

Dominic Barberi, C.P.

An Apostle of England.

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Dominic Barberi was beatified as Blessed Dominic of the Mother of God, in 1963.

CHAPTER ONE.

On September 4, 1813, Dominic Barberi, then 21 years of age, stood in the dusty Piazza of Viterbo, a town at the foot of Monte Cimino, 54 miles north-west of Rome. He was deep in thought, almost unconscious of the jostling crowds around him who were dispersing after the annual procession in honour of Saint Rose, the patron of their city. The sun shone from a cloudless sky. Its heat reflected from the lava blocks with which the Piazza was paved in the thirteenth century, was fierce and overpowering. But neither the movement of the people around him, nor the heat beating up into his face, nor the tumult of voices, snatches of song or cries of recognition, could distract his attention from the problem that was agitating his mind. He had reached a crisis in his life. He had to make a decision, which, he felt, would be irrevocable. The question was: should he go to his older brother, Salvatore, who was waiting for him as a matter of course, or should he seek out in her accustomed place the girl whose friendship he had for a long time deliberately but more or less secretly cultivated?

Dominic Barberi, in his peasant homespuns, though scrubbed and polished for the festa, would have been the last to consider himself a catch for any girl. He had too much native intelligence and good sense not to know his own limitations. But to marry or not to marry was not exactly the question that was exercising his mind that day — marriage was not just then practicable. It was rather the perennial problem of the conflict between instinct and conscience, between nature and grace. And his ultimate decision was in perfect accord with the whole tenor of his life until that hour.

Dominic was born on June 22, 1792, at Palanzana, near Viterbo. His mother was then in her fiftieth year and he was the youngest of a large family. His father was a farmer owning a few acres of land. Hard work from morning until night, frugal living and few pleasures, enabled him to keep his head above water financially and maintain his wife and children in security and independence. But Dominic scarcely knew him, for he died in 1795.

Signora Maria Antonia Barberi, though in delicate health and often sick, managed, with the help of the elder children, to keep the farm going. She faced her trials and difficulties with a sensible cheerfulness, which was later very observable in Dominic. A hundred years of melancholy and brooding, she used to say, would never pay off a penny of debt. No task was too humble for her. In after years when anyone would be bold enough to show Dominic particular honour, he would say quietly but emphatically that his mother had been a woodcutter on Monte Cimino. But what was in every way more important, she was a good woman who showed her children a fine example of Christian virtue. Moreover, she had a deep devotion to the Mother of God and found much personal

consolation and help, in the saying of the Rosary. But she also died while Dominic was still a child, and thus within a few years he was left doubly an orphan.

The loss of his mother made a deep impression on Dominic's mind. In his "Autobiography," which was written when he was 30 and from which these details concerning his early life are gleaned, he recalled that while she was still alive, a Capuchin friar once said to him "Do you love Our Lady? You know she loves you more than your mother does!" That remark, remembered and pondered over, set the seal on that devotion to the Queen of Heaven, which he had undoubtedly first learnt from the teaching and example of his mother. It was a devotion that grew to be a bulwark against temptation in the days of his adolescence and an outstanding characteristic of his sanctity in later years. "On the very day on which my mother died," he wrote in his "Colloquio celia Santa Vergine," "I cried out to you, O my mother, scarcely knowing what I did, and I said: 'Virgin most holy, you see that I have no longer an earthly mother! Therefore, in you I hope, in you I trust, and from this day I take you as my mother!' Yes."

It must not be thought, however, that Dominic was one of those highly-favoured souls whom God from the beginning of their lives sets apart for His service. He was a perfectly ordinary child indistinguishable from the many other children in Palanzana except, perhaps, for his ugliness and for an attraction for reading wholly incomprehensible to his elders. Indeed, he may be said to have taught himself to read. Before he was 10, he had spelled his way laboriously through a variety of books. In after years he expressed regret that such reading matter had fallen into his hands, for the good derived from it was more than counter-balanced by the harm wrought in prematurely awakening curiosity and over-exciting his imagination.

But whatever chances Dominic might have had of indulging at his ease his taste for reading and of satisfying his thirst for knowledge, had his mother lived, he had very few after her death when he went to stay with her brother, Bartolomeo Pacelli, at Merlano. Though Bartolomeo loved him very much and took great care of him, he was a man whose vision of the world was more or less limited to his farm. He could see no purpose in book-learning for a boy who was destined by circumstances to spend his days ploughing, sowing and reaping.

So during the 11 years Dominic lived at Merlano, he received no formal education. At 10, he was old enough, it was believed, to rise early and accompany his uncle to the fields. When other boys in more affluent circumstances sat at their desks in school, he was hard at work in the open air, in winter with his feet deep in snow and mud, in spring with all nature around him in tune with the song in his heart, in summer under a broiling sun, in autumn when the empurpling olives were ripe for the gatherer and the grapes hung full on their stalks. Not that these hours of aching toil were altogether intellectually unprofitable. Near to the heart of things, he learnt much that no masters or books could teach him: dogged perseverance in the face of difficulties and the habit of patiently waiting for results.

Yet even in such unpropitious circumstances and under the mildly disapproving eye of his uncle, Dominic eagerly seized on the few opportunities he had of reading, stolen minutes, hoarded half-hours. But books were hard to come by. It was natural, perhaps, that in a village such as Merlano, the taste for reading seldom called for anything better than love stories. At all events, they were the sort that, as a rule, came Dominic's way when anything printed was as grist to his mill. However, not all of them were entirely worthless. He came upon some of the most enchanting love tales in

Italian literature and was caught up into the romantic lives of the heroes and heroines of “Orlando Furioso” by Ariosto, and “Gerusalemme Liberata” by Tasso.

Whatever good effect the reading of Ariosto and Tasso has on mature minds, it had on the whole a bad moral effect on Dominic’s. At least, that was his own opinion. In retrospect, he made no distinction between those world-famous poets and the authors of the trashy romances he bought or obtained on loan. They all equally lured him into an unreal world in which, as he confessed, he spent nights and days imagining himself like a great warrior or a great lover winning his lady love from a host of valiant competitors. In following the fortunes of Rinaldo, Angelica and Armida, he gradually became possessed by the passions that were the impulses behind their romantic adventures. But eventually, as usually happens in such instances, he left the land of dreams and took a step towards reality. After the manner of Dante, he chose a village Beatrice, the sister of a friend, and for a year worshipped her more or less from afar. But if he did make any attempts to win her affection he was not successful, for she gave her heart to another.

That episode may be taken as marking the beginning of an intense struggle in his soul, which went on for several years. He was good and bad by turns, but neither very good nor very bad. Whenever he moved further than usual in one direction there was a violent reaction towards the other. Thus, when his Beatrice married he was apparently not in the least disappointed. On the contrary, he was so relieved at being released from what he called “an occasion of sin” that he said a ‘Te Deum’ in thanksgiving. (‘You, O God, we praise’.)

While one must not read too much into his own descriptions of his state of mind at this or any other time, for when they were written he had advanced far along the road to perfection and his soul had grown very sensitive to evil, nevertheless, it is quite certain that nature achieved many victories, even if they were only minor victories, over grace. Though he went to the Sacraments every month and said the Rosary regularly, he did so, he says, only through routine. He was not interested in spiritual things. And thus, at times, his mind became so pre-occupied with worldly and quasi-sensual thoughts that there was room in it for little else. “It seemed to me,” he wrote, “that to be devout and pious was nonsense and that only those who had achieved fame in war or literature were worthy of esteem. I reached the point of losing my regard for our holy religion and actually came to the conclusion that the world had grown worse after it had become Christian.” Though he did not overtly commit mortal sin, and inwardly calmed his conscience with the reflection that he was not as bad as other young men he knew, he thought about sin to the point of lamenting that God not only forbade the doing of evil but also any deliberate and pleasurable thinking about it as well.

