keep for ever green the memory of this first apostle of the Northern Territory.

In course of time, Victoria lost her title of capital and the Northern Territory remained decapitated until a replacement could be found. In the end, Fort Darwin was chosen and, it might be mentioned, this was only the name of the actual port. The town was called Palmerston after the British Prime Minister of that day; the port after Charles Darwin, the great naturalist, who, some years before the company of the famous *Beagle* first sighted the port in 1839, had visited Australian waters in that same vessel.

Mission progress is slow and uneven in virgin country, and so it was not until 1881 that a Christening Certificate is found signed by Father André Navarre, future Vicar Apostolic and Archbishop of Papua. The ship upon which Father André happened to be travelling called at Port Darwin on the right day to permit him to pour the holy water on the forehead of the newborn baby of a certain Mr Pickford.

When things are not going well and difficulties seem insuperable in the Catholic Church mission field, the Jesuits are



Nowadays the natives wear European-style clothes except when they recapture the nomadic spirit of their former way of life on periodic "walkabouts".



Hunting the kangaroo with spears thrown with the aid of the woomera.

called in. And so, in 1882, Father Streele, S.J., an Austrian, was named Apostolic Administrator of this vast area which, beginning with the title of the Diocese of Victoria and Palmerston, was eventually to enjoy the simpler and shorter title of the Diocese of Darwin. The work of the Jesuits covers twenty years, actually up to 1904.

They began by establishing a missionary station for the natives at Rapid Creek, seven miles from Darwin; but this proximity to Darwin with its European and Asiatic population was the underlying cause of an initial failure. Bitter experience has proved to those engaged in mission work amongst native peoples that if they want their missionary labours to bear fruit, they must work as far as possible from the centres of white population. There are good white people in such centres, but the influence of the less worthy can be corrupting.

Eventually, the disciples of St Ignatius Loyola thrust deep into the south, planting their flag one hundred miles away on the banks of the Daly River. There a church was built surrounded by houses, a school and workshops. The land was ploughed, fences were built and horses and cattle introduced: so that, gradually, the natives saw the advantages of farming and the civilizing influence good husbandry brings.

Alas, the Daly River itself, always temperamental, like all rivers in a land where long periods of perfectly dry weather are followed by equally long periods of rain, swelled angrily in a succession of unusually high floods and washed away this good land wrested from the bush. These blows might have been met; but when the establishment of a copper mine in the neighbourhood of the Mission brought the Whites pouring in like a cloud of locusts, the Army of the Lord packed its baggage and withdrew, the kind of strategic retreat that has never dishonoured anybody.

And so, during four years, the Northern Territory awaited a new offensive; and while, during those four years, there was no resident priest, the registry of christenings remains to witness that Christian seed had been sown. More than a hundred names

are inscribed on it, and anyone who has lived amongst natives will know just what that means. The mortal remains of both Father Streele and Father O'Brien, the first Jesuit to arrive and the last to remain, rest at Seven Hills, S.A.

The campaign reopened in 1906. Cardinal Moran, Archbishop of Sydney, led the bishops in Australia in asking the Holy See for reinforcements. This appeal was duly passed on to the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart already preaching the Gospel in neighbouring New Guinea and New Britain. Although the hazards were great and the work promised nothing but hard and perhaps disappointing labour, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart met the wishes of the Church.

Father Treand (of Hermance, near Lausanne), then Provincial in Sydney, offered me this new task; and since at that time I knew of no difference between a Papuan and an Australian aboriginal, I offered no objection and started off.

Port Darwin had a bad reputation in the south at that time. I was told that the country was either sun-scorched or soaking like a sponge, that it was arid and barren, that its black inhabitants were savages and that the whites were tainted. I was mad, they said, to attempt so hopeless an enterprise, adding, as a final piece of encouragement, that I'd soon be back utterly discomfited.

And I must confess that as I left Sydney my mind was heavy with apprehension. But there it was: all had been settled and the only thing to do was to take some comfort from the thought that despite the warnings and forebodings of my friends, the best way to judge a country is to go to it oneself. And, after all, was I not a missionary and was not northern Australia a mission field with souls needing help? Had not our Lord urged His servants to go everywhere and to preach the Gospel to all creatures? In the north He would be with me, with His grace and overwhelming power.

The truth, as I found later, was that the picture had been painted with black paint. As in other parts of the world, I found

there was a mixture of good and bad, a mixture of things neither good nor bad with those which were neither bad nor good.

Each of us must measure his words according to the shape of the things which help or oppose him, according to the impact made by the people with whom he walks along life's pathway. Wherever in the world a man leaves his footprint, he has taken his chance whether he be saddled with great handicaps or small ones.

On the day of the Feast of the Assumption, 15th August, 1906, I landed at Port Darwin. There were three Catholics to greet me on the wharf, Mr Tom Caine, Mr Robert Pickford and Mr Francesco Chavez. My parish church was a tiny chapel dedicated to our Lady Star of the Sea which could hold forty people. My parishioners led me to a comfortable little bungalow, built by the Jesuits; and this was to be my home for five years. Because, for the time being, I was to be the only missionary in residence, Mrs Helen Ryan was kind enough to prepare my meals, refusing to accept any kind of remuneration for this service. Mr Francesco Chavez, later to be killed during the Japanese air attack on Port Darwin in 1942, came every morning to serve at Mass and to keep house for me. This provisional arrangement lasted for two years.

I hurry over this part of my story because, as a missionary, my first care was for the natives and one might not call Darwin a native centre in any sense of that term, although there were, indeed, half-castes living with a dwindling population of Chinese—dwindling since the White Australia policy had forbidden fresh immigration of Asiatics. And throughout this northern country there were numbers of whites and half-castes, some five thousand in all, scattered over an area greater than France. There were upward of a thousand Catholics living to the east of Alice Springs, some stock-breeders and some miners, the latter employed at the Arltunga gold-mine then working at full capacity. I must add to these a hundred or so from Manila, employed by pearl-fishing interests.

To begin with, my headquarters at Darwin had to be organ-

ized, with due arrangements made for the saying of Mass and necessary attention to the sacraments, teaching, inculcating a knowledge of the Catechism, and house-to-house visiting. As a shepherd I saw I must begin by trying to count my flock; but this was not easy in a highly unstable population where mixed marriages had had disastrous results and where other marriages less irregular, perhaps, had suffered through the prolonged absence of a priest.

Nevertheless within five years the Darwin centre had been organized and I could look back on many adventures, particularly during my attempts to explore my vast domain so far as my means would permit. There was the journey along the railway track to Brock's Creek, to Burrundie and to Pine Creek. When, later, the last-named grew in importance, it was decided to build a church there. Father Cros, Missionary of the Sacred Heart, was given a collection of girders from a disused mine by a Mr Byrne; the generosity of Australians is proverbial; and with these he built a church showing considerable ingenuity and foresight: because, aware of the fickleness of gold seams, he bolted the edifice together without using a single nail. Thus, when Pine Creek fell on bad times, the church had only to be unbolted piece by piece and put together again a little farther off, at Tennant Creek.

And thus I wandered about in this vast land, always seeking my sheep, sheep whom I might not gather into a compact fold but who could be taught to see they were still under the care of a shepherd.

Aranda, Lake Amadeus, Alice Springs—and far to the west to the back and beyond I wandered, looking towards Kimberley through which I must pass like a streak of lightning although Catholics lived here. I followed wild and seldom used tracks; they call them pads in that country; and once I travelled in a horse-drawn carriage, a luxurious mode of travel which did not save me from a startling adventure when, before we were aware of it, the carriage had its four wheels in the air and we were

sprawling about the ground, yet quite unhurt: and was it a coincidence that this day was the Feast of our Lady of Miracles? I prefer to think she had good fortune up her sleeve.

At Wyndham, I had the joy of introducing a new Christian into the Church Militant, of giving a blessing at a wedding and of noticing, during my little discourse, that one of these who listened to my words was Dr Trower, the Anglican bishop. The wilderness favours a wide tolerance between different confessions of faith, and relations between them remain friendly.

And then I recall that happy day when two comrades came from Sydney to join me, Father John O'Connell and Brother Lambert, the latter wearing the blue cord at his waist: and thus the environment of a presbytery, so dear to the heart of a true priest, was created.

The Christian education of the Catholic children obliged to attend the State school, a score or so, demanded our thought and became my main preoccupation. Until nuns could arrive, Father John and I acted as schoolmasters and thus laid the foundation of a convent and school, both mainstays and effective props of all missionary work.

But a foundation is only a beginning. Suitable buildings were needed and we had neither builders nor materials. Fortunately, the foresight of the Jesuits had provided the actual ground.

Without hesitation, we ordered the necessary materials from Sydney, the other end of the continent; and after that we began pestering Mgr Navarre until there came running to us the "Construction Brother", a solid Dutchman, Brother Philippe. As if by magic, a convent and a school rose from the ground and they remain, in my mind, the best ornaments of which Darwin may boast.

The school opened with more than a hundred children registered as scholars.

The parish of Darwin was on its feet. It had taken me five years but now I could turn my attention to a new objective, the conversion of the aborigines.

CHAPTER II

Of Whom and of What is it All About?

THE Lord speaks in the plainest terms. Choosing and calling unto Him certain men—the Apostles—He gives them a definite task. “Go ye and teach all nations,” He commands: “I send you as lambs amongst wolves.”

The issue then remains perfectly simple. The work before the one to whom He speaks is to carry the divine message to those who have not seen, or felt, its light. And if he does not hear the call, he can always go back to his parish pump.

And amongst whom must he who obeys the divine order work? Amongst the primitive peoples mentioned in geography books after such books have given a careful outline of a country’s agricultural possibilities in the way, perhaps, of sugar-cane production. They may be the native porters or the guides an intelligent explorer will engage by the dozen to help him to proceed faster. It is the souls of these people that every missionary with a true vocation burns to awaken. The soul is there: it sleeps.

The people I tried to teach, for as long as I was able, were white-faced and black-faced. The former were Australians who, as we all know, have built for themselves a proud young nation which, as history is always showing, counts with, and deals with, any power in the world on an equal footing. The latter were the aborigines.

A strange contrast! It has often been said that the aborigines of Australia come lowest in the human scale, so near to the animals, indeed, that some travellers and so-called scholars are

willing to question their capacity for a spiritual life. But those of us who have lived amongst these people know that while it is true that they are endowed with life, as a tortoise or a dog is, they are also living beings to be numbered with those whom our Lord will judge "when He comes to judge the quick and the dead". They, these Australian aborigines, possess a conscience; they are capable of mental, even intellectual and spiritual, processes, and, given the opportunity, they can reach as high a standard as the best.

What they have lacked is certainly not intelligence. They have had no one to take them by the hand. Cast, centuries ago, upon an almost uninhabited continent, with no dealings or even transitory contacts with the civilized world; Australia was unknown before the sixteenth century; they fought hard to survive. Nowhere did Nature offer enough of those fruits which in happier lands only wait to be gathered, whose seeds might be sown with a certainty of a harvest. The land they were cast on could not inspire in them the idea of sowing with certain hope. And thus they wandered here and there, seeking out a meagre living, doomed to nomadism, in a vicious circle like a lost traveller who wanders for hours around the point of his departure. The hours of the lost traveller are millenniums for the aborigines, and their circle encloses thousands of square miles; but the endless tramping and denial of progress is the same.

Thus it had become natural for the Australian aborigines to reap, to gather, what the land offered with no thought of sowing. Indeed, it is difficult for them to believe that anything can come from a seed. According to their ideas, men proceed, as do animals and plants, from spirits; different spirits producing different foods; and thus the need to wander searching for this spirit-produced nutriment is a vital necessity. If the need becomes desperate, they address a *corroboree*, or prayer, to the particular spirit concerned with the food they seek, and sooner or later it is found.

Here one day, there the next, one never knows where to find him, this vagabond by necessity. Forced to be always on the move in pursuit of game, the aboriginal carries with him as little as possible: the man his weapons, the woman her yam-stick and her bark-woven basket. Furniture and clothes? What on earth for? And a house; but who would look after a house? And so they eat when they find a bite of food, and they sleep where they happen to be. If the sun strikes down too fiercely or the wind is too harsh, they make for a dense thicket where they break or bend a few branches to make a rough shelter. If, by a lucky chance, they find an area where food and water abound, they will tear wide strips of bark from trees, the barks of some Australian trees lending themselves to such uses, and a rude hut more like a tunnel than anything else is quickly improvised. Here they will spend peaceful hours devoted to digesting food and smoking.

It is true that a nomadic life is not always incompatible with at least an embryonic civilization. We know that in Asia, in Africa and in parts of the Americas, whole tribes move to and from the hills with their flocks, as did the patriarchs of the Old Testament, establishing relatively stable encampments while pastures lasted; but circumstances have always forced the Australian aborigines to behave differently: they must move in small parties, isolated family groups, through country where large numbers dependent on the land's offering would starve to death.

It is true that unusual circumstances, as, for instance, war, a burial of importance, or initiation ceremonies, will see the natives muster in large numbers. On these occasions thought is given to food supplies in the collection of extra kangaroos and palm nuts; but the ceremonies must end as soon as this food is consumed, and once more the people disperse. Apart from dogs and half-tamed dingoes, both useful for hunting, domestic animals are unknown to the aborigines. Sometimes children will bring up with loving care a young kangaroo or even a

crocodile, but the happiness of these pets is highly transitory and ends on the campfire to meet what might be a long-felt want in the stomachs of their protectors.

The migrations of each tribe are limited to well-defined areas, but any movement beyond the boundaries of these areas could easily be a *casus belli*. There is actual space and to spare in the vast "reserves"; but much of the immensity is exhausted in a scorched, stony landscape, seemingly tortured to the bone, so that gazing upon this land one can imagine some prehistoric catastrophe. In the more northern regions, where the land is richer and rains heavy and regular, the minimum living space per man would seem to be about one square mile. But in the centre (Arunda) twelve square miles would hardly be enough to support one man, so very great are the differences in soils and climates.

The main concern of the aboriginal is hunting. With what? Well, it all depends. It can be with spears which are thrown or with clubs which vary in appearance according to the ingeniousness or taste of their designer and maker. In the far north and in the islands, the spears used are from three to four yards long, the end being flattened and furnished with a point. These can be deadly up to one hundred and thirty feet; but the comparative lowness of their velocity makes them fairly easily avoided. The clubs, made of hard wood, are short and slightly curved with a heavy knotted end, their chief use being in hand-to-hand fighting, when they can produce many gashes, bad bruises and broken joints. The coming of the white men has inevitably produced some modifications in weapon design by our children of the bush, but the essential characteristics are not changed. For example, they now harpoon the dugong and turtle with steel rods, and their fish spears or multi-pointed javelins are today made of galvanized wire.

In the north of Australia unaided spear-throwing is little practised. A woomera is used, this being a length of wood about a yard long ending in a hook. Into this is inserted the

projectile and, with a suitable movement of the arms and body, the woomera can send a spear flying at astonishing rapidity. This spear is made from a light wood, or rather a reed, six feet in length and pointed with very hard wood about four inches long. Sometimes this spear is pointed with a flat fragment of flint and, occasionally, a fortuitously shaped broken bottle end is used.

There are also what are called "shovel throwers", a weapon in the form of a pole of hardwood, at the end of which is fixed what looks like a shovel. This is made of iron-wood. Propelled by a woomera, these weapons can lay flat any victim they strike. Then there is the "waddy", which looks like a dagger, made of hardwood from four to five inches long; and this can grievously wound an adversary in single combat.

It is in central and southern Australia that the apparently mysterious boomerang holds sway. Imagine a very strong hardwood blade in the shape of a crescent, with its ends slightly curved on the inside and outside like a propeller with a cutting edge. The boomerang flies off, propelled by a powerful movement of the wrist and, following a circular course, turning on itself like a wheel and at the same time describing a circle sixty to seventy yards in diameter, it returns near the feet of the thrower. The accurate throwing of a boomerang demands the exertion of much skill by a boomerang expert; boomerang throwing is a difficult art to master. I have seen a boomerang which was made to turn twice on itself, only touching the ground in the middle of the third turn. Many white men have tried boomerang throwing but few have enjoyed more than indifferent success. Even the natives themselves do not take a successful throw for granted, showing amazement equalling that of the whites when they watch a boomerang's evolutions. A boomerang can kill game behind trees or rocks, and it can kill birds in full flight.

The game hunted by the aborigines is diverse, plentiful at some times and places, scarce at other times and places. Apart

from kangaroos with their fantastic leaps or flights, because they seem to plane through the air propelled by their powerful hind legs, there are bandicoots, rat-like or rabbit-like creatures which live in burrows; emus, a close relation of the ostrich but rather smaller; cassowary, a flightless bird about the size of a turkey which lives in dense scrub; and there is a variety of waterfowl, including ducks and geese on the billabongs or lagoons which are found most often in Arnhem Land and in the north. While the men hunt, the women and children are tireless in their search for anything edible they can lay their hands on—yams, seeds, lily roots, lizards, snakes, wild honey and birds' eggs.

The aborigines are very fond of goose eggs, and a goose egg hunt is an exciting occasion enjoyed by men only, the women and children remaining at home in the camp. The frailest canoes, in a sense improvisations made from a single strip of bark from the *Eucalyptus tetrodonta*, are used as the men manœuvre these light craft with great skill and dexterity along the narrow channels between trees that emerge from the marsh and through the fronds of aquatic plants. The canoes follow in line close upon one another and the conversation is limited to various exclamations: "Bulna! Bulna! Ngarra yauyun!" Gently! gently!

Now and again there is war. Pretexts are seldom lacking: it may be a matter of a stolen wife, or worse—a violation of a frontier, or an infringement of tribal law.

An explosion of great joy and excitement follows the declaration of war as the war corroboree is arranged with the ritual dance which is performed to the sound of the didjeridoo, a long hollow pipe into which the piper blows. But neither joy nor excitement may affect the laws of battle, each tribe affected carefully obeying a code and using the arms peculiar to itself. A messenger carrying a "message stick" roughly carved with simple symbols designed chiefly to vouch for the messenger, announces the opening of hostilities and indicates the date and

place of the encounter. The women are concerned with collecting provisions for the combatants.

The encounter, despite its wild and exciting heralding, is usually limited to a few lusty blows. Unlike civilized battlefields, the scene of an aboriginal encounter is not littered with many dead bodies; indeed, in twenty years I saw only one dead body. Nevertheless, wounds abound; and there are many cuts and bruises, even broken or nearly broken bones; but even the last-named knit quickly and the wounds are not long in healing. The state of belligerence continues until the losses on both sides are equal. An equal number of corpses (if any), or an equal number of men put out of action, is the signal for peace.

However, it must be admitted that this very real sense of the strict rules of warfare goes hand in hand with a kind of cowardice which permits treachery and cunning in days of formal peace. Premeditated killings are not uncommon, and the aboriginal kills shamelessly for reasons of revenge or through rivalries over the most trivial of causes. The aborigines think nothing of stealing into an enemy camp to take an adversary by surprise, stabbing him with a spear while he sleeps.

Aboriginal society subdivides itself into clans and totems, the clan being local, and the totem being universal in the sense that it can be common to several tribes. The material and national aspect of the tribe can be seen in the clan; its spiritual and religious aspect is in the totem. It must be borne in mind that all members of the tribe can belong at once to a clan as well as to a totem in the same way that in our own society individuals of a nation may be of different races and different religions.

The origin of a clan goes back to an old patriarchal group, each member of such a clan bearing a name shared by all its members. For example, there exists on Melville Island a clan called Mandiboo, and without much reference to what is known of the history of the original ancestor, each member of the clan is automatically a Mandiboola. The district inhabited

by these Mandiboolas has a distinct name as opposed to other districts.

Numerous varieties of totems exist in each tribe. It is difficult to define with precision what is their significance; it would seem to be hidden in the secrets of initiation concerning which each tribe proffers its own explanation. Nevertheless, on one point there is unanimous agreement: the totem is a group governed by a particular spirit symbolized perhaps by an animal, perhaps by a plant. For example, the members of a kangaroo totem are called Kangaroos; the members of the snake totem are called Snakes, and so it goes. The kangaroo spirit controls those belonging to the kangaroo totem, establishing an intimate relation between members of their group and the animal in question.

According to native belief, the spirit of a dead person of the kangaroo totem will live in a kangaroo and, in consequence, members of this totem will not kill a kangaroo because of the danger of killing a relation; nor will they eat kangaroo flesh because of the risk of eating, possibly, their brothers. A man of the kangaroo totem will not marry a woman of the same totem for fear of marrying his sister.

This brings us to the subject of initiation, a word which may permit us to indulge in a little amusement at the expense of some American and European dabblers in the occult who overwork the word, or so I have thought when reading their accounts. It has seemed to me that our natives have an advantage over these gentlemen in knowing precisely what they mean by initiation, at least in its practical and ceremonial form.

All authority derives from the fundamental laws and customs established by the great ancestor, and these are transmitted orally. They are unchanging, like the Ten Commandments. Nothing is modified; nothing is either suppressed or embellished, the result being that since all are equal before the law without discussion, a formidable theocracy is in practice a democracy. No one can introduce a new law; no one dare

suspend an old one; all that is permitted is interpretation, a power common to all adults. Thus there are no chiefs or kings amongst the aborigines as we have learnt to consider such amongst native tribes. Each aboriginal man can affirm, "I am the Chief; I am the King", accepting without embarrassment the title sometimes given to him in ignorance by white men.

Although all have the status of kings, none are born members of what might be called the Supreme Council. Membership of this is reserved for those who have braved and successfully passed through the rites of initiation, rites which may extend throughout years. Step by step, the candidate for this supreme honour approaches its threshold and it is unlikely that he will be invested with office before the evening of his life. The Supreme Council is, in fact, the Senate and, as will be guessed, all power and prestige is enshrined in the aged while the young men are undergoing their training.

A young boy who has been coddled and thoroughly spoilt by his parents (young aborigines are outrageously spoilt) will disappear one fine day. He has been seized by a delegation of elders who will take him by force to some mysterious forest or mountain retreat. What will happen there? In principle, no witness is ever tolerated, with the result that only by great patience and tenacious perseverance have one or two ethnologists been able to assemble scrap by scrap a certain amount of information. It is certain that adolescents, as a test of courage and endurance, must submit to the most frightful tortures in the way of teeth and nail extraction to musical accompaniment in the way of a fine display of bull-roarers, of didjeridoos and the beating of the sacred drum or *balnooknook*. We have mentioned the word "corroboree" in connection with war; but there are varieties of corroboree, including those celebrated in the initiation ceremonies. In some of these the performers attempt to imitate the appearance of the totem and to display its motions.

At intervals between the corroborees, the neophytes endure

intensive cramming, which puts a great strain on their memories as, during hour after hour on end, long poems are drummed into their young heads—a jumble of semi-epic, semi-religious symbols steeped in a kind of magic innateness.

This stereotyped accumulation will never be forgotten by the neophytes: it will remain with them until death, and not one of them would be capable of breathing new life into this dead letter. Automatism has killed invention.

The initiation ceremonies occupy several months of each year during upwards of seven years and, as the sessions progress, the novice is promoted successively to higher grades until, finally, he receives consecration as an adult and a full member of the tribe. Nevertheless, before he may raise his voice in the Council, he has still to prove himself by some outstanding feat, a feat which could be the execution of a guilty man condemned to death by the elders. All this witchcraft and casting of spells takes place, of course, under the seal of secrecy, and an aboriginal would die before revealing its smallest or least important detail.

From the moment of his consecration as an adult, the native is dedicated body and soul to his tribe and he may never abandon his tribe. To us, the servants of the Church, herein lies a stumbling block: we can tame the aborigine, but how can we convert him? He is no longer free. This inward, or spiritual, binding is denoted, or registered perhaps, by a more apparent binding, the tattoo marks on his body, markings which show to which tribe he belongs. Thus he may be easily recognized as a member of that tribe.

The Maoris of New Zealand and other Pacific Islanders, to say nothing of sailors and soldiers of our own race, practise, or have practised, the art of tattooing by the injection of coloured substances which outline a design on their bodies and even on their faces; the aborigines employ a somewhat different method, a method, incidentally, which is used in parts of Africa and Melanesia.

The aborigines begin by submitting to long cuts being made on their bodies, the part chosen following the rule of particular tribes. Into these long wounds are stuffed ash and clay. When the wound has healed over, the line has the appearance of a pad of soft rope. Each tribe displays its own particular patterns with the same pride shown by a regiment in its flag. Circumcision and other mutilations must be undergone by the young of some tribes as well.

The aboriginal is a spiritualist. He has no doubts about the existence of spirits around him; and he is convinced of the survival of the soul after death. According to his firm belief, when the soul leaves the body at death, it exists for a time in the other world, but it must return to occupy a body for a new existence. If, during life on earth, the person, of which the soul is an essential part, has behaved well in the sense that he has been faithful to the customs of the tribe, the soul once more lives in a human body; but if that person has not behaved well in that sense, the soul must suffer the downfall to a new existence in an animal. This faith in successive reincarnations of the same person (and it is definitely a person that these simple-minded folk are concerned with), this faith in successive returns, is often linked, not illogically, with a place sacred to some old ancestor who might have covered himself with glory there. Should, for instance, a woman be seized with the pangs of labour in one of these places, then, if a son is born, he will be without any possible doubt the ancestor in question. If the child should be a daughter, there is no dilemma: the ancestor has decided to change his sex, and all is for the best.

As for the disposal of mortal remains, there are almost as many customs as there are clans. Always there is the death corroboree, the wailing of wives and daughters filling the air as the dead man is buried with great pomp. Sometimes his body is exposed on a platform of interlaced tree branches. I have heard it said that some natives eat a morsel of a late parent or relative in order thus to assimilate his virtues; yet it must not

be thought that this indicates anything approaching cannibalism because even the bare idea of cannibalism is abhorrent, to these people.

In actual fact, the social system of the aborigines is communism, not the diluted form practised as a political system in parts of the world today, but an integral, absolute communism. Thus, if anyone with any faith in communism as a practical system of government wants to see demonstrated what communism really leads to, he could not do better than to live for some time among my aborigines to study their lives and habits. I am certain he would return cured of his illusions.

As the aborigines say, they are all "on the same level", which may be translated: equal; there are neither high nor low, rich nor poor, neither master nor servant, no bosses and no employees, no bourgeois or proletarian, noblemen or slave, neither powerful nor weak. All are hunters; all are warriors; all are kings. None cultivate the land: therefore none is productive. All live on the same spoils of the chase, day after day, week after week—year after year. All are ready to defend their own area as all are ready to invade their neighbours' territory. Private property is unknown amongst them because everything belongs to everybody without exception unless it be, to a certain extent, their wives and their weapons. The children belong to the tribe, the game to the successful hunter.

However, it must be noted that in this republic all power is concentrated in the hands of the elders. They form the "party" in European communist parlance, and all outside the party—the women, the children and the non-initiated—do not count. They have no say in any matter whatsoever, and their masters, "the party", may dispose of them freely, even of their lives.

The aborigines are proud, independent and indomitable. Although it is true that they do group together under the command of a chief on the occasion of war, for a burial, or for an initiation, as a general rule they will not submit to restrictions, and they tend to act on their own account following the laws

of their tribe. Inevitably, as in all societies, outstanding personalities make themselves felt amongst their number, but this pre-eminence will confer only a limited influence and purely a moral one. And because competition raises its head here as elsewhere, this pre-eminence and moral influence do not last for long. Behaving like the children they are, yet convinced of their adult status, some aborigines will puff themselves up like the frog in the fable; they will agitate; they will bustle about as they throw up a lot of dust; but one day, sooner or later, such a superior one will be found with an anonymous spear through his body. Why? For the simple reason that nobody is allowed to speak any louder than the others. The head emerging above the crowd is cut off. To go either more quickly or more slowly than others is a sign of rebellion which merits severe punishment. All take off from the same line in the initiation rites and all survive at the finishing post at the same moment, maintaining the same pace, with the same wind and the same stride.

Well-meaning philosophers, sociologists and anthropologists try to indoctrinate us with the slogan—"Leave the natives alone: natural evolution will produce progress." Experience, however, leads us to conclusions entirely opposed to this, particularly if there is implicit in the slogan the idea that in his natural state the aboriginal finds peace and contentment denied to more civilized peoples. Man is never satisfied with what he possesses: he always wants more, even if he does not want everything. This mentality is common to children as to adults, to aborigines as to white men. The aboriginal, while guarding his own wives with anxiety and care, being willing to defend them with all his strength, will, at the same time, take any chance which will permit him to steal the wives of his neighbours. He, like a wild animal in many ways, must ever be alert to danger, real or imaginary. He may possess; but he is envious of the possessions of others. Fear follows the aboriginal as fear follows other men; but in the case of the former there are fixed tribal laws whose breaking will expose him to sanc-

tions and reprisals. One terror pursues him. Is he, or are his friends, going to infringe some tribal law? This cruel anxiety which appears often to obsess him leaves him neither peace nor rest; he is condemned to an existence of suspicion during which he must ever be alert: and thus his happiness is spoiled. Certainly, our blacks are often to be seen relaxed, apparently enjoying themselves as they laugh happily; but while the laugh exposes fine white teeth, it does not tranquillize the heart.

The word progress when applied to the aboriginal in his natural state is only a fetish. Absolute communism, let it be repeated, removes even the remotest glimmer of progress because, in its essence, it forbids any forward movement.

Let us suppose that a native decides to build himself a house and to sow a field. All right: he does both; but both will be on common land and will become, *ipso facto*, collective property. Is he going to be mad enough to work for the benefit of the others? Of course he is not: and so he does nothing.

This explains in many ways the permanent character of aboriginal poverty. They would seem to be heirs of a myth with an origin yet to be discovered. Its discovery may be left to ethnographers; but in practice no life is found in it: it is a simple formalism based on terror. There is no monument, no trace of any kind, that can be found to show that these people have progressed in the slightest degree since they settled in Australia. Vestiges of mural paintings have been discovered in the caves of Chasm Island, for example; but these are very old—and extraordinarily suggestive they are, moreover—and since their painting, there is nothing. There is nothing but an automatic repetition of black, yellow or ochre streaks and figures within the magic circle on the bodies of participants and neophytes made during ceremonial rites.

Indeed, there would seem to be only one hope for these people. Us! Contacts with civilization! With the help and intelligent persuasion of the white man (alas, not always so intelligent), the aboriginal can loosen the vice that grips him

and the yoke that has held him in slavery for thousands of years, the yoke that atrophies him even before he is born.

It is fortunate that the two races have met, even if the story of their meeting is not a happy one. The black man claimed the right to unlimited space, but the white man needed his strip of land to cultivate and upon which to feed his flocks. Pooh! What does wild game care for fences, and what does a mere fence mean to an aboriginal hunter?

