

ECHOES OF THE MISSIONS
MARCH 1, 1935 n° 126,pp 268-279
To Know Better Our Venerable Father and Founder
The Cause of the Servant of God

*(Conference given to the Community of Bon-Secours, Jersey,
on November 26, 1933, on the occasion of our Father's Day)*

It's an honor and a joy for the mission of Egypt, quite humble and almost unknown, although linking two parts of the world, to be allowed to give praise to our Venerable Father, whose most loving solicitude was always for his missionary brothers.

To the concert which is heard today in all our schools for the praise of our beloved Father, I shall try to join a "right" note, because I do not wish to hurt delicate and experienced ears. Lacking talents, I bring my whole heart as a true son of Venerable de la Mennais, to outline for you the road to glory, walked by our Founder, from the time of his death until today. The road to reach the final glory is long. However, a long distance has been walked; I would like to glance with you at the numerous stages of this road.

In order to be acquainted with all the features of this path to follow, and to distinguish clearly the goal, let's start with the study of our "itinerary".

In the old days, God canonized his servants with the vox populi. With the passing of the centuries, the Church has come to make it her privilege. But the Holy See takes care of a cause only if a legal proof that there is an opportunity to do it, exists. First, the bishop makes inquiries about the life, reputation of holiness of the Servant of God, and hands his documents to the Sacred Congregation of the Rites, which examines and completes them. Therefore, there are: 1st the ordinary trials, 2nd the apostolic trials.

The Congregation that starts working for the glorification of a person who died in odor of sanctity, chooses a "postulator" to represent her. This latter writes the "Articles" based on the witnesses' statements taken to the diocesan ecclesiastical Tribunal. These "Articles" are nothing but the life of the Servant of God, divided in a certain number of paragraphs, gathering information of the same kind. When the trial of the Ordinary is over, the documents are taken to the Sacred Congregation of the Rites. The Pope appoints a "Cardinal Ponent", assigned to defend the cause in front of this Congregation. A prosecutor, assigned by the postulator, prepares, according to the "Articles", a Summary of the life and virtues of the Servant of God. The procurator resumes the summary in Latin, this work being called the "Information".

The collected writings are examined very seriously by the censors; their decision is controlled by the Sacred Congregation of the Rites, which brings a decree to be submitted to the Supreme Pontiff's approval. Then it's the time for the promoter of the Faith to step in and set out all the critics that may stop the pace of the trial. He puts his whole historical knowledge and theological skill to formulate his remarks or "Animadversions", so as to demolish the structure of sanctity raised for the glory of the Servant of God. The prosecutor of the cause has the mission to keep him quiet. If he succeeds, the question is asked:

6

“Is it advisable to introduce the Cause of the Servant of God?” The cardinals of the Sacred Congregation of the Rites having answered affirmatively, the Pope signs the decree on Introduction of the cause, and the Servant of God receives the title of Venerable. (Nowadays, the title of Venerable is given only after the decree on the “*héroïcité des vertus*”.)

Beatification.- At this moment, it’s the beginning of the apostolic proceedings during which the bishop is only the judge assigned by the Holy Father. There are four of them:

1st, the proceeding of Non cultu to make sure that the Servant of God has not been the object of public cult.

2nd, that on the reputation of holiness in general, which leads to admit in the

3rd, after a triple discussion, that of the “*héroïcité des vertus*”. The Promoter of the Faith finds easily many arguments, during these proceedings, to be against a favorable decision.

4th, examination of 2, 3 or 4 miracles in front of 3 successive committees.

The number of miracles differs according to the kind of witnesses having testified to prove the “*héroïcité des vertus*”. If during the ordinary and apostolic proceedings, eye witnesses testify, two miracles are sufficient. When eye witnesses are heard in ordinary proceedings, and “second hand” witnesses in the apostolic proceedings, three miracles are needed. Finally, if the proof of the virtues has been done only by means of traditions and documents, four miracles are necessary. As for our Venerable Father, we need two.

