

Our Catholic History

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as the friars celebrated fifty years since their coming to the U.S.

(edited by Fr. Lawrence Jagdfeld, O.F.M.)

In the New World (New York)

“What joy, when the call resounded: ‘Land! Land!’ How our hearts were thrilled, when, for the first time, we gazed upon the shores of the new world! We were, however, obliged to stay aboard the ship until the next morning, because the baggage was not examined by the custom house officials till then. In the evening we enjoyed the splendid panorama of the metropolitan city, illumined by a flood of light. It was September 14, the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Was this meant for an omen, warning us to be prepared for the cross and to bear it courageously? It may be so, for the path of a priest in America is frequently beset with crosses. Contrary to our expectations, all our baggage was exempt from duty (tariff). We were then conveyed to Castle Garden (then the U.S. landing place for immigrants) and put ashore. Soon we learned the glad tidings that our journey (inland) might be continued that very day.”

When drawing near shore, the religious had doffed their habits and donned citizens’ clothes, thereby eliciting from the disrespectful stewards the sneering remark, “Jetzt geht’s aber per Sommerpaletot!”ⁱ. For all wore ordinary summer suits.

Near Castle Garden a number of Irish women were washing clothes. As they caught sight of the Roman collars, they hastened towards the Franciscan Fathers, knelt down and asked for their blessing. “Father, bless me!” “The Fathers were astonished and knew not what to make of this scene. Father Servace, who possessed a smattering knowledge of the English tongue, at length, guessed the desire of the good washer-women. This was indeed a gratifying sight for the missionaries: such a scene in a city considered the Babel of the New World.ⁱⁱ “At first the Irishwomen hardly ventured to speak. I conversed for some time with an old lady with her children came up to us, as well as my smattering of the English tongue permitted. They showed us some rosaries and medals and asked us to bless these. Their happiness knew no bounds, when I opened my Notebook and gave them some holy pictures; they could not find appropriate words to express their gratitude. The following days we had occasion to become still more acquainted with the kindly dispositions of these good people. Thus in a railroad car, a poor Irishman offered me some beautiful apples, which I would never have accepted from one so poor, but for the fear of offending him by a refusal.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Westward to Cleveland, Ohio; Indianapolis, Indiana; and Alton, Illinois

But we are anticipating. As our missionary band the next day wended their way to the depot, Brother Herman, again carrying the wafer-tongs over his shoulder, again aroused the curiosity of the people. At the depot he forked out all his change to pay the ticket agent, but the change was refused and Brother Edmund thereupon paid in gold.^{iv} The journey was by the way of Dunkirk, Erie to Cleveland, Ohio, where they arrived Saturday morning, September 18. Here (where Fr. Capistran Zwinge after a few years founded a monastery) the Fathers had the consolation to celebrate their first Mass on American soil. It was in a schoolhouse, as a German Catholic church did not then exist in that part of Cleveland. “Thence,” continues Fr. Servace, “we journeyed to Indianapolis, where we arrived Sunday at 10:30 A.M. We had

remained fasting, in order to say Mass, if possible, and separated, the more easily to accomplish our purpose at different churches. Those going to St. Mary's (German) Church came too late, while I arrived in time to say Mass at St. John's Church. Here I heard for the first time an English sermon, treating on fraternal charity, delivered in plain and simple style. The hearers did not seem to take much interest in it. At the invitation of the pastor, I sang Vespers and, I must confess, was by no means pleased with the singing of the English (i.e. American) ladies and the polyphone music, accustomed as I am to Gregorian chant.

"In the afternoon our company paid a visit to Rev. Father Siegrist, who was exceedingly rejoiced to see more German priests coming over. He dwelled at length on the Church in America, "The Land of Divine Providence," as he termed it, and particularly entertained great hopes for the diocese of Alton, since it found in its first Bishop, with whom he was well acquainted, a man giving promise of great achievements.

"Having said Mass next morning, we continued our journey via Terre Haute to Alton, where they had been already informed of our coming. Accordingly Rev. J. Menge, as representative of the Rt. Rev. Bishop, had been at the railroad station Monday evening until 1 o'clock, to escort us to the Episcopal residence, for he expected us on the evening train from Chicago. Instead of this we arrived at 2 o'clock A.M. on September 21, but easily found our way by being directed by some Irishmen."