There was, indeed, plenty of room in theory, but both wanted the same land and the most fertile with, obviously, the best and most regular rainfall. The planter wanted his land, and had he not paid good money for it? But what meaning could the payment for land have to an individual when that land belonged to the whole tribe? To pay one member of a tribe for land while ignoring others with equal rights according to aboriginal law was to create misunderstanding to say the least of it. But it was worse than that in effect. To permit these overgrown children to sell their patrimony was precisely the same as starving them systematically. Does not a white man in his own country protect minors by laws which forbid them to dispose of their possessions? In Australia, there was no law to save these unemancipated children from themselves, and they were left with nothing but sand and stones. Thus, whatever the price paid, the seller was always the loser, for, deprived of his hunting grounds, he faced only famine and death. Of course the buyer could have guaranteed the seller's nourishment until the end of his days, but what man amongst white men could accept such a responsibility?

Those without knowledge of native laws and customs might suggest that the selling tribe could always withdraw deeper into the continent to live on the lands of neighbours. In actual fact, such a move would see these neighbours taking up arms promptly to resist invasion. If more had been known ethnologically early enough, many errors might have been avoided and many evils evaded.

There are countless stories about the traps and ambushes laid by the natives to destroy the invading white men, as there are descriptions of cruelties and savage attacks which make one's hair stand on end; but we should take many of these with a pinch of salt: adding a little water to our wine, as we say in France. There is no doubt that horrible crimes were committed, but they were really few. The two races soon understood that they needed each other, that friendly relations between them would be to the advantage of both. There are stories of great heroism shown by blacks to save the lives of white men, as there are stories of whites saving the lives of black men. And how many lives were thus spared?

Occasionally, cruelty was merely the result of well-meant kindness, as, for instance, when a white man gave natives well-sharpened tools whose instant effect was not understood by these big children. Often cool investigations of motives have shown clearly that attacks by aborigines have been the direct result of misdeeds on the part of white men, perhaps the killing of a black by a white, often enough the abuse of a woman, sometimes dishonest dealing in business. According to native ancestral law, such misdeeds demand vengeance which, if the guilty one is out of reach, must justly be wreaked on the first white man he can lay his hands on. It must be added that the white man was not slow in paying back the black man in his own coin—paying to one black man or another: he did not look too closely. False dealing and injustice will wound children; both hurt the aboriginal much more than physical punishment. In this respect the white man is more often to blame than his black brother.

In carrying out its desire to protect the natives, the Government was faced with many difficulties, especially in the early days. Laws may be passed and enforced where people live in towns or even in small settlements within easy reach of a central authority; but authority is baffled and frustrated when, over immense areas, potential law-breakers are constantly on the

move and everything made more difficult by the absence of regular communications. Thus lack of co-ordination between the passing of a good law and its application made that law at first ineffective. And even when laws were broken and the offenders overtaken, the time lag between the crime and its punishment was too great to make the latter much use. Experience, of course, played its part; and conditions improved bit by bit.

As is well known, the continent was subdivided into States and a further difficulty developed when each State developed its own set of statutes, resulting in great inconsistency in the treatment of the natives.

With time and experience, policy regarding the treatment of the natives evolved somewhat. In the south, the aborigines solved the problem with tragic simplicity by becoming practically extinct, allowing a civilized economy to take over. In the centre, the vitality of the tribes diminished increasingly as the more virile young men dispersed to find remunerative work on stations and in mines. The north has fared better, for here the life force of the aborigines appears to remain intact. Thus something is saved, even though the error of trying to govern different peoples by the same law is still committed today.

The situation must be accepted as it is: the settlers are here to stay, and the native race must be preserved, two factors which must be reconciled. To reconcile them, successive Governments have created Native Reserves—vast tracts of land upon which no white man has the right to settle. The idea that the two races can thus live happily together within their respective frontiers is good theoretically; but in practice difficulties are raised, the most thorny being that segregation into reserves demands from a native an exodus from his tribal lands which he instinctively feels bound to resist with all his might. We have seen what an atavistic attachment he has for his own little area of country. To him, such an uprooting is less a matter of sentiment than of life or death. Indeed, the problem

of displaced persons, the *bête noir* of European Governments, is no less cruel in our latitudes.

The wisest policy, it seems to me, would be to serve the interests of the natives first: they are the least numerous and the least favoured; and just as a good mother at the head of the table gives the smallest and weakest the first helping, so might the natives be treated. And might not such a policy bring in excellent dividends in increased production in a vast land crying out to be more thickly populated, particularly in areas where a dark skin, the "livery of the sun", acts as a protection?

And so, I would say, guarantee the natives their possessions and, rather than abandon them to their own devices, to an anachronistic social system which denies all progress, let them be joined, little by little, in carefully supervised stages, by white men who, settling on their own land, or near them, quietly and gently, will thus avoid the shock of mass invasion as they raise herds and plant fields. The natives could become shepherds for these carefully chosen white men until they had learnt to raise their own herds. Harmony in a period of transition might thus be preserved.

But always it must be remembered that in Australia, still with its vast Never-Never Land, one must always know how to give time its head.

Now, how does the missionary fit into this scheme? The aim of the missionary is obedience to a divine command: he must bring the heathen to the true faith. Even if this command were ignored today, which it could not be by a follower of Christ, no one, I think, would dare to deny that the true faith is the generating force of civilization. Thus it is in vain that some people say, "Why not leave these people in peace? Why disturb their old customs if they make them happy?"

But we do not forget that these fine talkers, few of whom have given the subject any deep thought, themselves enjoy the benefits of Christian civilization: and they enjoy this security because, in day of old, missionaries brought these benefits to

their forefathers. The heathens are men as we are men and, as such, they have the same right that we have to the benefits of Christianity.

"Go ye and teach all nations . . ."

In Australia, particularly in those northern areas where the aborigines still maintain a foothold, the Christian has a double duty: of charity, in communicating his faith to his less fortunate brothers; of justice, in making what restitution can be made. The natives have largely lost their religious heritage with its beliefs and customs, and this heritage must be replaced. They have lost their lands.

The two compensations, moral and material, march together. Obviously the transformation of a nomadic native hunter into a husbandman and a producer without destroying, or at least upsetting, his tradition is a Utopian idea, as impossible as the making of a Christian from a nomadic pagan before converting him from his erring ways.

However, whatever may be said to the contrary, it is not impossible to reform the aboriginal attitude towards life so that he can become a planter and, indeed, a good Christian. Yes, the process must be long and inevitably obstructed by difficulties; but how many centuries did it take white men to emerge from barbarity? The main thing is to face up to the task and to stick to it, trusting in God.

CHAPTER III

In Search of a Beginning

A BEGINNING, then, had to be made. How and where? My experience in Papua could be of little help, otherwise than indirectly: because conditions were entirely different. I was the Apostolic Administrator; I knew that from the start; but as yet I had no idea how I could catch my *administrés*, roaming at will in the wilds.

It was good fortune that the Jesuit Fathers had been here before me; they had established mission stations in places they considered attractive to their migratory birds, and waited for them to perch. This lesson was not lost on me. It is a vital principle which must be appreciated by those who would found a mission on a rock that they should never attempt to run after nomadic peoples. This is simply because one never knows where they are. It is better to establish a settlement and to arm oneself with patience. Sooner or later they will find their way to one's door.

Working on this vital principle, I had to decide whether to make my base on the mainland or to establish a bridgehead on one of the numerous islands which lie off the north coast. Once more, if indirectly this time, the Jesuits were my guides. I recalled that they had tried the mainland, only to suffer a setback through flooding and the proximity of white men. I decided to choose an island. But which one?

To the north of Darwin and separated from that town by Clarence Strait, lie Melville Island and Bathurst Island, the former with an area of 2158 square miles, the latter with 800 square miles. Each could boast a population of a thousand in-

habitants. Both attracted me, although I gave my first preference to Melville, the bigger.

Alas, I soon heard that buffalo hunters made raids on Melville; and this did not sound promising.

Buffaloes on Melville Island? How on earth could buffaloes get there? The explanation is simple. In 1824, a British garrison had occupied the north-westerly point of the island. To assist in the transportation of food and other supplies, buffaloes had been imported from the island of Timor, 500 miles to the westward. Incidentally, this settlement on Melville Island had taken the name of Fort Dundas; but Fort Dundas is today nothing but ruins. In 1829, the difficult climate combined with quarrels with the natives to force the British to withdraw. We are now, it must be remembered, in a country where towns, like sand dunes at the will of the wind, rise and are levelled in the shortest time: in but a night, it would seem. In short, the soldiers left and the buffaloes stayed to multiply in the surrounding marshes. The hides of these lucky beasts were so thick that native spears hardly dented them and thus they escaped annihilation. Yet why, it may be asked, are there no buffaloes on Bathurst? Evidently, the Apsley Strait which runs between the two islands has proved an impassable barrier. There is a story that a number of old veteran buffaloes showed much enterprise by leading some other males into the sound, and that they swam across to Bathurst; but, so the story goes, not a single female had the courage to risk the crossing.

After investigation, I gathered that a permit to shoot buffalo on Melville Island had been issued to a white man at the beginning of the century. I felt more than a little anxious, but realizing that such a permit might not last for ever, I hoped that sooner or later the chap would take himself off. With official approval, I wrote to him to tell him of my plans. Legally, he could not oppose them; but this did not allow him to hide from me his personal opinion. After attempting to show me how very unsuitable Melville Island was for a mission, he

admitted that his own business would prosper much better without one. He had made the position perfectly clear. Knowing what I was up against, I withdrew.

Bathurst, to the west of Melville and separated from the latter by what is called inaccurately a fjord (it is open at both ends) is thirty-five miles long and an average of three miles in width, spreading itself into the spray of the Timor Sea, a land mass with an indented coastline which forms something the shape of an ivy leaf. The island's population, of about 1000, as I have already said, was sufficient to make the establishment of a mission worthwhile. The natives on both islands belonged to the same tribe, with the same language and the same customs, and intermarriage between the two islands was common. Few white men had up till then set foot on Bathurst, something which especially pleased me.

I had a little difficulty in getting the Government to proclaim Bathurst a native reserve, thus to ensure the protection of my work and to establish its legality. The reserves belong exclusively to the natives, and only missionaries have the right to reside in them, provided only that missionary activity is concerned solely and exclusively with the natives.

What obstacles arose in my path! Missionaries have many friends, of course; but they are not without detractors who go about talking a lot of nonsense about missionary fanaticism even while admitting the missionary's good will—more good will than sense: that they are wasting their time and money to little good purpose, if not to achieve a dead loss. The children brought up under mission influence, these people say, are no better and may be worse than other native children: so often they are lazy, liars, thieves and a lot more besides. I cannot meet this nonsense by showing that our converts are angels. Baptism does not change natures, natures are sinful. We have known this for a very long time, and we had not to go to Australia to learn it; but I can, nevertheless, guarantee that, in the majority, our young Christians accept and absorb our teaching,

and that they learn to behave decently and, in fact, they do the Church honour. This, of course, wins them the mocking comment of the lowest type of white men when the boys refuse to black the white men's shoes and the girls deny them the entertainment they seek. These young people are ready to face up to such skirmishes and to win, knowing they are sustained.

To return to the important business of getting Bathurst proclaimed a native reserve, I must admit that my request seemed to be gathering dust in some pigeon-hole while, even as I waited, Bathurst became the prey of speculators. Indeed, seventeen or eighteen thousand acres had already been sold while other lots had been put up for auction with the certainty of finding buyers. My anxiety became so great, as I chafed at the bit while I waited, that, feeling myself to be blackballed by junior officials, I went over their heads to Mr Denny, then Minister for the Northern Territory, a man in whom I had great confidence. I was wise in doing so because, backed up by Mgr O'Reilly, my Archbishop in Adelaide, I was able to arrange the suspension of the sales of the land, and the Minister let me know that he awaited my visit finally to settle the question. That was in 1910.

In 1911 the Federal Government took over the Northern Territory and Dr Gilruth, its first Administrator, a solid fellow and a man of decision, showed an effective interest in our efforts. At this time, a parliamentary commission visited the country and I seized the chance to lay my plans before the personalities that formed it. To my joy, the Federal Minister fully approved my scheme and at once gave orders for an effort to be made to recover the land already sold, thus making it possible for the whole area of Bathurst Island to be the future reserve. As it turned out, this attempt met with few difficulties because, happily for us, those who had bought the land were found to be incapable of fulfilling the financial obligations its sale required, and they were only too glad to accept cancellation.

The people of Darwin were not pleased. My plans for departure offended them. Besides, they assured me, I should not find any aborigines on Bathurst. They quoted the account of a prospector who had crossed the country without meeting even one and, from this they jumped to the conclusion that the island was uninhabited. They little knew that a thousand eyes had watched this prospector's every movement, spying on him as, in native fashion, they leapt from tree to tree or crawled through the tall grass. Others, Darwin people, admitting the existence of a handful of miserable blacks wandering here and there, assured me that these were of the wildest type of savage, that, indeed, some of them had recently attacked travellers. Would not this shocking banditry cause me to reconsider my decision? Was it not reckless to risk falling into the clutches of these cut-throats and despoilers of women?

I faced up to these worthy townsmen with the imperturbable serenity of the man who sees his duty clearly. As for the risks, real or imaginary, I would take them along in my baggage, between my breviary and my crucifix.

About this time, April 1911, I heard that a man called Lee was about to set sail for Melville Island; and because this could hardly have given me a better opportunity to explore at least the shores of the scene of my projected operations, I arranged to accompany Mr Lee. After an uneventful crossing, we landed on Melville Island, actually at the camp of the buffalo hunters I have mentioned, and from here, across a stretch of about 1500 yards of sea, I could enjoy my first view of Bathurst. I saw a pretty beach framed in foliage, apparently charming and seductive; and the next day I landed there. As it turned out, the distant promise was well fulfilled: my beach was more than pretty; indeed, it was splendid. There were no mangrove thickets to give that dank sombre effect mangroves always give and thus to destroy a coastline's beauty; and the background was filled in by the finest trees in the world. I was not put off by the apparent fact that there was no fresh water near the

shore because I suspected that a little exploring farther inland would show that water was not scarce.

I was right. There was indeed a swamp fed by a useful spring.

Although I was favourably impressed, I thought it prudent, nevertheless, to do some exploring in case there should be other parts of the island with even greater advantages. But although I set off up the valley and examined other creeks and inlets, I found nothing to compare with my first choice. Definitely not! There were no vain regrets: the first site was by far and away the best and not the least of its advantages was the easy access it offered to boats, which could enter and leave with no treacherous reefs, rocks or shallows to upset them.

Thus, Ngouyou became the cradle of the Mission and, later, the station of Bathurst. When, as time went on, I had more opportunities to explore the island, I could only congratulate myself that I had kept to my first choice.

And Ngouyou was neutral territory, No-Man's-Land. But let me explain. I was well aware of the subtleties of aboriginal laws concerning tribal frontiers; and I knew that these had to be considered if I were to enjoy the free hand I felt I must have if I were to succeed. A station built on land held by a particular tribe, in their midst, would instantly become its possession—all our buildings and effects could be annexed as their own property so that we could be forbidden to catechize their neighbours and, most probably, they would defend us against visits from neighbours at the point of the spear. Heaven only knows the squabbles which could follow.

But by a happy chance there was nothing of this kind to fear at Ngouyou. In principle, the land belonged to the Mandiboolas of Melville; but either through negligence or inability to defend it, they had forfeited their rights, or they had allowed their rights to lapse; and the site had become a no-man's-land over which people came and went as they pleased. Bordered on the west by the lands of several tribes of the interior, and washed on its eastern side by the Apsley Strait, it had a good geo-

graphical position, especially on the eastern side where Apsley Strait is used freely by aboriginal canoes.

Thus no one could lay claim to my settlement, and all could visit it.

We ordered a prefabricated house from Darwin. Yes, that does indeed seem strange when the site of the mission was surrounded by trees and thus with a surfeit of timber on the spot; but we were suspicious of local timber until we could know it better, fearing that one kind might season into a spongy condition while another kind might prove attractive food to white ants. We had to be prepared to resist rain and heavy storms; we had, if necessary, to be able to resist a hail of spears or blows from clubs; and then we were in a great hurry.

The work really started in Darwin where each piece of timber, reinforced with iron and properly fitted, was carefully numbered and a strong iron roof assembled.

We needed a boat: because, without a boat we, poor islanders, would soon be reduced to idleness, to stand about with our arms folded. And, of course, our prefabricated house and our tools would not come to us under their own steam. Finally, my duties demanded that I maintain a regular liaison with Darwin.

Much too poor to buy a vessel, we hired one from the firm of Jolly and Co. at a pound a week. A boat of our own would have been better; but later we could see about that.

Now a boat must have a crew and a crew has got to be paid; and, of course, there should be a captain. There were no white men available and, even if there had been, I should not have been able to pay them. However, I got my crew: four men from Manila, good sailors used to pearl-fishing in this area so that they knew every safe anchorage, every useful bay and, perhaps better still, every dangerous reef. And they had offered their services for love of God, in addition to food, clothing, tobacco and a little pocket money. They had not to make the offer more than once.

And so with our little ship laden with the prefabricated building, tools and supplies on board, we weighed anchor on 1st June; and soon our craft bound for Ngouyou, fifty miles to the north-north-east, was leaping over the waves before a stiff south-easterly breeze.

We landed towards evening. There was not a soul on the beach. It was not that we had expected a grand reception; but, without doubt, the natives must have detected our approach and it was natural for us to wonder why they had not been following their usual custom of running up and down the shore as we drew near, eager to identify the visitors and thus to calculate the amount of tobacco ration to be got out of them.

This curious silence puzzled us.

The explanation came later: the natives had indeed seen our boat approaching, but these fine fellows, having something on their conscience, decided that our boat was laden with military police, and vanished into the forest.

It took me some time to piece together the full story, but it should be sufficiently interesting to pardon a digression as I try to tell it. Incidentally, the buffalo hunters on Melville Island had told me something about this curious incident during my first exploratory voyage to the island.

It seems that the buffalo hunter leader had engaged a number of Taroolas on the mainland near Cape Don to shoot buffaloes, and these gentlemen had become first-class shots with .303 rifles. Unfortunately they did not confine their attention to buffaloes. Indeed, they took to threatening with instant death those local natives who did not hand over their women. If an aboriginal refused, he was shot down. Intensifying this work, perhaps seeking variation, three Taroolas from Melville organized a raid on Bathurst. There are no buffaloes on Bathurst, as we know, but there were plenty of young women. Our bandits, full of arrogance and harsh threats, began commandeering this appetizing loot.

"What use," asked the Bathurst people before this threat,

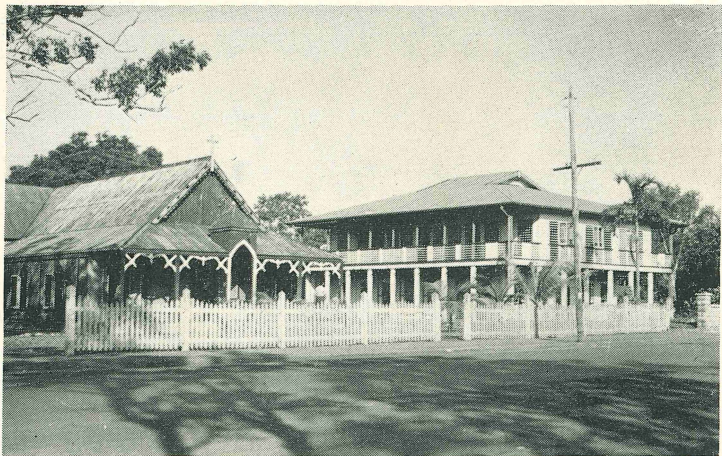
"are spears against fire-sticks?" And so they promptly agreed, saying: "Yes, we shall give you our women: we promise to give you our women, but they have gone to the forest and it will take us a little time to get them back. So be patient; sleep here tonight and tomorrow we shall hand them over to you."

The women-abductors, confident in their arms, accepted these smooth words and went to sleep. But when darkness fell, their potential victims turned themselves into executioners and, falling upon the gunmen's camp, adroitly confiscated the dreaded arms and ammunition and gave the intruders such a hiding with clubs that they escaped more dead than alive.

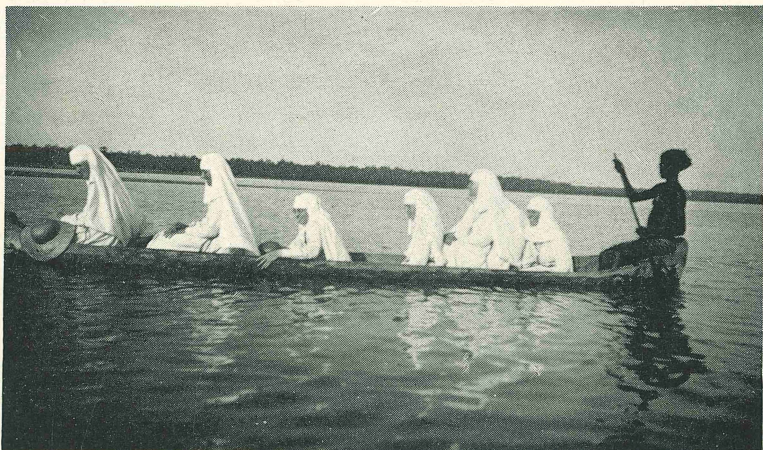
It was into the midst of this tribal feud that I landed; and it was not at all surprising that the beach was deserted. The sight of one policeman's cap in those days would disperse a whole tribe.

I assume that at this time the Taroolas were having their wounds and bruises treated at the Darwin hospital; but the dispute was not at an end: because the Bathurst islanders had now three rifles and seventy-five cartridges: and what would the police think of this state of affairs?

To resume the story: although the three bandits had been forced to retreat, a counter-attack was expected from Melville. After a few quiet days, a dozen Taroolas, taking advantage of the absence of their boss, duly appeared in a canoe with the object of making another and, they hoped, more successful raid on Bathurst. They were received by a well-directed crackle of fire and commanded to return whence they came. They did so, grumbling; but from the safety of Melville they began a desultory bombardment of Bathurst. The fire was not returned, thank Heaven, not wounding anyone. The Taroolas were further abashed when a boat appeared crossing the bay at full speed, unexpectedly bringing to the scene of the conflict the officer detailed to supervise the natives. He, taking in the position at a glance, and without carrying his inquiries any further, forbade the Taroolas to carry arms in the absence of



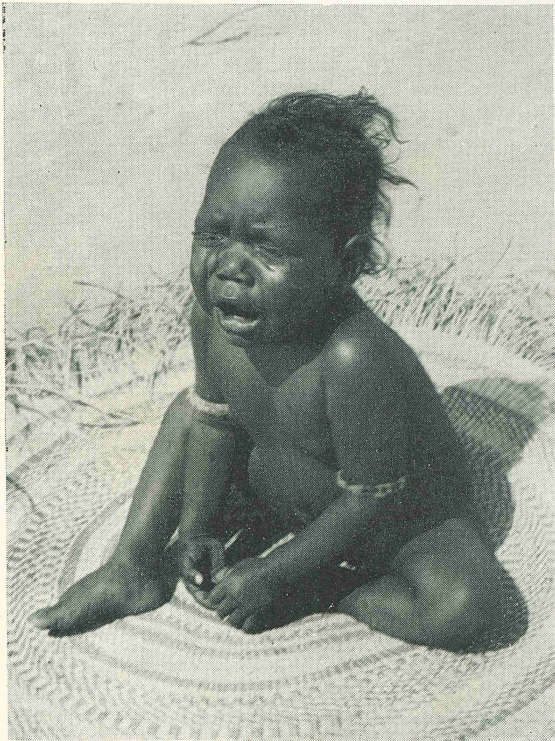
The Cathedral and Bishop's Palace at Darwin.



Sisters of the Order of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart of Darwin.



The old man of the tribe discussing the disposal of . . .



. . . his wife.

their chief and confiscated their rifles. It was a short time after this that the firm of Vestey Brothers bought ill-famed Melville and the buffalo hunter and his band of Taroola brigands were ordered to leave.

Because it is customary in ending a tale to confide somewhat in a reader, to say whether or not all the characters in his story lived happily ever after, I can reassure him about the unfortunate Melville women who had been earlier captured by these Taroolas. They were given the choice of going back to their own people or of following their abductors to the mainland. Those with children took the latter course: and this explains why there are still to be found women from Melville in the Coburg Peninsular, which is Taroola territory. The others rejoined their own people and husbands. To arrive to start a mission on Bathurst Island at so very difficult a time was perplexing and I had to ask myself whether or not I should return to Darwin and there to await less tumultuous days. But no, really: the prospect of such a retreat was too unpleasant to be considered. I preferred to force the hand of Providence by letting Providence know that I intended to land the next morning. Providence would have to protect us.

And so we duly landed the next day and I began by choosing the most suitable position for the house. A position shaded by great trees appeared to be attractive, but for thousands of years, without doubt, this position had been enjoyed by a tangled mass of *lianas* and parasitic plants and creepers which, in turn, for the same number of years, had been in the undisputed possession of billions of mosquitoes, harvesters (tiny insects with unbearably sharp stings) and green ants.

Travellers in northern Australia will agree that, all things being equal, one should show nothing but abject obedience to the invariable command of the green ant—"Get out!"—when a camp has been inadvertently chosen near a green ant colony. I should imagine a doughty hunter who might deal successfully with lions, tigers, crocodiles and even elephants being quite

willing to accept defeat and to retreat before the approach of even two or three small green ants which, he would know, would soon be followed by an army corps. These ants are, perhaps, a quarter of an inch long, but they are without fear as they advance to sting all intruders. The sting is not a violently painful sting, but enough, *en masse*, to make a pause near the stingers quite intolerable. In my case, the green ants had to be faced and defeated by the destruction of their shelter.

Thus it was that each blow from our tools, as we hacked away the undergrowth, produced showers of green ants which, without hesitation, stung: this constant irritation was varied by the attention of mosquitoes and the harvesters.

Eventually, two natives arrived to help us. They, belonging to a tribe in the north, were somewhat incomplete physically: since one, Tokoopa, was a hunchback and the other, Boolak, had only one eye. But what workers they were when stimulated by the lure of food and tobacco!

Once our piece of jungle had assumed something of the appearance of a promenade, we began the task of assembling the prefabricated house. To begin with, we continued to sleep on board; but not one moment of daylight was wasted.

It took us seven days, as in Genesis, to give our Lord a roof and, on 8th June, 1911, on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, I celebrated Mass on Bathurst Island. Was this not a wonderful coincidence?

Our shanty was divided into two parts. One of the rooms served as a temporary chapel, where the Blessed Sacrament kept me company; the other served as office, storeroom and bedroom.

When our boat had been unloaded and all our possessions stored away, I was ready to begin my normal life as a missionary. While the crew continued to return to the boat each evening, I now remained ashore.

My feelings were curious during those first nights—alone and in the midst of a people reputed to be so savage. There was

indeed a key to my door, and the door was solidly built; but a solid door carefully locked means very little when imagination takes charge. The brushing of an insect's wing against a wall puts one on the alert as one's nervous system multiplies the mildest and most innocent sounds and, I must confess without false shame, that I was at first well satisfied at dawn to find myself alive. But one gets used to anything; a habit is soon formed, and it was not long before I slept the sleep of the just, without a care.

For quite a time, my only native visitors were Boolak and Tokoopa, the hunchback and the one-eyed man. But soon, here and there, a chimney-sweep's face would appear in the jungle, only to fade away shyly, and as quickly as it had appeared. I was being watched and, most probably, discussed in the hidden depths of the forest. After all, this white man did not look very alarming: no doubt there would be profit made in working for him. Finally, at the end of a month, I was at the head of a good team of men only: neither woman nor child had shown so much as the tip of a nose. This worried me: because until the women felt free to come and go as freely as the men, I knew that full confidence was lacking.

Never mind! The women and children would come in time.

My workers showed no objection to hard work, and it was clear that they appreciated the station food and tobacco. As our relations developed from friendliness almost to the point of familiarity, I began to feel quite at home. There was much work to do as every day some improvement was put in hand and other jobs completed. First we built a kitchen and then, at a little distance, the store. A school followed, and then a church. Building, building, building! Perhaps it is true that one must start from clear bare land before one can realize fully all the idealism that the brain of man can put into that one word—building. We sawed up timber rather at random, without knowing its quality or lasting strength; but we had no doubt about the uses of a broad stringy bark supplied from one

variety of tree because this made an excellent roof, a good substitute for sheet iron and a much cooler covering than iron. Our aborigines excelled in the preparation of this bark which, from time immemorial, had served them as the chief raw material for their shelters. Soon a fine village—the natives' joy and pride—adorned Ngouyou.

I mentioned earlier a spring which I had discovered in a swamp at some distance behind the station. We found that while, at a pinch, its water could be used for making tea, its position in the swamp with all the swamp's decaying vegetation made it useless for drinking. The neighbouring creeks were tidal and their waters consequently brackish and tainted with salt; and since their sources were too far distant, our only solution of the problem of finding good fresh water was to dig a well.

There is nothing significant in digging a well, is there? No, perhaps not: but wait, you'll see.

Hardly had we started to scratch the soil before the natives assailed me with questions.

"Why are you digging this hole?"

"I am digging this hole because I want to find water."

"But who told you there was water underneath here?"

"Nobody. I simply know it."

This was a little bold in a well-digger digging a hole anywhere except through a bridge crossing a running stream. I had risked my reputation by the expression of my certainty. If I did not find water, I would lose face. Here a man is judged by his deeds. The shakiness of my reputation at this point was made clear to me by the expression of stupefaction which lit the faces of the natives. What kind of a magician was I?

Meanwhile the hole was getting deeper and deeper; but, suddenly, the gradual descent into the earth stopped when my well-diggers began a discussion as they worked, a discussion which grew in excitement until they finally threw down their tools.

"Hullo, there—what's the matter?"

"We won't go any deeper," they shouted. "Look at that rainbow!" They pointed to a rainbow half spread across the sky. "If we open a way for him, he will come up out of the ground and kill the lot of us!"

As I learnt later, the rainbow is an important spirit in native theogony, a spirit that comes up from the earth at one of its ends to travel across the sky until it can descend to enter the earth at its other end. A deep hole can interrupt the rainbow's journey and the hole-digger can be punished forthwith.

Since nothing I could say would persuade the men to pick up their tools, we were obliged to tackle the job ourselves without help from them. They remained seated, grumbling and sulky, as they watched us work.

"He'll find it——! No, he won't! This queer white man! Look out—if the rainbow gets angry!"

By great good fortune we came upon water at fifteen feet—beautiful fresh water, and the rainbow remained wisely where he was. This victory, for such it was at a first attempt at well-boring, was a severe blow dealt at the deep-seated convictions of these dark gentlemen; and the result was that they believed we could dig wells when and where we pleased, so steeply did our prestige rise. As the instinct of imitation is innate in man, especially in primitive men, our example was followed when our natives needed fresh water. This, I would say, is the secret of true colonization.

Perhaps we had better say nothing more on this point in case we have all the worthy anthropologists at our heels, especially those who urge us to leave our brothers alone, in effect to permit them to go on degenerating, sunk in their squalor.

To the natives we offered one surprise after another.

Watching us cutting down trees, clearing the land of stumps and turning over wide areas, even acres of soil, they said, "But, Father, why all this work? You do not want to build here, so what are you doing?"