Canonization.- Two new miracles allow us to proceed to the reopening of the cause. If they are recognized as authentic by the assigned Congregations, the Pope, according to the advice of the Sacred Congregation of the Rites, announces solemnly in a bull “*Urbi et Orbi*” in Rome and throughout the world, the holiness of the Blessed, and sets the canonization feasts which take place at St.Peter’s, in the Vatican.

Guided by this brief information, let’s have a look at the work accomplished for the Cause of Our Venerable Father.

Preliminaries.- In 1860, the devout Father Jean-Marie de la Mennais died at Ploërmel. This priest had accomplished a ministry so charitable during his long life, and left such a reputation of sanctity, that many, from the bottom of their hearts, hoped to see the glorification of this humble and zealous servant of the Holy Church. The favorite son of M. de la Mennais, Rev. Bro. Cyprien, who had known him intimately and loved him passionately, got ready to save for future ages the memory of his holy friend and father. Some books had already been published on Jean-Marie de la Mennais; but they did not mention his astonishing virtues, especially, his indefectible love of the Holy See. Bro. Stéphane, having discovered a mine of precious documents, published in 1894 a brochure entitled, “*A Friend of Children in the 19th Century*”. This book was praised in Rome, and Bishop Marini told Rev. Bro. Abel that it would be appropriate to take care of the cause of the great defender of the papacy and the personal infallibility of the Supreme Pontiff.

Rev. Brother Cyprien and Bro. Abel consulted Bishop Bécél, bishop of Vannes, on this matter. The latter suggested them to ask the opinion of Cardinal Richard, who had been quite often in touch with the Brothers’ founder, as director of the education department, in the diocese of Nantes, and to whom a great sanctity of life gave authority. Having received a very encouraging answer, the Council of the Institute, on April 7 1895, began talks with the Ordinary of Vannes to prepare the Trial. Rev. Father Nicolet, procurator general of the Mariste Fathers, was accepted by Bishop Bécél, as postulator of the Cause. After this prelate’s death, extremely loved by the Brothers, his successor, Bishop Latieule, whose name became

also dear to the congregation, set up, on October 7 1899, at the Mother-House of Ploërmel, the tribunal in charge of investigating the cause of Father Jean-Marie de la Mennais.

That was the departure on the road to success. So, all the brothers gathered in the nice community chapel, rejoiced and were proud, hoping to see the day when they would see their Father on the altars. With what fervor and excitement the 500 voices vibrated, voices which, during the benediction of the Holy Sacrament, formed the choir, amplified by the organ and musical instruments. Besides the members of the main house, about forty outstanding priests and lay people attended the ceremony.

Trial of the Ordinary.- The trial of the Ordinary lasted 2 years, from October 7 1899 to August 29 1901. During this time, the Tribunal held 88 sessions and heard 55 statements from witnesses, which form 3 volumes in -4°, representing 3,000 pages. The writings of M. de la Mennais had been collected thanks to the Institute and the bishoprics, according to Orders from Cardinal Labouré, archbishop of Rennes, Bishop Fallières, bishop of St.Brieuc, and Bishop Latieule, bishop of Vannes. At the end of the meeting, Rev. Bro. Abel promised, under oath, with his hand on the Gospel, to take to the Sacred Congregation of the Rites in Rome, in the name of all the members of the Tribunal, the documents of the Trial.

Carrying his precious parcel, the Superior General arrived in the Eternal City on September 4, and, due to his insistent request, he rejoiced at seeing the Holy Father sign, on September 9 1901, two decrees: one assigning Cardinal Vincent Vannutelli, Ponent or Reporter of the Cause, and the other declaring the opening of the Trial.