At this time, owing to the suppression of the religious Orders following the seizure of the Papal States by Napoleon, the Provincial of the Passionists, Father Joachim, was living privately in Viterbo. He was a learned and holy man but inclined to severity. Having seen him by accident in the street, Dominic thought it would be a good idea to go to confession to him. He went and accused himself of his usual catalogue of sins and among them of taking part in improper conversations. He received a kindly warning and was given absolution. He went again and accused himself of similar sins. This time Father Joachim was a different man. He spoke very sternly to Dominic and sent him away without absolution.

An unexpected shock to one’s pride often opens the eyes of the mind. Dominic always tried to be honest with himself. Such a rebuff made him reflect that perhaps there was something fundamentally wrong with the conduct of his life. He would have to do better, he concluded.

Nevertheless, he could not bring himself to go back to Father Joachim. Fortunately, Father Joachim departed from Viterbo soon after and Dominic then felt free to go to confession to another Passionist, Father Joseph, who, for similar reasons, had been living privately in his native city. Father Joseph was a man of a different stamp and in him, Dominic found an understanding friend. He was treated gently and given every encouragement. He was not only told to be good, but shown the way. He was taught how to make mental prayer. He reached at times a degree of fervour that made him long to suffer something in union with the Passion of Christ and the Sorrows of Our Lady. It seemed that he had gained the mastery over himself and that there would be no return to his former ways.

Dominic was now 20 years of age, as ungainly as ever and short in stature. From dawn until dark, he worked on his uncle's farm. Now and then, he helped on neighbouring farms and on Sundays and feast days he sometimes went into Viterbo. Life in general was undisturbed and peaceful. The noise of the great political events then agitating Europe did not reach his little corner of the earth except in whispers. He was, therefore, greatly surprised and alarmed when he received an official intimation that he had come of age for military service for which a drawing of lots would be held shortly.

Dominic's alarm did not arise from lack of courage. He was never a coward. But to be a soldier in those days meant only one thing: fighting for Napoleon — for the invader who had entered Rome and carried off the Pope into captivity. To be a warrior with sword and lance in the Ages of Faith was one thing; to be a soldier in an army attacking the rights and interests of the Church was quite another matter. But since, humanly speaking, there was no way out of the difficulty, Dominic betook himself to earnest prayer. According to his own account, some time later he had a dream in which he was instructed, he believed, to enroll himself in the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary. This he did immediately, for it was besides very much in conformity with his own special devotional bent. Whatever his lapses may have been, his love for the Mother of God had never suffered an eclipse, and not long after this time, he made a vow to propagate the practice of saying the Rosary. Then on the evening before the drawing of lots, he felt inspired to make a vow to become a Passionist as soon as the religious Orders were re-established. Next morning, he drew the highest number, which was 123, and was at once declared exempt.

Naturally, he was immensely relieved and pleased. No doubt, one of the first things he did was to go to a church and thank God for so remarkable an answer to his prayers. But somehow, there crept into his joy, a sentiment he looked back on with dismay and shame when he was writing his "Autobiography." He began to experience, he says, a sense of pleasure in the fact that others had not been as lucky as he, including one young man who had of late been showing an interest in a girl on whom he himself had been bestowing a secret but quite lawful affection at least up to the time he had made a vow to become a Passionist.

This was the beginning of another violent conflict in Dominic's soul. It invaded even his dreams. In them, he saw himself condemned and cast into hell for not fulfilling his vow to consecrate his life to God. In his perplexity, he took his brother, Salvatore, into his confidence and his brother introduced him to a holy Frenchman then living in Viterbo. But neither his frightening dreams nor their wise counsels succeeded in helping him to break his attachment to the girl. It seems, however, that by this time his uncle knew something of the matter and was not displeased to see the beginning of an arrangement, which fell in with his own ideas concerning Dominic's future. On her side, the girl was being openly encouraged by her mother to use whatever charms she possessed to get herself

married. But her charms were few. In after years Dominic expressed amazement at his stupidity in being enamoured of one so scantily endowed with physical attractions. She had neither beauty, nor stature, nor grace of movement. Nevertheless, she was, he says, in his thoughts night and day. He silenced his conscience with the reflection that although he was not just then in a position to marry, he could wait for her as Jacob did for Rachel. In his "Autobiography," he notes with quiet humour, that became very characteristic of him in after years, that he did not realise at the time that he was no Jacob nor was his beloved a Rachel.

This interior struggle lasted for five or six months. He gives a very clear picture of the vacillating state of his mind when he relates that while waiting for her under the shade of a tree, he used to say the Rosary but "with distractions such as anyone can imagine," and that after making up his mind to give her up he used to convince himself that it was necessary to tell her so in person, with the result that he used to leave her with renewed promises of everlasting affection and with arrangements made for further meetings.

And then came Saint Rose's day in Viterbo. The force of his natural inclination on that occasion was so great that his victory over himself gave him a mastery he never afterwards lost. Though he met the girl again he did not deflect in the least either from the path of virtue or from his intention to give himself wholly to the service of God. All his leisure time he now spent in practices of devotion and in studying a Latin Bible with the aid of a dictionary. He had no idea when the religious Orders would be re-established and, consequently, did not know when the way would be open to him to become a Passionist. He was content to wait in patience for the hour appointed by Divine Providence.

CHAPTER TWO.

Twenty-seven years or so later, that is, about the middle of November, 1840, Father Dominic Barberi sailed up the Thames to London. He was dressed in the shapeless outdoor garments then worn by secular priests on the English Mission. It was the first journey he made otherwise than in his religious habit, and he had laughingly remarked on setting out that he supposed the good God would recognise him in such clothes.

It was a bleak and dismal day, but nothing could overshadow the joy and exultation in his heart, neither the cold nor the fog nor the unfriendly curiosity of the people. The only thing that mattered just then was that at long last, his dream had come true.

That night he slept in a soft bed at Portman Square, London, in the house of a friend of the Passionists, Mrs. Canning, a convert daughter of William Spencer, second son of Lord Charles Spencer. Next day he went on to Oscott College, an ecclesiastical seminary six miles or so north of Birmingham. There he remained for a little over a month learning from personal experience that his own burning enthusiasm for the conversion of England was shared by few. Apart from Bishop Wiseman, then President of the College, and Father George Spencer (who is now known as the Venerable Ignatius Spencer), son of Earl Spencer, who had been received into the Church nearly 11 years before, none of the professorial staff gave him more than a polite welcome. And even Wiseman, who had invited him to England for the purpose of establishing the Passionists there, though full of zeal and able to plan in broad outlines, lacked foresight in regard to immediate practical details.

So Father Dominic, looking out of his window across the gorse and moorland shrouded in winter's gloom, could easily have become a prey to melancholy and succumbed to feelings of frustration.

But nothing could ever extinguish the fires of his enthusiasm or damp his zeal. He was too conscious of that long series of providential events that had led him so near to his heart's desire. He was unshakeable in his conviction that God had marked him out to preach the truths of Faith to the people of England.

Dominic Barberi entered the Congregation of the Passion within a few months of its re-establishment by Pius VII in June, 1814. He was allowed to retain his own name, but in accordance with the custom of the Passionists, he added to it his particular devotion, and was therefore officially known as Dominic of the Mother of God.