"Potatoes and fruit will grow here," I explained.

"But," they objected, "they already grow in the forest; there is no need to dig out trees for that."

I went even further and surrounded our garden with a strong fence.

"That," I explained, "is to stop kangaroos, dingoes and our own dogs from eating up our plants. You'll see that we shall have many more potatoes and much better ones."

They did not believe a word I said. They even went so far, if they were short of fuel, as to take our fence stakes to light their fires. Watching us sowing, they grumbled: "What a pity to lose all this food, these potatoes, yams, and ground-nuts. In the earth they will go bad and be of no use to anybody. If," they said finally, "you really want something to eat, sing a song to the spirits, dance a dance, and you'll get all the food you want."

The time of our seed-sowing, apparently, was one of the rare occasions when a song to the spirits was unnecessary: merely an evening leap over our fence to the garden when all our seeds were devoured without more ado—to spare us this frightful waste.

It is sometimes said that the aboriginal is a thief and, on the face of it, the nocturnal consuming of our seed would appear to be larceny. But he is not a thief: he is a practising communist. Everything belongs to all and to each individual, anyone having the right to make use of whatever comes his way. The aboriginal has no objection to one helping oneself from one's own garden; and he will permit one to hunt on his lands. If he is a thief, then so are you, in his eyes.

We were eager to see a garden producing; but, of course, we knew that success was impossible if our tilled land was disturbed before it could offer a harvest. It seemed the last straw to us when they made it plain that, since our vegetable garden had been planted within their territory, it was their property and that, in consequence, anything that grew in it was as much theirs as ours.

Such was their simple logic and, into this, with oceans of patience and tact, we had to try to introduce ours without ever giving up hope. In the long run, the black man will come to realize that the white man is wiser and cleverer than himself, and he will eventually fall in with the latter's ideas.

To maintain health in the tropics, a white man needs a better variety of food than a vegetable garden can offer. Darwin sent us supplies of flour, rice, sugar, tea and other foods; but for perishable food we were dependent upon what the country could offer in the way of kangaroo flesh, birds and fish as well as turtle and crocodile eggs, the last-named being eatable with some discretion: since one cannot be entirely sure what their shells cover, all depending upon the length between their laying and their discovery by the hunters. We found what might be called the native market highly irregular: one day offering large quantities of food and the next nothing whatever. Temporary famine raged occasionally. To regularize this situation we began taking steps to import cows and goats and to establish a model poultry farm.

The sea teemed with fish; but tropical fish are wily and tend to ignore attractive baits no matter how carefully arranged at the end of conventional lines. Perhaps patience, the virtue of all good fishermen, might have been rewarded had we used lines and nets with more determination; but patience, even in a fisherman, is hard to practise in the face of hordes of mosquitoes and harvesters. The natives used spears more or less successfully; but the best results were enjoyed by using baskets left anchored as lobster pots are left, and by other forms of fish trap.

There was no question regarding the adequate fertility of the local soil, and Bathurst could have met all the alimentary needs of the mission station if immense worms, caterpillars, grasshoppers and locusts had not eaten bare shoots; if parrots, crows, flying-foxes and other flying creatures had not pounced on what fruit approached ripening, and if wild dogs had not

grown fat on our hens, pigs, goats, and calves. Enemy Number One was the native dog, not the wild dingo common on the mainland, but his descendant, half domesticated and possibly carrying a portion of European dog blood and, in consequence, being given added intelligence. These quite terrible quadrupeds are plentiful, the natives being enormously attached to them because of their great use in hunting. Each native owns five or six. Because the aboriginal never thinks of feeding his dogs, they are very voracious. They made merry amongst our defenceless livestock whenever they and their masters were near the mission station.

Because of their undoubted value to their owners, we were reluctant to kill these dogs; but in defence of our livestock we were, nevertheless, occasionally forced to shoot them. One day I was forced to shoot one who was attacking a goat already wounded. His owner rushed up in fury, demanding the price of his hound.

"But," I protested, "the dog was killing my goat."

"That'll do!" he yelled. "Look, your goat is alive—so pay up!"

I gave him tobacco to get rid of him; and I may say that this was not the only occasion when my inexperience cost me dear.

The attitude of my superiors in Sydney towards the foundation of a mission on Bathurst Island had been one of prudence, a watchful waiting, shall we say: a period during which I was "under observation". At the end of two months, when the station had assumed shape with what appeared to be the assurance of a prosperous future, they decided that the results of our work appeared to be sufficiently conclusive to warrant their sending the reinforcements I needed in the way of priests, Brothers and Sisters. Also, I had soon the pleasure of regaining the services of Brother Lambert, that German with his fine presence who, it may be recalled, had been my general factotum and an excellent cook at Darwin.

The first person to join me was Father Regis Courbon, M.S.C.

Born at Saint-Just-Malmont (Haute-Loire), Father Regis was a good specimen of old French stock whose fine face was in harmony with an equally fine and energetic character. The promise he at once gave of being a valuable assistant was amply kept. Incidentally, he had been one of my pupils in Sydney, but at that time I had not dreamt that I was training a future comrade. Thus I had known him for many years and, in consequence, I was no stranger to his lively personality and his outstanding spiritual and affectionate qualities. Since he had taught in a school before working as a parish priest in Australia, his English was perfect. As a matter of fact, he was one of those lucky people who have the gift of tongues: something of immense importance in our mission work because, as in Papua, there were almost as many dialects here as there were tribes of aborigines, nearly five hundred I have been told, and each dialect more difficult and complex than any other. Thus all the talent for language Father Regis had was sorely needed if we, the first people who wanted to learn these dialects, could hope to succeed.

They have, these dialects, so beautiful a sonority and so wide a voice of variation in their intonation that the same collection of syllables can offer a wide range of meanings. Thus the word *Tjuruna* in the Aranda dialect has at least a dozen meanings, ranging from the pole which bears the sacred emblems through the mass of legends relating to it.

But, like others who associate with these native peoples, we had to make ourselves understood quickly: and so to begin with we were obliged to use pidgin English, a highly simplified form of English which makes use of much slang, respectable and otherwise, to form a common language and thus to permit white, yellow and black races throughout the Northern Territory to understand one another: in a word, a *lingua franca*, like that used on the fringes of the ancient Roman Empire.

Our aborigines had some notions of pidgin English, picked up from the buffalo hunters and odd traders: and in this way we were able to communicate with our parishioners although, little by little, we tried to introduce language worthy of that name. Nor was this too difficult: because these people have a keen ear for sounds and they are quick to learn. However, we thought it our duty to study their own native dialects, Father Regis being more successful than anyone else: indeed, he was one of the first white men to grasp the more complex secrets of the native forms of expression.

The aborigines, naturally curious, had shown great interest in Father Regis before his arrival. "Was he tall, or was he short? Where was he born? Who was his mother?" Also the name "Courbon" appealed to them enormously because one of their elders, a fellow with twenty-five wives and thirty-five children, was called Kerepon, both names harmonizing so closely in sound that the natives decided that the expected arrival must be a tribal relation. And indeed the good Father's reception was a triumph, since, apart from the fact that his charm was not a bit affected by his ignorance of the language, his hosts saw that he was tall and could grow a splendid beard. Old Kerepon was so impressed that as a sign of welcome he offered the good Father one of his wives: and although the tact and charm of Father Regis did something to soften a refusal of this gift, the old man was deeply disappointed.

The popularity of Father Regis amongst the natives, something won effortlessly, was extraordinary; and he was never seen without being surrounded by a joyous band. This highly erudite theologian of brilliant intellect had a most inventive turn of mind, especially where hunting, fishing, gardening and other homely pursuits were concerned. Because the young on Bathurst Island differ little from the young everywhere else, whether black or white, the good Father's delightful way of finding new, better and more amusing ways of doing things won the adoration of our children. I have to admit that there

was one thing which did not march nearly fast enough for him: and that was the conversion of the natives. I dare not try to imagine what he would have thought had he foreseen that even after thirty years of work we still could not claim one single adult convert.

As it happened, three years of superhuman effort exerted with an all-consuming zeal seriously undermined the health of Father Regis Courbon, and it was found necessary to recall him to Sydney where he was still convalescing when war broke out in 1914. He was mobilized as an interpreter between the British and French armies in Palestine, work which he performed, I know, with his characteristic devotion; but his health never improved enough to permit him to resume missionary work.

We met at Issoudun as late as 1947 and, I regret to say, he died shortly afterwards. I console myself with the certainty that our Bathurst Mission remains dear to him in heaven.

CHAPTER IV

Christian Penetration

THE people of Bathurst and Melville islands are fundamentally of the same ethnical group as the natives of the mainland, although there are differences of language and considerable variation in ornaments, weapons and tattoo marks. Also the marriage laws differ. Physically, these island people are rather short and thick-set with crinkly hair, like the Papuans, while the continental people tend to be taller, slimmer and their hair is straight.

Geography is responsible for these differences. The Malayan natives from the clusters of islands large and small to the westward have, from time immemorial, travelled in their canoes from the west to the eastward, returning home with the south-east monsoon. These Malayan sailors in their frail canoes paused for rest and refreshment at the islands on their route, trading with the aborigines by exchanging what they had to offer chiefly for tortoise-shell. In the main, relations were friendly; and since the aborigines had no objection to trading their women, the purity of the island race was inevitably affected. Traces of these Malay travellers survive today in certain words in the language as well as in the type of canoe the islanders use. The island canoes follow the Malayan form in being made from a hollowed-out tree.

The aborigines are strikingly observant, a natural enough development when survival depends on attentive faculties—the necessity for keenness of eyesight and hearing when both must be extremely sharp and selective in the pursuit of game. To see clearly without being seen; to listen and to be silent; to inter-

pret the least obvious of signs; to guess what lies behind the least expressive expression on a man's face—all these highly developed faculties are perfectly natural to them. White men are greatly mistaken in imagining that they may speak without care or discrimination in the presence of "these blackamoors, these scatter-brained over-grown children". The truth is, I can assure them, that these same "scatter-brained over-grown children" will not have missed one of their little absurdities, hardly one of their most fleeting expressions; and during the following evening as they sit around their fires, such will be discussed and gloated over with exquisite attention to detail.

Thus, if a missionary is to guide these people, leading them gently and persuasively towards the Communion of Saints, he cannot be too careful about his personal behaviour, and he should never underestimate their quick intelligence.

The aborigines had had contacts with Christian civilization before we came to Bathurst: with the buffalo hunters, with traders and the other wandering white men who had chanced to come amongst them; but I am certain that it would be better for them to remain faithful to their ancestral faith than to exchange it for that Christianity. Sincere paganism is better than false Christianity.

We quickly appreciated the fact that we could not teach the natives until we had a common language at our disposal. Christian doctrine must be set out clearly and definitely in simple terms and, so far as these people were concerned, it was clearly necessary that such terms should be those which one might use in teaching big children in whom first impressions tend to remain fixed. If these impressions are wrong impressions, or even if they are confused, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to eradicate them at a later date.

Thus, before we could offer the Way, the Truth and the Life, we had first to remove the bad impressions left by those least unworthy of a Christian heritage who had associated with the natives before we came: always trying to show ourselves in our

own lives, in the purity of our minds and our conduct, to be worthy of our Model when "He began to act and to preach". In our case, priority was given to action.

Our lives were lived in full view of these people; and it is unnecessary to say how fully they exercised their supervisory talents as they observed us. We were so very different from the white men they had hitherto met. Apart from our normal work of missionaries, the work of strangers who had come with no desire either to trade or to confiscate, the austerity of our lives and the isolation we had accepted excited their curiosity. We were unaware of being watched, but we knew that even the least important of our actions was known to the whole tribe. This is not a pleasant way to live; we all like some privacy; but we accepted the fact of living amongst them at the mission station as an excellent way of preaching by example.

It is, in fact, the key to the whole situation, although it may not seem very important. "So," thinks the nomadic native, "it is possible to live otherwise than by galloping eternally behind the dingoes or even the kangaroos."

The aboriginal is not only a keen observer; he is also a clever mimic. He mimes birds and beasts in his songs and dances; everything that has more or less struck his fancy by its strangeness or novelty will awaken in him a desire to attempt the same. Sooner or later, whether it be good or bad, he will attempt to reproduce what he has seen done by others; and because his memory is astonishingly good, he is not unsuccessful. Endless repetition does not bore him; a good story often told remains a good story; and his legends and laments, his ballads and anecdotes, lose nothing in being endlessly repeated around his camp-fire far into the night.

The mission could not really be a residence and a home until we could have the help of Sisters, bringing, as they always do, so much devoted care. They are the real teachers: the mission was an orphan without them.

White people living in settled and secure communities must

find it difficult to imagine the poor conditions under which native women live in uncivilized countries: their degradation both morally and physically. The men, their husbands, consider them as inferior beings, little more than beasts of burden who, according to a man's whim, may be cajoled, thrashed, killed or even taken to market to be traded infamously. Clearly the status of our aboriginal women had to be raised before they could respond to Christian teaching. The example of capable and devoted Sisters would be of enormous value to our work, especially amongst the women.

There had been nuns in Darwin for several years, Daughters of our Lady of the Sacred Heart. The Mother Superior, at once accepting our invitation to visit us, unhesitatingly faced the thousand and one discomforts as well as the tedium of a sea journey to us on little more than a raft to make this initial tour of inspection. The Mother Superior, Mother Mary Liguori, who had lived for a long time in Papua, brought with her a plucky Irishwoman who was ready for anything.

Mother Mary Liguori inspected the station in great detail, specifying with great precision what buildings would be required if Sisters were to join us. Sister Dominica from Ireland began at once to collect the urchins around her in masterly fashion and, in a confident tone of voice, to give them a foretaste of the instruction they might receive.

This visit was fruitful in effect: it was decided to send us some Sisters. We, therefore, withdrew to a bark hut, leaving for the Sisters our bungalow which, with the addition of a spacious veranda, would make a suitable convent.

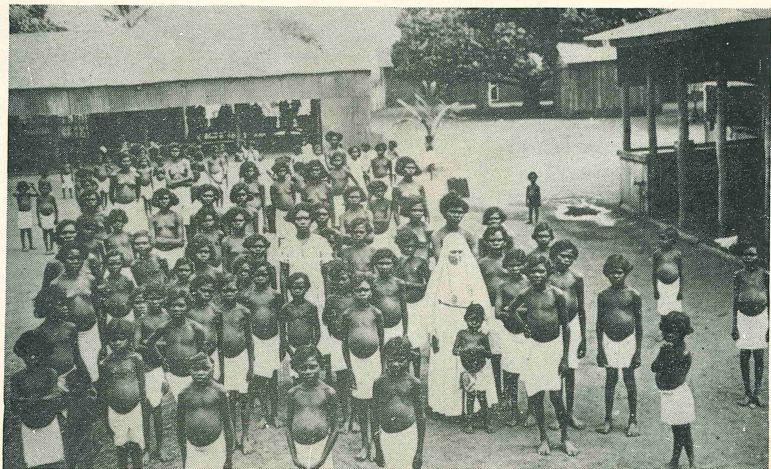
The arrival of my colleague had created a sensation; but the news that Sisters would soon come to settle in Bathurst created an excitement which was quite indescribable. The aborigines had indeed been told that white women existed; but up to then they had had no proof, and a white woman remained to them something fabulous. Nor could they understand, at first, what these white women were for. To their primitive minds, a

woman served a man, and that was the beginning and the end of it. Consequently, their minds could only accept the thought that the expected Sisters were the wives of the missionaries. When they discovered, which they were, of course, not long in doing, that these ladies, like the gentlemen, lived celibate lives and occupied separate dwellings, their astonishment knew no bounds. As it turned out, they treated the Sisters with natural courtesy and respect, and no one raised so much as a finger, or uttered so much as an unseemly whisper, against them. The example of the Sisters had a profound effect. It is true that the natives had admitted our superiority when compared with themselves; but the Sisters were placed in a different category: they were of another world, angels sent to look after them; and they were given complete confidence. Yes, indeed: our Sisters became the pillars of the station.

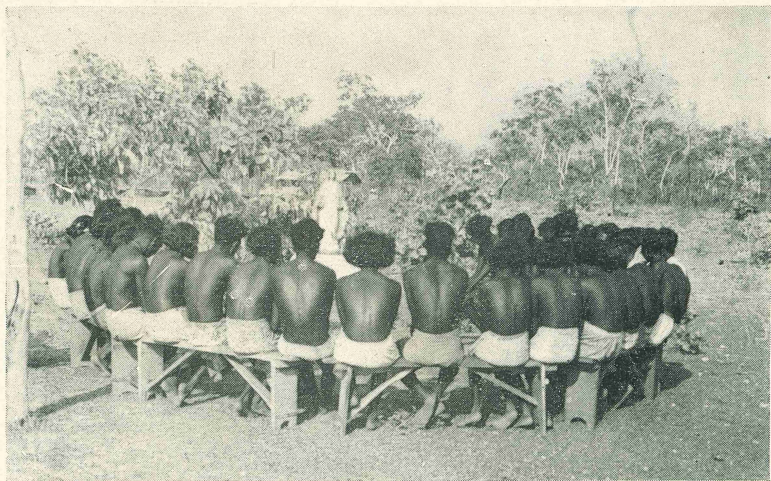
As I write these lines, I easily recall that day when in full sail their boat majestically entered the harbour, the climax of days and days spent watching the horizon for the first signs of their approach. There was no noisy demonstration, I recall: none of the usual shouts and yells; an attentive silence, seemingly pregnant with fear and hope, welcomed our new arrivals whose small figures could be seen from the packed beach as their boat approached. The ice, however, was soon broken.

And thus we grew. Indeed, we grew so rapidly that the narrow boundaries of the shore tended to stifle us. Slightly inland, there was a wide wooded plateau and this, we felt, would make an excellent site for town-planning projects. Here we would build a church, a school, a convent and other necessary outbuildings. With the Sisters in charge of the house and responsible for the cooking, the cleaning and other household chores, we could give up our time to architecture.

Architecture may seem rather a pompous term to apply to our simple building; but I refuse to abandon the word and its artistic implication because experience has taught me that strength and solidity do not outrage beauty. Our practical



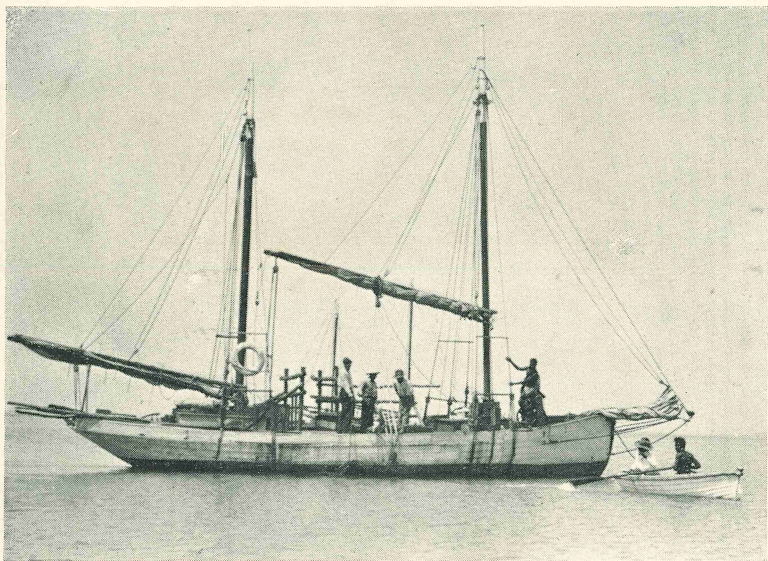
Aboriginal girls being trained at the Bathurst Mission.



At Port Keats: The Legion of Mary.



Martina, the first girl bought by the Mission, with her husband, Agau, and their two daughters, Elizabeth and Mary.



Our fine little sailing ship, the *Saint Francis*.

buildings held good against the wind and the rain and their unpolished wood gave them quite a stylish air. When all was completed and the buildings consecrated with great solemnity, the moving started on the strong shoulders of our parishioners.

We had taken this work in our stride, as a missionary must : because all things must be possible to him, as he must strive to be a master of every trade. What he does not know, he must, and does, learn : when practice is added to his heart and good will everything marches very well.

Our parishioners were good fellows and excellent labourers even if they were not yet very familiar with what seemed to them the queer tools placed in their hands by the white men : these queer tools which caused so many cuts, bruises and blisters. It was not, of course, revenge which allowed them to treat tools with so little respect, maltreating them shockingly, abandoning them to risk of fire, of rust and of theft by passing thieves. Sharpening remained for long a mystery to them. "Why bother," they asked themselves, "to take care of an axe? Are there not plenty more in the store?" The fact that axes cost money was the very least of their worries.

The girls adapted themselves very easily to household duties and to work on the farm and in the farmyard; but milking puzzled them. They themselves had known no other milk than their mother's and the sight of us sipping our goat's milk amused them very much. They thought us babies when they did not see in this something rather degrading as a new form of drunkenness. "Father," one of them objected, "you drink too much milk. Look, your beard is going quite white."

This attitude of mind towards milk-drinking lasted until the goat-girls began to feel that what might be good enough for the Sisters might be good enough for them. From this thought they went on to helping themselves to half of the milk, making up the loss in normal quantity by the addition of water, a habit not unknown in the outside world when nobody is looking. When a watchful eye from the kitchen had detected this trick

and had taken obvious steps to prevent it, the goat-girls said, "Why, these Sisters are even cleverer than the witch-doctors."

Oh, those witch-doctors! What trouble they gave me! However, they are far from exercising on Bathurst the power they claim on the mainland and in New Guinea. The bone-pointing ritual with its accompanying incantations capable of terrifying a victim to the point of wasting his life away is not practised by our islanders. They are unaware of the therapy whereby kidney fat is taken from a living person, knocked senseless for the purpose, who more often than not dies in consequence: this horrible remedy, whose object is the restoration to health of some sick man, is not used on Bathurst.

But while our islanders did not themselves practise these barbarities, they were well aware of them and, with the object of frightening an enemy, they were not above pretending to be versed in this form of witchcraft, imitating the gestures and grimaces of the witch-doctors for the purpose.

But although they did not actually practise the more horrible forms of witchcraft, they had a profound respect for sorcery and what they believed to be its mysterious power. One day a young man came to me with what appeared to be a bundle of dirty rags which he had taken from a rival, assuring me that it contained "the powerful evil of the Devil himself". When, to verify this testimony, I began unwrapping the awful object, the young man fled like a startled hare, yelling as he went that merely the sight of the object I was about to expose would be enough to kill him forthwith. I continued unwrapping the rags, finally bringing to light a cartridge case from a '303 rifle filled with sand and some black substance whose nature I was never able to identify.

Fantastic nonsense, I shall be told; and, of course, I agree willingly; but it must be admitted that imagination has much strength and I have seen myself a great improvement brought about in the condition of a patient by the absurd palpitations and lively ranting of a witch-doctor. Upon one occasion, during

my early days on Bathurst, I was present at a ridiculous performance conducted by a witch-doctor. My attempt to intervene instantly brought upon me the fury of the sorcerer, who called down on my head the direst catastrophes. Since, naturally, nothing whatever happened to me, my prestige rose with the natives.

In our islands, as on the mainland, the spirits hold pride of place. From birth to death, the spirits preside over the lives of the aborigines. Yet curiously, while everybody talks a great deal about the spirits, no one can say exactly what they are. Is it that the tribal laws insist on complete secrecy? In considering that question, it must be understood that native dialects do not lend themselves to metaphysical discussions. There are no words for any subjects taken in a general sense no more than for the expression of supernatural ideas. Everything is material and concrete for the aboriginal. Even their belief in spirits is so loosely expressed that one wonders how precise is their actual thinking about them. They seem to think of spirits as entities which can show themselves and hide themselves at will, who can hear at any distance and leap with lightning-like speed from one given point to another on land, on sea and in the air. These spirits vary in rank as in form. There is the Great Spirit at the beginning of all things; then there are spirits of less importance concerned with natural phenomena and, finally, those spirits who are in, or who are, human souls. They do not hold as certain that the Great Spirit created the lesser spirits, but, they believe, there is no doubt that he created all human souls in one operation, an operation he has not repeated: he has not created any new souls, souls which, apparently, have the quality of spirits because, after inhabiting a human body, they can withdraw to the happy land of dreams for a time. When they have finished dreaming, they return to this earth in human form, alternatively occupying a man or woman. This amounts to a belief in the transmigration of souls. I once met a very serious old chap who claimed that he recalled his former lives.

This worship of spirits is based on fear in the sense that the aborigines believe the spirits to be jealous beings, very exacting masters, who will punish severely if they are not served.

I was never aware of any form of sacrifice; but it does not follow that there is none. There were sacred meetings, dances and prayers; but these appeared to be merely acts of submission or requests for material benefits. The Great Spirit, they claim, is the supreme legislator of the tribe, the director of changeless customs and usage, who must be obeyed to the letter. The lesser spirits, on the same level as the totem, have the right to be honoured with special ceremonies. These lesser spirits preside at initiations, guarding the tribe's secrets and concerning themselves with the production of a special food of which they are the guardians.

The ritual surrounding death has importance. It begins with deafening cries and lamentations and goes on with the flowing of blood and of tears until the funeral when, after a day or two, the body is placed in a narrow tomb which is covered with bark and stones as a precaution against wild dogs. Because the soul of the dead person is believed to prowl around the tomb until the end of the mourning period, which lasts six months, no one dares to approach its immediate area, since the dead person would seem to have become malignant and might attack a trespasser. The name of the dead person dies with him and will no longer be used, because it has become taboo.

The actual funeral is a terrifying spectacle. Each mourner behaves like a maniac, howling, beating his breast and inflicting horrible wounds on himself with his spear, his knife and hatchet. Men tear out their beards and fling the hairs on the tomb in sign of deep mourning and, often enough, the whole performance ends in a fight as one totem attacks another. Since members of the same totem are not necessarily members of the same tribe, the result is that friends attack friends and brothers strike brothers.

Faced with a psychic pattern so complex, the successful intro-

duction of Christianity had to rely on demonstrating with untiring patience to those we sought to convert a set of rules which, practised before their eyes, could end by impressing them. Nothing could be enforced with anything approaching compulsion. We knew this. Our aborigines are proud, considering themselves supermen who can never bow the knee to anyone. They begin by looking down on us from the heights they believe they occupy; but if we can prove to them that we are not grovelling in the valleys, they will learn to treat us as equals. If they see that, in fact, we can do better than they do, they will respect us.

But however we proceed, our attitude must always try to be one of friendly co-operation and, fortunately, there are many opportunities for this. Many jobs which have to be done can easily be undertaken by native labour; but the work marches well when it can be offered to them as a kind of game at which all may play who wish. God loves gracious gifts, and so do our natives; and if your gifts to them are spontaneous and they see that, you become one who has put them under an obligation, a benefactor, but never a master. This cannot be emphasized too much. If they realize you are helping them, the cause is won; but it is fatal ever to attempt to play the boss because authority is constitutionally repugnant to them and they will always refuse to recognize it. Order and discipline are necessary in a mission as in any enterprise; and this is not less so because the foundation of a mission rests on love, love for those it tries to serve; but all depends upon the way discipline is enforced. It can be enforced only with persuasion and discretion.

And above all one must be just. As I have already said, these poor creatures have an innate sense of fair play and they expect one to keep one's word. Thus they have the utmost contempt for liars and cheats and, it must be admitted, their loyalty to a deserving neighbour is, as a rule, above reproach. Thus one must never promise anything which cannot be guaranteed, as

one's word must always be honoured. By following these simple rules difficulties can be avoided.

When the aboriginal sees the missionary not only giving material help but also plainly giving of himself without reserve, he is astonished. It is true that mutual help is not unknown to him, but it is seldom really disinterested. Its object is the good of the clan which, because of it, will prosper in power—better self-defence which, in effect, means better ways to attack. The missionary can expect no reward for his devotion. The aboriginal, realizing this, will, it is to be feared, think his kindness nothing more than stupidity.

Oh well, in that case—no more cajoleries as we give generously the wages earned and multiply the opportunities to earn more.

I was fortunate enough to find an entry to their lives through the door of the medical service as I followed the precept of our Lord: "Heal the sick." Also it opened a way to their souls.

As a matter of fact the race, as a whole, is healthy, being free of the ills that afflict us. Apart from colds, their maladies seem largely confined to skin affections. Despite what may be said by native charlatans whose outcries mask what is only trickery, their remedies hardly exist in practical form. At any rate, they soon saw that our remedies were much better than theirs; and so they came running to us directly they suffered the slightest hurt. This gave us a chance to practise our much advocated patience and charity; because these anarchists were not concerned with surgery or dispensary hours of opening and shutting: any hour of the day or night was the right one to get treatment. We might never attempt to put them off until the next day because, we knew, they would never return.

Because they could not easily dissociate medical treatment from magic—and, of course, magic is not concerned with time if it is really good magic—they expected our medicine to cure on the instant. They would be perfectly content with "just one dose". In the case of a burn, for example, it was enormously

difficult to get them to return for a fresh dressing. On an occasion like this a little temptation has to be offered in the promise of tobacco. Frequent and necessary treatment permits them to decide that they are doing you a great favour by submitting to it and that, in consequence, a tip is indicated.

Our first-aid kit was nothing very much; indeed it could only be called rudimentary; but its service was inestimable. How could it have been otherwise?

It replaced to a large extent strange treatment: blood-letting for instance, their greatest standby in medical treatment. In a serious case of neuralgia or even rheumatism, the witch-doctor bleeds the patient by making numerous cuts near the affected part with a pointed shell, a sharpened stone, an old razor-blade or, more recently, with a broken bottle. This they believed to be a sovereign remedy and, of course, it could have what advantages there are in counter-irritants. For wounds, a little human milk diluted with urine is prescribed. For fainting? The best thing to do with fainting is to press your two thumbs with all your strength under the patient's ears and he will soon come round shouting. Snake bites can be met by an extravagant use of ligatures and cuts along the whole length of the limb affected without any attention being paid to the actual snake punctures. Have you got toothache? All right: we'll soon cure that—by applying a red-hot coal which kills the nerve without more ado. Finally, to cure a suppurating ear, call upon the good offices of a maggot.

It would be easy to say that these curious remedies were ineffective; but blood-letting and even the use of maggots to devour badly affected tissue were not unknown in Europe in the past days and, of course, our natives' faith in a witch-doctor could do something. However, the fact remains that in comparison our castor oil, our Epsom salts, our aspirin, iodine, and Vaseline, appeared as miraculous remedies. The patients who came to us were already familiar with our remedies and saw no need to tell us what was wrong with them. "Me need a drink,"

would be understood as the request for Epsom salts; "Me, a rub," meant an application of iodine; "Me, to smell," and instantly we would produce eucalyptus. We dared not show too professional an interest in our doctoring since, we soon learnt, the very sight of a thermometer would send a patient scampering back to his forest.