August 6 1900.- Since, according to the Rules decided by Urbain VIII, informative proceedings must “sleep” 10 years before they are taken care of, a delay the Pope may shorten anyway, let’s have a look at a most comforting event that showed the brothers’ filial devotion, passionate affection and deep veneration for our pious founder: the examination and transfer of the precious remains, on August 6 1900. Two brothers who had attended the funerals of Father Jean-Marie de la Mennais, were present when the transfer occurred. On December 31 1860, “Everything was quite sad and gloomy; nature itself spread out its cold icy blanket on the coolness of death.” On August 6 1900, on the contrary, a ray of Mt. Thabor transfigured the earth: everything radiated life and joy, and spoke of hope, glory, immortality.” The reliquary, containing the remains of our Father, moved forward along the nice avenue of the oak trees, carried in turns, by the members of the Council, the Visitors, the brothers, representatives from the missions of Canada, Haiti, Senegal and Tahiti. The missionaries were honored on this beautiful day; was it not right, since they had suffered so often?

An imposing cortège, never seen at the Mother-House before, accompanied the humble priest: over 1,000 brothers, scholastics, novices and postulants, between 180 and 200 priests including about 20 canons, a good crowd who had come from Ploërmel and the surroundings. While, from the steeple, dominated by the Tricolor decorated with a picture of the Sacred Heart, triumphal notes scattered, the procession advanced under the green vault. The load, which was priceless to our love, was put in the Grand Parlor.

After the high mass, the crowd was allowed to walk near the corpse lying in the open casket. To prevent all indiscreet endeavor, the Vicar General of Vannes had announced, before leaving the cemetery, that “whoever would dare, even with a pious intention, take a part of the corpse, bones, clothes out of the casket of the Servant of God, or add something to it, could be subject to excommunication.” The corpse of our Father had been found, “entirely in a state of mummy, still clothed with his vestments and very recognizable.”

8

For three hours, people walked in close order in front of the corpse whose head only could be seen, touching it respectfully, with medals, rosaries, or pictures of our Father. Many brothers who had known him in the past, wept, gazing once more, after 40 years, at his beloved face. Many kissed him piously on the forehead, “which, in the past, flashes of genius had radiated and which seemed, on that day, to reflect rays of sanctity”. The brothers who had happily witnessed this moving scene, must remember it with a rather sweet emotion.

At 4 o'clock in the afternoon, the community waited in the chapel for the arrival of the casket which would be placed into the cellar prepared to receive it. When the cortège entered the sanctuary where Father had prayed so fervently, enthusiasm was indescribable: more than a thousand voices sang the hymn on grateful humility, the Magnificat, and repeated the verse Canon de la Villebarel had developed with eloquence during the high mass: “Deposuit potente de sede, et exaltavit humiles”, (The Lord has set down the powerful ones from their seats, and has exalted the lowly.) Truly, God was exalting this man whose “humility surpassed the genius”, and the whole crowd, in the bottom of their hearts, proclaimed him blessed!

Our brothers, who had died since the foundation of the Institute, and whose eternal salvation our Father had guaranteed, joined probably the feast. The great speaker of that day mentioned them saying, “When the flag passes in the middle of the regiment, vibrating in the blow of battles, it seems that victory and glory fly with it in its quivering folds, and that the shadow of the veterans goes through the clouds, above the brave men chasing death. Above our heads, I hear like a sound of wings, the movement of angelical bands surrounding the Servant of God, the sound of the troop of his sons who have entered into heaven, drawing one another in their surge toward the Eternal. A part of Paradise opens up to show us the sacred squares, the believer, the humble victim, the Father we have greeted a while ago.”

This sacred tomb will give us back, on a more solemn day, the body it keeps for glorious purposes. With a heart gladdened by this vision, let's go back to Rome. The cause being opened, the documents of the Trial of the Ordinary were entrusted to Bishop Mariani, who had been chosen as prosecutor. He prepared, based on the “Articles” (declarations), a Summary of the life of Father de la Mennais, and his successor, Bishop Salotti, classified the 128 postulating letters, asking the Holy Father for the introduction of the Cause.