Though in the past he had, at times, thought of becoming a priest, he had put the idea out of his head as unrealisable and was received into the Novitiate House as a prospective brother. One day during his postulancy, which lasted six months, he went into the church to pray at Our Lady's Altar while the rest of the Community were at table. As he was praying, he began to wonder how the heavenly promise made to him in the preceding year was going to be fulfilled. ("One day — I think it was towards the end of 1813 — while I was at prayer, I heard a voice saying to me: 'I have chosen you to announce the truths of Faith to many peoples'.") He did not know whether he was to be a priest or a brother or where he was to exercise his apostolate. China and America came into his mind. Then, in the flick of an eyelid, as he said himself, he understood "not by an internal locution or indefinite words, but in a more elevated manner which it is impossible to describe, and which cannot be conceived by anyone who has not experienced it," that he was not to be a brother but a priest, and that the field of his apostolate would be the north-east of Europe and especially England. And, he added, he would as soon have doubted his own existence as doubted the reality of that divine communication.

That special questioning of God's plan, with its extraordinary answer, happened in September or October, 1814. Not long afterwards, the Master of Novices, astonished at the ease with which he understood the Latin of the New Testament which was read before meals in the refectory, put him through an examination, and still more astonished at the result, recommended him to the Father Provincial as one who had more than enough brains to begin studying for the priesthood. He had no doubt found out the truth of what Father Joseph had written to the Father General from Viterbo, that Dominic "though uneducated was a youth of the greatest virtue and of singular intellectual acumen."

Thus began Dominic's training for his promised apostolate. His novitiate over, he set himself to his studies with an ardour that carried him easily over the difficulties that normally face one who in such circumstances lacks a fundamental education. His taste for reading now stood him in good stead. Soon he outstripped all his companions and in the end acquired a reputation for the width of his learning and the profundity of his thought. His industry was immense. Before 1840, he had written at least 15 considerable treatises on philosophical, theological and ascetical subjects as well as a host of lesser works. He was the first, in Rome, at all events, to detect the errors of Felicite de Lamennais, then at the height of his popularity. He had a most fertile mind and his head was so full of Ideas that they poured out on paper in a flood. And yet it has to be remembered that these literary works were the fruit of what may be called his leisure hours, for after his ordination in 1821 he was always more than occupied as Professor of Philosophy at Vetralla and later as Professor of Theology at Saint John and Paul's, Rome. Indeed, his entire life as a Passionist shows what can be achieved by a man who makes a vow, as he is said to have done, never to lose or misemploy a moment of time.

However, the main occupation of his life was neither study nor lecturing nor writing. He had become a Passionist primarily in order to save and sanctify his soul, and consequently, his first concern was growth in holiness. One can get a glimpse of his interior sentiments from the following resolution taken from his “Orario Spirituale,” which he wrote when a student: “Every day I shall ask for this grace among others: to suffer, to be humiliated and made of no account for the love of Jesus Christ.” In his “Dialogue Between a Young Priest and the Blessed Virgin,” written probably about the same time as his “Autobiography,” he thus addresses the Queen of Heaven: “Mater mine, I am filled with confusion when I consider that I am a priest! Oh, obtain for me the grace never to lower the great dignity of the priesthood. At times, when I am on my way to the altar I have to stop and persuade myself that I am really a priest. A priest! I can scarcely believe it! A few years ago, I was — God knows! And now I am to celebrate Mass... And then he makes Our Lady reply with words of encouragement and consolation, telling him to act towards her Son as she did. “Imagine that you are receiving Him as I received Him when He became incarnate or as I welcomed Him in my arms when He was born, or embraced Him on the road to Calvary, or received Him when they took Him down from the Cross.”

But during all those years, he never lost sight of England. In his eyes, the development of his spiritual life and his studies were but the remote preparation for his apostolate in that country. Yet as year by year passed without anything being done to establish Passionist foundations outside Italy, his patience must have been sorely tried. The repeated excuse that the time was not yet ripe, that the period of consolidation after the disasters of the Napoleonic invasion had not passed, that personnel was lacking, must have seemed to him in his enthusiasm as an obstacle subtly raised by the devil to prevent the evangelisation of the English.

Undoubtedly, the most extraordinary feature of Father Dominic’s life, apart from the heroicity of his sanctity, is this conviction that he was destined to work in England. One day when he was on his way to preach a mission somewhere in Italy and had to cross a swollen river, the horse he was riding was carried away by the violence of the waters. Father Dominic went down twice. Then, aware of his danger, he prayed to Our Lady for help. “O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for me,” he cried out, and immediately found himself safe and sound on the bank. “I really never thought of death,” he used to say when relating the incident. “You see, I have to go to England, where I shall die, and not elsewhere.” Indeed, he seems not to have been able to get England out of his head. He prayed for England; he spoke and wrote about England; he sought prayers for its conversion from all with whom he came into contact. Years before he left Italy he asked a boatman who was rowing him across a river to pray that he would save as many souls in England as there were drops of water around him. It was this awareness of his destiny that no doubt caused him to refuse with great decision the offer of a bishopric in Sicily.

Nevertheless, Father Dominic was six years in Rome before he made the acquaintance of an Englishman. Every winter and spring saw numerous visitors from England come not only to enjoy Italian sunshine, but to look with appreciation and even veneration upon the artistic beauties of the Eternal City. Many a time, he must have seen little groups of them strolling along from San Gregorio to the Coliseum and the Forum, all of which are near Saint John and Paul’s Church. But with none of them (and what is indeed strange, not even with the professors and students of the English College), does he appear to have had any social contact. Had any of these non-Catholic visitors met him in the street by accident and spoken to him, his unprepossessing appearance, his weak unmusical voice as he tried to make himself intelligible in English, would have given a totally

false impression. He would have been put down as just another of the 'Frati' with no special talents or characteristics to make him interesting. As a rule, none of the non-Catholics, whether residents or visitors, had any desire to be on speaking terms with people who appeared to live in another world and went about dressed in fantastic garments. Some of them avoided Catholics as they would those infected with the plague. Thus John Henry Newman, writing of his journey through Italy with Hurrell Froude in 1833, said:

"We keep clear of Catholics throughout the tour." And no wonder, for about the same time he had written: "As to the Roman Catholic system, I have ever detested it so much that I cannot detest it more by seeing it."

However, in 1830, Father Dominic at last met an Englishman who was willing and desirous to talk about the conversion of England. In that year the Honourable George Spencer, late Anglican Vicar of Great Brington, in Northamptonshire, arrived in Rome to study for the priesthood at the English College. And from that time, the pattern of Father Dominic's future apostolate began to take on a clearer outline.

Among the first to visit George Spencer was Miss Trelawney, a member of a very old Cornwall family. She had become a Catholic 20 years or so before. And now her father, who had followed her into the Church, had come to Rome at 70 years of age to be ordained priest, his private studies in Cornwall having been accepted as sufficient. But it was necessary to find someone to teach him the ceremonies of the Mass. His spiritual adviser and friend, Cardinal Odescalchi (whose character is well delineated in Henry Harland's classic, "The Cardinal's Snuffbox"), therefore requested the Father General of the Passionists to appoint someone for this purpose. Father Dominic was chosen. "It was a preposterous choice," says Denis Gwynn, in his excellent work on the revival of Catholicism in England, "The Second Spring," "for not only was Father Dominic unable to speak either English or French, but Trelawney could not speak Italian." The difficulty had to be solved at once and George Spencer, who spoke Italian well, was asked to become an interpreter between them.