No doubt, the missionaries were heartily glad to be near their journey's end. In all, they spent four uncomfortable nights in the railroad coaches, which, of course, in those early days were not furnished with our present-day comforts. There were no upholstered seats, but wooden benches. Now was there provision for ice water, etc. To quench their thirst, the Brothers (not the Fathers) watched the opportunity, when the locomotive took in water. They caught in the hollow of their hands the water dripping from the pipe and drank.

After this digression let us return to our narrative. "The Bishop was just absent on a confirmation trip. As he was expected home within a few days, Rev. J. Menge, the Bishop's secretary, a native of Osnabrueck, although empowered by the Ordinary to accompany us to our destination and to introduce us there, desired us to stay a few days. We shall make our first home at Teutopolis where a residence is in course of erection. In Germany we had been assured that Hanover (now Germantown) in Clinton County, Illinois, would be our field of labor, and it had been described to us as attractively possible. At Alton, however, we were told: "To Teutopolis!" No doubt, there were grave reasons for the change. We were acquainted with neither place and could easily leave the decision to the Bishop." When Thursday dawned and the Ordinary had not returned, Rev. Menge accompanied (a number of) them to Teutopolis, while Fr. Praeses^v Damian, Brother Marianus and Brother Edmund remained at Alton to await the Bishop's return. When he came back, he was very glad at the arrival of the religious. They had to stay at his residence and eat at his table. The following day, the Bishop himself accompanied them to Teutopolis. At Mattoon they were hospitably entertained by a Catholic family. The Illinois Central Railroad conveyed them to Effingham, whence a wagon took them to Teutopolis.

At Teutopolis

When they had passed a few houses in the dusk, Father Damian asked the Bishop whether they would soon arrive in town. The Ordinary laughingly replied, "The church is outside of the town." Meanwhile the first division of the Franciscans had reached Teutopolis Thursday evening, September 23, at 10 o'clock in the evening and were kindly received at temporary residence of the Rev. Bartholomew Bartels, who after

laboring as a priest for eleven years in Germany, had been won for the Alton Diocese, had come to this country a few months before, and had been appointed pastor of Teutopolis. October 3, the 19th Sunday after Pentecost, he preached his farewell sermon and expressed his satisfaction that the friars had been sent to Teutopolis, which place they would satisfy by their labors, their prayers, and the chanting of the psalms. After arranging different matters, Bishop Juncker left Teutopolis, September 30.

The Temporary Monastery

At the arrival of the Fathers, the new parochial residence, or the first monastery respectively, was in the course of construction. Meanwhile Rev. Father Bartels with his mother and two of his cousins occupied a house, still standing east of Mrs. Hackman's.^{vi} A new wing was afterwards added to this house. There were then only three rooms, exclusive of an out-building which served as a kitchen, for these four occupants. Nevertheless, Rev. Fr. Bartels generously received the nine religious into his house and entertained them most hospitably for about eight days. After his departure in the beginning of October, 1858, the religious continued to reside at this house until about eight days before Christmas. Three rooms and three beds were at their disposal. Rev. Father Praeses Damian was assigned one bed, the other two Fathers occupied the second, two brothers the third; the rest slept on straw sacks which were brought into the room at night and taken to the yard in the morning. "So practically were matters arranged," writes Fr. Servace good-humoredly, "that there was a room for the Praeses, a parlor, a refectory, a cell for Fr. Capistran, one for me, a workshop for every brother, and, finally, nine bed rooms sufficiently furnished: we had sufficient room, none treading on another's foot, nor was anyone disturbed in his sleep. Is was, forsooth, a happy life."

(To be Continued)

ⁱ "Now the trip will be continued in a summer overcoat!"

ⁱⁱ We, who know the deep reverence of the Irish for their priests and their courage in professing their faith, do not wonder at this; it was different with the fathers, unacquainted with these people.

ⁱⁱⁱ From a letter by Fr. Servace to Fr. Gregor

^{iv} Brother Herman and Brother Edmund, the two tertiary brothers, were exempt from the prohibition of handling money, a prohibition that was in force for the professed friars. It was for this specific purpose that they were sent with the missionary band.

^v "Praeses" is the Latin word for Superior.

^{vi} This property belonged to Waschefort, now inhabited by Mr. Joe Thoele, but the property of Leo Fulle.