We struggled for a long time against an ugly skin disease, not uncommon amongst dark-skinned people, known as yaws. This induces unpleasant, purulent sores which eat away the tissues and spread to all parts of the body, especially to the mouth. We began by trying what proved to be a painful application of blue stone; but while we did obtain local healing, the sores continued to break out on other parts of the patients. Happily, Dr Cook of Darwin, the Protector of Aborigines, supplied a marvellous intra-muscular injection: and thanks to this, in less than a month, I was able to clean up the whole island of this foul disease. In consequence of this, my reputation as a healer rose sky-high. Indeed, my promotion as a major-general amongst healers entitled me, after winning each battle of the yaws, to treat the many bruises, cuts, and dislocated, broken and crushed bones from which the people suffered. Of course, to the best of my ability I disinfected the wounds with iodine before cleaning and stitching them up with fine ligaments made from kangaroo tail tendon. I set bones and banded them. God only knows the state of filth in which my patients came to me, yet I never had a single case of blood-poisoning.

Of course, you will say that this is all very well; but would it not have been better to strike at the causes, to put a stop to the fights, to separate these people before they could batter each other? That is true: I saw that. And so I boldly stepped forward one day as a peacemaker; but from the midst of the *mêlée* I was drawn forth by a tactful old fellow who said, "No, no, Father: not you here. They now mad: and they will hurt you."

Evidently the fight was their business; mine was to tend them after the fight. However, as I unrolled my bandages I gave them a good talking-to. They listened to me when calm was restored and wagged their heads as they left me, possibly repentant—until the next call for vengeance.

I tried my hand at dentistry. When I had first arrived, our aborigines had fine healthy teeth, free of decay and any suspicion of pyorrhoëa. It is true that the teeth of the older men were worn down to the gums, but they were still good: doubtless because their food, often eaten half raw, demanded much slow mastication which would stimulate all the juices. But, alas, when they began eating white men's foods, the results were disastrous to their teeth; indeed, ten years after my arrival it was impossible to find a native with a good healthy mouth. After a few lessons from an expert at Darwin, I bought a textbook on dentistry and collected an assortment of tweezers and the like instruments of torture and, thus armed, I opened my surgery. I drew out teeth without anaesthetics and discovered that men who stand up stoically to blows from heavy clubs which produce painful fractures, will writhe in the dentist's chair and yell as piercingly and pull as many faces as anyone of the Western world.

And thus ten years passed in spade-work, because that is all I may call this period. True, babies had been baptized, the first blossoms, the guardian angels of the tribe. Several old men, too, had asked for baptism *in articulo mortis*. We had, indeed, one hundred names on our register.

"Poor Father," some would say, "you are wasting your life, your time and your money." But in my heart of hearts I was not dissatisfied with this second best. Because, even amongst the adults, so heavily entrenched in their traditional beliefs, we knew we had had some influence. Fear and suspicion had been replaced by confidence and friendship in the belief that, after all, these white men were not worthless. If it was not yet conversion, it was already an exchange of civilities.

I did not forget that preaching could, in effect, assume varied forms: that standing talking from a pulpit was not the only way when one was faced with a stone wall tightly cemented with ancient laws and customs which were incompatible with Christian practice. I had to discover a weak spot in the wall, and this was not easy. I had, on the face of it, as little chance of weaning one or more individuals from this deep-rooted ancient cult as I had of converting the whole tribe, so fettered were all by traditions. For instance, in my whole career as a missionary on Bathurst Island, I never met a native who, while openly respecting Christianity and even aspiring to it, had the courage to dismiss his wives.

"Who will feed me?" demanded an old man one day when I was explaining to him this *sine qua non*. And I could see his point of view was quite logical. Decrepit and weak, he would have starved without his young and flourishing wives to look after his material needs.

And so far as proselytizing amongst the women was concerned, how can you hope to convert creatures who are deprived of all freedom? They are, in fact, born married; and always belong to a man: but I shall explain this more fully later. If they ran away from their man, they would run to certain death. Young boys are not more approachable. Even though a boy has not reached the age of initiation and, in consequence, is not recognized as a member of the tribe, he already belongs to the tribe and not to his parents. He is watched by the leaders and woe betide him if he tries to escape when he reaches the age of puberty. I knew of several cases where young men took the risk by remaining in the employ of white men; but long afterwards, when one would have imagined that their existence was forgotten, the spy service of the tribal elders laid hold upon them. Those who succeeded in living through the unimaginable tortures were fortunate.

Mass conversion was impossible; individual conversion, impossible; the conversion of the women, impossible; the conver-

sion of the children, impossible . . . What then? Was I to fold my hands until the Last Judgment?

The answer being a decided negative, because inaction is not in my nature, I decided to set about the business in another way. The breach in the native defences, if breach there was, had to be found amongst the adolescents; and it had to be found in the teeth of the bogey of initiation.

The men who came to the mission, perhaps merely out of curiosity, became more and more familiar with our ways and, finding us friendly, they began bringing their wives and children. At first, at the end of these visits, the entire household marched off together; but gradually a habit was formed of allowing the children to remain with us. These little ones were enormously interested in everything as this unsuspected world opened before their eyes—buildings that were built to last more than a few days, the gardens that produced fruit at our command, and the strange mysteries that might be hidden in the church and school. It wasn't half bad at Ngouyou. It was better than in the forest. Now, as these children thought, if only one could live here; but, of course, the elders would have to give permission, and they would never agree: it was too unusual and unheard of. Perhaps the missionary could do something. Why should he not? He is good and he is powerful . . . "Father, help us: the elders frighten us so that we must obey them. Speak to them!"

I took the opportunity. If I failed, I should only have wasted my eloquence and, in view of the friendly feeling so quickly developing, I had my chance.

I temporized a little, watching the expression of the elders, awaiting the right moment. One day they seemed to be in good temper and I approached them.

"Do you not think," I asked, "that the ways of the missionaries are worth as much as yours, even more?"

"But yes—certainly: it is a pity that we cannot adopt the ways of the missionaries."

"For you, yes, it is difficult; but what about the boys? There are amongst them some who want to be Christians, but this they cannot be because they are faced, by you, with the necessity of initiation. They cannot be pagans and Christians at the same time. Will you not let them be free to choose?"

I was asking them to swallow an immense morsel; but I had caught them at short notice and I could not expect a quick reply. There would have to be much talking, which you might call a Council of State.

And indeed there was much talking, in every corner; and the discussions were long drawn out, because they did not wish it to appear that they would accept out of hand. There were debates and discussions; objections were raised, and even propaganda directed towards those who wanted to join us.

"You," the old men urged on the young people, "will be outcasts; evil spirits will lay hold of you; perhaps you will be struck down—who knows?—and perhaps you will be killed——"

But the children held out. The spirits, after all, no longer frightened them; and as for the loss of their civic rights, they felt they would be more than compensated by their membership of the Christian community.

They won. This success was a major one, believe me. A revolution if ever there was one! My proselytes were given further religious instruction and they were baptized in the church at Bathurst Island.

Oh, it is true that as yet this was only a small group; but a start was made and an impetus was given so that the group rapidly grew in number and in fervour as our children were allowed to complete their instruction under our protection. We offered no objection to their accompanying their parents for holidays—walk-about—in the forest. Nobody, it must be admitted, ever tried to entice them away from their Faith; indeed, the elders assured them that they had definitely excluded themselves and that, even if they begged for re-integration, this

would be refused. I will not go so far as to say that my boys were angels—what boy is?—but not one of them renounced the Faith.

Emboldened by this success with the boys, I turned my attention to the girls. If I could succeed with them, I should be laying the foundation of the Christian family : which, of course, has vital importance.

But everything was very different with the girls : because for countless ages tribal tradition has placed them in a very different position from the boys.

The traditional matrimonial system deprived females *a priori* of the right to have any say in their future. Each young man had allotted to him by the tribe what amounted to a mother-in-law, not a wife in the first place, as one might have imagined. This arrangement resulted in all the female offspring of the mother-in-law being the young man's wives from the moment of their birth, an arrangement which resulted in the young man perhaps being over thirty before he could marry. It took me a long time to appreciate this topsy-turvy regulation and thus to understand the oddities which struck me when I first arrived, how, for instance, it came about that little girls who had hardly reached puberty (ten or twelve years old) belonged to a husband who was so much older. Of course, if a mother-in-law had no daughters, or while what daughters she did have were unmariageable, the young man remained a bachelor although not necessarily for the rest of his life; because native law permitted him to have several mothers-in-law and thus, in time, he could accumulate a respectable harem. It naturally followed that the older a man got the more wives he might have : indeed, he might have as many as twenty-five. I know one who still lives with his twelve young wives like a pasha.

Thus, to become a widower amongst our aborigines was impossible; because short of a violent epidemic, a massacre, or theft on the grand scale, it would be impossible to remove *all* a man's wives. And, of course, he can always hope that his

mothers-in-law will replace any losses. If he dies, his wives pass automatically to his nearest relation: his brother, perhaps his cousin, or even his uncle. In addition, a man's mothers-in-law pass to these, his heirs. Not the slightest detachment is shown in these processes even by old men: they carefully count the daughters of their mothers-in-law and claim their rights. At the same time, the woman always knows on the one hand that she is the chattel of a particular man, her husband, and that, on the other hand, her daughters are born married to her son-in-law.

I noticed in the islands that there were marriages between half-brothers and half-sisters. This could never happen on the mainland where the totem is handed down through the father while, on the islands, it passes through the distaff side. In consequence of the totem being the only nullifying impediment, consanguinity does not worry them in the slightest because it derives from mothers belonging to different totems.

It was always to me a sad sight to see these poor little mites of from eight to ten years becoming the playthings of old grey-beards whose other, older wives, too often made them drudges while he, himself, thought nothing of making them the object of shameful trading. While there was constant supervision and spying, there was not the slightest respect for innocence or for any appeal these children might make. The slightest prank was followed by a beating, a punishment fully approved of in the eyes of the tribe.

Nevertheless, little by little, these girls, so jealously guarded, managed to establish friendly relations with the Sisters. When, eventually, they were allowed to make short stays at the Mission, something that pleased them very much, hope grew in my heart; but when all seemed to be going well with a particular girl, some old chap would emerge from the forest to claim her as his prey. With tears in her eyes, she would leave us.

Of course, she would come back; but each time she, and

others in their turn, were taken away, their fate was like a cruel stab from a dagger.

Must this go on for ever? I asked myself. The present was surely overcast and the future hidden in mist. Well, it was up to God to act. His time had come.

CHAPTER V

Martina

LITTLE Martina belonged to the Maolas tribe and she came from the north of the island. An intelligent, lively little girl and quite clever at small tasks, she was not, perhaps, distinguished from other little ones about the mission. No one could suspect, not the good Sisters, not I—not anyone—that Martina, a name we had given her because her own was not easy to pronounce—that Martina was, indeed, a little guide sent by the good God to show us a way through the gloom ahead whereby we might now march well, well guided by this little one, Martina, a heroine of events which allowed me to change the lives of herself and many of her sisters.

There came to me a hairy anonymous man who said, "I have come to fetch my wife."

"And who is your wife?" I asked.

"That one," he said; and he pointed to Martina.

Nothing could be done, I knew. No one might challenge the law of the tribe. No one had ever thought of doing so. Martina, not yet baptized, must go with this hairy, anonymous man and be lost in the sad company of the tribal women, slaves, owned body and soul by the men of the tribes. One might not try to persuade, to beg a reprieve for this bright little one whom we loved. Our love might reach to where the forest began and then be lost in its gloom; the light we had tried to direct towards little Martina would be darkened for ever; and we must try still to direct that light on other little ones and with the same ending—the slaves of other hairy, and sometimes aged, anonymous men of the tribes.

But now a most extraordinary thing happened. Martina said, "No, I will not go with that man."

I am astonished, and to myself I say, "But the little one may not resist the tribal law. It is terrible, but she must go with this man and I, can I help her? Can I fight this man with my hands? Can I resist a strong custom of these people? I cannot. Yes, Martina must go."

But now Martina comes near me and as her little fingers clutch my cassock she cries, "Oh, help me, Father. Do not let me go. I do not want to go with this old man who is ugly. Please, I want to stay at the Mission, and then I will be a Christian. Please, Father, let me stay!"

There is nothing I can do, nothing. I had always found it very hard to part with these little ones when men came to claim them. Now it is harder; it is harder because of Martina's courage. Also, she appeals to me for help, but what can I do for the poor child?

"Martina," I say, "you must know that if I try to keep you here, this man can make very much trouble for you and, yes, for the Mission. And so you must go; you must go, because the law says that you must go. Yet pray, Martina, because God can save you. Only God can help you."

And so the little one accepts her fate and, trying to stifle her sobs, she goes with that man to begin a life which, I know, has less joy than that of the lowest beasts of the forest. The incident passes; there is yet no sign of the palest glimmer of light on the lot of Martina and all of her sisters.

But in five days' time Martina is back. The man has taken her to his district, more than forty miles from the Station; but she has not marched willingly, nor on arrival amongst his own people and, doubtless, other wives, does she show that submission a woman must show. She has resisted her man and he has driven a spear into her leg to drive a right spirit into her small body; and then, when it was dark, she has escaped and, despite the gash in her leg, she has come swiftly back to the Mission.

It is easy for that man, her husband, to know the direction of her flight; but to him and his tribal family this small revolt is a big revolution: a woman has left her man, her master, and so the relatives gather together and, working themselves up with shouts and yells as they put on their war paint and get ready their spears and knob-kerries, they march to the Station to recapture the rebel whether dead or alive.

In the meantime at the Station, Martina, well aware of the enormity of her flight, is in a state of terror. I can see her wary eyes watching the forest, ready to detect the slightest movement of the leaves; and her ears are pricked to catch the faintest sound.

It is evening, and they come—an ugly mob of muttering, gesticulating tribesmen—and they are at the Mission gates. Martina is in my arms; she believes, poor little one, that I can save her. But it is not possible.

I am deeply distressed and call on God to help; yet I smile and welcome these men in whose hands is the fate of Martina. With me, yes, she is safe for, perhaps, only minutes. I must gain time because I know that once she is in the hands of these men a life begins for Martina that is the life of a lost one. Yet I smile disarmingly because these men must think I am unaware of what they want. I show sympathy and commiseration; and it is true they are tired and hungry.

“You,” I said, “have come a very long way: and so you are very tired. And, also, you are very hungry. But come, you are welcome and there is flour and tobacco for you. You must eat your fill and smoke pipes; and then it will be dark and you shall sleep and find rest: because you have come a very long way.”

I hear myself, and I am a hypocrite: because I am as one gladly welcoming honoured guests and yet, in my heart, I am saying, “You will take away the little one who has called to me for help.”

But I must gain time.

I say gaily, "The morning will come and then I will talk with you, and in the morning you will tell me why you have come."

They are tired and hungry, these men; and they eat their fill, and they smoke, and then they sleep.

But I do not sleep. There is a crisis. If I can find some way of winning Martina's freedom, then, perhaps, there will be freedom for other little ones. And now, and this is strange, I believe I will not fail; and I will not see failure. I will save Martina, and so I will save other little ones who come to me.

But I must look at this problem and consider it carefully from every point of view. I pray; I pray that God, now, will guide me so that I may find a way. There comes to me an idea. I will buy Martina from these men. But this is not the custom. For payment—tobacco, flour, calico—they will *lend* Martina to any unscrupulous brute who may desire her; but they will lend her only; they will not sell her. There is no question, ever, of giving up a woman who is useful as exchange for tobacco, flour, tins of meat and pots of sweet treacle.

Yet I must try. It can cost me nothing to try, and I must not fail.

Now I proceed with great cunning. On a long table in front of the Mission House, I carefully set out much which can attract these men who are now sleeping while I make arrangements. On the table I place a good blanket, a sack of my best flour, a good sharp knife, a hatchet of good-quality steel, a mirror, a handsome teapot, some gaily coloured beads, a pipe and some good tobacco, some yards of brightly patterned calico, some tins of meat and pots of treacle. It is all worth perhaps two pounds sterling at this time. It is a stall at a bazaar; or, better, it is a gaily furnished table at a street market; and it is I who will be the merchant. The price I must have for my merchandise is to me a high one; tribal custom, often so inexorable, makes the price these sleeping men must pay when they awaken a high one; but my table carries for them untold

riches. As a good merchant I must not seem eager to sell my wares. I, the clever merchant, will sell, yes, if I must sell; but my customers must please themselves and if they do not buy, the goods are mine still. They must please themselves. No line must be seen on the hook that holds the bait; no fisherman is waiting to draw home a catch. I am nonchalant, I, the street trader, with my table laden with good things. And still I pray; and I may not sleep.

My guests are early risers and I, hidden behind a fence, yet seeing all, watch them approach. I am anxious. I must watch their faces as they come near. It is interesting. At once they see my stall and they crowd near it chattering like monkeys, gazing at my merchandise longingly. They are now street urchins with their noses pressed up against a shop window full of pastries, sweets and all that a hungry child loves. And now their eyes are gleaming. They are trembling with desire. The bait is working.

I will not hurry, and yet I am eager to sell my wares. I wait a little while and then, drawing myself up to my full height, I advance with majesty. I am a great man, and I must look like a great man. With condescension, I greet them as I say, "Ah, good morning, my friends. And how are you all this morning? You have slept well?"

My grandeur is ignored. To them, I am not there: because they cannot drag their eager eyes from my table laden with what seems untold riches to them. This is very good, I think; but my rich collection is not only to be looked at: they must buy, but they must not know my price yet, my price that is Martina's life and, I think, Martina's soul. And always I pray because I know that while these men will sell without hesitation the little one's soul, their powerful tribal laws will not easily part with her body.

"Ah," I now say lightly, "I see these little things of mine please you. You would, perhaps, like to have them to take away with you?"

"Very much," they say as they now look up and see me. "Very much," they repeat, gazing at me with uncertainty in their eyes, suspecting that, perhaps, I am playing some kind of trick on them. "But, we are poor people, very poor people, with nothing to offer so that we may buy."

I laugh in a friendly way. "Indeed," I say, "I know you are poor people, that you have nothing to give in return for—look at this fine bag of flour, this knife, this hatchet, this calico——" And item by item I show my wares, trying to gain time: because the crisis is approaching and I must come to the point and know the worst, or the best.

Finally, I say carelessly as I hide my deep anxiety, "It is all very easy for you: you may have everything—everything: the calico, the flour, the tobacco; and look at this nice pipe, and here is a teapot and there is sweet treacle in pots. All is yours to take away with you but, in return, you must let me have the girl you have come for."

The men are struck dumb with astonishment, and a deep and significant silence follows as they gaze at each other with open mouths. Then for a few moments they gaze at my, now, unsmiling face: so that they know I am deeply serious. Again, their eyes return to my table. Clearly, they are tortured by overwhelming desire to possess such riches; but my price, as I well know, is one they fear to pay.

With a perfect appearance of an assurance I am far from feeling, I say carelessly, "Of course, you must please yourselves; but that is the price, and I shall not bargain with you. You must make up your minds one way or the other."

They begin a discussion in low, urgent tones, each man turning eagerly to his neighbour. They are on the horns of a dilemma, I know. The sale outright of the girl is in direct opposition to their tribal customs which have the force of law; and they can be severely punished by their tribal elders if they make this bargain. Above all, and this counts for most, they may win the enmity of spirits who can play them unfriendly tricks. On

the other hand, would they, they ask themselves, be wise to let such a windfall slip by?

The discussion in low, inconclusive whispers seems to me interminable, but at last their leader turns to me and says that since I raise so serious a question, nothing can be decided until they have gone into council. I understand that formal proceedings will begin at once; and so I leave them to themselves while I watch and pray.

As I watch from a distance, I see that the problem is indeed a knotty one. They are wrangling as they gesticulate, evidently twisting and turning over the matter and considering it from every possible angle in an effort to solve the problem of how to have a piece of cake and to eat it too—to gain those tempting goods so seductively spread out on my table and yet to salve their consciences in this defiance of tribal customs. Will they, I wonder anxiously, eventually find a way of solving their difficulty, some way whereby they may sell the girl to me in exchange for my goods and still be able to placate their living elders, old, powerful men as frightening as the ever-present spirits who also take a malignant interest in law-breakers.

Although the council seems to sit interminably, at last it ends and now there comes to me that hairy anonymous old man who claimed Martina as his wife, quite justly according to native law. His face seems slit from ear to ear in a grin as he approaches.

"Everything is good," he declares happily. "We sell the girl, but there is a condition: you must keep her for yourself always; she must not be passed on to any other man."

This condition, a fig-leaf to cover their shame before the higher ghostly powers, seems not a hard one to me although I do not accept it, something their eagerness to possess the goods allows them to ignore, for I merely say, "I am glad you decide to sell. Take everything, and I'll take the girl."

And so, chattering happily in a wild state of excitement and joy, these men go off with their rich prizes while the price I am

given in exchange, little Martina, withdraws with the good Sisters and, for my part, the sight of her happy, smiling face is worth a hundred times the amount of trouble and money my first appearance in the market-place cost me.

Martina remained at the Mission and became, in due course, a good and devoted Christian—a gentle, sweet and charitable soul. When, at last, she reached marriageable age she was perfectly at liberty to accept, or to refuse, any of the young pupils of her own age at the Mission School. This was something no young native woman in that part of the country had ever been able to do before. She chose an excellent young man from amongst our pupils, pretty well her own age. If the courtship differed somewhat in form and finesse from what might be an inherited art amongst European young couples, it was no less effective. With my permission and my blessing, their marriage was solemnized as impressively as we could possibly make it.

Martina thoroughly understood the meaning of Christian marriage, freely accepting monogamy and convinced of the permanency of the marriage tie. Her marriage, a happy one, was blessed with five children, three boys and two girls. Incidentally, we heard nothing more from the hairy anonymous gentleman who had first claimed her and who had, unconsciously, started a train of events which, in effect, were of great benefit to our work.

We could not forget, even if we had wanted to forget while working amongst these native peoples, that both Martina and her husband were Australian aborigines, born to a nomadic life, at home in the forest through which they might wander at their own sweet will, a forest which spoke sometimes harshly, sometimes gently, to a consciousness inherited from countless generations of nomads like themselves. There might be days of some want; but these would be followed by days of plenty when game was not scarce or hard to hunt and it would all count up to an average of adequacy. It was, in effect, their life.

And so Martina, her husband and her little children, followed this way in perfect contentment for most of the year, returning to what they called their Father's house to spend a few months with us.

They had been married for some years when, one day, they returned, but, I noticed, without their daughter Elizabeth, a child of six. They usually approach the Mission Station in a state of great excitement and joy; but now, and it soon became clear from their downcast appearance, something was seriously wrong. Elizabeth had been forcibly taken from them by a man of their tribal family.

"It is the tribal custom," Martina explained midst her tears, "that all baby girls are given a son-in-law who will be the husband of all her daughters. When I was a little girl, I was given a son-in-law; and this son-in-law, now a young man, came to us in the forest; and, although I protested, telling him that we were now Christians to whom tribal law did not apply, it was useless. The young man was strong and he had many friends to help him. We could not stop them from taking Elizabeth away."

As can be well imagined, I was horrified when I heard this story and I decided at once that, come what may, Elizabeth would be saved. She had been baptized, and she belonged to Christ. She should not remain in the hands of pagans. Without any hesitation, I told Martina and her husband to return to the forest and at all costs to bring little Elizabeth back to the Mission.

I understood that she had been taken to a place more than fifty miles distant and I was, therefore, prepared to wait some time. However, I was not prepared to wait the two years I had to wait during which, imagining all kinds of disasters, I had almost given up hope of ever seeing not only Elizabeth but her parents. They had been asked to fly in the face of an old native custom and the penalties, I knew, could be severe.

But happily, one fine day, my gallant *protégée* returned, fol-

lowed by her small daughter Elizabeth. It had not been easy to recapture Elizabeth; it had demanded much determination and persistence before an opportunity could be found to carry her off.

So much to the good, but only so much. I was well aware that the tribal family, thus robbed of what it considered an undoubted right, would react swiftly, and that I might now await a sequel, following a tribal uproar, in which the whole tribe in war paint and armed to the teeth would bear down on the Mission. They would be met by a point-blank refusal to give up the child; but what would then happen?

God alone knew. I did not. But following my invariable custom in moments of supreme difficulty, I turned to Him for light and guidance.

As it turned out, nothing whatever happened. But yes, the enraged tribe, even while I prayed, were bearing down on the Mission determined to win back little Elizabeth; but on the eve of the day of decision, Martina's son-in-law—it is difficult to give him another name—a young and vigorous man, died suddenly. Elizabeth was saved.

Was this chance or Providential intervention? A missionary has strange experiences of this kind too often to permit him to regard them as anything less than something larger than life. God sustains His servants and, knowing this, they are strengthened in well-doing. It is true: the hand of God is tangible; its firm grasp can be felt.

One lives and learns; and this alarming incident taught me, and I was dismayed, that the unborn daughters of all the girl children I had purchased as I had purchased Martina from the hairy anonymous gentleman were *not* included in the sales contract. Their husbands had undoubtedly surrendered all, but their very difficult sons-in-law retained a strong tribal right to their female little ones when such should appear. But I am not one who is caught twice in the same trap. From then on, whenever I engaged in this novel form of black slave traffic, I saw to

it that, for an appropriate consideration, the son-in-law as well as the husband surrendered all rights.

We may now bid farewell to Martina. She remained faithful to the end and was always a credit to the Mission and to her Church; but was I right in regretting that God did not spare her even more suffering? Perhaps I was wrong. Christ offered her a share of His cross. One after the other, she lost her three little sons to whom she was deeply devoted and, towards the end of her days, she was smitten with a form of leprosy. She was, of course, taken into the lepers' hospital run by the Sisters she loved so much; but despite all the care and tenderness they were glad to show her, her condition did not improve and, finally, she gave up her soul to God. Not long before she died, she asked for me; but, alas, I was then away on a journey and I was not able to see her. We placed a cross at the head of her grave on Channel Island and there she now awaits a glorious resurrection. And thus passed Martina, the little guide sent by the good God to lighten our way through the gloom. And because of Martina's courage, our work greatly prospered.

She was followed by many other little ones. From the time of her rescue in 1921 up to the year 1938, one hundred and fifty little girls followed the same bizarre process. They all retained their native status, but in the unwritten records of the tribe, they were all entered as my wives. A Man of God with one hundred and fifty wives is indeed something of a rarity; but I am, it is true, taking some liberty with the word "wife".

Amongst the aborigines of Australia a "wife" in the sense we attach to the word does not exist. To use it is, perhaps, to create some confusion. The man is the absolute master of his aboriginal family in a very real sense, much more so, as I understand it, than amongst peoples who practised, or practise, polygamy nearer home. He is the owner of the women in his family, in no sense a husband in a European sense. The women are his chattels, his slaves, and merely part of his movable possessions, items of property amongst other items. He has the power of

life and death over his women, and he may treat them precisely as he likes. In buying these little ones, I became their owner, according to tribal law, with the same rights which had been enjoyed by their vendors. It was admitted without hesitation by the aborigines that no one had the right to take them from me.

Amongst the aborigines, a woman is born "married", and from the moment of her birth she belongs, as a chattel, to her mother's son-in-law who has been appointed as such by the tribe. It was from these sons-in-law that I bought the little girls, not from their fathers.

As I have explained, my strange and paradoxical measure was adopted on the spur of the moment, if one can so describe something which had the effect of giving a great fillip to our work. It seemed to me that I was commanded by grim necessity when little Martina rebelled and called to me, in her helplessness, for aid. Obeying the Divine command, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me", in so isolated and remote a corner of Australia should, on the face of it, hardly have mattered to, or even concerned, people in the outside world; but missionaries, obeying a wider Divine command, are open to thoughtless attack by those who know little of missionary work.

The story of the Catholic missionary buying "wives" by the score spread throughout the country and even farther afield. I was called upon to give an explanation to the authorities.

Happily, the Commissioner for the Northern Territory was that Dr Gilruth I have already mentioned; and I knew I could count upon his sympathy and understanding because he shared with me the desire to do everything possible to improve the miserable conditions under which the aborigines lived, with considerable emphasis on the lot of the native women. I told him my story, in essentials very much as I have told it here, and he agreed that I had hit upon a way, not less excellent through its simplicity, of laying a good foundation which could mean a gradual improvement in the lot of native women.

"Carry on, Father," he said. "You're on the right track and you can count on my backing."

Thus, when the alarming telegram arrived from Canberra with the ominous request, or command, "Please explain purchase of women", the Commissioner himself was able to do all the necessary explaining and without difficulty he obtained the *nihil obstat* of the Government.

To buy children is not like buying coconuts. I had to be tactful and to show much care in making my strange bargains. A child will live much longer than a coconut, and she will grow: and there is responsibility for her training and, indeed, for her health and wellbeing. And then the actual business of concluding the bargain required circumspection. Too direct or forceful measures were not possible with these people; and I had to avoid any kind of pressure or over-persuading. Eagerness shown by me might see a husband, for so we must call him, change his mind and decide not to part with a child. It was nearly always, with some rare exceptions, that I first waited for a native to approach me; and to some proposals I showed a deaf ear. My cautious and reserved attitude had the effect of never permitting the aborigines to regret their transactions with me and, it is fair to say, they never tried to recover the little girls they sold to me.

Never? Well, hardly ever. There was the native called Sam who came to me one day to sell me his little wife whose name was Helen. All went well and the bargain was concluded happily. Sam made no attempt to renounce the contract while Helen was a child; but when she became a young woman he went to her and said that since he had sold her to the good Father, he would not, of course, attempt to take her away for himself. He went on to say, however, that his brother had determined to have her and that, willy-nilly, his brother would take her.

Greatly distressed and in tears, Helen came to me to tell her story. I reassured her.

"Helen, my child," I said, "you belong to no one, not even to me. You are a free woman, and that man has no power over you whatever. There is nothing whatever to worry about. If this brother tries to molest you, you must come to me. I will help you."

In due course, she came to me—to say that she had decided to marry Sam's brother after all. He had threatened to kill her if she did not marry him and, what distressed Helen most, he said he would kill everyone else in the Mission. Perhaps it was that Helen was impressed by this fierce determination; perhaps she knew Sam's brother; I do not know; but it turned out that Sam's brother proved to be a good fellow and Helen never had any cause to regret her decision which, at the time, was a sacrifice on behalf of the Mission and the abandoning of other apparently more promising matrimonial prospects.

When the men of the tribe understood just what was involved in the sale of their girl children to me, when they saw how these girls were treated with never an attempt to wean them from what was good and wholesome in their native way of life, and when they saw that at a marriageable age they were perfectly free to marry young men of the tribe, all doubts and lingering fears were abandoned and I began to receive so many offers of "wives" that I became embarrassed and I was forced to limit my business.

Upon one occasion, a young man came to me to sell a small girl who was not more than four years old. There were limits to the numbers I might take, and I was compelled to refuse.

To soften this refusal, I said, "She is, perhaps, all you have. Later you may regret having parted with her."

"I shan't, Father," he said firmly. "I now go to work in Darwin and I cannot take her with me. While I am away, someone will steal her. So," he begged, "will you please buy her?"