This friendly contact with Englishmen added coals to the fire of Father Dominic's zeal for the return of England to the Faith. His zeal and enthusiasm were still greater after George Spencer had introduced him to the man later known as Ambrose Lisle March Phillipps de Lisle (Ambrose Phillipps), aged 21, and just down from Cambridge, the son of a wealthy landowner in Leicestershire, who had become a Catholic while a schoolboy six years before. They used to walk up and down the beautiful garden at Saint John and Paul's talking about England.

At this time, Father Dominic was more or less ignorant of the real state of religious affairs in England. He did not realise that the Church there had, in Wiseman's famous phrase, just emerged from the catacombs. And his conversations with Ambrose Phillipps, young and with all the optimistic zeal of a convert, did little to correct the impression that it needed only a few men fired with the love of God to bring about a conversion as complete as that wrought by Saint Augustine of Canterbury many centuries before. But in the divine scheme of things what was merely human; rational foresight, studied and accurate planning, was to have little part in the formation of this modern Apostle of England.

From that time onwards, Father Dominic's thoughts were more than ever concentrated on his predestined apostolate. Everywhere he went he obtained prayers for England's conversion. He taught the Brother porter at Saint John and Paul's a set of English phrases ingenuously designed to

awaken interest in the Faith in the non-Catholics who came seeking permission to visit the Basilica, and was thus instrumental in bringing about the conversion of several. Though he was more than fully occupied with his duties either as Professor of Theology or later as Rector or Provincial, he found time to keep up a frequent correspondence with Father Spencer, Ambrose Phillipps and with a Mr. Ford, an Anglican clergyman. "Every hour," he wrote to Ambrose Phillipps, "seems a thousand years till I see my dear England and shed my blood, or at least be spent with labours for it."

In 1833 — the year of John Keble's famous sermon on National Apostasy, which Newman always regarded as the beginning of the Oxford Movement — it looked for a moment as if the day so long desired by Father Dominic was at hand. In April of that year, he was present as Provincial Consultor at the General Chapter, and appealed to the Capitular Fathers to sanction the establishment of a foundation in England. Because of the love Saint Paul of the Cross, the founder of the Passionists, always expressed for England, and in view of his prophecy that his children would one day be settled there, any such proposal was sure to be received with sympathy. But after an exhaustive discussion, it was decided that nothing could be done about the matter just then.

So Father Dominic, disappointed, but confident that the day was now not far off, went back to his routine duties. But however absorbing his occupations, the thought of England lingered on the frontiers of his mind. There were changes of light and colour on the surface of his life, but its centre remained constant. Fortunately, what is known to us was hidden from him. The adverse decision of the General Chapter meant the loss of a golden opportunity. After that, the friends of the Passionists grew a little weary of waiting. Ambrose Phillipps, on whom Father Dominic was relying for at least some financial help, became interested in the Trappists and threw all his energy into establishing them near his Manor House, "Grace Dieu." He was warned by Lord Shrewsbury, prejudiced by rumour against Father Dominic, not to have anything to do with the Passionists. "You will bring yourself and others into trouble with these good people and do no good." Moreover, Ambrose Phillipps found the Trappists no financial burden. "You may support half a dozen Trappists," he said, "on what would not satisfy one ordinary priest." He still desired to see the Passionists working in England and through his means, as he assured Father Dominic, but he was no longer as enthusiastic as before.

But in spite of all these indications of trouble ahead, Father Dominic was serenely confident. And at last, in 1839, things began to move. The General Chapter of that year, on receiving a Memorial on the subject from Monsignor (later Cardinal) Acton, decided to make a foundation in England at the first available opportunity. Meanwhile, a start was to be made in Belgium.

One can easily imagine Father Dominic's elation at this turn of events. But if he had been taking it for granted that he would be an obvious choice for such an enterprise he would have been greatly disappointed, for when the names of the pioneers were made public his was not among them. But, as a matter of fact, he was not at all downcast. When the news reached him, he was giving a mission in a small out-of-the-way village. He merely turned to a companion priest and said: "You will see... They will not set out without me — I have to go with them."

His confidence was justified. At the last moment the priest appointed Superior of the new foundation, a former Father General who had shown little interest in the idea of an English foundation, begged to be excused from setting out on so difficult an undertaking. His request was granted.

Thus did Father Dominic's hour come. He was openly jubilant. Though in the thoughts of his Superiors he was going only to Belgium, he knew better — he was going to England by stages. "Good-bye," he wrote to a friend at Lucca, "I am leaving for the land I have desired to see for so many weary years. Go and come as we may, things turn out at last as God has arranged them from all eternity."

On May 24, 1840, he knelt at the feet of Gregory XVI, a Benedictine, as Saint Augustine knelt at the feet of the first Pope (Saint) Gregory, also a Benedictine, before setting out to convert the Anglo-Saxons. On May 26, the Feast of Our Lady Help of Christians, he, with his four companions (one of whom, Father Peter Magganotto, was within a few years to go to Sydney and teach theology at the Cathedral and Benedictine Monastery of Saint Mary's), bade good-bye to his religious brethren at Saint John and Paul's, to Rome and to Italy, which he was never to see again, in order to fulfil the destiny so definitely marked out for him so many years before.

CHAPTER THREE.

On October 8, 1845, in the evening when rain was pelting down from heavy, dark clouds and the roads were deep in mud, two youngish men well muffled up against the cold, stood, one with a walking stick in his gloved hand, in a shelter near the Angel Inn at Oxford. John Dobree Dalgairns, MA., of Exeter College, whom Father Dominic had received into the Church ten days before, and Mr. Ambrose St. John (pronounced 'Sinjen'), who was also a recent convert, both of them disciples of John Henry Newman, were waiting for the coach from London to come in. When it arrived a short, stout, thickset man, began to climb down awkwardly from an outside seat. He was, as he afterwards said himself, soaked like a chicken. And indeed the water poured over the brim of his hat as he bent his head, and his clothes were sodden and shapeless. But to Father Dominic such misfortunes were of little account. Was he not about his Master's business? If, however, he had been disposed to feel sorry for himself, his mood was immediately transformed when, as he was descending from the coach, Dalgairns, full of eagerness to tell him the good news, whispered in his ear that Mr. Newman had sent a message that he, too, wanted to be received into the Church. At that moment, a thrill of joy must have shot through Father Dominic's shivering and uncomfortable body, filling it with a sort of divine warmth. Yet all he said was: "God be praised." And then they all walked in silence over the wet fields to the parsonage at Littlemore.

On that October day, Father Dominic had been four years in England. He had had his joys indeed, but they were far outweighed by his sorrows. He had been warned that the shadow of the cross was to fall darkly on him during the years of his apostolate. While Rector of the foundation at Chateau d'Ere, which he had established in Belgium, he had occasion to visit Boulogne, and there in the church erected by his friend, the Abbe Haffreingue, he had been given to understand in prayer that he would have many things to suffer in England. And Father Spencer, writing from West Bromwich, had thought it well to advise him of the difficulties facing a priest in England, by pointing out that he himself had no idea of how great they were until he had experienced them. But, as Father Dominic confessed afterwards, no anticipation could have prepared him for the reality.

After his visit to England in 1840, Father Dominic had gone back to Belgium to wait once again in patience. In his "Loss and Gain," Newman describes him at this time as looking over the northern stormy sea, "when Caesar of old looked out for a new world to conquer," and eyeing the restless waves wondering if ever the day would come when he should be carried over them. It would have made any other man mad to be balked again and again, by what after all were but trifling

obstacles. He did not want a properly furnished house to begin with. As he wrote to Ambrose Phillipps, he would have been “content with a house fit for a peasant, built in some open field or in a wood,” or “in a cabin made of straw or in a cave dug out in a rock.” He could not understand the slow, cautious circumspection of his friends when it was a question of saving souls.