Postulating Letters.- It's interesting to know the origin of these various petitions that prove the reputation of holiness of our Father. First, there were Cardinal Labouré, archbishop of Rennes, Bishop Dubillard, bishop of Quimper, Bishop Rouard, bishop of Nantes, the bishops of St.Brieuc, Vannes, Coutances; for Puy, the Most Reverend Abbot of Thymadeuc, the R. F. Le Doré and 33 Breton senators and deputies joining Cardinal Richard, to ask the Holy Father “to crown the so pious life of a holy apostle”, devoted with his whole love to the Holy See, and to give a heavenly protector to the threatened Congregations.”

To the voices of these chiefs, those of the Superior Generals of religious congregations were added: Daughters of Presentation of Holy Mary from Broons, Daughters of the Holy Spirit, Sisters of the Retreat, from Vannes and Lannion, Ursulines from Dinan, Sisters from Créhen, and so on. Finally, the petitions of 54 General Councillors from Rennes, Nantes and Quimper who appealed to the Holy Father “to sign the decree on the introduction of the Cause which would be received, “ they said, “all throughout France and, especially, in the religious province of Brittany, with grateful transports and joy.” Altogether, these letters emanated from 5 cardinals, 15 archbishops, 44 bishops, 17 Superior Generals, many chapters of cathedrals, senators, deputies and general councillors.

Examination of the Writings.- The writings of Father de la Mennais, which could be tracked down, consisted of 4,995 letters, making up 6,237 pages in-4°, 2,920 pages of homilies and 24 brochures written by himself or with his collaboration. The examination of these 30 volumes in-4° required a long work. The three consultants, chosen by the Cardinal Reporter, raised the objections considered necessary. Bishop Alexandre Verde, the promoter of the Faith, composed them, and collected everything that could oppose the progress of the Cause. The defense attorney, Bishop Salotti, replied to those victoriously in front of the Sacred Congregation of the Rites, which pronounced the “Nihil obstat”, on December 10, 1907. One of the most serious dangers was spared; the Cape of Storms was weathered.

The Trial in Vannes on the reputation of holiness, to be controlled in details, remained. It consisted of more than 2,000 pages that the advocate summarized in 700 pages. The examination being over, R. F. Copéré, postulator, asked to be exempted from the 10 years' delay and requested the decree on the introduction of the Cause.

Decree on the Introduction.- On March 21, 1911, since there was nothing to stop us from going forward, acceding to the requests from some very eminent cardinals of the holy Roman Church, from many bishops and superiors of orders or congregations, and especially that of the Brothers of Christian Instruction and of the Daughters of Providence of St.Brieuc, the Most Eminent and Reverend Cardinal Vannutelli, at a meeting of the Sacred Congregation of the Rites, held on the given day, at the Vatican, suggested they discuss the following doubt: “Must we sign the Committee for the introduction of the Cause, in this case, and for the purpose concerned?” And the Most Eminent and Reverend noblemen, assigned to protect the holy rites, having weighed everything carefully, considered it right to give a positive answer, that is, the committee must be signed, if His Holiness considers it right. The following day, March 22, Our Holy Father, Pope Pius X, condescended to sign, in his own hand, the committee for the introduction of the Cause of beatification and canonization of the Venerable Servant of God, Jean-Marie de la Mennais.

Feasts of the Venerability.- The Church praised, the following way, the person who, avoiding all human ambitions, hid among the little ones. Receiving the decree of venerability, the entire Brittany rejoiced with a justified pride. H. G. Bishop Gouraud, bishop of Vannes, ordered to celebrate in his cathedral, and at Ploërmel, thanksgiving celebrations. Unfortunately, the prosperous community was no longer there to participate! If we judge from the accents on August 6 1900, what thankful hymns could have risen toward the heavens near the Venerable's tomb? His sons had left his remains with deep grief, and had emigrated to more welcoming countries.