I agreed, and the bargain was concluded. Years passed and the exiled returned from Darwin, still a bachelor, while his

former little wife had grown up into a very pretty and well-educated young lady : something he observed with great appreciation because he promptly offered me no less a sum than fifteen pounds, quite a fortune to an aboriginal, to buy her back.

"Listen, my friend," I said, "it is true that I buy women, but I do not sell women. This girl is free. If she wants you, it is good; if she does not want you, then for you it is, perhaps, bad : but there is nothing I can do even if I wanted to."

To give this man his due, he accepted philosophically what must have seemed to him a strange situation and went away without more ado.

I will always remember the very old man, a bearded Methuselah, who came to me carrying a four-day-old baby in his scraggy arms. You must not laugh : but this was the old man's wife.

"Father," he said, "I have come to sell you my wife."

"And why," I asked, "do you want to sell me your wife?"

"Of what good is she to me, Father?" he asked. "I am too old! I've got beyond it. If you buy this wife I will have something for my old age."

I bought her.

That case of Methusaleh and the baby was plain sailing; but occasionally there would be an attempt at sharp practice of not a serious kind but enough to show how simply a native's mind works. What appeared to be a very cunning fellow came to me to say that while he had many wives, his brother no longer had a single wife. "Why not," he suggested, "buy a baby wife from me and marry her to my brother?"

"Not so fast, my friend," I said, "not so fast. So far as buying a baby—that is good. But as for marrying her to your brother that is a very different proposal. If I buy a child from you, we'll bring her up and train her. If she wants to marry your brother when she is old enough, that will be good. But if she does not want to marry your brother, that will be the end of it."

The bargain was concluded along these lines.

Another memory now comes to my mind and one that moves me in its recalling.

A number of little ones were playing on the beach when without warning an unusually big wave rolled in and engulfed one of them, a little girl of about twelve months. When I reached her she showed no obvious signs of life and I worked hard to resuscitate her. When, after a long time, there still remained no sign of life in the little body, I decided that she was at death's door and I gave her conditional baptism. When, shortly afterwards, she returned to life and had soon completely recovered, I was in a quandary. I had baptized a little creature who was still under the power of a husband who was, incidentally, something of a personage in the land and the master of an already large harem. In principle, the solution was simple: I might buy the child. But in practice it proved far from easy and it was only after long negotiating that at last I succeeded. She is now one of our more promising pupils. It was she, the child I saved from the waves, who once made me an unexpected and quite moving declaration.

"You know, Father," she said, "you are three times my father: you saved me from the sea; you saved me from the man who held me in his power; and you saved my soul by Baptism."

But you must not think that I bought only baby wives. I was often offered older girls and even women of mature years. A certain hoary old reprobate died a natural death in God's good time, leaving behind him a harem of six wives. One of them was already an old woman; four of them were matrons, and the sixth was a baby. Tribal law, if properly followed, makes provision for a situation of this kind; but tribal law is not, or perhaps cannot, be properly honoured on all occasions; and then it becomes a matter of first come, first served. And thus it was when this old man died. There was claim-jumping and this led, as always, to endless bickering and squabbling with the result that even at the end of two years the ultimate pos-

session of the six masterless females remained unresolved. By this time, the various claimants were heartily tired of the business and I was appealed to to arbitrate for them.

I could see that no mortal man could disentangle this dispute to the satisfaction of all concerned, and since I had no desire to show any form of partisanship, I decided to cut the Gordian knot by offering to buy the disputed property in one lot. My proposal meeting with acclaim, I was forced to dig deeply into Mission funds. However, this was one of the rare occasions when a dispute ends with everyone being happy although, for a time, I had no idea what I should do with the five grown women left on my hands. I could manage the baby.

Fortunately, the four young women had their own ideas about their future as had the old woman about hers, and they were not a bit shy in saying what they wanted. The four younger women said, "Father, none of us wants an old man who has already plenty of wives. We want young men, young men who will have only one wife in the Christian fashion."

Their plan was, indeed, laudable; but its arrangement not easy. However, there happened to be at this time no lack of young men waiting with as much patience as they had for their tribal mothers-in-law to have female children, and for such to grow old enough to live with them in a conjugal state. Enough of these with patience somewhat exhausted were found willing to solicit the hands of my four newer younger "wives", left by the hoary old reprobate who had died. I agreed, upon three conditions: firstly, monogamy; secondly, the ceding to the Mission of all "baby wives" in whom they might now or in the future hold tribal rights; and, thirdly, all children of the unions were to be baptized and to be brought up as Christians without the intervention of any tribal sons-in-law. The four suitors consenting, I gave my formal consent and we had a grand quadruple marriage ceremony.

The case of the very old woman was different. "Father," she said with considerable resolution, "I have had three husbands

so far, and the very thought of another fatigues me. Please may I live alone?"

"Your wishes, madam," I said, "are my commands. So shall it be."

And thus we had another, and delightful, revolution. The old lady has lived happily with her children and has learnt the unusual art of being a grandmother. And the miracle was doubled: because, for the first time in local history, there was an aboriginal woman living without being attached as the property of some man. For the first time there was a widow in northern Australia. Indeed, a new word had to be introduced to label an entirely new social category.

The sixth wife, or widow, the baby, presented no difficulty whatever. She went to the good Sisters.

And then there was one of my boys called Antonio, a dyed-in-the-wool native if ever there was one; but with what we might call personality, or charm. Antonio, finding life delightful, always wore a broad smile; but he was not only ingenuous, but ingenious. He enjoyed the good things life with us gave him and he thoroughly enjoyed being himself.

"Me not like the others here," he would say happily. "Me different. Me good fellow, me king."

And this cheerful opinion of himself was shared by others to some extent. Antonio was always surrounded by friends, I think because of his high spirits and his never-failing sense of fun. He seemed to have three great passions in his life: the Mission, the wealth stored away in the missionary cupboards, and his numerous baby wives. The only doubt which seemed to cloud his tranquillity was the difficulty he apparently found in reconciling these passions. He did what he could according to his lights.

He said to me one day, and I was a conscious victim of his charm, "I have many mothers-in-law, Father. One day, all their daughters will be my wives. That will be very good. But, Father, you and I are very good friends and so you shall have

the first girl, I shall have the second, you may have the third, I will take the fourth—and so on.”

From his beaming face I gathered that Antonio thought this a magnificent idea which would put everything on a good Christian footing. That, of course, might be doubted; but on the principle that half a loaf is better than none, I accepted what was a generous offer. Antonio kept his word like a gentleman and in due course he sold me five of his piccaninnies. He felt that in this way he had arranged everything for the best in his little world: he had kept my friendship; he had increased his fortune as a good merchant should while, at the same time, retaining an adequate harem. Antonio, it seemed to me, appreciated the beauty, and uses, of diplomacy.

We had, obviously, to establish a school for my so-called wives. This presented no difficulty; but when they began approaching marriageable age, their future had to be considered and opportunities given to them to get to know the native boys attending the Mission boys' school, kept separate because we had never considered as practical any form of co-education. Without knowing the boys, our girls would not be able to make a free and intelligent choice when considering marriage. Of course, that sounds perfectly reasonable but, in fact, to our people this was a fantastic and most extraordinary innovation. In the bush there are no engagements, there is no courtship. When the time comes there is merely an automatic transfer from the mothers of girls to their “sons-in-law”.

The change we instituted was revolutionary to our young charges and, at first, they hardly knew what to do about it nor how to behave themselves. No one had ever seen a native boy talking to a native girl and, it is true, our young people were much too shy to get beyond making sheep's eyes at each other to express what they felt. However, shyness and timidity gradually wore off, and sometimes there would be some older, matronly females willing to act as go-betweens (with the most honourable intentions of course) and to act as post-offices.

We at the Mission were, of course, deeply interested, even while we were somewhat puzzled when we noticed at this time striplings lying on their backs in native fashion and singing apparently to themselves but at the top of their voices, one here, one there. After a little while the voices of the lads would fall silent and then in the distance, sometimes a long way off, a girl's treble would begin singing. Of course, our minds at the Mission, being innocent and turned to religious things, thought these young people were merely expressing a natural delight in music for music's sake; but as the phenomenon became more common, we made some discreet inquiries and we were told that these simple children were, in fact, courting: preparing themselves for the great day of their marriage.

It would be absurd for me to claim that true Christian love played a big part in these outpourings. In missionary work it is always well to bear in mind that a first native Christian generation remains inevitably, perhaps naturally, saturated with the sensuality it inherits from countless ancestors. The delicate blossom of conjugal love as we know it can develop only very slowly and gradually. Undoubtedly, sheer physical attraction played an important role in these idylls. We could only accept this fact, or probability, making it a strict principle never to interfere unless faith or morals seemed to be in obvious danger. On our side, we saw to it that the usual canonical impediments were respected, but we agreed with our charges that totem law should be upheld. We saw no reason to object to the latter, tolerating it in the knowledge that ancient laws would gradually fall into disuse and be, in time, forgotten.

As a matter of fact, my position was immensely strong. I was, of course, the spiritual leader and the teacher of them all; but, in addition, in native eyes, I was the tribal owner of the girls. Consequently, it was my duty to place the seal of spiritual and official approval on the plightings of troth as they took place. As this revolution in native conduct was creating an important precedent, I was most anxious to lend every occasion the utmost

solemnity in order to impress upon the popular imagination its supreme importance. It might be interesting to know precisely what happened in the preliminary skirmishings to the first marriage solemnized amongst these my children :

One day there was a timid knock at my door and, in reply to my invitation to come in, there entered one of my boys. I welcomed him politely without permitting him to see that I was well aware of his embarrassment which hardly permitted him to speak.

"And what can I do for you, my son?" I asked gently.

The lad was, at first, speechless, so much so indeed that I busied myself with some papers on my table to permit him time to pull himself together.

Suddenly, he whispered : "Father, I want to get married."

"Good!" I exclaimed in a way that I hoped would seem to indicate that his wish was not a bit out of the ordinary. "Good, and why not? But who is it you want to marry, my son?"

He told me,

"And does she want to marry you?" I asked.

"But yes, Father! Of course she does."

"And you love her? And because you love her, you want to marry her?"

"Oh yes, Father! I love her dearly. My heart is on fire."

"That sounds all right," I said; "but you must tell her to come to see me. In the meantime, I'll think the matter over."

A few days later it was the girl's turn to enter the presence. If the boy had been somewhat frightened and embarrassed, the girl was plainly terrified and trembling like a leaf. Had she come to face a sentence of death, she could hardly have shown more fear. However, with considerable difficulty, I was able to feel perfectly assured that her feelings for the boy were equal to his devotion to her.

I now arranged a meeting between the boy and girl in the company of their relatives and friends : because I was most

anxious to emphasize the solemnity of this first betrothal in the presence of witnesses.

Although I knew that, since both were fresh from school, they knew the text of the Catechism and the sense underlying its teaching, I thought it wise, nevertheless, to set a precedent for all the Christian marriages which would follow theirs by bringing them face to face with the responsibilities of the married state. This public examination was designed to bring out the fundamental differences between marriage in native law and the marriage which they now proposed to contract according to Christian doctrine.

It will, of course, be understood that in questioning these my children the form of speech I used was much simpler than what I now use in reporting what I said; but the sense of my words is precisely the same. And this, of course, applies to their responses.

"The Catholic Church teaches you, my children, that a man may have only one wife and that a man and his wife represent one flesh. Do you believe that, and do you accept it for yourselves?"

"Yes, Father, we do. We know the law; we believe in it, and we accept it for ourselves."

"Now, as you know, out there in the bush a man is the absolute master in a family and the woman is his slave, his property. But in Christian marriage the man and his wife are equal in human dignity and they join together as partners in bringing up their family. The father, the man, is the head of the family; the woman, the mother, is his devoted and loving helpmeet. Therefore, my son, when you are married, you must not treat the other half of your marriage as a slave. She has the same human rights that you have. And you, my daughter, you will not regard your husband as some kind of ogre, but rather as your protector and your companion, as someone you must help when he needs help, and to whom you must always be devoted. Are you both willing to make this kind of marriage?"

"Yes, Father, we are willing."

"Good! Then there is just one last point: what were the words of God to the first man and to the first woman in the Garden of Eden?"

"God said to them that they should cleave together and be of one flesh, and also He told them that what God had put together, no man might put asunder."

"Very good: and so He did. Now you must understand that in consequence of those words, once you are married, you are married for ever. In tribal law, as you know, when a man's wife becomes old and feeble, he is allowed to throw her away like a worn-out garment. The Christian Church says that is a very bad thing; and so the Christian man will never abandon his wife and she will, on her part, always remain loyal to him. Now you are both fully in agreement that you will live together in marriage in this Christian fashion?"

"Yes, Father. And we also know very well that the Christian family is something quite different from the pagan family."

"Splendid. And now, my son, before you are allowed to marry this woman you must make me a promise. How many *emprenua* have you?"

(*Emprenua* is the native word to describe the mother of those children who will belong to the "son-in-law": An *emprenua* is, in effect, a potential mother-in-law.)

"I have two *emprenua*, Father."

"Young Christian," I said finally, "before marrying this Christian woman, my daughter, you must first promise here before witnesses that you will sell to the Mission any daughters your *emprenua* may have. Do you solemnly agree to do that?"

"I do solemnly agree, Father."

It may be wondered why I did not simply ask this boy to renounce his rights over the *emprenua's* progeny; but this would not have met the case, because in tribal law a son-in-law not only owns such progeny, but he is also under certain obligations. I did not think it wise to make any attempt to interfere

with this very old institution since such interference, apart from leading to endless trouble, could make for much confusion. In the case of this first marriage, the rights of the Church were well safeguarded.

This last-named undertaking having been solemnly given, all difficulties were now at an end, and I could solemnly declare the two young people officially betrothed.

This first marriage was a milestone in the history of the Mission.

And never was such a marriage! The church was crammed to bursting point. Those who know the special capacity native peoples have for compression will know what this meant. Without doubt, natural curiosity played a big part; but whatever the motive, or attraction, the whole community had succeeded in jamming itself into the church; and the bride and bridegroom marched along the aisle attended by their witnesses, the object of fond, and perhaps compassionate, attention from their friends and relatives. I cannot say that the bride was blushing in the traditional way of brides as she advanced to the altar because, owing to the nature of her complexion, it would have been impossible to detect it.

The solemn Catholic marriage ceremony unrolled in all its splendour and not a customary rite was omitted. Questions and responses were articulated clearly in voices whose clear tones could be heard and understood throughout the church. The plain gold ring was blessed and the bridegroom placed it on the bride's finger with so much awkwardness, incidentally, that for a few moments my hair threatened to stand on end.

Instead of the usual sermon, I gave a short explanatory address in order to emphasize the deep significance of the ceremony.

After High Mass had been celebrated with great fervour and rejoicing, the happy couple trooped off to the sacristy to complete an inspiring and happy occasion by signing their names in the marriage register. Thus was completed the celebration so

far as the Church was concerned; the wedding breakfast and its more mundane joys followed.

We had arranged long tables in the shade of a magnificent poinciana tree blazing in a glory of scarlet blossom. Without doubt, the wedding guests would have felt more comfortable squatting on the ground in their usual fashion; but this was, indeed, an occasion; and they accepted politely the school benches we had arranged for their use. Enamel mugs and plates were arranged along the tables adorned with great dishes of food along their centres—piles of waffles dripping with sweet syrup, fresh beef and tinned beef, large quantities of sugared almonds and many bottles of coloured water sweetened with sugar. The good Sisters had arranged bowls of flowers on the tables; and while many of the guests probably wondered what use they were, since they could not be eaten, their presence was accepted without question. Equally ornamental and useless to our guests were the knives and forks on the festive boards. Does anyone suppose that eating is less important to native peoples at a marriage celebration than it is in what we like to call the civilized world? And should we deny them human dignity at their feasts because they squat around a common bowl into which each guest plunges his bare fingers?

There was no question about it: that marriage feast was a grand success. It became the subject of discussion for many a long day, and along the banks of the Bathurst River, up its winding creeks and deep into the very heart of the bush, went the exciting news that there was no real Christian marriage without a wedding feast.

I shouldered all my obligations. I was establishing the first of my girls in the conjugal estate and, in consequence, I considered it not the least of my duties to provide her with a trousseau. And then, of course, it seemed a right and proper thing that the new-founded family should have a house-warming in the hut the young husband had built. And for this, the doors of the Mission stores were flung wide open. Only I knew the cost; but

it was well worth it. Indeed, I considered myself repaid a hundredfold by this successful establishment of the first Christian hearth and home amongst the natives.

Misunderstandings are inevitable, I suppose. As I had established a great reputation as the buyer of women, it was perhaps not surprising that some people should think me a seller of young ladies as well. I often received offers for what was thought to be my merchandise. Upon one occasion, a Japanese pearl-diver came to me with what he thought a good business proposition; but he was received in a fashion carefully calculated to dissuade him and all his friends from ever repeating such an attempt. At another time, a polished Chinese gentleman offered me the princely sum of two hundred pounds sterling, and for a mere half-caste.

"My dear sir," I replied amiably, "there isn't enough tea in the whole of China to buy that girl."

These local offers were not hard to deal with. More difficult, or perhaps more annoying, were the attacks made on our work by the communists. Since, to the communists, the aborigines as an "oppressed colonial people" are already in a state of communistic grace, it naturally follows that the Missionary is Enemy Number One. And so they were soon snapping at my heels.

Just before the last war, a militant communist from Sydney wrote a pamphlet "upholding the rights of the native people", which, of course, as an object is very right and proper; but in this same pamphlet I was bitterly reproached for having committed the abominable crime of buying native girls. We can hope that the communist gentleman was unaware of the facts. One fact unknown to him was that when a Japanese pearling fleet was anchored in our waters, the "oppressed colonial people", living in their natural state of communistic grace, hired out all available young women to the Japanese sailors. I repeat, *all*—all except the one hundred and fifty I had so deeply disturbed communistic sensibilities by purchasing.

Even had he known of this incident, it is unlikely that the pamphlet's author would have mentioned it. The point of his attack would have been seriously blunted.

Shortly afterwards, a communist paper in Prague took up the story, horrifying its gullible readers with a story of a high Catholic prelate in Australia making a very good thing out of buying, and selling, young native girls. The story was, of course, accompanied by the usual scarifying comments. From Prague, the "news" found its way to Holland; but here my brethren in Christ championed my cause so effectively that the campaign of calumny came to an end.

I had already received the approval of the Australian Government; but soon I was to receive even higher approval. In 1947, during my visit *ad limina* to Rome, I reported to His Holiness Pope Pius XII on the state of my diocese, telling His Holiness of the extreme poverty in which my flock were still compelled to live. Also, I told him of the unconventional way I had followed to make easier the degraded lives of the native women. His Holiness listened with deep attention to what I had to say.

"Yes, I quite understand," said His Holiness. "You buy these women in order to give them their freedom. Your diocese and your work in it both have my apostolic blessing."

The approval of the Head of the Church is quite enough for me.

CHAPTER VI

The Bushranger's Garden

THE history of the mission can be divided into two parts: the period of preparation before the first Christian marriage, and the period of development that followed it. After years of searching vainly, after years of labour, sweat and toil, of days of waiting and days of starting and re-starting, the corner-stone of our work was at last set up and in place. The road forward seemed to be clearly traced before us.

The successful solution of the problem of saving the girls from their normal degraded fate by buying them brought another problem: the Mission's population increased and there had to be control. The first question was that of language. The native language was very difficult to learn. We were the first foreigners to speak it, or rather to smatter it: because we could only use a few words. If the aboriginal language was to be the official language of the Mission, it would have to be mastered: something which presented enormous difficulties because the aborigines refuse fiercely to initiate the white men into their mother tongue. In fact, we never learnt more than the most commonly used words, filling in gaps with pidgin English. This was good enough with the adults; but something much more precise was needed to teach the children effectively.

The Government having insisted that the Mission should teach English, we proceeded to teach English; and because these aboriginal children are highly intelligent and blessed with a prodigious memory, they were very soon prattling away like sons of Albion. And the teachers, in turn, were now able to learn from their pupils much of the aboriginal language, a knowledge which we felt indispensable if we were really to

understand the soul of this people. Thus the teachers were taught.

The smallest children were taught by the Sisters who established an infants' school, while the Father took charge of the older ones; and with so much success that it was not long before the more advanced could help with the correspondence. Although ten years have passed since they left their desks, some of them still write to me in quite respectable English.

Religious instruction was accepted and understood with equal success. With the help of a Catechism in pictures we explained to them the Church's doctrine and they soon had this off pat, to their finger-tips, indeed. And what is more, they put the doctrine into practice, soon being as ready to repent as to err. Truly they knew how to admit their faults. I recall the child who, having helped himself to some fruit without permission, took his punishment stoically and then, turning courteously to the Father, said, "Thank you, Father." I recall another who swore freely at me before taking to his heels, after a reprimand; but who returned half an hour later with a very big stick. As I looked at him with some apprehension he said, "Beat me with it, Father, I was naughty." And he offered me the cudgel.

This very new faith sometimes expressed itself in curious ways.

I was called to give the Last Sacraments to a young man who was at death's door. As always on these occasions, I was followed by a handful of children close at my heels. When I had ministered to the dying young man, it was necessary to leave him so that I might attend to other tasks; but the children constituted themselves clergy and remained at the dying man's side until the end. One, who had been given the name of Patrick at his baptism, had evidently inherited the quick wit of St Patrick; because he recited for the occasion a litany of his own invention, calling on all the saints he knew of with special emphasis on St Michael. When questioned later about this archangelic preference his reply amounted to: "Oh, I needed an aggressive

intercessor, because the Devil was after the soul of that dying man. I wanted St Michael with his flaming sword to chase the Devil away."

Oh, wonderful Christian tradition reappearing on these young lips!

Then there is the story of Frank, a proselyte. At a time when Frank was encamped with his family near the Mission a baby girl was born to his mother, a baby so puny that it was thought every minute would be its last. Frank wanted to baptize the baby at once, but this was instantly forbidden by his father who, apart from anticipating all the excitement of a pagan funeral in the family, did not want anything done that might affect the marriage of the baby girl if she survived. To make quite certain that the baby would not be affected by any Christian influence, the father without warning raised camp and withdrew to the bush. Getting wind of this, Frank followed and remained to watch over his baby sister. Taking advantage of the temporary absence of his father at a moment when he saw the baby had not many more minutes to live, he baptized her.

The pagan burial duly took place without disturbing Frank in the least. As he said when he proudly signed the Mission register, "My father had her body; but I had her soul."

Except for the rule summed up in "An eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth; a life for a life", direct killing is not permitted; thus the getting rid of hopeless cripples and the maimed must be accomplished in such a way that they die on their own account without obvious help. This is done by burying them alive.

It happened once that a Christian mother gave birth to a boy who was blind. His eye sockets were empty with no sign of eyes beyond black spots at the backs. Incidentally, I have been told by an ophthalmic surgeon that such a condition is extremely rare. When this condition was observed by an old harpy, she demanded that the tribal law should be put into force at once.

"I am a Christian," the mother protested. "I will not have my baby buried alive." And she drove off the old harpy and sent for Sister Geraldine. With great devotion and, perhaps, not with much hope, Sister Geraldine bathed the pathetic little eyeless sockets for weeks on end. One morning she called to me, "Father, come and look at the baby!"

The black spots had developed and were beginning to bear some resemblance to pupils and, somewhat later, both eyeballs became normal. Today, that child, now a young man, can see as well as you and I.

On another occasion, twins were born and, once more, tribal custom demanded that one must disappear since, in so poor a country, how could a mother feed two babies? The older women, the old geese, shouted that the Capitol was in danger; but once more the mother stood up against the barbaric custom. No, God should not be defrauded of one of his little children. But, alas, this story had not a happy ending for the poor mother. Both babies died and she had to submit to hideous reproaches from all sides: "That'll learn you to fly in the face of tribal custom!"

Obviously, old and decrepit people had little chance of survival when they became a bother, when they could no longer go hunting.

Come on, a good big hole——! This is better than perishing from hunger and thirst, or from being slowly devoured by ants; and we are spared a sad spectacle.

Needless to say, the Mission did not subscribe to this "euthanasia". Those whose strength was declining took refuge with us and we taught them that there was a good and just Saviour. We looked after them to their endings, and many died baptized.

And the Faith became active and exuberant. My young apostles nailed their colours to the mast and in order to be convincing, without minding a bit what might be said, they prayed aloud. In the camps, along the pathways bordered with euca-

lyptus-trees, while the heathen sang, danced and recited their tribal stories, they continued busily catechizing the old people. And these were the first, and by far the most faithful, translators of the Gospels into the native tongue. Like a bush-fire, the knowledge of Christianity spread throughout the country, reaching and influencing even those who did not practise it. It must be admitted that our apostles were never molested; indeed, their influence was strong enough to prevent certain of the horrors I have earlier described. Not a child in the district died without Baptism and these fervent young Christians could not imagine a higher award than the privilege of placing their signature on the parish register after duly making their report to me, their pastor.

The effect created by the gardens we had planted with the sweat of our brow always remained a source of wonder to our aborigines. To them our gardens seemed windows opening to an earthly paradise. They had imagined that to produce one's food oneself was not merely difficult: it was impossible. They themselves never attempted anything of the kind. We had, therefore, to try to implant what was a revolutionary idea in the minds of our children, an idea which could command the necessity of establishing permanent settlements, or villages, near which they could plant their gardens and find subsistence on the spot instead of wandering about in search of pastures. In a word, they had to be taught to be planters and, incidentally, this was in harmony with the desire of the Government, who wanted to see an attempt made to raise the natives to this level.

So great a transformation, in a way of life so deeply rooted throughout the centuries, could not be attempted without time to lend time's aid; and, we knew, our primitive people would never be able to settle with any stability or a feeling of security unless the transformation took place in stages: in a word, to make haste slowly. However, even primitive peoples have their enthusiasts and energetic characters and some of these amongst our children were only waiting for permission before they could

start cultivating their strip of ground. The land was divided up and every man was free to work his part as he wished.

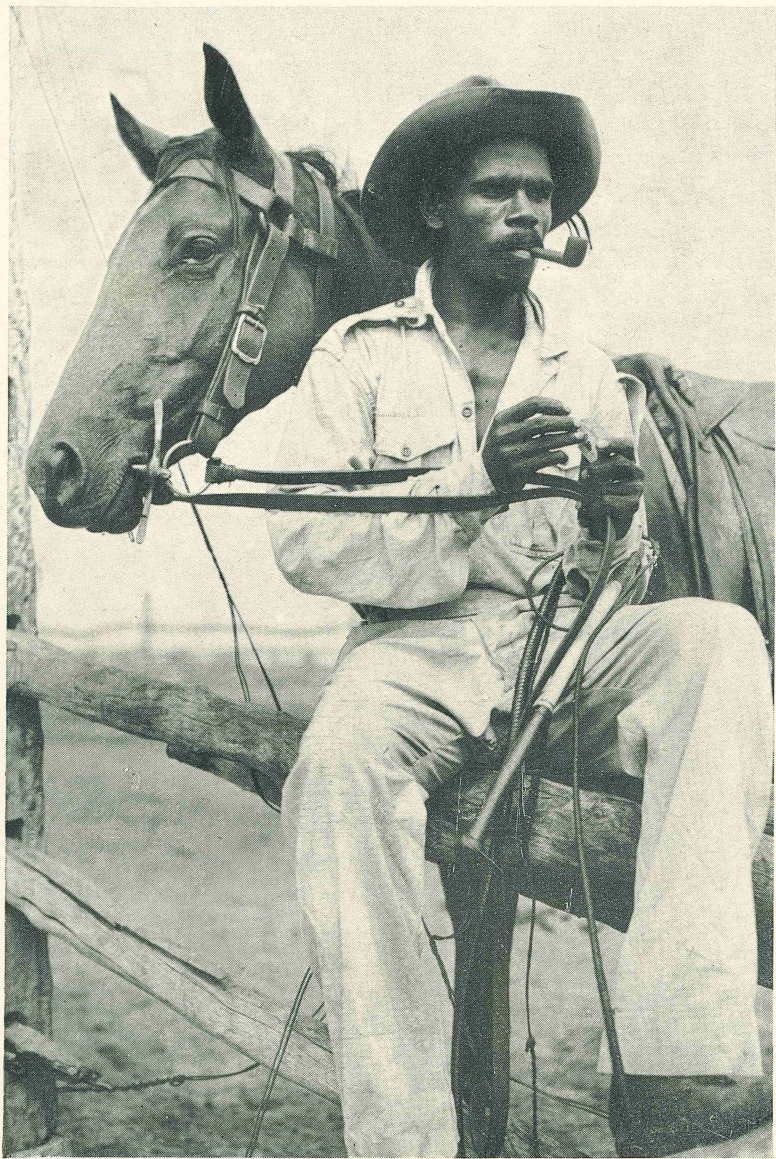
Of course, things did not always go smoothly; they seldom do, especially when experience in cultivating and planting are not there to aid enthusiasm. But ground-nuts were a superb success. Indeed, one of our boys was able to sell three sacks of ground-nuts and this after helping himself to the lion's share. I believe these sacks of peanuts were the first fruits produced by an Australian aboriginal.

This great success with peanuts put others on their mettle, and these others got hold of all the plants and seeds they could find in an attempt to emulate the peanut planter.

The idea was thus launched and began making its way. Indeed, it became so attractive and so original that local places lost their names and gained new ones. Thus we had estates called Charlie Williams's Garden, Bushman's Garden and other topical names. Inevitably, our planters were up against the deep-rooted conception of property in the aboriginal mind, everyone wanting a share in the harvest at the expense of the planter who had worked so hard to produce it. This greed of the tribe at the expense of the individual caused our planters some worry.

There can be no peasantry without a hamlet; this is true under all skies. Our children, who had helped us to build our home, now began building their own after the same fashion, with roughly hewn wood and bark. This was another aspect of the revolution in their lives: because their nomadic existence had, naturally, forbidden even the idea of a permanent dwelling. Unable to carry a house about with them, they had done the next best thing and done without one.

The coast became dotted about with huts; and if these varied in perfection there was no doubt about their picturesque appearance—more picturesque than our home but, it is to be feared, much less hygienic. And because one cannot become house-proud overnight, a shortage of fuel might see flooring and



One of the young men brought up by the Mission taking care of the mission cattle.



Aboriginals dancing during the course of a circumcision ceremony.

walls coming down to keep the fire going. If by chance a tidal wave carried away a village, this was by no means a disaster; because a fallen house could be quickly rebuilt and put together again. These people had been through much worse than that and, after all, a night out in the open meant nothing whatever to them.

The development of an agricultural policy had not made hunting unnecessary; the skill of our people in hunting kangaroos, bandicoots, possums, geese, duck and pigeon was of immense benefit to us. For the natives, the list could be lengthened to include snakes, lizards, bats and other beasts and reptiles which fell before their spears and clubs.