But at last, the day did come. In the beginning of October, 1841, with one companion, Father Amadeus McBride, an Irishman who had become a Passionist in Italy, he arrived again at Oscott College. He had come in the expectation of taking possession almost at once of Aston Hall near Stone, in Staffordshire, a house many centuries old, which had been donated to the Church, but which was stripped of its ancient grandeur and in a state of disrepair. However, on reaching Oscott College, he found to his amazement that further difficulties had arisen in the way of handing it over to the Passionists. So once again, he was bidden to possess his soul in patience. “Padre Domenico tells me that he is uncertain when he shall go to his mission and so am I,” wrote Father Spencer to Ambrose Phillipps. “I tell him the beginning of his mission is to exercise patience; and no wonder, after the devil has kept him out of England for twenty-eight years, that he should be shut up silent for twenty-eight days or even weeks...”

Actually, it was for five months. If the voice of the children in Focluth wood never ceased to resound in the ears of Saint Patrick, the future Apostle of Ireland, the voice of the people of England crying out for spiritual help resounded with no less insistence in the ears of Father Dominic. To be inactive with plenty to eat and every comfort when souls were in need, made him uneasy and even unhappy.

At length all major obstacles were removed and he and his companion took up residence at Aston Hall. Though his knowledge of English was at this time more theoretical than practical, he lost no time in beginning his apostolate of the spoken word. “I wish to say a few words for your edification,” he said in his first sermon, “but I cannot do it because I am not yet able to speak English. However, I shall say something — a very short sermon! My dear beloved, let you love one another because they who love their brothers accomplish perfectly the will of God. Let you love God and men for God’s sake, and you shall be perfectly happy for ever. Amen.” It is related that when he said the prayers before Mass on his first public appearance before the little group of Catholics in Aston, his mispronunciations and foreign accent caused some laughter, so that when he went back into the sacristy he was unable to keep the tears of disappointment from his eyes. And probably much the same thing occurred when he preached his first sermon.

But Father Dominic persevered. There were always some who could not help smiling at his faulty English, his Italian gestures and general appearance, but even they soon learnt not to smile at the man — he was too patently sincere, too obviously holy for that. And his perseverance brought success. In a little while, as he said himself, he began “to do a little of everything; to preach, to hear confessions, to give public and private retreats, to instruct Protestants, to hold disputations, to receive people into the Church and the like.” Nor did he confine his apostolate to Aston. Somehow or other he scraped together £12 and hired a room at Stone, a town two miles away which had also been confided to the care of the Passionists. “Three times a week for nearly two years,” says his official biographer, Father Urban Young, C. P., “he walked, sandalled and in his religious habit, from Aston to Stone. And three times a week he endured the Cross, despising the shame. It was not so much that he brought forth the Cross and held it gloriously before the eyes of the people, as that he himself seemed transformed into the Crucified, and his walk a Via Dolorosa, a very ‘Way of sorrows of the Cross’.”

Until Father Dominic came, Mass had not been said in Stone since the Reformation. Such daring on his part called forth all the bigotry that had been nurtured in ignorant minds for three hundred years. His very appearance in the streets was a signal for an outburst of fanaticism. "As he entered the town," said an eyewitness, "the crowds rushed out to gape at and insult him, as if he were a savage beast. Hat in hand, and in perfect calm, the Servant of God walked slowly along, bowing to all and with a kind word to all. Behind him surged a rabble of local wastrels from whose mouths came ribald and unrepeatable insults. As he passed under the windows the more respectable citizens joined in the hideous outcry against the Demon, the Papist, the Devil!" He was given a nickname — Padre Demonio. Every possible effort was made by those who resented his apostolate to make him desist and depart from the neighbourhood. He was preached against, threatened, calumniated and even physically attacked. A scar on his forehead remained to the day of his death as a reminder of a violent blow from a stone cast at him as he walked along the street.

However, Father Dominic did not allow himself to become so pre-occupied with apostolic work as to forget what was happening in religious affairs generally. The Catholic world was at this time following with great interest and hope the Oxford Movement. The men who had set out to reform the Church of England from within, in the belief which was well founded that it was in danger of succumbing to the attacks of Protestant liberalism, had themselves reached open disagreement. The publication of Tract 90 in which Newman had contended that the Thirty-nine Articles were opposed only to Roman errors and not to Catholic doctrine, had raised a storm of indignation and brought the Tractarians under an official ban. Newman, with a few friends, retired to Littlemore, where, in a barn-like building called by Dalgairns the Parsonage, he gave himself up to a life of almost total seclusion, and by prayer, study and mortification sought to come to the knowledge of the truth. In the following year, 1843, he formally retracted all he had said against the Roman Church and resigned his living of Saint Mary's Oxford.

Father Dominic's name will always be linked with Newman's. Yet the strange fact is that they met but three or four times altogether. Nor did they at any time write to one another. The link that binds their names so inextricably belongs rather to the sphere of the supernatural. (John Henry Newman was beatified in 2010.)

Father Dominic's first acquaintance with any of the members of the Oxford Movement began after he had read an article in the French "Univers," bearing the signature "Un Jeune homme de l'Universite," in which an appeal was made for the sympathy and understanding of foreign Catholics in the religious affairs then agitating Oxford University. This was in the early part of 1841. Father Dominic wrote a long reply in very elegant Latin, which was published in the "Univers" on May 5 of the same year. Its opening words are in themselves a revealing commentary on the writer's own life: "There is nothing too daring for love to venture."

There is every reason to believe, though it cannot be stated with certainty, that Newman looked through this closely reasoned answer to the objections raised by the Anglicans against the Catholic position, and thus came to know something of Father Dominic's great intellectual powers. It is very probable also that this first acquaintanceship was strengthened through the letters which passed between Father Dominic and Dalgairns at Littlemore after the former had found out that the latter was the young man who had signed the article in the "Univers." Then, when Father Dominic was in the vicinity of Oxford in 1844, where he had preached "in a hayloft to five hundred Protestants," once more greatly daring, he paid a visit to Littlemore. The visit was, indeed, a short one, but long enough to make a good impression on Newman. On this occasion, Father Dominic left behind him

some of his own polemical writings, but since even Dalgairns confessed that he had not had time to look into them, it is unlikely that Newman did.

However, Father Dominic's pun on the word Littlemore must surely have gone the rounds of the Community there. "Dear Littlemore, I love thee," he wrote to Dalgairns. "A little more and we shall see happy results from Littlemore. When the learned and holy Superior of Littlemore shall come, then I hope we shall see the beginning of a new era." At all events, the relationship between Father Dominic and the Community became intimate enough for Dalgairns to make a request of a particularly private nature on behalf of some of them, perhaps including Newman. "Several persons among us," he wrote, "are anxious to lead a more mortified life than is common among us; they have been trying in vain to procure shirts or girdles of haircloth. They only succeeded in getting one from abroad. Could you manage to put us in the way of getting a dozen such instruments? They will be put into the hands of a person who guides many souls among us, so you need not fear their being indiscreetly used..."

Thus, though Newman was not properly speaking on terms of friendship with Father Dominic, he knew him very well by reputation. According to Dalgairns, he was always glad to have news of him. And in his farewell letters written to his friends on the eve of his conversion, he mentioned him in ways which show in the aggregate how high he stood in his estimation. He told J. R. Hope-Scott that he was "a shrewd and good and deep divine," and H. Wilberforce that he was "a simple, quaint man... but a very sharp, clever man, too, in his way," and another who is anonymous that he was "a simple, holy man, and withal gifted with remarkable powers."

