

THE REVEREND FATHER BLANCHET, 1818-1906

(Missions des Oblats de Marie Immaculae)

The Reverend Father Blanchet gave in his life a great example of humility which recalls St. Francis of Assisi, to whom he has also other resemblances in his spirit of simplicity and of poverty. For more than thirty years he refused, from a sentiment of deep humility, to let himself be promoted to sacred orders, and finally consented to it at the age of 54 years only from a motive of pure charity in order to keep company with an isolated Father in a remote mission. George Blanchet was born in the Dauphine in the village of Septem, Nov. 3d, 1818. For his classical studies he attended the little Seminary of the Cote Saint-Andre in Isere, and later went to the Noviciat de Notre-Dame de l'Osier, where he presented himself as a lay-monk, Oct. 3d, 1842, at the age of 24 years. He took courses in philosophy, partly at Notre-Dame de l'Osier, and partly at Marseilles, and during this period he received the tonsure and the minor orders, but postponed the sacred orders through humility, as has been said.

He taught for some time in the Juniorat of Notre-Dame des Lumieres (Our Lady of Lights) and then set out for the Oregon Missions in 1847. For 25 years he was a missionary there without the priest-hood, still refusing in humbleness of spirit to mount the last steps of the altar, believing himself too weak to bear the weight and the responsibilities of the priestly ordination.. But if he dared not become a priest we must not think it was because he hadn't the courage to fulfill the onerous apostolic duties, nor that he lacked the devotion to give himself over to the functions of the holy office, so tiring and so difficult. On the contrary he proved by his activity, his consecration, his unusual religious spirit, that he was a true missionary in every sense of the word. To the Fathers he gave the most brotherly and untiring assistance, and during that quarter of a century he rendered to the Missions services that were most highly appreciated.

From the beginning there was entrusted to him an important and difficult work which showed plainly that people had confidence in his devotion and in his talents. He was appointed Proctor Vicarial (Substitute Proctor) and he exercised these functions for many years. During this time he purchased a great number of properties

for the Brotherhood and the dioceses, and built several churches, residences for the Fathers, and schools.

His first post was at Yakima where he remained only a short time and then went to Olympia. It was the Fathers who had founded this locality which grew little by little to a considerable extent; but it was he who, as he jokingly said, baptised it, without being a priest, in giving it the name of Olympia. At the end of a dozen years he went to the Island of Vancouver and was attached to the College of Victoria where his aid was much appreciated on account of his common sense and his devoted but retiring disposition. From there he went to the Mission of Esquimalt where he built a chapel and a house for the Fathers, and later to New-Westminster where he was called for various projects of construction. Next, the Mission of Fort Rupert had him for some time and there he displayed great activity in clearing the ground and in constructing a residence.

Always indefatigable and not less esteemed for his valued cooperation, he next went to the Mission of Tulalip; and this time he showed more than ever that his modesty was of the true stamp by consecrating himself joyously to the humble business of a lay-brother. Under the orders of the Superior he gave himself over to the most material and wearisome occupations, leaving in the Mission the very evident marks of his stay there.

He was next sent to the Mission of Sainte Marie. The work to be done was no less important and perhaps even more difficult. But he did not know how to draw back from hardships; in a short time, with the help of Brother Jeanin, he had erected three buildings: a church, a residence for the Fathers, and a convent.

He had such good success there that the Mission of William's Lake wanted to profit by his skill as a builder and entrusted to him the care of accomplishing the same work. With equal devotion he built there a church, a house for the Fathers and a convent. Meanwhile a consecration so marked by abnegation deserved to be crowned by the halo of priesthood. Monseigneur D'Herbornez tried one last effort with our humble builder of churches; but since he knew that his humility would still resist, he appealed to a motive which he knew had great power over his heart, to his fraternal love. He asked him to accept the priesthood in order to keep company with a Father in a far-away Mission at Stuart's Lake. This time charity got the better of Father Blanchet's objections; he gave in to the urgent desire of his bishop and went to New Westminster to

review and complete his theological course. In the following October, 1872, he received at last the three sacred Orders at the age of 54 years.

Clothed with the priesthood Father Blanchet still adorned a career of 34 years, but it was much less active than the first, whether because he remained a long time in the same Mission at Stuart Lake, or because the fatigue of his hard labors and the weight of age made themselves keenly felt. But his apostleship was none the less useful nor less fruitful.

After his ordination he went to Stuart Lake to fulfill the mission of love that had been asked of him and he stayed in that residence about twenty years in two periods. He built there a house for the Fathers, broke up and cultivated a garden with great care, and busied himself with all his powers in civilizing the savages. By the lessons of his long experience he bettered their material condition, and at the same time in affectionate devotion occupied himself with their salvation. And so he won those childlike hearts who entrusted themselves to him with great sincerity and called him the "dear grandfather."

Finally in 1897, being an octogenarian and afflicted with serious infirmities he was sent for a rest to the home at William's Lake. This repose, which he had so fully earned by a life full of labor and care, he sanctified by patience and prayer during the nine years that he still lived, edifying his companions by the strict observance of his religion and by the purity of his beautiful soul. The will of God crowned all his merits by one last trial; the sainted old man became almost blind and he was incapable of going up to the holy altar. With wonderful resignation he bowed to the divine will, passing his long days in meditation and prayer; and finally he gave his soul back to God on the 17th of November, 1906, at the age of 88 years.

May he rest in peace.

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