

LETTER FROM MGR. DEMERS.

MISSION OF VANCOUVER ISLAND, FOUNDED IN 1836.

IN 1836, the Holy See having given commission to the Archbishop of Quebec, Canada East, to send missionaries to that part of the Pacific coast now comprising the State of Oregon, Washington Territory, Vancouver Island, and British Columbia—ten years before the boundary line was settled between Great Britain and the United States of America—accordingly, in 1838, in order to carry out the intentions of the Holy Father, two French-Canadian priests were selected, and received the mission, as the first Catholic clergymen, to go and bring the good tidings of salvation to that far distant, and till then neglected, portion of the Lord's vineyard. They went overland from Montreal, through rivers and lakes, in bark canoes and boats, at times on foot and on horseback. The journey was long and tedious, accompanied by great privations and hardships, and many were the dangers they had to encounter. At last, having left in the month of April, they safely arrived, on the 24th of November, at Fort Vancouver, then the head-quarters and principal depot of the Hudson's Bay Company, on the Columbia River, at the distance of nearly one hundred miles from the Pacific Ocean.

The undertaking was great and arduous, the field was immense, and the amount of work before the missionaries may be better imagined than described; but though unworthy and poor instruments in the hands of Him who, to show forth the might of His arm, chose to procure the salvation of mankind by the ministry, not of angels, but of men, they put their whole trust and confidence in Him, humbly begging His blessing upon a work undertaken for the glory of His name and the honor and triumph of His holy Church. But here, it will be asked, who were those two happy priests to whom such a noble and im-

portant mission had been confided?—the Most R. v. F. N. Blanchet, now Archbishop of Oregon City, and my humble self;* and when we look to the time when we arrived in a country almost as wild as nature had made it, and seeing what has been done in a point of view both religious and material, a feeling of legitimate pride forces itself upon us; but we thank God for it, giving all glory to Him who is the author of all perfect gifts. We humbly acknowledge the manifold favors He has been pleased to bestow upon us in our unremitting efforts in carrying out the object of our mission.

Its beginning was small indeed; it was the mustard-seed sown in a vast field, but which has grown and become a tree. You would no longer see the two first missionaries constantly travelling, and principally myself, over the whole country, visiting the almost numberless Indian tribes, and teaching them the first rudiments of Christianity, being at times separated, one from the other, by hundreds of miles. Another state of things has succeeded; other laborers were called into the field, who, with one mind and one soul, as their faith was one, joined us in the common cause, and are now reaping up the fruits of our first labors; and, to tell all in a few words, from the boundary line of California up north to the Russian possessions, the whole country is divided between an Archbishop, two Bishops, and one Vicar Apostolic. The labors, privations, self-sacrifices, and hardships of the Missionaries have been rewarded a hundred-fold by the conversion of thousands of Indians. The Bishops have established schools among them, the boys being taught by clergymen, the girls by Sisters of different orders, who at the same time are conducting schools in the principal cities and towns, in which young ladies of all classes and denominations can receive as liberal and finished an education as anywhere else.

Such are the principal traits of the whole tableau, and the brief statement of which I hope will not be deemed out of place, before I come to the object I have in view, and to which I take the liberty to call public attention.

* I had come to the Mission of Red River the year before, 1837. This Mission was also founded by two Canadian priests, in 1817.

I was appointed as first Bishop of Vancouver Island and of British Columbia,* in 1846, and, as a matter of course, I had every thing to do to establish the Mission. My cathedral is a small frame building, hardly large enough at the present time. In 1857, I came to Canada, with the purpose of getting Sisters for the education of the young females. In April of the year following, I returned home with four Sisters of the order of St. Ann, lately founded by the present Bishop of Montreal. A school was opened forthwith; but I soon saw the necessity of adding to their number. In 1859 two more came out; but the work increasing, the combined efforts of six Sisters soon proved to be inadequate to the task, and in 1863 they had the consolation to welcome eight other Sisters. Their school in Victoria has been, all the time, and still is, in a most flourishing condition, there being at the last examination one hundred and fifty pupils, boarders and day scholars; and, finally, they will soon receive a re-enforcement of six Sisters, who took their departure by the steamer *Arizona*, on the 10th of November last.

The good and zealous Sisters, always true to their holy vocation, are not contented with devoting themselves to the education of the white and half-breed children in Victoria, and in New Westminster, British Columbia, where they have also opened a school nearly two years ago; the Indian girls at St. Ann's Mission, forty miles from Victoria, have also become the object of their boundless charity. There, in the summer of 1864, I built a convent for them at my own expense, as the Colonial Government gives me no assistance whatever, even for the Indian Missions, and a great number of girls are being educated and trained in the habits of domestic life, *gratis*: a blessing which the boys are also receiving from one of the Missionaries. I was omitting to say that I have also a good school for the boys in Victoria.

All these establishments are going on prosperously; but other institutions of equal, if not of greater, necessity are still wanting—an orphan asylum and an hospital in Victoria. The Sisters are impatiently waiting for the moment the buildings are put up to take charge of them. Till now they are com-

* Now separated from my diocese, and being a Vicariate apostolic.

pelled to take the orphan girls into their own house, and for this reason they can afford to receive but a limited number of them. At the time I built the present convent, I thought it would be large enough for many years to come; but, the very year following, it proved to be too small, even to accommodate the number of pupils. The little economies of the Sisters going to support the orphans, they have not been able to build a larger and more comfortable house; and I am sorry to say that, not for the want of good will, but of sufficient means, I am deprived of the satisfaction of having done it myself. Therefore, not to be an idle witness of increasing wants and necessities, I humbly laid before the Holy Father the suffering condition of my diocese, and earnestly begged of him to grant me permission to go to some foreign country in order to solicit aid and assistance by which I might be enabled to establish the above-mentioned institutions, which he has been pleased graciously to do by a Rescript, dated September 17, 1865.

I am also possessed of a letter of his Eminence, Cardinal Barnabo, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, in which his Eminence strongly recommends me to all the Most Reverend and Right Reverend Bishops of any country I may visit, in order to accomplish the hard task I have undertaken.

I have said enough, and Christian charity will not require more. May then this simple but true *exposé* enlist in my cause the sympathies of all, not only Catholics, but also such of my separated brethren so well known for their liberality in answering the call of suffering humanity, not unmindful of what is written, that "alms covers a multitude of sins," and again, that "blessed is he that understandeth concerning the needy and the poor: the Lord will deliver him in the evil day." To this cause I have devoted nearly thirty years of my life. Could I have done more?

Any donation sent to my address, 173 Third Street, will be thankfully received.

✠ MODEST DEMERS,
Bishop of Vancouver's Island.

NEW YORK, Convent of the Most Holy Redeemer, 173 Third Street, December 6, 1866.

Happy New Year to you
B. Demers