In Canada.- A new de la Mennais family was formed in the Nouvelle-France. In broad youth and vitality, (she celebrated her 25th anniversary), starting enthusiast, she celebrated the event with a magnificent assembly at La Prairie, on August 24, 1911. H. E. Cardinal Bruchez was the guest of honor. A former student of the brothers in Normandy, R. F. Rondot, spoke very highly of the institution founded by Venerable de la Mennais.

In Tahiti.- The land that had benefited from the last apostolic attentions of M. de la Mennais, was the first to rejoice publicly at his glory: as soon as June 24, a high mass and a solemn benediction of thanksgiving were sung in Papetee.

St.Brieuc.- However, the most imposing feasts took place at St.Brieuc, on February 9, 10 and 11, 1912. The orators spoke: they had authority and competence to do it. On the first day, the Vicar General of Bois de la Villerabel, for 1 hour and 15 minutes, talked to the audience about the three reasons for which they were assembled to thank the Lord: 1st, the happy ending of the trial of the Ordinary; 2nd, the gratitude for the outstanding virtues of the Venerable; 3rd, the favors obtained through his intercession.

On the 2nd day, Bishop Gouraud recounted the work of M. de la Mennais and showed its charitable feature. Speaking to the exiled, he consoled them saying, “God gives to your institute and the person who founded it, its crowning; the crown of trial and sacrifice. Persecution came to prove totally that his work emanates from God: it came to give “hope that the glorification of Jean-Marie de la Mennais is at hand”.

On the 3rd day, the ceremony started at 3 o'clock; one hour and a half before, the cathedral was taken over by a great crowd, who had come to hear the bishop of Orleans, Bishop Touchet. He pointed out that Jean-Marie had been pitiful in Jesus Christ, like Him, with the same subject as Jesus Christ, and had been one of the most excellent servants of this eternal robustness of the Church and of each one of the forces which produces it: 1st force: that of the blood, this priest had the soul of a martyr; 2nd that of the word: God did not ask him to shed his blood, but to take up “the Sword of the spirit”; 3rd force, that of the hierarchy: Jean-Marie de la Mennais worked to give back to the tiara the luster of great ages; 4th force of holy love: it is for the children and the poor that the Venerable priest worked in his first outbursts, without stopping.”

All these solemn and pious expressions of affection decorated, with wonderful bas-reliefs, the first the triumphal arch erected on the glorious road.

Towards Beatification.- Since March 22, 1911, the Cause of O.V.F. has gone on. On July 31, 1912, the apostolic proceedings began under the presidency of the Bishop of Vannes. The first is that of “Non cultu”, proving that the Venerable was not the object of any public worship anticipating the judgement of Rome. The ecclesiastical tribunal of Vannes sent a bulky document on the hearing of the witnesses to the Sacred Congregation of the Rites. It was examined, and, on March 9 1915, the objections of “the devil’s advocate” having been refuted, this Sacred Congregation passed a favorable judgement. That was the first step in the second stage. The second step was made, on June 11, 1924, by the publication of the apostolic decree ratifying the reputation of holiness of our Venerable Father.

The third trial is going on: it deals with the proofs of the “héroïcité des vertus”. It started on December 1, 1926, with the examination of the body of the Venerable Father, found more or less in the same condition as in 1900. The documents were given to the Sacred Congregation of the Rites, on September 26, 1927. The collected statements make up a volume of 1,260 handwritten pages. Once the validity of the Trial in Vannes is admitted, they will examine in 3 special meetings, to what degree of “héroïcité” O.V.F. has practiced the theological and cardinal virtues. The 3rd meeting is always presided by the Holy Father, who does not give an immediate judgement, but asks for prayers to implore divine lights. We shall be informed of the date of these 3 meetings, because, in these days, public prayers will be addressed to God, in the Institute, to obtain a conclusion in accordance with our wishes. The present prosecutor, Bishop Beltrami, has written a Summary of the witnesses’ depositions. This summary contains 1,000 pages...