It was only after a great deal of hesitation that I permitted them to use firearms because of my fear of accidents, to say nothing of, perhaps, murder. But since it is my experience that a white man who goes shooting in this country gets more fever than game, I finally decided it would be better to educate the natives to the use of a rifle or shotgun and thus to make them conscious of the harm carelessness could do—harm, as I assured them, it was their duty to avoid.

There was security in the knowledge that a black man will never use his gun against people of his own tribe; and it should be emphasized that there was a very strict law applied to the use of arms, violation of which entailed the death penalty. One day I ordered one of my boys to shoot a dog which had killed one of our goats. The boy was about to obey me when the owner of the dog appeared armed to the teeth with spears, insisting that only the owner of the goat (myself, in this case) had the right to kill the dog. Although my boy could have defended himself, if necessary, with his gun, he at once threw it and the cartridges away, taking up his own spear and clubs.

Would the black man use his gun against a missionary? It is possible; but for the last forty years nothing of that sort has happened. There are risks everywhere, and if one took them into account, one would do very little, if anything.

During forty years we had only two accidents with guns. The first was caused by the carelessness of a hunter who had left his loaded gun within reach of children coming out of class. One of these starlings pressed the trigger and a child fell. I had heard the shot plainly but I had not paid much attention to it, thinking a dog or a duck had been shot. It seemed that the aborigines, horrified, had imposed silence on all the witnesses and had buried the corpse. Three weeks later, Father McGrath, my colleague at the time, overheard whispers that inspired him to ask some questions, and ended by his knowing the full story of a drama known to everyone but us. Although the death of the child was nothing more than an accident resulting from carelessness or thoughtlessness, the careless hunter, according to tribal law, became the object of a vendetta, the malign results of which he managed to avoid until the death of the victim's father put an end to it.

About the same time—troubles never come singly—two boys, intimate friends, were out hunting game. They had separated in the bush, each pursuing a different course. One of the lads, armed with a .44 bore rifle, thinking he had put up a kangaroo, fired; and the bullet struck the chest of his unfortunate comrade, who died a few hours later. Terrified, because he knew only too well that tribal law would insist on his life being taken in recompense, he sought refuge with me.

It was not long before the dead boy's relations were besieging my house, demanding with threats that the boy, whom they called a murderer, should be handed over to them. As the boy's priest and employer, I was determined to protect him from harm and I said I would do this until it could be proved that a deliberate crime had been committed. They dared not force an entrance to my house and, finding me quite determined in my intention, they withdrew for the inevitable conference.

The result was very much as I had expected; indeed, I was prepared for the worst when an old woman came with a warning stick. She had been sent by a young girl who had overheard

the deliberations of the angry relatives of the dead boy. Eventually, I received an ultimatum. Unless I gave up the boy I was protecting, I would be killed with him. I think this is the only time that my life was really in imminent danger. I was, indeed, in grave peril. But my life has been one of providential coincidence; there is no doubt about that, and most certainly there is no doubt in this case: because at this critical moment on a remote island where visitors arrive but seldom, a motor launch appeared carrying Dr Gilruth, the Protector of Aborigines, and Judge Bevan from Darwin.

Upon being told of the trouble, these gentlemen immediately ordered a general meeting of the tribe. At this meeting all the witnesses were one in affirming that the two boys were intimate friends who had never quarrelled. All agreed that the death of the boy had been the result of an accident; in a word, homicide "by imprudence".

But even while the relatives might agree with this verdict, the deeply rooted tribal law of the jungle that a life must be given for a life was much stronger in their minds; and they held out for the death penalty.

The magistrate, with the utmost patience, explained that, while the law of the jungle might be good for the jungle, it was not in harmony with organized groups. It was true, he said, that the Government condemned to death men who had deliberately and with premeditation taken human life; but after studying all the evidence he was convinced that the boy was not guilty of murder, and in consequence he pronounced him Not Guilty. He added as a grave warning that anyone who touched a hair of the boy's head would be hanged. He offered some satisfaction to these fanatics by forbidding the boy to carry a gun for a year.

Talking of guns as opposed to native arms in the way of spears and clubs, guns were, we found, particularly useful in hunting crocodiles, much to the joy of the natives: because, to them, the flesh of these formidable reptiles is delicious and is,

indeed, their "Meat Number One". When they are lucky enough to catch a crocodile, a great feast is immediately organized and all work stops until every fraction of the beast is consumed. Personally, while respecting the taste of my neighbours, I found the flesh both tough and insipid.

The crocodile is a menace in this area and too often he is responsible for the death of the natives. One of the girls I had bought, Clara, was paddling along in her light canoe when a crocodile upset the light craft with one of its paws and seized her in his powerful jaws. We never saw her again. On another occasion, Jumbo, the husband of another of my girls, was wading out to reach his canoe anchored in the middle of a creek when he was caught in those terrible jaws. Later that day one of his legs was found, a macabre trophy of this tragedy. Another young man was more fortunate through his presence of mind. Having been seized by a crocodile as he was pushing a tree-trunk along the water, he succeeded in digging his fingers into the eyes of the beast, which immediately let go. Later, when attending to this young man, I found two broken crocodile teeth in the gaping wound on his arm. That wound took six months to heal.

Experience has taught our natives that the best way to deal with a lurking crocodile is for everybody to plunge into the water, splashing and making as much noise as possible. The man-eating crocodile is essentially a coward, preferring to attack loiterers, single persons, children and old women. These weak creatures, however, defend themselves by a trick. They take a small dog with them, and at a moment of danger they throw the little beast to a crocodile to allay, at least temporarily, his voracious appetite. Our station lost many a dog, goat and pig—stolen by the crocodiles!

I had my small revenge one day. I had set a trap for fish, a method of catching fish which sometimes had marvellous results, but which, if successful, attracted crocodiles when, as the tide receded, the fish became alarmed and splashed wildly

in their vain efforts to escape. On this occasion crocodiles had duly arrived to regale themselves on a cheap feed; but well-placed bullets ended that pillaging. We were greatly alarmed one day when at low tide a too eager child jumped into the fish trap, a wicker-and-branch-enclosed circle at the end of carefully designed passages, to gather the spoil. Suddenly, the child saw a fish, but much too large. He called for help, but his comrades were struck dumb when they saw a crocodile, twelve feet long. Fortunately, the beast was as terrified as the children and a rifle shot prolonged his immobility *in aeternum*. The child had had a narrow escape, thanks to the natural cowardice of the great crocodile who, once he was caught, seemed to have forgotten his ferocity.

CHAPTER VII

In Which We Sum Up

WE would ask the reader to be kind enough to let us run briefly through the early history of our Mission. We had landed on Bathurst Island in 1911; it was in 1921, ten years later, that Martina was freed. Some things in mission work may be done quickly; and so it took only eighteen months (1911-13) to establish the station solidly with the church as the centre surrounded by other necessary buildings including the convent and the school: thus forming an all-important centre from which and through which the progressive reclaiming of the aborigines could be undertaken.

I think I have explained with sufficient clarity why we saw the need to concentrate all our efforts on the children, both boys and girls. The former, we knew, must be won to the Church before they could be caught up in the complex toils of the initiation; in regard to the latter, as it eventually happened, I substituted myself, as the representative of Christian authority, for their husbands before they could become inured to the normal life of slavery which was the lot of all aboriginal women.

I had, as I have written, solemnized one marriage; and this had been followed by others; but the less spiritual side of the Christian life could not be neglected and so, in addition to Christian teaching, I had instilled into my flock good principles of farming. Thus I could look forward to a double result: Christian families and regular work. I felt that the Mission was well and truly founded. It was, as laid down in the Scriptures, built on a rock.

I must emphasize the fact that by its very nature the nomadic

family group is the antithesis of the Christian family; and so our teaching made us appear revolutionaries undermining old traditions as we endeavoured to rebuild on new foundations. In the place of totalitarianism on a small scale with the aboriginal man all-powerful, a feudal lord in his way on his lands, we offered our black men Christian brotherhood, a brotherhood which establishes and blesses the equality of men and women, both enjoying the same rights and the same obligations.

To achieve this was not easy. Children are the common possession of their parents, whose duty it is to bring them up with that love and care which points to their common duty. Clearly, to implant in the minds of our converts what was to them so far removed from anything they had hitherto known but yet was so of great importance, it was necessary to give them a robust spiritual and a good material grounding.

I think we achieved our objective, despite all the difficulties; and please remember that we had started with very little. What we could not create ourselves, we had to import; and to begin with, we could not count on any help from the natives. We lived on the generosity of a few white Catholics, on what help we could win from our children and on a meagre Government subsidy. It had been for us a matter of life or death that the Mission should make full use of what resources the country could offer both agriculturally and by the organizing of some industry related to the natural possibilities of the area. Eventually, I saw that our progress would be accelerated if we could own a boat.

You will, of course, recall that in the beginning, in 1911, we had hired a boat; and a useful little vessel she was too; but she had proved much too small as the Mission grew in size. Eventually she no longer met our needs.

The nearest shipyard was on Thursday Island, more than six hundred miles to the north-east in Torres Strait; but one of the Fathers attached to the Thursday Island Mission willingly agreed to superintend the building by a Japanese firm of our

“schooner” (a local designation attached to any craft rather bigger than a dinghy). She was already called *Saint Francis*.

But now the 1914 war broke out and prices rose by leaps and bounds: I had to pay down £350, a very serious blow to our finances. Nevertheless, in three months' time, our ship, fifteen tons, was built, launched and ready to sail.

So far, so good; but it is one thing to have a beautiful new schooner anchored off the shipbuilding yard at Thursday Island and quite another thing to have her in our commodious harbour off Bathurst Island, especially when her crew, four Filipinos, with the best will in the world, had more faith in their instinct as navigators across waters out of sight of land than, evidently, in the orders they had been given. These were to hug the coast as closely as possible until they reached Bathurst Island.

If you look at a map of north-eastern Australia, you will see that a point of land, a peninsula, shoots up at the top right, at the north-east, of course, and threatens to pierce the belly of New Guinea. That peninsula ends at Cape York. Immediately to the west, to the left of this long peninsula, you will see a great big bite in the land—the Gulf of Carpentaria—and beyond this is the land mass called Arnhem Land with Melville Island to the west of that bulge in the continent's contour.

Instead of obeying directions by hugging the coast enclosing the Gulf of Carpentaria which, in effect, could be a very long way round, the Filipinos decided to make a bee-line from Thursday Island, which is not far from Cape York, straight across to Arnhem Land, from where they would have no difficulty in finding their way to us via Darwin. Unknown, evidently, to the good Filipino sailors, the currents at that season of the year have a decided set to the north-west and so the *Saint Francis* got off her course and, having missed Arnhem Land, sailed on, and on, and on—out into the blue towards Timor. They might have reached Timor in time; but after three weeks' sailing without seeing any land, they decided that they had

gone sufficiently far to the westward and turned south to find Darwin.

Yes, indeed! But they were now out in the Indian Ocean sailing towards Africa with, had they known it, the Cocos Islands to the north of them. They were soon at the end of their food and fresh water supplies and within an ace of dying of hunger and thirst.

The war saved them—and another coincidence: the German cruiser, *Emden*, was at that time scouring the Indian Ocean in search of prey, with the Australian warships in hot pursuit. The Australians were naturally suspicious of any unknown craft; thus, when the *Saint Francis* was sighted by a lookout on an Australian cruiser, she was intercepted and boarded.

Our four Filipinos, lying on deck in a state of collapse, were questioned; and when they replied that they were on their way to Darwin, they were thought to be mad. However, when the Australian sailors had fed them up and restored them to something approaching their normal state of intelligence; and when the *Saint Francis* had been well provisioned with food and water, a fresh course was set for Western Australia, and Carnarvon was eventually reached without further mishap.

Imagine my anxiety as I waited for our little ship! We had thought the journey would take at the most about three weeks. And when the three weeks had passed and there was no news, I fretted; when six weeks had gone by with still no word, I gave up hope.

At what seemed the darkest moment, a telegram arrived from Father O'Neill, the priest in Carnarvon—"Boat called *Saint Francis* has arrived. Men say she belongs to you. Refuse to leave alone. What shall I do?"

Joy mingled with a certain amount of worry; but I thanked God and cabled Father O'Neill to engage a captain. Eighteen days later, the captain sailed the *Saint Francis* into Darwin. There were a hundred extra pounds on my bill, but, nevertheless, I was well content.

She was a fine little sailing ship, the *Saint Francis*; and she soon proved herself of enormous value in widening the field of our work. We had had to find a permanent skipper and crew and, as usual, Providence had come to our aid in giving us a former pearl fisherman, a famous Filipino called Alphonso, who, it seemed, knew every drop of water and what every drop of water covered in the way of hazards on that northern coast. For a very low wage, Alphonso worked splendidly for us for twenty years.

We were indeed fortunate to have the *Saint Francis* at a time when the first World War took away my colleagues (Father Cros died in Paris after serving as a captain; Father Courbon was also mobilized, and Matthew Garr, one of the four men from Manila, who had joined us during the early days, enlisted in the Australian army and fell on the Somme), when financial aid to the Mission was cut off through the war. Valiantly, our little boat stepped into the financial breach and actually saved us by turning herself into a coastal trader. She carried salt and other necessary cargo to the buffalo hunters, taking back skins, ground-nuts and other products; and thus she assured us of some financial help. Alphonso tried to organize pearl-diving by training half a dozen young men in that art; but while I had at first been attracted by an idea that could in the future provide lucrative employment for my aborigines, the results of the season's work were disappointing despite a good start. Only expenses were covered. Our boys were too inexperienced.

The aborigines are traditionally less at home on the sea than the coastal Papuans. Originally, they had been content with primitive bark canoes which were good enough to sail up the creeks; but the passing Malayan sailors and traders had taught them how to hollow out something more seaworthy from tree-trunks, and it was on these that they made their first attempts to use sails. Any old rag, sack, shirt or blanket was good enough to hoist in a suitable wind.

But the *Saint Francis* showed them something much better

when the children served their apprenticeship on her. We would take on board half a dozen in turn to serve as cabin boys and apprentices, and it wasn't long before the intricacies of the rigging and the handling of the ship held no secrets for them. Their taste for adventure urged them on.

Just think of it! They could sail to so many wonderful places. They might go even to Darwin, the great city of their dreams. We helped as many as possible to realize this great ambition.

Alas, in at least one case the adventure ended in tragedy. Toorimpi, an elder, white-headed, renowned amongst his people, took passage to journey to the great camp of the white people at Darwin. Toorimpi had seen horses, but the sight of a horse drawing a vehicle along a Darwin roadway startled him enormously. As he was recovering from this first shock, a motor-car appeared, and this was too much for him. Raising his hands, he shrieked, "The Devil, the Devil is coming!" and dropped dead in the street. He was buried in Darwin and every year his tribe goes there to perform the funeral corroboree at his grave.

Despite the tragedy of Toorimpi, everybody, as in the song, "wanted to see Carcassonne"—in this case Darwin—but no one wanted to see Darwin's hospital. This was because of the adventures of an old fellow, who, with great faith in the white witch-doctors, asked to be taken to the Darwin hospital where, he believed, they could restore to use a badly crushed leg. But the white "witch-doctor", with the best will in the world, saw at once that there was only one thing to do with an advanced case of gangrene: and that was to amputate the leg without more ado. The patient would have been delighted to throttle the doctor in consequence: but how on earth could he do this in the white man's great camp? He had to be content with stirring up the whole tribe against the white witch-doctor's infernal retreat; and, since then, nobody will have anything to do with it.

Pearl-diving failing as a means of raising money for the

Mission, something else had to be attempted at all costs; and so I turned my thoughts to another enterprise. The Darwin market for cypress timber was good because cypress had the reputation of being resistant to the attacks of white ants. The cypress grew in great numbers on Bathurst Island, and the idea of embarking on the wood-cutting industry appealed to the natives, who could thus enjoy their natural life in the forests and yet have the advantages of semi-civilization in the way of adequate supplies of flour and tobacco. We began by sending roughly dressed billets of timber to Darwin in lots of twenty or thirty : and the business went well.

It was not difficult to cut down the trees or to pay the wood-cutters; but the business of indemnifying the owners always presented problems which never solved themselves without some worry. We had an endless series of legal disputes. The only irrefutable claim to ownership was proof that such and such an old man had been buried in a close vicinity, this fact firmly establishing the claim of his tribe.

We were never content to do well if there was any chance of doing better; and when we saw that a much better price would be given for timber dressed into planks we said, "Well then, let us have a saw-mill!"

Our training in the seminary having neglected the art of the saw-miller, this idea was bold, even rash; but we were never deterred by anything so unimportant as lack of training. All we considered was that planks brought a better price than roughly dressed logs and that, in consequence, it would be better to send planks to the Darwin market. A saw-mill would make planks.

Therefore I went to Sydney—a mere walk of several thousands of miles—to buy an engine and a saw-milling plant. Of course, I knew that the efficient running of a saw-mill demanded experience; but I was quite confident on that score : any help I needed would most certainly come. It did, too. A Swede, Jack Johnson, an excellent mechanic, accepted with enthusiasm the proposition we laid before him. He was a fine

fellow, this tall Scandinavian, who soon taught his eager pupils, Father Henschke and myself, as much as he knew, or at least as much as we could absorb at the time. Emotion ran high at the school when I lost the tip of my second finger. My little girls grieved over my misfortune and, forming a procession with a cross at its head to the strains of the *Libera* echoing sadly under the trees, they proceeded to inter my finger-tip and, with startling initiative, to plant a cross at the head of the Lilliputian grave. Brother Smith lost two fingers without, that I know of, a double funeral; but these casualties were a mere trifle compared with the twenty-five years' excellent service given by our saw-mill.

The natives took a great interest in the mill and they were fairly successful in learning how to work the engine and the circular saw. Curiously enough, the simple job of filing and sharpening the saw always presented an insuperable difficulty to them. Another odd detail: they have a noisy admiration for a straight line without ever being capable of drawing one. Thus, when a perfectly straight plank emerged from the saw bench, it never failed to be greeted with the ancestral exclamation—"Shah!" followed by their English equivalent in this use of the word—"Number one!"

It was at the saw-mill that our aborigines gained their first lessons in arithmetic. The abstract number does not exist in their minds. One, two, three mean nothing to them; one man, two men, three men instantly conveys a clear mental picture. Being forced not only to count and to measure the planks but also to calculate their hours of work, they learnt simple arithmetic more quickly at the mill than they ever did at school.

And so, in spite of the hard times forced on us through the war, we lived: God gave us all we needed; He had never promised superfluities.

We tried to solve the problem the first World War offered us. And how did the natives regard the war? We often discussed it without ever removing their perplexity. Their idea of war-

fare was less deadly than ours, merely confining itself to the exchange of well-dealt blows which did not demand the climax of death. They found it impossible to imagine the enormity of what seemed to them massacres on our battlefields. Were not, they asked in effect, the terms "white man" and "Christian" synonymous? Yes, truly, the war—its causes and awful effects—was an awkward subject which did not make the conversion of these people easier.

All things pass, and the war passed; but we had not long been enjoying our share of peace before the elements decided to attack us with great fury. A cyclone devastated the Station.

During the afternoon of 5th March 1919 a storm broke with violent wind and torrential rain. Both could hardly be worse, it seemed, but one glance at the barometer, which had fallen dramatically, warned us that we could expect a great deal more.

And so it was. During the night, the wind and rain doubled in fury as the seas thundered on the beach. Except for the convent and its outbuildings, our houses lined the shore. Towards ten o'clock, trees began falling, and it was not long before our more fragile dwellings collapsed. That awful night wore on until, at five o'clock in the morning, the elements seemed even more frenzied as more trees and huts fell. Finally, a tidal wave came rushing in and carried away the lot.

I had begun by taking refuge on higher ground with a number of strong fellows; and here we hung on to each other to prevent ourselves from being knocked flat and helpless by the furious wind. During the height of the hurricane I managed to crawl as far as the convent. There was nothing of the convent left. I was dumb with horror at the thought of the fate suffered by our Sisters and the children they guarded; but, thank Heaven, they were all safe and sound. When their building began shaking so alarmingly that its disturbed foundations promised to collapse at any moment, they had just time to run to another building near. Although they felt far from safe, the wind prevented a further retreat and here they remained

throughout the storm and were found clinging to one another with chattering teeth under the torrential rain.

Sitting on a tree trunk at ten o'clock the next morning, I contemplated the full force of the disaster. There was only one description—a clean sweep. I could easily have wept: for there is comfort in weeping. But it was not the time to accept comfort gained by tears. When faith is firmly enthroned in one's heart, God remains. If He had permitted this total destruction of the material work of so many years, then it was certainly for our good, even if we might not see precisely where that good lay.

We had to deplore the loss of only one human being, a baby who was drowned when his mother was swimming with him across a creek swollen and made fierce by the tempest. On the other hand, our livestock suffered severely—pigs, goats and chickens being found lying dead all over the place. Our once tidy, trim gardens and our pastures were a lamentable sight with all fences blown flat enough to allow the surviving animals to complete the destruction of everything neglected by the tornado.

It was Ash Wednesday; and was this not a suitable day to begin Lent?

But sitting down and groaning gets one nowhere. Helped by the few natives who had stayed with us, we shored up and pieced together what timber we could find and soon we had temporary shelters. We then turned our eyes to the sea.

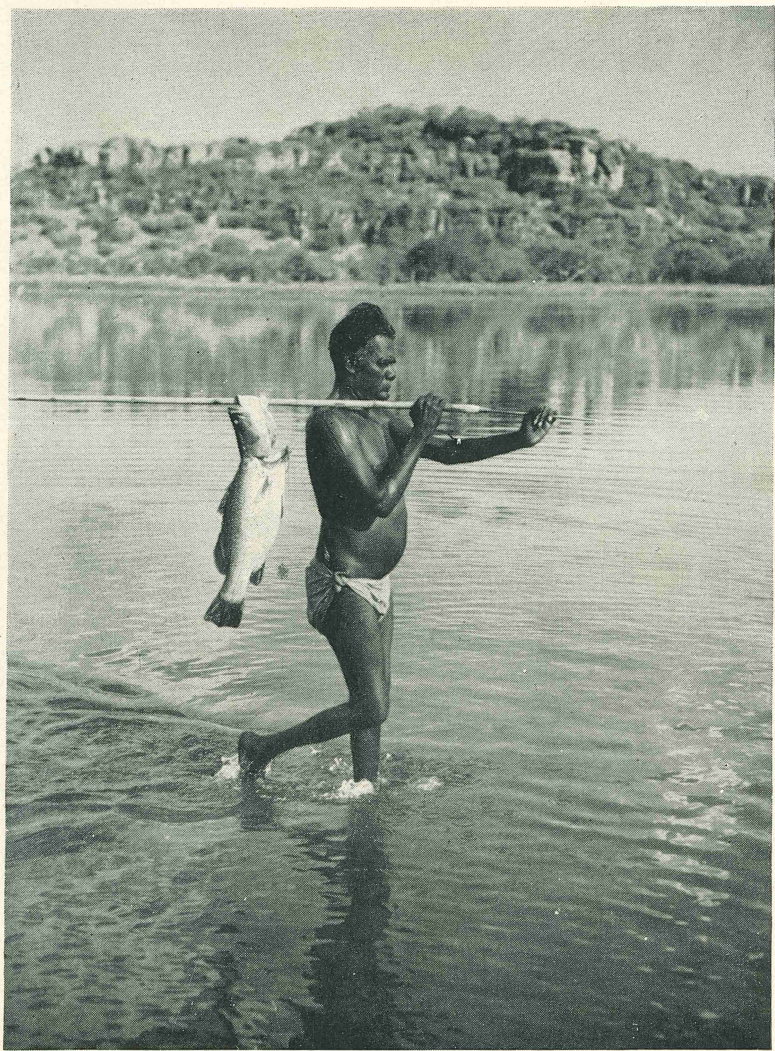
What had become of the *Saint Francis*? A week before the hurricane, Father Henschke had sailed in her for Darwin, and, we feared, anything could have happened to her. During ten days we watched anxiously, but the horizon remained as empty as our stomachs: all our stock of food had gone with the wind. Early on the eleventh day, accompanying the natural sounds of the day's dawning, we heard what was to us the sweetest music—the sound of an anchor chain running out. Our beloved *Saint Francis*!

She had shared the hurricane with us. The storm had carried away her anchor at Darwin and had quickly followed this up by flinging her helplessly on to a reef, fortunately at low tide. At high tide, they managed to get her safely off the reef with remarkably little damage considering everything; and under the direction of Father Henschke, they quickly repaired her and he, guessing that Bathurst had not been spared, quickly loaded her up with essential provisions and came swiftly to our aid.

As it turned out, I was not wrong in believing that it was only for our good that God had permitted what had seemed so awful a disaster. Our buildings were already half eaten away by white ants, and we had plans for rebuilding. Well, the storm had undertaken the tedious job of demolition without making any charge; and the work had certainly been done thoroughly. And that was only the first favour. The second came when a group of young workmen from the firm of Vestey Bros. arrived to visit the island for the Easter holidays. They were greatly shocked by the state of our settlement and one of them volunteered to remain with us to help us to rebuild in exchange for his food and clothing. By great good fortune, the saw-mill had not suffered severely.

And then again: what about all the trees that had been uprooted by the whirlwind? If the whirlwind had not blown them down, we should have had to cut them down instead of finding them ready to our hand. And so we collected them together, going timber cutting here and there until at last we had a heartening pile of useful planks. Our new friend, Frank Veardon, stayed with us for eight months and only left when the finishing touches had been put not only to the new home for the Sisters but also to that of the Fathers.

The *Saint Francis* came and went on a busy shuttle service, carrying off cargoes of timber and coming back with funds. One incidental result was that Father Fanning, pastor of Darwin, was able to enlarge his church.



An aboriginal with a barramundi he has speared.



Our Bishop with his successor, Mgr O'Loughlin, admiring a cluster of frangipanni blossom.

Now what did I tell you? The cyclone, so frightening an experience for us, was indeed a blessing.

On Bathurst was enacted again the story of olden times when the converted barbarians sheltered in the shadow of the castle keep and around the abbeys. The Christian village of Bathurst was a garden blossoming gaily around its church, its monastery and its schools.

It was not that I wanted to keep our converts tied to the Mission Station: on the contrary; because, we knew, sooner or later they would have to return to their tribe where, we hoped, they would form the nucleus of a Christian community. We felt that before they did go back they should have a period of probation in our factory, a factory designed to make firm defenders of the faith. Little by little, many marriages similar to that first one were celebrated; and today there are no less than forty couples established on the shores of Ngouyou. I may not claim that our village of Bathurst is a model village; but I firmly believe it is on the way to becoming one. Progress, though perhaps imperceptible from one year to another, is regular.

The greatest obstacle in our way, what impedes progress most, is the clash between the rudimentary and simple mentality of our aborigines and the excesses of so-called civilized persons whose influence is too often corrupting. Our people are well protected in their own district, but the inevitable contacts with many white men in Darwin do them no good. And, of course, contacts with their brothers of the bush are not always helpful. They have examples before their eyes and they are exposed to an attraction that is hardly favourable to spiritual advancement. Baptism does away with original sin, but it does not do away with its consequences. The temptation of ease is everywhere present. Where is the Christian in Europe or America who has never given in to it? We are often told that our aboriginal converts stumble often, often falling by the way-

side. Well, it is up to us to be patient. With God's help grace will triumph in the end.

"By their fruits shall ye know them . . ."

I invite to Bathurst all those who condemn at sight great effort, those depressing pessimists who find it so easy, in their thoughtlessness and ignorance, to criticize unkindly all missions and missionaries. We have nothing to hide. The story of our Mission is written in a book always kept open. An Australian writer, Frank Clune, who came to see us, wrote a chapter in his book *To the Isles of Spice*, a chapter as kind as it is picturesque when it speaks of "the paradise of Bathurst". Perhaps Frank Clune's enthusiasm carries him away a little, but not so much as all that on the whole.

Our faithful followers do indeed shine with happiness. Of course, it is true that they have lost their old tribal life; but, in exchange, they have been introduced to the life of the Spirit. Would we wish these people to be cooped up in their reserves, as in a zoo, for the vulgar delight of the curious or even of the cold-blooded experiments of ethnologists whose deep interest does not necessarily contain a deep desire to be the friends of the subjects they study? Science is meant for man; man is not a plaything of science. Everything that raises primitive man is useful and good; all that keeps him in a state of inferiority is harmful. All the energy of the Mission is directed towards the former; and the Missions would enjoy even better results if, instead of ill-informed criticism, they were given help in their efforts.

Of course, it is inevitable that the first contacts between a primitive race and a civilized race must cause uneasiness; but with tact and patience this difficulty can be overcome, for the native, quick to sense the white man's intentions, regains confidence when he sees that these are directed towards improving his condition. It is only the scoundrel and the hooligan who is upset by the work of missions.

Again I repeat, come to Bathurst! Come to Bathurst and see

our young fellows bursting with gladness. Before they came to us, they had to wait until they were thirty or even thirty-five before they could marry; but now, at twenty, they can choose a fiancée who is clean, good-looking and educated. The wretched little slave of former days has become an accomplished young girl who may accept a husband who is a Christian youth. No longer is she forced to be the chattel of a degraded old man. Her partner has been brought up as she has been brought up; and both are aware of what cleanliness and humanity mean.

Come and see the elder members of the tribe. Are they bewailing the passing of the good old days? They knew the questionable sweetness of those times, these older men, and they can make comparisons. Of course, they do sometimes indulge in recriminations and express fears: surely the spirits are angry; surely the spirits will judge them harshly and punish them for giving themselves to the Mission? But the days, weeks and months pass into years and there is no disaster. The Mission treats them well, these older men; and, after all, there is an appreciable advantage in not being buried alive.

It is needless to repeat what I have already said about the initiated adults, so deeply imbued with ancestral doctrines. The missionary can gain no hold on their sensibilities. They, in their way, form the Sanhedrins of the bush; and we know how one of that species met the Master's Word. Still, it is true that friendly advances sometimes do make these elders tolerant of Christian ideas, if not for themselves, then, at least, for their children.

In this latter field, we are winning as we shall continue to win, with time, and against time. With time: because we are now dealing laboriously with a first Christian generation; against time: because the bestial customs of our aborigines will not withstand the long-term work of grace, shown in the realm of visible reality by our large families, so happy a promise of the recovery of this poor race.

“Increase and multiply!”

We have established a maternity hospital where qualified nurses are in charge. We have checked infantile mortality. Bathurst is, perhaps, the loveliest of all things, a veritable kindergarten.

CHAPTER VIII

Steps to my Episcopate

It was 1921; and I had not seen France and Alsace for twenty-four years. With the Station recovered from the blow (in two senses) of the hurricane, and now brand-new and working smoothly, I felt a great longing to freshen myself up in my native country. I needed a rest. Therefore, leaving Father Henschke in charge of the Mission, I set off at Easter and spent a few months in Alsace, pausing briefly in Paris, then in Issoudun and finally in Rome, where His Holiness listened to the story of my mission and blessed me.

Upon my return to Bathurst, I found that except for the help of three Sisters and our captain, Alphonso, I should have to work alone. Father Henschke, for reasons of health, was forced to retire and become pastor of Darwin and Bursar of the Mission. This was indeed a hard period, a period not relieved until five years later, when Father McGrath and Brother Smith arrived.