According to all his biographers, Newman was a peculiarly sensitive man who hated any invasion of his mind or soul. He felt it particularly difficult at this time to unburden his mind in speech. Thus, when he ceased to believe in Anglican Orders, he did not say so openly; he wore grey trousers instead of clerical black. In his "Apologia," he says of Dr. Russell of Maynooth, that he was a dear friend "who had, perhaps, more to do with my conversion than anyone else... He let me alone." Newman wanted seclusion and silence in which to overcome his intellectual difficulties and he believed himself competent to deal with them alone. However, there came a stage in his progress to the truth when it became necessary to check his results by observation of the marks which he knew were pointers to the Fold of Christ, and especially the mark of holiness. "What has affected my feelings very much," he noted in a diary, "is to find the holiness of the Roman saints since our separation."

Father Dominic would, no doubt, have given the world to be invited to discuss doctrinal difficulties with Newman. It would have seemed to him the chance of a lifetime. Yet though he was unaware of it, he was doing something far more advantageous to Newman. In a letter to Ambrose Phillipps, gently refusing to enter into any controversial discussions with him, Newman, with the assurance of a man who believes his question is unanswerable, had asked when would Catholic priests go barefooted into the manufacturing towns and preach to the people like Saint Francis Xavier. And then to his surprise he found in Father Dominic an answer to his challenge. In one of his University sermons preached several years before, he had said that it "was difficult to estimate the moral power of a single individual, trained to practise what he teaches, may acquire... The hidden saints... are enough to carry on God's noiseless work." It was Father Dominic's noiseless, humanly imperceptible work on Newman's soul that forged the link forever binding their names together.

Father Dominic was no mere Ananias chosen unexpectedly to bring to Christ's Church a new Paul. His entire life from the moment his future apostolate was made known to him, was shaped by a single thought, was coloured by one desire: the conversion of England. His unceasing prayers, his constant self-sacrifice, his indefatigable literary labours, his persevering correspondence with all who could help in the achievement of his heart's desire, these things undoubtedly were responsible for his presence in Littlemore that day in October, 1845. And as he stood by the fire drying his wet clothes and saw the door open and Newman kneeling at his feet humbly asking to be received into the true Fold, he must have felt that his life's work was nearly over.

Many years later, Newman was to realise more fully the unobtrusive but active part Father Dominic had in his conversion. Within a few months before his death in 1890, in response to an inquiry from Cardinal Parrochi, Newman wrote: "...Father Dominic was a marvellous missionary and preacher filled with zeal. He had a great part in my own conversion and in that of others. His very look had about it something holy. When his form came within sight, I was moved to the depths in the strangest way. The gaiety and affability of his manner in the midst of all his sanctity was in itself a holy sermon...I hoped and still hope that Rome will crown him with the aureole of the saints."

CHAPTER FOUR.

On Monday morning, August 27, 1849, the passengers in the Great Western train from Paddington, London, stared out of the windows at Pangbourne Station as Father Dominic was carried from a third-class carriage by his travelling companion and a porter, and placed sitting on a seat offered by a neighbouring non-Catholic woman. He had taken seriously ill soon after the train left Reading, and it was at once obvious that medical aid would have to be obtained at the next station. Fortunately, a doctor was on the spot, and having easily diagnosed an acute heart attack, said that it would be necessary to get him into bed immediately. But because the patient had come from London, where cholera was then prevalent, neither of the two hotels would take him in. So it was decided to bring him back to Reading. In the meantime, since he was unable to continue to sit up, he was placed lying down on a little straw on the platform. And there for an hour or more until the up-train arrived, he remained in great agony but in peace and with "Thy will be done" ever on his lips.

The years that had passed since Father Dominic received Newman and his companions, E. S. Bowles and Richard Stanton, into the Church, had been full and fruitful. Great joys had come his way, as when he saw the repeated success of the Processions of the Blessed Sacrament on the Feast of Corpus Christi, which he had inaugurated in 1845, the first in England since the Reformation, and which at Aston were usually attended by as many as two thousand Catholics and non-Catholics. But his joys were fleeting and his tribulations many. The task of founding the Passionists in England brought him continual anxiety.

Aston Hall — it had been given the name of Saint Michael's Retreat — was far from being an ideal place for religious. One of the upstairs rooms was turned into a chapel because it was the largest. But this arrangement was very inconvenient, for the passing to and fro of seculars interfered with the normal solitude of a monastic establishment. And it was long before anything could be done to alter this state of affairs. A church had to be built first, and much of Father Dominic's time and ingenuity were taken up in ways and means of paying for it. The full tide of Irish immigration had not been reached at this time, and the pennies of the poor for church building were not yet available.

However, the problem that caused him the greatest worry was the acquisition and training of English-speaking novices. Promising subjects came and went as they came and went in the days

when Saint Paul of the Cross was setting on foot the first foundation of the Passionists on Monte Argentario in Italy. Some indeed had to be sent away as unsuitable. It was heart-breaking but nothing could be done about it. The idea then got abroad and even reached the ears of the Father General at Rome through other channels than the Passionists, that the Passionist rule of life was too rigorous for the English. Father Dominic himself was at times tempted to think the same, especially when a person possessing all necessary qualifications and full of religious fervour, returned to secular life because he found things too hard at Aston Hall.

Things were undoubtedly hard, but this was not precisely because of the Rule. There was only a minimum of furniture in the house because there was not sufficient money to buy more. For the same reason the food had necessarily to be the plainest possible.

One can get some idea of the sort of life the Passionists led at that time from an account of a visit made by Newman in 1846. "Ambrose St. John and I are on our way back to Oscott from Father Dominic," he wrote to F. S. Bowles. "We got to Aston Hall on the afternoon of the last day of the year in time for Vespers (Evening Prayer)... Benediction... and the Te Deum, which usually end the year among Catholics. After the Benediction I spoke of, we went to Compline (Night Prayer) — then to supper — then after visiting the B.S. (Blessed Sacrament), to the Rosary — then at 8 o'clock, after a gossip with Father Dominic, to bed. Up at 12½ to Matins (Early Morning Prayer and Readings), Meditation and Confession — to bed at 2 — up at ½ past 5 to Prime and Tierce (Prayer for the 'First' Hour and Prayer for the 'Third' Hour) — Mass with Communion at six — then Meditation — then a good breakfast — then a gossip with F(ather) Dom(inic). At 10 (I think), High Mass — then at once to dinner at 12 — and so on (not to tire you) till 7 this morning, when we set off walking for Stafford, and here we are by rail. The Aston monks are simple, modest, smiling, cheerful persons, and we liked very much what we saw of them." Even excepting confession and the good breakfast, which concerned Newman and Ambrose St. John alone, it was a programme full enough to fill anyone's day.

But Father Dominic and his few companions had also to attend to the needs of the parish at Aston and Stone as well as give Missions and Retreats up and down England. So, therefore, it is not astonishing that when recalling this visit a year later Ambrose St. John should have described the Passionists as "too strict for poor dear old human nature." Nevertheless, his conclusion was erroneous, as the years have amply proved. (Ambrose himself was to become an Oratorian Priest.)