After the decree on the “héroïcité des vertus”, the examination of the miracles will take place. And then... it will be the official veneration of the Blessed in the Bernin splendor. Is this date far from now? It’s God’s secret; nevertheless we can hope it’s near, and work to make it closer. In fact, what’s missing? The divine seal that we can obtain: miracles for the beatification, miracles for the canonization.

Favors obtained through the intercession of O. V. F. are very numerous. To arouse our faith and encourage us to ask “much”, I shall mention some of them, gleaned in the Summary on our Father’s life for the introduction of his Cause, and the numerous articles in The Chronicle.

The Summary, which cannot recall all the spiritual graces and temporal favors, mentions about ten healings. As soon as 1864, our Father shows his power beside God, giving back health to the young Léon Stubert of Ploërmel, a three-year-old boy, struck down by meningitis. The doctor having abandoned the sick boy, his father and mother come and pray at our Father’s tomb. When they come back home, the child welcomes them, sitting on his bed, asking for chocolate, and says, “Mom, it’s been a long time since you gave me something to eat.”

Like during his lifetime, the Venerable’s predilections go to little children. In 1882, Augustin-Marie Boury, also from Ploërmel, who is 14 months old, is struck down by meningitis. His mother comes to recommend him to our Father with great faith, and she finds him convalescent when she comes back home.

Conclusion,- We read in the Psalms, “Qui seminant in lacrimis, in exultatione metent.” Those who sow in tears will reap in joy; but, often, one sows the seed, another reaps.

R. B. Abel, a passionate admirer of our Father, is surely the person who has shown the most active zeal for the Cause of the Venerable. He has prepared the ground on days full of tense anxiety, has thrown the seed, has watered it with the tears of his heart, and has left to others the joy to see it sprout. Rev. Bro. Jean-Joseph tasted the greatest happiness of his generalate in the decree on Venerability in 1911. During his long government, he had other quite comforting dates, but he left to his venerated successor the erection, in the chapel of Bon-Secours, of a statue of the “Blessed” Jean-Marie de la Mennais.

And the day will come, we hope firmly, when a pope of the 20th century will show to the world our Father acknowledged worthy of living in the St. Peter’s basilica, with the chief of the Apostles and the founders of religious orders. Our congregation stimulated by this honor will feel compelled to renew her fervor and generosity so as to show her gratitude to the Lord. Strengthened with the help of our blessed Father, she shall see generous apostles increase and holiness blossom in her ranks.

Favor Attributed to Venerable de la Mennais. Mrs. Jeuland, from Torcé, near Vitré (l.-et-V.), sister of Bro. Crémence who died at Ploërmel in 1900, and mother of one of our present Brothers, entered recently a clinic in Rennes with an acute attack of appendix. The operation took place immediately. I went to her bedside two days later. She could hardly recognize me and said only a few words: a congestion of the lungs had just broken out. Her condition was giving serious cause for concern, and the Sister, a nurse, made no secret of it.

At that moment, I told the sick woman and her anxious family, assembled near her, that I would ask the Jersey community for a Novena to Venerable Father de la Mennais. Then, someone declared that an “image-relique” of the Servant of God had just been slipped under her pillow, a picture that had been borrowed the previous year by another sick person and that had been found again the night before.

When I returned to the clinic a few days later, I was happily surprised to find Mrs. Jeuland out of danger. She told me that, since the beginning of the Novena, she had had the impression to have, at her side, Father de la Mennais and Bro. Crémence, both of them watching over her.

The congestion had disappeared, and the dressings, so painful before, were applied and she did not feel any pain.

Her convalescence happened in the best conditions; and, some time later, Mrs. Jeuland, accompanied with her whole family, went to Ploërmel, to the tomb of the Venerable, as pilgrims, to give thanks.

Bro. NATALIS-Jh.