But even if these five years were hard, there was great comfort in the daily proofs given to me that my faith in my Church's progress was not betrayed. The behaviour of my flock was exemplary. The school functioned normally. The adults were of great help on the Station, especially in agricultural work.

I spent much of my time in medical work, looking after the sick and doing what I could to repair the effects of what one had better call "accidents". Medical attention is always a good way to win the confidence and affection of a race which, to say the least, is so very simple-minded. But even with the gaining

of affection and confidence there remained much that I wanted to correct; and I succeeded in summoning up all my powers of tolerance, promising myself that I would put right in the future what I was powerless to prevent in the present.

I was always aware of the odd effects caused by that impact of two diametrically opposed systems of ethics, Christianity and heathenism; but I never permitted these to worry me unduly. This phenomenon is to be expected. It appeared in the days of the Apostles as, indeed, it was apparent in later evangelizations.

Stealing, lying and beating one's women is not considered normal behaviour in our countries; but for the natives all three are perfectly legal and carry no reproach. Of course, it must be admitted, theft cannot exist when everything is held in common. Lying is nothing worse than a form of politeness. Thrashing one's wife is one of the normal privileges the stronger sex has traditionally accepted as a right.

One day I caught a young woman helping herself to potatoes in my garden. The moment she saw me, she took to her heels; but I followed and ran her to earth in her encampment, where I found her sitting on my potatoes like a hen on its eggs.

Punishment of some sort was absolutely necessary: because, if one catches a native red-handed and overlooks an offence, that offence will cease to be one in his eyes and, of course, will be repeated. The offender will say, "Father hasn't scolded me: so all is well."

I had a stick in my hand. Of course, I had no intention of hurting this poor creature; but something had to be done, and so I aimed a steady blow at the cooking pot and broke it in pieces.

The husband now arrived on the scene and, noticing the broken pot, immediately demanded who had broken it.

"It was the Father."

Picking up the pieces, this dark-skinned Jupiter approached me and demanded, "Who broke the cooking-pot?"

"I did," I replied with much dignity. "I hit the pot to punish your wife for stealing my potatoes."

"All right," said Jupiter; "but why not hit my wife instead of the pot. Besides," he continued, "you are a priest, and you shouldn't lose your temper."

This was a deserved one in the eye for me. I accepted the little lesson, glad in my heart of hearts that our islanders expected to find so high a degree of perfection in us.

Sly as foxes, my aborigines never hesitated, when occasion arose, to play tricks on me. One very nice example of this will force me again to mention the dingoes, my *bête noir*. The Government of that day had not yet put a price on the heads of dingoes; but necessary defence against their attacks on my beasts forced me to do so. "If," I said to my boys, "you see a dingo, kill him; and if you bring me his tail as proof, I will give you one stick"—a stick of tobacco, of course.

It was not long before an apparently successful hunter brought me a fine tail and, of course, I paid up.

A little later, during one of my rounds, I noticed that one of the dogs attached to a camp lacked the adornment of a tail. Evidently the apparently successful hunter needed a stick of tobacco rather badly and had simply chopped off his dog's tail.

"Next time," I said, without batting an eyelid, "you will bring me a head!"

A native never says thank you. He accepts gifts and benefits without showing any discernible emotion. Does he, in fact, feel any kind of gratitude? Possibly; but there is no obvious evidence of gratitude as we know it. Should you give him some kind of service, you will be expected to repeat the service or risk offending him by betraying an expectation.

"Now, what are you going to give me," a sick man once asked me, "for having looked after me for so long?" This question throws light on the native sensibility.

Gratitude is a Christian flower; and I was proud to see it blossoming one day in my children.

Accompanied by a dozen of them, I was on my way to visit a man who had broken his arm. We met a herd of cattle, once controlled by the Mission but which, through the destruction of the fences by the hurricane, had been running wild for some time. I wanted to inspect them. The children objected strenuously.

"Don't go near them, Father," they urged; "they are very bad-tempered. They rush at us when we pass near them and we've to get up trees. Now you, Father, are old; and your shoes are heavy. You can't run fast, and you can't climb trees."

Of course, I felt I knew much better than these children; and because I really wanted to see the condition of the herd, I ignored the warning.

Suddenly the cattle formed themselves into a belligerent squadron and, with the great bull at their head, they charged. My worthy little people were all up trees within the space of a second and I was alone with the certainty, I felt, that my last hour had come.

But my boys had no wish to see the Father massacred if they could do anything to help him. Stifling their terror, they came down from their perches and stood with me to face the charge and, as they knew, the possibility of death or, at least, mutilation. As sometimes happens with a rushing herd of cattle, this bull-led squadron stopped dead before reaching us and this pause in the charge gave us time to escape.

When I got home that day I thought over the incident with emotion. The danger I had been in meant nothing when compared with the knowledge that my flock was completely devoted. My Christians might not know how to say thank you—mere words, after all; but they were ready to offer their lives to save mine.

Shovels, spades, picks and axes had been our first tools. They had the necessary advantage of cheapness and they could show what can be achieved with little expense. Many a long day passed before anything more effective could be afforded. How-

ever, little by little, we introduced more modern equipment. Father McGrath, the son of a peasant, knew how to manage a plough and it was not long before the natives learnt how to manage a team.

Of course, it was quite out of the question for us to buy a tractor! And so we bought one, our Fordson increasing the yield of our land in sweet potatoes, bananas, ground-nuts and other fruits and vegetables of all kinds suitable for the soil and climate.

With hunting and fishing added to the fruits of the earth offered by our plantations, abundance reigned at the Mission.

But our animals had been gadding about since the cyclone and, in consequence, were of no use to us. Because we did not know how to bring them under control, it looked as if they would have to continue to gad about.

I do not know whether or not, as often happened in the Scriptures, an angel appeared as in a dream to young Pat Ritchie; but I do know that the four years he came from the south to spend with us were notable for a number of important improvements.

As a road-builder and constructor of reservoirs, young Pat showed remarkable efficiency and ingenuity; but it was as a herdsman, a veritable story-book rancher, that he surpassed himself and, I suspect, thoroughly enjoyed himself, too, when he recovered our cattle.

He began by building a stout enclosure, a corral, in the heart of the forest. When this was completed, he, mounted on horse-back, organized a team which he led towards the wild herd. Without disturbing the cattle unduly, allowing them to graze quietly at intervals, he gradually edged them towards the corral opening. When they were all safely enclosed, the gate was shut and the cattle permitted to fast for a few days. After that, they were as docile as sheep.

It all seemed so perfectly simple. All we had needed was Pat to think of the idea.

The first result was that we soon had supplies of meat and milk; but Pat did not stop there. He put up a cow-shed and soon he was teaching the boys and girls to make butter and cheese.

Finally, as what I think was his masterpiece, Pat designed and established an aerodrome. Of course, we had no aeroplanes; but on the assumption that an aerodrome might attract planes, ours was laid out. As will be seen later, it did enjoy its hour of glory.

And so the years passed. When seven had passed from the time of my trip overseas—and how swiftly they passed—the Eucharistic Congress called me to Sydney. This was in 1928.

I took with me Noel, an excellent fellow married to one of the girls I had bought, a girl who answered to the name of Rose. I had Noel dressed in a new suit for the journey. The magnificent and imposing ceremonies of the Congress dazzled him: the boy, naturally enough, had never imagined such splendour. He, in his turn, attracted the attention of the notable personages present. They were impressed by Noel's intelligence.

Incidentally, it might be worth recording that this boy was probably the first Australian aboriginal to use the post in writing letters to his wife. It is sad to relate that soon after his return to Bathurst, Noel was the victim of a serious accident which, possibly, could have been treated in hospital if Noel had been willing to undergo an operation. But he thought that a return to his native bush might be equally effective in restoring his health. After receiving the sacraments, Noel and Rosy exiled themselves to a place more than fifty miles to the northward. Unhappily, this attempt to win the help of nature failed: Noel's condition became worse. Should they return to the Mission Station? The question was asked too late; and they began telling their beads.

"Listen, Rosy," murmured the dying young man, "I am too weak to talk any more; but I shall hold the Rosary while you say the *Ave*."

Such was the Christian passing of Noel, son of the jungle.

To return to the aerodrome designed by Pat Ritchie. It was like this: From time to time small planes flew over Bathurst before rapidly returning to their aviary at Darwin. My aborigines, astonished at the sight of these unusual birds, could not believe that each one contained at least one man. They wanted badly to have a close-up view, and they wondered why one did not alight on their land.

I explained that this variety of bird could not perch on a tree.

"If," I said, "you want one to come down on the land, you must clear and level a wide space. Then you must wait, and I expect you'll see one of them land."

And so with the eager and energetic Pat at their head, they dug with great ardour and enthusiasm. This was no small task.

And their reward was not long in coming. One day, a very large four-engined aircraft began circling around the station. As I watched its movements, I became anxious. I hoped it would not attempt to land because I was very much afraid that our airstrip was too small for so big a machine. But after a few more circles, it settled on our "aerodrome" with the grace of a seagull landing on smooth water.

This turned out to be the *Astrea*, a transport plane flying from London to Sydney by a new air route. Having encountered strong contrary winds after leaving Timor, it had run short of petrol. A radio from Darwin had suggested a possible landing on Bathurst.

Squadron-Leader Brackley and his crew of six were delighted with this adventure but rather staggered to find they had landed on a Catholic Mission "aerodrome" with a big enough personnel of highly interested persons, but not one who knew the first thing about an aeroplane—and, of course, we had no petrol. To relieve the anxiety which they imagined must be felt in Darwin, they sent a radio to tell of their safe landing and to request the dispatch of a ship with petrol.

The reply, "No boat available", was not encouraging; but Brother Smith and the *Saint Francis* came to the rescue and enough petrol duly arrived.

To express his gratitude, the squadron-leader offered me a passage to Darwin, an invitation I gladly accepted. Crowding round the plane, my terrified children begged me not to go. "Don't go, Father," they begged. "You will die."

I did not die; and I thoroughly enjoyed my first flight.

In 1936 we celebrated the Silver Jubilee of the Mission, a celebration spent joyfully because we had before our eyes tangible proof of our progress. It was on this occasion that the Governor-General of Australia, Sir Isaac Isaacs, sent word to me that His Majesty King George VI had been kind enough to bestow on me the Order of the British Empire (O.B.E.). This, I knew, was really a tribute, through me, to all the staff of the Mission—Fathers, Brothers and Sisters: because all had given loyal and devoted service to their God and to their King. And when, fourteen years later, I was given the Cross of the Légion d'Honneur, I could say the same thing; although, on this latter occasion, my heart was perhaps touched more deeply since the reward came from my dear country of France, giving recognition, once again, to a few of her obscure children working in the furthest limits of civilization.

At this moment I cannot help but recall that time, a little while before the last war, when our lives at the Mission were darkened. In spite of the vigilance of coastal patrols, a Japanese pearling fleet landed their sailors on both Melville and Bathurst islands. Not a single little girl was "sold" to the Mission at this time; the Japanese offered more than we could offer; and the only children to escape prostitution were those in our care. However, we inherited twenty-five half-castes.

The Japanese Consul-General, whom I saw briefly in Sydney, told me that the crew of these pearl-fishing luggers were drawn from the lowest classes including former convicts and the like; but this was hardly a consolation.

Incidentally, these Japanese sailors made no secret of what they believed to be the intentions of their country, often telling the aborigines that in good time they would come to take over the country. "We," they assured them, "are your friends. Do not run away from us : we shall do you no harm. It is only the white men that we shall kill."

I included this information in my annual report to Canberra, the capital of Australia; and I repeated the warning later. In the meantime, the Japanese were populating this part of Australia with their half-breeds.

This trafficking in girls between the aborigines and the Japanese had a deplorable effect on the population, which, in consequence, tended to decrease. It was particularly noticeable in the harems of the older natives. Fifty years ago, it was not uncommon to find an elder with anything between ten and twenty wives; but now the number was reduced to two or three. Nevertheless, I knew one confirmed old scoundrel who had thirteen wives but who, nevertheless, could boast of only three children. He, as a matter of fact, was the chief procurer for the Japanese and almost the only old man who had never given us a little girl. Indeed, upon occasions, he succeeded in preventing me from buying children by claiming rights as a son-in-law.

The harem of this old fellow was reduced by three when the youngest died from a snake's bite, another died suddenly from natural causes, and a third ran away.

In former days, this fugitive would have been killed without more ado; but so-called justice has now become lax on Bathurst and inefficient in practice. When he was jeered at by his cronies, this old chap remarked, "It would be better to sell that run-away girl to the Mission. After all, I have ten wives left, and I think that quite sufficient."

And now, after twenty-seven years, the time had come for me to leave Bathurst. My life there had seen vicissitudes; but it had been lacking in neither joy nor the comfort of friendships.

Before I go on to tell of my accession to the episcopate, I would like to recall one of my friends, Pierre de Hair.

Born in Holland, Pierre de Hair had emigrated to Australia, where he worked as a plumber and contractor until the day came when he decided to devote the rest of his life to our Mission. He was then seventy. A man-of-all-work and full of vigour, there was nothing Pierre attempted that was not carried through to success. I think his chief love was our saw-mill. It was thanks to Pierre that we were able to build a church which is the most beautiful in the Territory, a spacious presbytery, schools and a model hospital. And we cannot omit from this list a second edition of our *Saint Francis*, the pride of the Mission. After fourteen years of intense activity, Pierre is still going strong and, I know, he will carry on until his last breath. He is of the kind that die in harness. May God reward Pierre, my dear companion.

Although, up to now, I have concentrated my attention on Bathurst Island in my story, I should explain that, in fact, my work was not entirely restricted to Bathurst. My function as Apostolic Administrator had placed the whole of the Northern Territory under my jurisdiction and, of course, it was my duty to give spiritual help wherever it might be needed. Happily I, a Frenchman, had sent to me by the Australian province of my community colleagues who could help me with this work. I would like to pay homage to their sterling qualities.

And now, as I approached my sixty-sixth birthday, my life as an ordinary missionary was coming to an end. In 1938 the Holy See nominated me Bishop of Darwin. Should I, I asked myself, be worthy of a position which placed me in charge of a diocese as vast as a kingdom, yet one which was hardly emerging from limbo? Indeed, I heard of my nomination with mixed feelings, with fear and trembling and yet as something dear to me, as if I heard the well-known Voice whispering:

"Well done, thou good and faithful servant . . .!" and the Apostolic Delegate adding, "Go on, go ahead!"

The title of the diocese had been the Diocese of Victoria and Palmerston; but this had lost all meaning. Darwin, the Back-door of Australia, had become the capital of the Northern Territory. I therefore suggested an alteration, an alteration endorsed by Rome, and it was as Bishop of Darwin that I would be consecrated. There was a further alteration in the diocese when a suggestion of the Apostolic Vicar of Papua, New Guinea, was approved by the Holy See. This was that the islands of Torres Strait, with Thursday Island as capital, should, because of difficult communications, be removed from his vicarate and incorporated with that of Darwin.

I went to Sydney for my consecration. All the preparations and all the arrangements were kindly taken charge of in the most helpful way by our Australian province, the ceremony taking place in the Church of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart at Randwick on 5th June 1938. His Excellency the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Panico, was the consecrating prelate, assisted by Archbishop Gilroy, the future Cardinal, and by Mgr Bach, a very old friend of mine.

It was Whit Sunday. A banquet reunited many friends in the convent of the Brigidine nuns, and amongst the guests I recognized that Mr Pickford who had greeted me at Port Darwin in 1906.

What a long way we had come since those pioneering days! I found it difficult, as I thought of them, to realize that here I was now invested with the fullest authority of the priesthood. My poor heart overflowed with the fullest gratitude to the Sacred Heart for all the blessings I had received, for all the gracious support and help, for the joys and sufferings, for the failures and, because it must be admitted to His glory, for the successes.

CHAPTER IX

Bishop of Darwin

My first episcopal visit was made to Thursday Island, because Thursday Island was on our way back to Darwin. I spent three pleasant weeks there with the priest-in-charge, Father Taylor. Apart from a number of white people concerned with trade, nearly always closely allied to the main industry, pearl diving, the inhabitants are somewhat mixed in blood, forming a brave and intelligent race often half Papuan and half aboriginal. I carried away with me an excellent impression.

The hours of rejoicing concerned with my installation at Darwin were not many. The air was full of rumours. Were the Japanese now going to keep their promise, a promise often made to our natives: "Soon we shall come—do not run away! It is to the white man that we owe a grudge, not to you—we are your friends. . . !"?

And fine friends they had already shown themselves to the natives, if friendship could be shown in the defiling of their women. When I thought of this promise of the Japanese, I recalled how one of our young men was strong enough to rescue his mother from these friends.

No, they were not friends.

Then came Pearl Harbour at the end of 1941 and, eventually, the fall of Singapore. White women and children were evacuated and carried to safer areas in the south.

This necessary action was taken hardly a moment too soon. The storm broke on 19th February 1942. A warning had come to Darwin by radio from Father McGrath on Bathurst, who reported the presence of many Japanese aircraft. We learnt later that six Zeros machine-gunned the Station and destroyed

a bomber on the ground. Thus the honour of receiving the first enemy attack on Australia was given to the Catholic Mission.

Full details were only known later. Incidentally, the military authorities in Darwin declared that the aircraft reported by Father McGrath were machines of our own patrols. Events soon denied this comforting declaration when, an hour later, the air-raid sirens sounded. All eyes were fixed to the northward; but the enemy formations, having flown a wide arc, actually came in from the south, a hundred and thirty planes dividing themselves into three groups as one attacked the harbour, another concerned itself with the town, while the third concentrated on the aerodrome.

I was deeply anxious about sixteen of our Sisters who, with fifty half-caste girls, had remained in the convent cowering under tables and beds as they called upon God to protect them.

I myself had joined a number of natives in a trench. They, apparently unconscious of any danger, seemed in the main to be enjoying this incredible cacophony. Personally, I was none too happy as I tried to find some protection by fixing a pillow over my head. It was the day after Ash Wednesday and I found myself repeating to myself, "Ash thou art, and to ash thou wilt return"—or, more correctly in English, "For dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return." I added to the text, "Perhaps today."

In two separate waves the bombs rained down. The damage appeared awful. A dozen boats were sunk in the harbour; twenty aircraft were destroyed on the aerodrome and all the hangars were burnt; a great number of houses were demolished; there were a thousand dead, both soldiers and civilians. I mourned the loss of my dear Francisco; but, thank God, the Mission remained unscathed that day.

Without delay, the Administrator, Mr Abbott, arranged to have all our people transferred first to Alice Springs and finally to Carrieton.

Although, in the three years that followed, Darwin, which

does not occupy a great area, endured sixty-five raids, during which sixteen bombs encircled the church, the church itself was never hit. Father Henschke and Brother Quinn, both of whom remained faithfully at their posts, were joined by Fathers Flynn and Cosgrove, the army chaplains, in sounding the call to arms. The church services, held every Sunday, were crowded.

A number of Japanese airmen who bailed out of their machines at Bathurst were taken prisoner by our children there. The *Saint Francis* was mobilized and, under the command of Brother Smith, joined the Royal Australian Navy.

In those war days, my dear Darwin became known as the entrance gate to Australia; but although the enemy concentrated all his hatred on the small port, he never succeeded in closing that gate. It was here that the invasion was halted.

Since all civilians had been obliged to leave the important strategic position Darwin had become, I followed my evacuated flock to Alice Springs, a thousand miles to the southward, but still in my diocese. I remained here for three years.

I found Alice Springs an interesting little city. It had begun as hardly more than a village, a centre for two hundred miners, cattle men and civil servants. In 1929, when the Darwin-Oodnadatta railway line was extended to Alice Springs, the village gained some importance in now being linked to the outside world. A number of my parishioners had gathered there, and Father Long, M.S.C., was their first pastor. He began by lodging in the hotel and saying mass in a public hall; then, deciding that he must have a church built of bricks, he made the bricks himself. Dear Father Long! How many dusty tracks of Central Australia have carried your shaky old car? How many Christians, weary in isolation, have been strengthened and fortified by you?

Father Maloney succeeded Father Long at Alice Springs and brought this isolated parish to a remarkable degree of advancement. A school was built for white children and another for black children; there was a new convent for the Daughters of

our Lady of the Sacred Heart; there was a boarding-school. Indeed, I could hardly keep up with consecrating the various new buildings at Alice Springs.

And now Father Eather was the pastor of Alice Springs. He had shown much forethought in never missing an opportunity to buy any land which appeared to him to be well situated, and, as events proved perhaps more dramatically than he had foreseen, he was right. The war turned the straggling village into a vast supply dump as well as an important military centre for troops. Alice Springs was humming with feverish activity.

It is an ill wind that blows no good: the war gave the Northern Territory excellent strategic roads, the best gift being the famous highway known as Stuart Highway, which joins Alice Springs to Darwin.

Since these troop movements brought many young Catholics to the Northern Territory, we felt that something must be done for them. In Darwin I had thought this need particularly urgent. An appeal launched throughout Australia on behalf of young Australian soldiers brought in the handsome sum of two thousand pounds. But just at the time when we were about to begin building, the enemy intervened with a direct hit on the site we had chosen. Because there was nothing further we could do at Darwin, I turned my attention to Alice Springs, where the need for a hall for Catholic soldiers was equally urgent. The Government being both responsive and generous, and the soldiers themselves being helpful, a good hall was soon built, opened and consecrated to the satisfaction of all concerned. Used for the most varied of purposes during weekdays—sports, festivals and banquets—the hall became the parish church on Sundays. The church built by Father Long had become much too small to hold the large numbers of people brought to Alice Springs by the war.

It would be natural to expect that the ending of the war would see Alice Springs falling quietly back into its former condition of lethargy and isolation. Not at all. Indeed, the

town continued to develop. Its admirable site is enough to attract tourists; it is, also, a busy mining centre and an important market as well as being a missionary capital. During my pastoral journey, as late as 1947, dear Father Eather had several buildings for me to consecrate and I confirmed upwards of fifty children, new young soldiers of Christ in those remote regions.

In spite of the war, perhaps because of the difficulties the war drew in its wake, it became more than ever necessary that we should not neglect the work of converting my aborigines. There were a fair number to be found in the neighbourhood of Alice Springs, either employed on cattle and sheep stations, or in the mines. Their women and children wandered here and there aimlessly with nothing to do and without regular support. A small number led a nomadic life.

It seemed to us a matter of urgency that something should be done for these people. We had to think of a plan which would take them away from the town and which, at the same time, would offer them a home where they could be looked after.

The Administrator offered an area of some sixty square miles eighty-five miles to the east of Alice Springs. This area, Arltunga, had been a mining district but was now abandoned. A day was fixed and, half happy and half cross, our flock was carried away in army trucks. The expedition as such amused them; but they plainly regretted what they were leaving behind.

In Australia, you must not be afraid of moving from one home to another. When the first site chosen proved unsuitable, we moved to a second; and although a well had been sunk and huts put up on this second site, we moved to a third which appeared better for our purpose, with water and a soil suitable enough for cultivation if not of the best quality. Finally, a new centre was born and here there soon appeared, thanks to the good offices of Father Eather and Brother Grove, a church, a school, a convent and a presbytery. This is not a threadbare

ritual, but a procedure followed everywhere in missionary work.

The work at Arltunga was different from the work on Bathurst. These aborigines were partially assimilated, living something approaching normal civilized lives without polygamy to affect the bringing up of families, the men being employed in regular work by white men. The Mission offered its spiritual and material advantages, not the least of which was a good education for the children and care of the sick. Thus Arltunga, once a gold mine, has become a mine of Christians.

There was Tennant Creek, more than three hundred miles to the north of Alice Springs. Tennant Creek had begun as a telegraph station on a waterless, desolate area of wind and dust where fresh food was unknown. But none of these disadvantages carried any weight when some prospectors found gold. There is no doubt about it: these men have a special flair. As usual, the slightest sign of gold nuggets saw a rush begin: and so we had to follow.

Father Wilfred Dew took over this district in 1936, abandoning the comfort of a professor's chair to plunge into the bush with neither church nor presbytery and only a car for his home, and his ministry to support his spirit. But Father Dew wanted a church. From an abandoned mining centre, no less than four hundred and fifty miles distant, Father Dew brought a church whose iron framework could be dismantled: and this he re-erected at Tennant Creek. As a gold-mining centre, Tennant Creek had had its ups and down; but gold-diggers are tenacious and they have stayed there in a parish almost exclusively composed of white people, as at Alice Springs.

I had not forgotten the undoubted right of the more primitive natives to receive the Gospel: indeed, the Holy See had reminded me of this right. With the help of a map, I searched for a suitable site for a new Mission Station. Because the largest numbers of natives are to be found on the mainland, I sought a place on the mainland. The Jesuits had tried to

establish a settlement on the Daly River but, as I explained in the first chapter of the book, they failed. Had I not already known this, I would have learnt from the Jesuits' set-back that it was vitally necessary to find a place inhabited by aborigines and free from contacts with white men. Without having seen the place, I decided on Port Keats. All the preliminary work was undertaken with energy by Father Docherty who was instructed to explore the district in the *Saint Francis*, our mission schooner, still under the command of Brother Smith. I knew that the aborigines of this area had a very bad reputation, that they had killed both white men and Japanese; the question was: how would they receive us?

By chance, one of the murderers of this area, a certain man called Tommy, had completed his sentence; and Tommy asked my permission to accompany Father Docherty. During his imprisonment, Tommy had learnt English and the ways of white men: which would be a great help. Thus, when he said he would be happy to serve us to the best of his ability, we accepted with gratitude—evidence that there are good murderers as there are good thieves.

And so all aboard for Port Keats! The *Saint Francis* weighed anchor and, with a lugger to escort her, and wearing the flag of our good old captain, Alphonso, she sailed away. She was followed by our fervent prayers.

On landing, Tommy served as an excellent interpreter, and to such good purpose indeed that, instead of fleeing, which would have been a natural impulse upon the arrival of strangers, or showing hostility, which might have been expected, Tommy's fellow-countrymen unloaded the cargo. Brave Tommy! He was sent to us by Providence.

Of all the Australian aborigines I have known, the people of Port Keats were by far and away the most ferocious-looking. They were big fellows, over six feet tall, with eyes shining like tigers and their hands full of spears and woomeras. An issue of tobacco, flour and calico gave permanence to their kindly

frame of mind, this first excellent impression being strengthened when Father Docherty was able to give effective treatment to a wounded man.

In time, there appeared a church, a house, a workshop, a well and a fence around a garden and, I should not forget, there also appeared Pat Ritchie, who came to the rescue. The Mission Station was taking shape. In many ways the people resembled those of the islands; consequently, the experience gained on Bathurst was of immense value to the Father in charge. Queerly enough, to all customs and practices associated with the initiation which, at Port Keats, included circumcision, there was added something which I think is unique amongst the Australian aborigines. This was divorce.

Thus, if a small girl of, say, ten years old is given to an old man whom she does not like and she shows her contempt, she gets a beating. This practice is not confined to Port Keats. If the beating is ineffective and she still refuses to settle down as a member of the harem, continuing to show her disdain, she is given a shower of blows. If this proves useless and she runs back to her mother, she is pursued by the old man and driven back with a stick. She may repeat this retreat to her mother, and he will still pursue her with a stick and again drive her back to his camp.

If the small girl survives a number of incidents of this kind, the putative husband consents to a divorce. However, her troubles are not yet over. A day is fixed for the ceremony and when the tribe has assembled a wide circle is formed surrounding the girl, who stands at the base of a tree. The husband, armed with ten spears and a woomera, stands facing her at a distance of forty yards. He throws the ten spears in succession. She has the right to move her head or her body to avoid the spears, but she may not, according to the rules, run away. If she does run away, the whole performance must be repeated from its beginning. If she is wounded or killed in this diabolical game, then it is just too bad; but if she escapes, her

divorce is completed and she may marry anybody she wishes. A happy ending of this kind is very rare.

I did meet a girl who escaped and I was curious to know how she had managed. "Oh," she said smiling, "the old man was so nervous and his hand so unsteady that . . ."

It was found after a few years that the site chosen at Port Keats was unsuitable in many ways. The sea was eating away the land, which, anyway, was not good for our purposes, being much too sandy. Also, the water was brackish. I therefore gave orders for a withdrawal.

Ten miles inland, Father Docherty found his Eden—fertile meadowland with a permanent watercourse and a more central situation. Viewed from an aeroplane, the Mission Station makes a pleasant picture. One sees a large variety of buildings surrounding a solid iron church, a pretty convent for the Sisters, a spacious home for the Fathers and the Brothers, schools, out-buildings, a hospital, a farmyard, shelters for the goats and a fertile garden. There is even a large aerodrome which may be used in any season; and so flights can be made in all directions.

The natives accepted the Mission's discipline very quickly, and Father Docherty could soon lead them like lambs, lambs which could, however, leap up like wolves. Yet it is wonderful to see these wild animals accepting the sweetness of the Gospel. Our experience in Papua was repeated here: the farther the black men are from the white men, the easier they are to convert. One can believe that the most backward make the best Christians.

This Mission Station, cut off from Darwin by more than one hundred and fifty miles, bids fair to be cited as an example of a model parish. When I visited this Station, the natives all knew who I was, and what I represented, as they acclaimed their Bishop.

While, in this kind of work, it is essential to settle as far as possible from white men, there is no reason why the useful discoveries of white men should not be used. The most useful

is the wireless. Each of our Stations has its own transmitting and receiving set relayed through Darwin. At fixed times every day, the Brothers chat together and this, of course, reduces, if it does not entirely remove, any feelings of isolation. Information being spread in this way with consequent encouragement, unity is maintained. Thanks to our aerodromes, the flying doctor often calls. This is science at the service of Faith.

The demographic chart of northern Australia appears more or less like this: a stationary white population; a declining black race, and a fantastic increase in half-castes. It is not difficult to imagine a majority composed of the last-named in future. It is unnecessary to say that the mothers of the half-castes are all natives. The fathers come from all quarters of the globe. Inevitably, the result is a curiously composite race of people with varied impulses. It is remarkable that these half-caste children, the offspring of white men, are inferior to the children of coloured men.

The pure native children are intelligent in the main and, if taken in hand at a fairly young age, they can become useful citizens of their country. But how easily the little half-caste beings can sink into a condition of moral squalor or, at the least, into passivity if they are not cared for with much vigilance. The adventurous spirit and moral laxity of their white fathers does not mix well with the instability of the black.

Our Missions have fought for these half-caste children for a long time, something worthy of praise in view of the indifference and inertia shown towards the problem they present by white men and by the Government. Of course, work of this kind is expensive, demanding as it does carefully chosen personnel not only with a vocation but also with a determination to give their lives to their calling with moral, intellectual and spiritual devotion.

It must be remembered, too, that children consume without producing: something which does not affect the Government's duty or the duty of the white men, responsible for their birth,

to support them and those willing to look after and educate them. In addition to this obligation which common justice demands, there is the necessity to take them in hand before they can develop vicious habits. The schools for these little half-castes should in every sense be centres of education, never reformatories.