But however strict was the life led by the Passionists in general, Father Dominic's personal life was stricter still. In all things, he set a constant example. Though according to the Rule he was allowed a rest from the midnight observance for a few days after returning from a Mission or Retreat, he would not avail himself of this privilege. But he made sure that others took advantage of this concession. And though he provided a fire at which the religious could warm themselves when the weather was cold, he never went near it himself. He was too busy, too pre-occupied with everyday duties and even at this time with literary work, in a word, with all that concerned the glory of God, to be able or willing to give attention to the needs of the body. Once when he had gone nearly all day without eating, he arrived late in the evening at a convent where he had to give a Conference, as hungry as a ploughman. The Sisters, naturally concluding that he had already dined, provided some light refreshments. These he gobbled up with amazing rapidity, with such rapidity indeed that the Sister who was waiting on him ventured to suggest that perhaps he would like an egg. "Yes, Sister," he replied, "I could eat a dozen, but two or three will be enough."

It was not that Father Dominic was a particularly robust man who had inured himself to hardship and did not feel in need of either rest or physical comfort. He suffered from a hernia all his life. He had frequent attacks of rheumatism, and was always subject to palpitation of the heart. Up to the time he left Italy, he had many serious illnesses during one of which he passed into a state of delirium. It is related that on this occasion he was afterwards very embarrassed lest he should have given scandal, whereas on the contrary he had delivered to the Brother Infirmarian an excellent discourse on the Sacred Passion of Christ. These illnesses were, in fact, one of the main reasons why the Father General had been reluctant to send him to a cold northern climate. Since he arrived in England, he had suffered a great deal physically. In the early part of 1845, he had been practically an invalid. Yet he could assure the Father General in a letter written about this time that although he had never been really well since he left Italy, he had not been ill enough at any time to miss the regular observance. Undoubtedly, Divine Providence watched over his health.

It certainly protected him from harm on one particular occasion. When he was returning from giving a Retreat to the Clergy of the Western District assembled at Prior Park, he was involved in a railway accident. "The first seat to be left intact," he wrote, "was the one on which two priests and myself were sitting. All that was in front of me was smashed to pieces. The shock threw me violently against one of my companions, and my head was hurt, but not too badly. So to have a hard head is sometimes useful."

Though Father Dominic was exceedingly hard on himself, he was full of understanding for the feelings of others. His was not a discouraging asceticism. There was nothing about his austerity that was flaunting or arrogant. "I have recommended to Father Constantine to be more liberal in his dealings with the religious" — that sentence in a letter to the Father General sums up his attitude. He was as tender as a mother towards the sick, and, unfortunately, there was much sickness in the Community. The Italian Fathers who were, with the exception of Father Amadeus McBride, his sole helpers for a long time, found everything in England difficult, the language, the climate, the food, and some of them had, in consequence, fallen into indifferent health. Though Father Dominic did not expect others to have his own heroic attitude to suffering, he, nevertheless, longed for companions who had. In his letters to the Father General, he again and again asked for priests who would be willing to endure every hardship for the sake of the Gospel.

Yet in spite of ill health or other difficulties, the priests at Aston Hall followed very closely in the footsteps of Father Dominic. Father Constantine developed a very painful cancer, but with extraordinary fortitude continued to carry out his duties to the end. His death when his experienced services were most needed was one of Father Dominic's sore trials. Then cholera and typhus broke out in England, and supplied the Passionists with an opportunity of putting into more open practice the immense charity for their neighbour that filled their hearts.

It was not Father Dominic's first experience of the plague. He had seen its terrible ravages when he was Rector of San Sosio in Ceprano. On that occasion, he left his monastery and gave himself up entirely to the care of the sick and the dying. And now once more at Aston and more especially at Stone he manifested his spirit of self-sacrifice. The plague was attacking with particular virulence the Irish who had fled from their own famine-stricken country, often leaving behind them, as someone has said, all that they loved in life lying in coffin-less graves. When even the kindest hearted were loath to have anything to do with those poor immigrants, Father Dominic and his fellow Passionists were unceasing in their care of them and earned for themselves a lasting reputation for heroism.

The charity of Father Dominic and his companions was not limited to Aston and Stone. His especially was not a microscopic heart. It was big enough to contain the whole of needy humanity. Having read an appeal from an Irish Bishop on behalf of the famine victims in County Kerry, Ireland, he consulted the priests of the Community about what could be done to help. They decided to sell a chalice and send proceeds to the Bishop, but this proving impracticable, they saved and sent £4 by cutting down the food allowed to them by their Rule.

But one by one, the Passionists themselves, excepting Father Dominic, fell victims to the plague. The priests carried it home to the novices. And thus it was that Father Spencer, who in December, 1846, in his forty-seventh year had received the habit and taken the name of Ignatius, was brought to the gates of death. When this happened, Father Dominic was in Belgium holding the canonical visitation of the Retreat at Chateau d'Ere. One can easily imagine what he called his "agony of grief" when it was announced in a Belgian paper that Father Ignatius had died of typhus. It would have been the last straw. But God did not ask His servant to bear this cross and preserved a precious life that was to be spent in unceasing work for His glory. (The Belgian paper was mistaken. Father Ignatius Spencer survived this ministry to the fever victims.) For a little while at least those two great apostles of Christ Crucified, the son of a peasant and the son of a peer, were to work side by side in life and then rest side by side in death.

In spite, however, of his infirmities and his manifold duties and anxieties as Superior of the Passionists in England and Belgium, Father Dominic continued his work of giving Missions and Retreats. When he was in Italy, his voice was considered too weak for the delivery of the stirring evening sermon on Missions. So like his countryman, Blessed Vincent Strambi, C.P., (who was canonised in 1950) who died in Rome in 1824, and who had also a weak voice, his work on missions was usually confined to the Meditations on the Sacred Passion, the Catechetical Instruction and the hearing of confessions. It is said that much against his will he was once appointed to preach the panegyric of a saint but that so disappointing was his effort and so final the verdict of the parish priest who had requested his services, that he was never again entrusted with that work.

But when he went to Belgium, where he had to preach in French, and when he came to England, he had of necessity to undertake the preaching of the evening sermons as well. It has to be admitted that he never really acquired a passable English accent. The "th" in words was always an insuperable obstacle. Thus, in addressing the clergy at Oscott College during the course of a Retreat he warned them that if they wanted to meditate well they must be good 'tinkers', and was no doubt surprised at the smile that greeted this piece of advice. Many of the sayings attributed to him are probably apocryphal, though they are the sort of things he was inclined to say, such as this to a Community of nuns: "Without face it is impossible to be shaved." ('Grace' and 'saved' is the English!)

It is certainly in the nature of a miracle that he was such a success with so many handicaps. It was the case of Saint Paul the Apostle all over again. Father Dominic was preaching Christ and Him Crucified, "not in the persuasive words of human wisdom but in the showing of the spirit and power." In the designs of Divine Providence, what was merely human was to have as little part in his missions' success as in the inauguration of his apostolate. Notwithstanding his displeasing voice, his faulty accent, and his other natural disadvantages, crowds listened to him with rapt attention and divine grace touched many hearts, Catholic and non-Catholic, in a most extraordinary way. Perhaps would be more accurate to say that crowds watched him with rapt attention, for often his voice

could not possibly reach all. But his very appearance was a sermon in itself, and moreover, his Italian gestures were as telling as words.

There is a story told of a man who came to him after being present at his sermon, and who on being asked what part of the sermon had aroused his manifest sorrow for his sins, had confessed that he had not understood a word of it. No doubt, what occasioned the change in that man's soul was the ascetical appearance of Father Dominic, the moving eloquence of his whole demeanour as he stood on the mission platform and by his frequent gestures towards the large crucifix erected there, endeavoured to bring home to his audience the heinousness of sin.

It is no wonder that he was in great demand. With a naivety and simplicity which was one of his chief characteristics and which had so impressed Newman, he told the Father General about those fruitful missions and added that the parish priests insisted on having him and would not be satisfied unless he gave at least the first mission himself. And all this contact with zealous Bishops and priests in places as far apart as London and Dublin, Scotland and Cornwall, brought pressing invitations to establish other foundations. As far as Father Dominic was personally concerned, he would willingly have made foundations in every corner of the English speaking world and lived on next to nothing so long as he had further opportunities of preaching to the people. But his desires were often frustrated by lack of personnel. In a letter to the Vicar General of Tournai, Belgium, dated July, 1849, he said: "...We have twenty-eight religious of whom eleven are priests. The majority of these priests are in a position to go out on missions, and in point of fact almost all of them are engaged on missionary work for ten months in a year."

Nevertheless, in 1846, when he had at his disposal still fewer religious, he decided with great courage to branch forth. In March of that year, with one companion, he took up his residence in Northfield House near Stroud in Gloucestershire. Though he had gone there at the invitation of William Leigh, a wealthy Oxford convert, who later built and handed over to the Passionists the Church of the Annunciation at Woodchester, the actual foundation was made in great poverty. "We are very comfortable here, even without furniture," wrote Father Dominic, who in such circumstances was always particularly happy. "We have a few things for the kitchen, and four chairs... Our straw mattresses are now on the floor, but we sleep well. If in reality iron bedsteads are the poorest of all kinds, I think they will not be against the letter {of the Rule} though wood is prescribed." He made this foundation a House of Studies and expected great things from it. Yet within a few years after his death, it was to share the fate of Aston Hall and his foundation at Poplar House, Hampstead, London, all of which were abandoned through one cause or another, and their communities transferred to other Retreats.

Father Dominic made the foundation at Hampstead at the request of Bishop Wiseman, who was then Vicar-Apostolic of the London district. Between them, it was arranged that the Passionists should take possession of Poplar House in May, 1848. Unfortunately, Bishop Wiseman forgot he had granted tenancy of that diocesan property to Henry Bagshawe and his family, which would not expire until the autumn of that year. When Father Dominic arrived, he found the Bagshawes determined to stay. The situation was ludicrous, but still more ludicrous was Bishop Wiseman's suggested solution of the difficulty. He offered the Passionists another house with a centenarian tenant. "This house might be rented," wrote Father Dominic, "but we should have to allow a lady nearly one hundred years of age to live there until she died." In the end, he came to an arrangement with the Bagshawes. They were to continue to occupy Poplar House until their tenancy expired and the Passionists were to be their guests.

The only foundation, which Father Dominic inaugurated and which has remained in Passionist hands to this day, is that at Sutton, near Saint Helens in Lancashire. In opposition to the expressed views of Father Ignatius Spencer, he chose the spot where Saint Anne's Retreat now stands, saying with prophetic insight: "Here will I dwell for ever, for I have chosen it."

At this time, the beginning of 1849, Father Dominic's health began to fail. During the previous year he had noticed that he was far from well "I am sorry to tell you again," he wrote to the Father General, "that my maladies seem ever worse, and I am weighed down with infirmities of every kind. I seem almost decrepit and aged beyond words. Yesterday someone told me I looked more like a man of eighty than one not yet sixty! Were the truth known, it is anxiety and worry of every kind that has brought me to this extremity, rather than fatigue of body." By July, 1849, he had worsened so much that, as he wrote to a friend, he was fully persuaded he was at the end of his labours, he had finished his course.

He was indeed near the end of his earthly sojourn. On August 27, in the early morning he set out from Poplar House to go to Stroud on his way to Woodchester in order to be present at the opening of the church there, which, as has already been mentioned, was the gift of William Leigh to the Passionists. Father Luigi Pesciaroli, a relative of his, who had just returned from South Australia where he had settled with two other Passionists after the failure of their Mission to the Aborigines at Moreton Bay, requested permission to accompany him in order that he might see an old friend, the Rector of Northfield House. Father Dominic demurred, but at length consented. And so in the designs of Providence there was someone of his own by his side when he lay in agony on the platform of Pangbourne Station.

On arriving at Reading, accompanied by Father Luigi and the doctor, he was carried to an inn, which stood on the site now occupied by the Duke of Edinburgh Hotel, and put to bed. He was fully conscious and in great pain. "O Jesus, now I know what torments You did endure on the Cross," he was heard to say. That same afternoon at 3 o'clock, he was dead.

EPILOGUE.

As the body of Father Dominic was taken through the streets of Stone on its way to Aston, the people who, a few years previously had looked on impassively or approvingly when he was hooted and insulted, now lined those same streets to show him reverence.

It was the beginning of a new attitude to this zealous apostle of England. When he had departed from the scene of his labours and more of his history began to be known, his true greatness emerged. His reputation for sanctity was always considerable. Now every year saw it increase, for time was allowing the immensity of his achievement to be properly weighed and appreciated.

After his body had been removed from Aston and brought to Saint Anne's Retreat, Sutton, his tomb gradually was recognised as a particularly holy spot dear to all who had the spiritual welfare of England at heart, and then became a place of pilgrimage. In 1889, the first steps were taken to open official investigations into his life with a view to his canonisation. Such investigations are ordinarily slow, and it was not until 1911 that (Saint) Pius X, in response to petitions from the Hierarchy of England, the Cardinal Archbishop of Armagh, and the Archbishops of Dublin and Glasgow as well as from the Generals of all the religious Orders, allowed the formal introduction of the Cause, as it is called, at Rome, and issued a decree giving him the title of Venerable. The war of 1914-1918 interfered with the normal progress of the processes of examination of witnesses, and it was only in 1937 that the exhaustive investigation into his life was completed and the Holy See was satisfied

that he had practised all the virtues in a heroic degree: faith, hope, charity, prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude.

In the meantime, heaven did not fail to manifest its confirmation on his sanctity. An Italian Passionist student was cured instantaneously of a tumour on his knee, which had resisted for a year and some months in spite of the efforts of two doctors to heal it. A short time before a particularly painful remedy was to be tried he prayed thus: "Father Dominic, if you are in Paradise, as they say you are, obtain for me the grace of a cure!" And placing over the tumour a picture of Father Dominic, which he hastily tore out of a biography a fellow-student had been reading to him, he added: "Father Dominic, if you want me to be cured, hurry, for the doctor is coming today!" The result was immediate. The pain at once lessened and then disappeared. He could now bend his knee easily and normally. An examination proved that the tumour had completely gone.

The Holy See having before it not only the statements of the two local doctors who had treated the knee in vain but also the sworn testimonies of two specialists who were appointed to enquire into the facts of the case, has accepted this cure as miraculous.

Finally, in 1945, on the occasion of the centenary of Newman's conversion, the Hierarchies of England, Ireland, Canada and Australia, petitioned Pius XII to raise the Venerable Dominic Barberi to the Altars of the Church.

Thus, even in this world, honour is paid to those who surrender themselves entirely to God's designs and unreservedly to His service. This is no passing honour, a fading flower on their tombs, a sentiment that endures at most for a few years. The Church never forgets her heroes and will sing their praises until the end of time. [As mentioned at the outset, Dominic Barberi was solemnly beatified in 1963.]

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In obedience to the decrees of Urban VIII, the author declares that he claims no credence for the facts in the preceding pages beyond what the available historical evidence may warrant, and that in using such words as sanctity, prophecy, and divine communication, he desires in no way to anticipate the judgment of the Church.