The Directorate of Native Affairs has, at last, shown interest in these outcasts of fortune. The first idea had been to establish a large institution in Darwin; but this idea was abandoned when it was seen that to subsidize the various Missions would be more logical and cheaper and, of course, the half-castes would be brought up in their respective religions.

When this plan was adopted our share of the delicate work was undertaken by Father Connors. After a number of experiments, Father Connors finally decided to take a piece of land on Melville Island, actually on the Apsley Strait, to the north of Bathurst. The Government supplied the material for two buildings and the work was undertaken by the Mission. Thirty boys and about the same number of girls were admitted and, after a rather difficult start, Garden Point is today making regular progress.

The great question is, what is to be done with our pupils when their education is finished? Well—"Sufficient unto the day . . ." Let us make a beginning, and God will provide. I have always had my own ideas on this difficult subject of the half-castes. As I have suggested before, the great thing is to take these children when they are young, when their minds are receptive. I have always been very emphatic on this point. I must admit that our attempts to look after half-castes on Bathurst had not proved permanently successful when, as happened, they left school to become the servants or employees of white men, only to be carried away by the examples set by their masters, an unhappy process helped by heredity.

But, I may be asked, is it not cruel to tear these children away from the affectionate environment of their homes? The ques-

tion is naïve. What homes and what natural affection have these little ones? Yes, if they had families, and if they were surrounded by that love and affection family life offers to the young even amongst primitive peoples, it might be cruel. But these creatures roam miserably around the camps and their behaviour is often worse than that of native children. It is an act of mercy to remove them as soon as possible from surroundings so insecure. After that, I think, they must be kept at school until they marry, when they can establish a home: because a home forms the strongest safeguard against the dangers which lie in wait for unprotected youth. When a young couple have a home in a decent house with their children around them, the husband earning a fair wage, a good start has been made and there is every chance that the family in that home will remain Christian.

I always feel we should try to keep, if we can, a certain number of families in the same village, to give them a community of interest without forcing them to live a communal life. The voluntary communal life would, I feel, give them some protection from the dangers and excesses of an independence they are not really ready for. I have always dreamt of a co-operative society where these half-caste people might share work and profits, where they might elect their own municipal officials who would hold their positions at the will of electors and consequently might be changed if their work in maintaining order and administering justice fell short of what might be desirable. There would be neither rich nor poor; all would share both good and bad fortune.

Am I dreaming of Utopia? Well, that remains to be seen; and, of course, my plan is open to revision after trial and error. Whether a dream of Utopia or not, I had the satisfaction of seeing the beginning of my little City of Co-operation a short time before my work came to a close. A number of couples had built their houses, putting up fences and planting gardens. They worked for the Station—stock breeding, carpentering,

treating hides—gaining a certain degree of affluence. There was a school, a hospital and a maternity home to complete this budding city—a tiny world, it is true, but a well-organized one.

I know that the people of both sexes gave their bishop a rousing welcome; and their school groups filled me with delight. The boys' quarters seemed a hive of different activities—some in the workshops, others busy with machines, or with water hydrants: all being directed towards stable occupations according to their respective ability.

The girls are taught plain cooking, sewing, gardening and, most important of all, baby welfare. Less serious occupations are not neglected: there are music and dancing, to say nothing of other expressions of pleasurable art. Under the stimulating guidance of Father Flynn and Sister Annunciata, Garden Point seems well on the way to inaugurating a Golden Age.

Alas, every rose has its thorn. We had to contend with leprosy. In earlier times, those who were struck down with leprosy were abandoned; the situation improved when a leper station was established on Channel Island, some six miles from Darwin, under the direction of Dr Cook. But the Japanese bombing attacks on Darwin which were followed by a general exodus from that town created a difficult situation. There were cases of lepers uncared for and these unhappy people, it was said, were making contacts with soldiers. The situation seemed sufficiently serious to the authorities to inspire them to send out an SOS to the Catholic Missions.

Of course, the SOS was heard. Three Sisters were hurried off by plane by Mother Concepta, Mother Superior of the Daughters of our Lady of the Sacred Heart, and an efficiently planned round-up was arranged to bring these unfortunate creatures back to the hospital. The love and care shown them soon reconciled them to their condition. They were given the help they needed and they began to feel the security of religion as, from their sheltered retreat, they watched the smoking ruins of Darwin. Our Sisters had the joy of witnessing the

recovery of a number of patients. Cured and happy, they returned to their tribes singing the praises of the women who had looked after them in their days of desperate need.

My first pastoral visit was made to the Leper Station of Channel Island. I recall the triumphant reception I was given by the Brother Superintendent, by the four Sisters and, not least, by the patients. I recognized among the lepers one or two little girls from Bathurst Island.

Yet the community was in good spirits. Those faces, even if, in some cases, affected by the disease, were alight with smiles. All had hope of at least improvement in their condition. Modern medicine can work wonders and has, indeed, succeeded in removing the most repulsive marks of this terrible disease. There were more than a hundred in a convalescent stage, people belonging to every tribe. May all those who still suffer in the bush come to receive treatment.

In 1945, when the people of stricken Darwin had accepted their losses and were getting on to their feet again, I saw that even if the great war was over, I had a war of my own to fight. The Government had decreed that there should be no private property in Darwin, that freeholds should be exchanged for leaseholds of ninety-nine years. We owned four and a half acres in the town, upon which had been built our church, the presbytery, the convent, schools and the parish hall. We were ordered to pull the lot down. We might rebuild on an area chosen by the authorities, and we would receive fair compensation.

Clearly, it was my duty as bishop to defend the property, the rights and the privileges of the Church. I therefore sent a firm, if polite, protest to the Government. I justly claimed that my Church in Darwin had the same rights enjoyed by other Churches in Australia, rights governed by the Constitution which accepted these rights and agreed never to interfere in any way with the activities of the Churches.

I claimed that the new law violated this part of the Consti-

tution, since it deprived us of our possessions, and thus struck a blow at our dignity, to say nothing of reducing our prestige and seriously disturbing our mission work. I could not agree that the promised compensation would make good our loss: indeed, far from it. The value of money had decreased to a point five times below its pre-war value; and how could we rebuild a house officially valued at three thousand pounds when its rebuilding would cost fifteen thousand?

I argued, and I argued again, with the Ministry concerned, without winning a point. According to the Minister, the life of the Church would not be adversely affected if this particular church was re-erected on rented ground. I agreed that the Church would live even if it were forced into catacombs or out into the bush but, I suggested, such a fate was not normal in a Christian country. The Church is not a subject of the State; the Church is the State's partner.

The controversy reached Canberra, and here I had more success, if not complete satisfaction. I was granted a site of five acres, and the site granted was the actual one upon which our church and buildings stood. They were, in consequence, saved. We were given the right to build on this land, but instead of being freehold it would be leased to us in perpetuity at a purely nominal rent.

Ecclesiastical law insists that a cathedral may not be built on land which is not the Church's property. I confided this scruple to His Holiness Pope Pius XII. He advised me to accept the arrangement. "Later," he said, "dealings with a more tractable Government should enable you to return to the old state of affairs."

Thus it is that Darwin can claim the privilege, unique of its kind, of having its cathedral on rented land.

All Australian bishops are expected to make a visit *ad limina* and to make a report to the Pope every ten years. It was 1947, and I had not seen Rome since 1921. The war had, of course, intervened. But now, in 1947, I left on a French liner.

Is that Marseilles? The scene in the harbour was simply terrifying: nothing but sunken ships everywhere, piles of rubble and twisted iron. And how many houses laid flat? The dear Basilica of Notre Dame de la Garde was itself wounded. My youngest sister came to meet me; and I became a comforter. She, who had become a widow in the first war, had lost her son in the second.

After visiting the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart at Marseilles, I went to Strasbourg, then to Sainte-Croix-aux-Mines, my native village. Tears . . . and smiles . . . so many old friends missing . . . so many new faces! The village, with the curé at its head, received me like a hero and we went from one festivity to another. The retreating Germans had tried to hold the advancing Americans on the main square. My birthplace was razed to the ground. Every family had lost at least one of its members during this carnage. And how many people had been deported? It was believed that many of them were in Siberia. Were they alive or dead?

At Benfeld, the curé showed me the register of baptisms where my name was written against the date of 27th October 1872. That did not make me any younger; but praise be to God who had given me so many years in which to serve and to love Him. Monsignor Weber, Bishop of Strasbourg, asked me to give a talk to his seminarists on my missionary experiences; and he showed himself the most enthusiastic of my listeners. The same warm welcome was given to me by the students at l'Orangerie. The late Mgr Ruche had, some time earlier, made me an honorary canon of Strasbourg Cathedral but, alas, I was unable to take possession of my stall because the cathedral's beautiful choir had been mutilated during the war.

I am proud of my Alsace. Alsace holds the record for generosity in making so many gifts to the Propagation of the Faith and to the Holy Childhood that sends out so many of her children to spread the Good Tidings throughout the world.

Again I went to Issoudun, and here I had the joy of ordain-

ing eight young deacons, several of whom had recently returned from German camps. At the time of my ordination in 1896 we had been eight elected of the Lord, and I was now the only survivor. My ordination of this eight assured replacement.

In Rome, thanks to the Very Reverend McCabe, our Superior-General, an Australian by birth and education, all doors opened before me. His Holiness Pope Pius XII, my old fellow student at Saint Appollinaire, received me in private audience and showed a keen interest in my primitive people as he looked at the photographs I had brought to show him. Cardinal Fumasoni-Biondi asked me a host of questions and arranged a visit for me to the immense College of Propaganda.

In May 1948 I left Europe on an Egyptian steamer carrying seven hundred and fifty emigrants of twenty-eight nationalities. I reached Melbourne just in time to attend the celebrations of the centenary of Melbourne's metropolitan church. The vast crowd of the faithful gathered around their archbishops and bishops presented an unforgettable sight. The grain of mustard seed had indeed become a majestic tree.

But it was within my own heart that I celebrated, at the same time, the centenary of the Church of Darwin. I dedicated a thought to its first missionary who rests at Victoria. I had the pleasure of meeting Mr de Valera, who told me he had been a student at Strasbourg. "It is not surprising," I said, "that you should be a passionate leader of Ireland: Alsace is the fountain-head of patriotism."

His Holiness the Pope having agreed to my withdrawal from active missionary work, granting me my exeat, I felt that before finally retiring I would like to make one last tour of my diocese. Thus, accompanied by Father McDermott, I climbed into the Darwin plane. I was happy to see from the plane how my town was rising from its ruins. The *dernier cri* in the matter of lodgment seemed to be the galvanized-iron hut: but we can wait patiently for the magnificent architectural creations we are promised.

Everywhere I was given that kind of warm welcome which gladdens a missionary's heart: it truly gladdened my heart. Naturally, Bathurst had a special visit. I do not want to dwell too emphatically on the ill-effects of the war on our Station. It seemed to me, however, that too many of our young people, those who had joined the army or navy and had returned after their demobilization, had lost their family feeling as well as their old love for a manly trade, preferring to be lazy domestic servants. I noticed in Darwin that these young people had apparently forgotten the independent spirit of their race. To scrub, to sweep and to brush, jumping to the call of a whistle, is no preparation for the natural destiny of headship of a family. The job is easy, with long periods of semi-idleness; and, it is to be feared, these young people will remain domestic servants until the end of their days.

I preferred, however, to allow my eyes to dwell on the two hundred children capering about so gaily, a gaiety exchanged for reverence and devotion when they came to the altar rails. There lay the future.

I toured the whole of my diocese. After Bathurst and Channel Islands, I returned to the mainland, to Port Keats, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs, Arltunga and finally to Katherine, the latest of our stations, where stood the last church it fell to me to consecrate.

And I finished where I had begun fifty years before: I finished in Sydney. But have I finished? Not at all!

My declining strength is better suited to a more contemplative life. An old bishop remains filled to the brim with solicitude and affection for all his brothers, for his successor, the Most Reverend J. P. O'Loughlin, for dear Australia, for both black and white Australians, and for the salvation of souls and the glory of the Creator.

Epilogue

BY ANDRÉ DUPEYRAT

How well I remember, and what a pleasant memory it is :

I was holding his arm with that deference a younger and unknown man owes to one older and well known as I guided his footsteps amid that veritable flower garden of crimson and purple blazing against the background of the immense crowd which, in May 1948, had gathered to celebrate the centenary of the Metropolitan Church of Melbourne, Australia.

Monsignor François-Xavier Gsell has just returned from a brief visit to France after forty-four years of missionary work in the most primitive, forsaken and remote land in the world—the territory surrounding Port Darwin in the boundlessness of northern Australia.

He who had led the Church forward so blithely far beyond the borders of a young civilization seemed, perhaps naturally, a little awkward in the white lace and purple draperies of his rank as, obviously unaccustomed to such, he, this venerable prelate, moved forward somewhat laboriously. Although his heart remained young, the years had brought a little deafness : and thus we chatted in loud and joyful tones.

Came a clear, warm and ringing voice from behind us : “What a pleasure to hear the fine language of fair France spoken here.”

It was Mgr. Fulton J. Sheen, the illustrious apostle from the United States of America, who had come from New York with Cardinal Spellman to join many other priests and prelates of the Church, from all over the world, in celebrating the glorious anniversary around Archbishop Mannix, that magnificent and

dominating Irish figure, one of the great builders of the Australian Church.

We turned with surprise towards Sheen's brown, dry, eager face, a face from which deep-set dark eyes glowed with faith and charity as a brazier glows with warmth and light. In this human warmth, the face of the old pioneer seemed almost lifeless. The broad forehead was wrinkled below the strands of receding white hair above a face somewhat blotched and tired-looking; the grizzled beard emphasized rather than softened the heavily modelled features. Grey eyes behind crystal lenses seemed to weigh on swollen lower eyelids.

But suddenly in the old man's face there shone the light of a young smile as the eyes, grown weary with so many years viewing so many empty, endless spaces, glowed with a vigour, born of a serene faith, of the assurance of a life well spent, of a love well placed, of a lively wisdom and of unique experience.

"The Bishop with one hundred and fifty native wives," the man who had pushed back the frontiers of the most implacably pagan of pagan lands, faces the prelate Sheen who, with the most modern means at his disposal, strives to convert to Christ the most modern country in the world. The two apostles understand each other. The same love unites them. The same flame consumes them. Their work, so different in appearance, is one and the same in its effort to bring souls to God. The Church they represent is subject neither to time nor space; its conquests conform to the rhythm and measure of the world and of little men . . .

François-Xavier Gsell was baptized at Benfeld, Bas-Rhin, in the diocese of Strasbourg, on 30th October 1872, but he always considered the neighbouring village of Sainte-Croix-aux-Mines as his birthplace, because his parents settled there when he was nine years old. Alsace, of course, had just become German following the defeat of the French under Napoleon III; but his family, like others, remained French. Nevertheless, when he

was old enough to go to school, he had to submit to what his family believed to be foreign discipline.

In the case of François-Xavier Gsell it was not long because, like other boys of his home, he had to begin work at an early age. He was apprenticed in a cotton-spinning factory.

But Providence was watching François-Xavier. A Missionary of the Sacred Heart who happened to visit his parish noticed the fifteen-year-old boy, so frank and pious. The priest asked the boy if he had ever thought of becoming a priest, even—who knows!—of becoming a missionary?

Yes, this was, in fact, the boy's heart's desire.

Thus it was that François-Xavier Gsell was taken to Issoudun (Indre), where the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart had, attached to their headquarters, an educational establishment known as Le Petit-Cœuvre. It was here that the young Alsatian studied during the six years that followed.

This decision to leave everything to follow Christ was to lead him to the uttermost parts of the earth. When, twenty-six years later, in 1921, he saw again his native country, he wrote these moving lines :

After my long absence, everything appeared new to me and, what I found strangest of all was that everyone, even the children, spoke the French I had almost forgotten. I hastened to Strasbourg and from there to my home at Sainte-Croix-aux-Mines. There I found my family, its old and new members; the village with its old and new houses; my schoolfellows and my friends; the cotton factory where I had worked . . . All these things caused such a sudden and so violent an emotion that I was almost overcome with joy. While I had been away, my father had been called to God, but I still had my old mother. How happy I was in the sweetness of her tears and kisses! And how sad I was to realize that I could no longer talk to her as in the old days : because she only knew the popular Alsatian dialect which I

had completely forgotten. And so I listened to her speaking in the local dialect which I could understand, replying to her in French which she, in turn, could understand. Yet in spite of this, my heart was wrung in the knowledge that I could not speak the language of my mother. God demands heavy sacrifices from us missionaries.

To be a missionary, however, was the great ideal which upheld the young Gsell throughout his time of study and especially during that very difficult year of the novitiate, the necessary preparation for the religious life. In 1892, in the full flush of his twentieth year, he pronounced the three vows which allowed him to enter the Society of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. He was then sent to Rome to study philosophy and theology at Saint Apollinaire University. At Saint Apollinaire he met a fellow-student, Eugene Pacelli, who was to become the great Pope Pius XII.

Four years later, on 22nd June 1896, François-Xavier Gsell was ordained a priest in the Eternal City. His Christian name, his education, his aspirations and his ability all marked him out for distant missions.

At that time, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart were fighting steadily and at great cost to complete the opening of a door which had remained shut from the beginning of time—the door to the large savage island of New Guinea. The first pioneers who had knocked at this sombre door, as early as 1885, were massacred. Reinforcements were now needed.

In 1897 a strong contingent was therefore sent on its way to Papua (the south-east coast of New Guinea) and to the Gilbert Islands, a sprinkling of low islands strung across the equator in the very middle of the Pacific. The evangelization of the Gilbert Islands is also the responsibility of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. Father Gsell found a place in the ranks of these young legionaries. Recalling his memories of this period, he wrote :

. . . We landed at Sydney (Australia) in October 1897. In due course, all my companions left for their respective goals. I, alone, to my great regret, was kept in Sydney. My heart bled as I watched them sail away to their islands: because I had continued to hope until the end that I might also go. Through the intermediary of my superiors, Providence willed otherwise. At the time, I could not understand why I had been left. Indeed, the blow appeared so hard that I felt it could destroy the ideal then controlling my life. But the ways of God are inscrutable. This trial was, as it turned out, only a blessing in disguise.

To be really effective, a missionary's calling demands careful preparation. This enforced period in Sydney gave me the chance to gain knowledge without which my pioneering work would have been futile.

Thus it was that during these three years in Sydney, Father Gsell learnt English, mastering a language that he was to use for the rest of his days. His Australian colleagues had, too, founded their own house of theological study, and he was enrolled in the professorial body: after all, he had come straight from a Roman University.

Instead, therefore, of teaching savages, my first missionary work was to teach future missionaries. It must be admitted that the best way to learn is to teach, something I saw was a sound principle when I realized that giving these lessons would be of immense help to me in my future work. It is sometimes thought that a missionary need not be a profound theologian because he has to deal with simple unsophisticated people; but the contrary is true. These simple people, when once one has learnt to understand them, do indeed need teaching that is within their powers of understanding; but it must be clear, direct and complete. This is certainly not easy.

Came another blessing disguised as an ordeal. "Suddenly and peremptorily" his superiors "pitch-forked" him into the post of assistant to the overworked Bursar of the Missions.

To succeed in its operations, an army must have a Quarter-Master's department to look after food supplies, ammunition and the many other items, all of which must be in the front line at the right time. Missionaries are the advance party of Christ's army. They need food, clothing, building and teaching materials and a thousand other things which are necessary to their work. It is the Bursar who looks after these needs; he is the Quarter-Master General. But oh, what a job!

Here then was Father Gsell plunging into the intricacies of bookkeeping, choosing and purchasing the most varied of food supplies, organizing the dispatch of goods and arranging the itinerary of travellers, and, more tedious, solving the maddening complications of British systems of weights, measures and money. "It was yet another school," he confessed: "a hard and sometimes a trying school, but what a useful one!"

In addition, since he lived at the presbytery at Randwick, a Sydney suburb with a parish entrusted to the Australian Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, he helped his colleagues in their ministry.

Invaluable experience. On arrival in Australia you find a new country, a new people with its own particular character, its own manner of thinking and its own way of living. Was it not my duty to adapt myself to these novelties and to familiarize myself with this environment? This first contact with Australian Catholics gave me ample opportunity to study their lives and methods, their needs and aspirations.

It is therefore only right that I should thank Providence for my delay in Sydney. It was a preparation for my mis-

sionary life and, without it, I confess that the task awaiting me would have been difficult, if not impossible.

"The task awaiting him . . ." Oh, God! how mysterious are Thy ways, but how wonderful!

After this unexpected wait of three years in Sydney, Father Gsell was at last sent to Papua. He really thought that he would stay in Papua; but this was only a "trial run", he says. The thread of his destiny was still being spun.

In his memoirs, Mgr Gsell gives this description of this period which lasted six years. We quote at length and word for word because, between these lines, already appears the outline of the hero whose life we follow in his book.

My heart's desire to be a missionary was fulfilled at the beginning of this century. The Vicar Apostolic of Papua, Mgr Navarre, was short of men: so great had been the losses caused by illness and death among his missionaries. There was an urgent need for reinforcements. I, with several comrades, had the great pleasure of being amongst these reinforcements. My packing was soon done and on 20th April 1900 we left on board the coaster *Moresby*.

We had expected to reach Port Moresby, the small capital of Papua, in nine days; but there was bubonic plague in Sydney when we left and any boat leaving that port had to undergo a period of fourteen days' quarantine before she could enter another harbour.

To avoid this inconvenience, the ship's captain decided to set a roundabout course via New Britain, a large island to the north-east of New Guinea. It was thanks to this detour that I had the joy of making friends with the Catholic Mission at Rabaul, directed by my colleagues of the German province. I found there one or two of my old fellow-students, children like myself of Le Petit-Cœur of France, including, in particular, Fathers Rascher and Rutten who, a few years

later, were killed by natives from Baining Peninsula, martyrs of the Faith.

I admired very much the magnificent organization of this great Mission; and my joy was completed when I was asked to give my first Baptism to a little black baby. I gave the little black baby my mother's name, Josephine.

Indeed, I felt I had been shown a great favour by being allowed to begin my missionary life by a visit to this impressive work of achievement.

But I had to continue my journey. After five days spent in a condition of purest enthusiasm, we weighed anchor for Papua.

On 9th May 1900 we reached our destination at last. We landed on little Yule Island, lying a short distance off the south-east coast. It was the centre of my new Mission.

With my heart overflowing with joy, I set foot on this promised land. I really thought then that I had reached the field where I should work for the rest of my life. It was a great joy to meet our venerable archbishop, Mgr Navarre, and all the missionaries I had already met in Europe. Under the leadership of such a chief and in company with such colleagues, I looked forward to giving my whole heart and strength to our common task. I never dreamt that Papua was only to be another trial spin for me, a training for another mission.

However, this first campaign in Papua prepared me still more, since I was given the opportunity to exercise a variety of trades. To begin with, I was put in charge of the Mission's shop in which are collected, and from where are dispatched, all the goods destined for the Mission Stations scattered throughout the great land of Papua. My new superiors felt that my knowledge of English and my training with the Bursar at Sydney marked me out as the right man in the right place. I did my best; but, oh, what a thankless task this is! Satisfaction has to be given to so many people with so

few means. There is too much paper work; the balance of accounts is too unstable, and one's calculations are upset so frequently that one endures a long headache.

Then, of course, there is the Chinese puzzle of finding funds. Each Mission tries to organize an industry which will bring in money; but for all of the Missions, their chief means of subsistence come from benefactors, either directly, or through the intermediary of the Pontifical Charities of the Propagation of the Faith and the Holy Childhood.

The result is usually this: there is never too much of anything, although what is strictly necessary does, at least, arrive in the end. Providence is kind; but the Mission bursars have plenty of worry.

My knowledge of English was responsible for the allocation of another duty. All along the Papuan coast, here and there, live a certain number of white people who may be Government officers, planters or miners; and some of these were Catholics. It became my duty to visit them periodically, to bring to them the comforts of religion. In this way, on board the *Saint André*, the Mission's small sailing ship, I visited, among other places, Port Moresby, the capital, Samarai Island, to the extreme east, and Woodlark Island to the north-west. I made many friends whose memory remains dear to me.

It was on Woodlark Island that I had a sharp surprise when visiting a village called Kooloomadau. It was on this island that Father Mazzuconi, of the foreign missions of Milan, was massacred in 1855. Well, an old native came to meet me and to tell me that he had been a witness of the tragedy. He assured me also that I was the first priest to set foot on the island since the massacre.

Kneeling on this land of a martyr, I asked God to give me the same courage He had given His servant.

My ambition, on reaching Papua, had been to devote my life to the service of the natives, to bring them the blessings

of the Faith. My wish was granted when, in addition to my duties as treasurer and my ministry as priest of the white people, I was given charge of the native village called Tsiria, on Yule Island, and not far from the Mission centre. It was an easy task; the village population was only three hundred souls and it was agreeable work because Tsiria had been converted by the founder of the Papuan Mission, Mgr Henry Verius of holy memory.

After two years' ministry at Tsiria, I was given the large village of Moou, which hides its huts along the edge of a swamp on the mainland. Later I was given the village of Inawi, situated further inland, at the opening of the great plains of Mekeo. This experience gave me knowledge of the Papuans living on this part of the coast, knowledge which was a useful preparation . . .

Papua is a magnificent but unhealthy country. Nearly everywhere is found malaria to say nothing of the deadly menace of black-water fever and dysentery. These diseases had already carried off many young missionaries. I did not escape. I had malaria every month as regularly as clock-work, and I ended by getting black-water which would mean death or a final cure. I was cured and, since then, I have not suffered from the least signs of fever.

But I have said enough about my missionary life in Papua. Papua is not the subject of my memoirs. I have mentioned Papua merely because my work there was a testing time, preparing me for the much longer life I was to lead in another missionary field.

Indeed, my superiors announced to me in 1906 that the Holy See had appointed me to be Apostolic Administrator of the vast territory surrounding Port Darwin.

Port Darwin . . . The very name conjures up in my memory vast lunar spaces which stretch from the south coast of Australia to the north coast: as the crow flies, nearly two thousand

miles! From Melbourne, we cut obliquely across the old and immense Australian continent.

What a sight! No sooner has one crossed the narrow fertile strip bordered by the Pacific than, under the wings of my plane, which the American Embassy has generously put at my disposal, the land of Australia appears in all its nudity: endless flat stretches still marked by stunted vegetations, gradually giving way to total desert, desolate and deadly.

This is the arid "Red Heart" of Australia.

Flying over the region of Lake Eyre, bounded by vast patches of shining salt, and beyond this inland, almost dried-up sea, one wonders, as one watches the ground, whether one is not suffering from a nightmare. The geologists tell us that this is one of the oldest countries in the world. It looks to me rather as if it was the youngest, as if it belonged to that fabulous age when the land was emerging from the waters. There is nothing to be seen but long, long tracks of red or dark sand, separated by deep yellow ditches at the bottom of which festers stagnant water that must certainly be brackish. Not the least sign of life: neither vegetation nor beast. Of course, few men, if any, have ever set foot on this dead land. And this hallucinating spectacle lasts for hours.

Then there is a complete change. Here are chains of low, smooth mountains, laminated by the centuries, their naked flanks streaked with wide bands forming curves, scrolls and bends, each coloured a most delicate pastel shade: emerald, blush rose, pale red, old gold, mauve and violet. It offers an extraordinary enchantment, especially in the morning and the evening.

We are now in the region of Alice Springs, truly a wonderland; and this little town, in the very centre of Australia, is the multicoloured milestone marking the beginning of the kingdom of François-Xavier Gsell.

After Alice Springs stretches the prairie, golden-tinted by the high, dry grass, dotted with twisted green and white

eucalyptus-trees, or with large white rocks which look as if ancient bones of the earth were bursting through the earth's old skin. As we approach the north-west, green, broken by rocks and stones, dominates the scene. Forests line intermittent water-courses, river-beds stretching out their hard and dirty dry sheets. This landscape appears endless. . . .

At last, on the edge of the brilliant blue Indian Ocean, appears a collection of white houses in the red dust. This is Port Darwin.

This is the country which awaited Father Gsell, Missionary of the Sacred Heart. It was there, and in that region, that this great pioneer spent the best of his life and it is the memories that he has kept of that fantastic land that he gives us: those of his five years in Port Darwin (1906-11); his twenty-seven years on Bathurst Island (1911-38); his twelve years as a Bishop (1938-50).

He is old now. He has nobly realized that his strength is "no longer equal to the task". With the approval and the praise of his former fellow-student, Pope Pius XII, he has retired to give place to a younger successor, the Most Reverend J. P. O'Loughlin. But, in his place of retirement, not far from Sydney, his only thought is to continue to "serve" his Mission.

I am far away from it, but my heart has remained with it. My black children are continuously in my thoughts, and I should like to use my last strength for them.

He wondered how. Colleagues, friends, bishops and particularly Archbishop Mannix of Melbourne, encouraged him to write his memoirs so that an unimpeachable testimony and unique experience would not be lost. He set to work. Unassumingly, and with no wish to present "a scientific treatise".

Fifty years ago, when I started my missionary life, anthropology was still in its infancy. If it had been developed as it

is in our days, it would have been very useful to me and would have helped me to avoid many mistakes. I had to establish contact with the natives, alone, slowly, prudently; I had to endeavour, to the best of my ability, to learn gradually their habits and customs so as to penetrate into their minds and hearts without hurt or shock. The story of this contact is the main subject of this book, the story of a divine task of which I was the humble instrument. . . .

The strong hand which has moulded a land to Christianity and given it shape, today finds difficulty in wielding a fountain-pen. In his retreat, therefore, he dictated his memoirs in English to an Australian colleague. As the years unfolded before the eyes of his memory, ideas flooded in and events jostled hard upon each other. It was like fruit which falls, very ripe, from an old tree still full of sap; yes, the fruit of his experience among the most primitive of peoples, of his wisdom enlightened by love, of his knowledge nourished by faith. It fell pell-mell, in a rich heap. French hands have taken it up, set it in order and polished it for us, this fruit of an old bushman.

It is up to us to savour it to the full.

Bishop Gsell had not foreseen the title which was suggested after reading his memoirs: *The Bishop With a Hundred and Fifty Wives*.

What an idea! Quite simply, he had chosen: *My Fifty Years as a Missionary*. But, nevertheless, he is now written into the history of the Church and of civilization, endowed with this strange designation.

He furnished the explanation himself in the course of these pages, for it has become a kind of legend that the press has spread all over the world, a legend which, however, like many others, expresses an extraordinary reality: that of a set of human beings, unrelentingly kept down to the status of animals, irreparably warped it would seem, which suddenly

THE BISHOP WITH 150 WIVES

rise and start to walk towards the Light and the Life, helped, encouraged and guided by the Frenchman, François-Xavier Gsell, Missionary of the Sacred Heart, that is to say, Apostle of Love.

ANDRÉ DUPEYRAT, M.S.C.