

CHAPTER VI

FRANÇOIS PALLU

ON the Feast of the Epiphany in the year of grace 1685, Fénelon preached in Paris in the chapel of a small missionary society, in the presence of the ambassadors of the King of Siam. The preacher was already one of the glories of S. Sulpice, and he had once wished to become a missionary in the Levant, and to proclaim the Gospel from the Acropolis. He was not yet 'The Swan of Cambrai'; but the occasion justified the selection of a famous preacher, for news had just reached Paris of the death of Mgr. Pallu in China.

When the great missionary had last been seen, there had been the additional glamour of his return from the Far East as a Spanish prisoner, who had been brought back by way of Mexico; and the preacher did not lose the opportunity of pressing effectively the point that he had thus made a complete voyage round the world. Then he had gone back to the East, to open up, at the orders of the Pope, the evangelization of China, which since the days of Ricci had been regarded as the exclusive sphere of the Portuguese missions.

Fénelon chose for his text the words from Isaiah, 'Arise, shine, O Jerusalem, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.' Pulpit eloquence is a fickle taste, and, great as is the reputation of French preaching in the seventeenth century, the apostrophes of Fénelon do not appeal

to us as does a more simple and direct style. But one must be very cold if something of the emotion that moved the congregation on this occasion cannot still be felt.

'Empire of China! thou wilt not be able to close thy doors. Already a holy prelate, walking in the steps of Francis Xavier, has blessed this country with his latest breath. We have seen this simple and large-hearted man, who returned from compassing the entire circuit of the terrestrial globe. We have seen this premature and very touching old age, this venerable body, bowed down not by the weight of years but by that of penances and labours. And he seemed to say to all of us, in whose midst he had passed his life, to all of us who could not have enough of seeing and hearing him, of blessing him, of tasting of his unction, of smelling the sweet odour of Jesus Christ which was in him; he seemed to say to us, "I know that ye shall see my face again no more." We saw him just as he came from encircling the whole earth; but his heart, larger even than the world, was still in those far-off lands. The Spirit was calling him to China; and the Gospel, which he was debtor to give to that vast empire, was as a fire that he could not restrain, devouring the very depths of his heart.'

'Go then, holy patriarch, and cross once more the astonished and submissive ocean; go, in the Name of God. You will see the promised land; it will be granted to you to enter it, because you have hoped against hope. The stormy tempest, that threatens to shipwreck you, will land you on the desired shore. For eight months your dying voice will make the coasts of China to resound with the Name of Jesus Christ. Oh, all too soon death! O precious life, which should have

lasted longer! O sweet hopes sadly dashed! But let us adore God, and keep silence.'

The subject of this oration certainly deserved it more than some of those whose funeral orations are familiar to us as among the masterpieces of 'The Eagle of Meaux.' Bossuet, who had his hands upon most things in the French Church, and was later to cross swords successfully with Fénelon, was also one of the friends and advisers of the Société des Missions Étrangères, of which François Pallu, Bishop of Heliopolis, was the first member.

We have chosen him as the central figure of one of our chapters, partly because he illustrates the attempt of the missionary-hearted Church of France to cut itself adrift from the evil traditions of the Portuguese prerogatives, which, as we have seen, were damaging the good name of foreign missions, and partly that we may close our sketches with some account of the rise of the first modern missionary society in the hands of the secular priesthood. No other selection could so well link together the past and the present as the history of this Society, which is to-day one of the glories of the French Church, together with the Association of the Propagation of the Faith, which early in the nineteenth century was to revive its activity after the blows of the Revolution and the era of Napoleon. We are so accustomed in England to date from the S.P.C.K. and the S.P.G. (1698 and 1701), that it is good for us to learn something of a society in France dating from 1658, and receiving its Royal Charter in 1663, and which has from the first been in the closest relationship with the *Congregatio de propaganda fide*, adumbrated before the end of the sixteenth century, and established by a papal bull in 1622.

In history one can never expect to find a begin-

ning which has not some inspiration or source in what was already in existence. Here the story of a French secular missionary society must begin with a French Jesuit. Alexandre de Rhodes was a citizen of Avignon, the city in which the Popes had luxuriated during 'the Babylonish Captivity.' At the age of twenty-two he had joined the Jesuit mission in India, and had at first been sent to work among the slaves and jail-birds of Goa. Then he had earned the name of the Francis Xavier of Cochin China and Tonquin. The numerous converts, the fruits of his many journeys, like those of S. Francis, surpass imagination. In prison he converted the jailors, on board ship the captains and sailors; the gulf of Tonquin, notorious for its storms, seemed specially to guard him, although he challenged it fifteen times. Nor was his reputation for healing the sick body less than the fame that he acquired for ministering to the diseased soul.

We have had the opportunity of reading some of Rhodes' accounts of his labours in these parts prior to the year 1648. One of them was translated from the Latin into French and published at Lyons in 1651. It is an interesting history of Tonquin, which serves as an introduction to the first Christian labours in the kingdom, undertaken in 1624 and onwards by the Portuguese missionaries from Japan. When their work was being impeded in that country, Father Rodriguez conceived the idea of following up the Japanese Christians who had dispersed into these regions. Fortune was variable. The ruling powers were not averse to offering an asylum to the Japanese, and they welcomed the possibility of encouraging commercial intercourse with Portugal. Unfortunately the King and the missionaries did not see eye to eye on the

matter of matrimony. 'You tell my subjects that they should only have one wife; I want them to have many, so that they may have many children faithful to me.' Rhodes reached Tonquin in 1627, and the history of the next years is a continual alternation between expulsions and returns. Yet in 1639 there were reckoned to be 82,500 Christians, of whom 12,230 had been baptized within the last year.

In the Jesuit 'Relations,' written by Rhodes, of the years 1644 and 1645 in Cochin China, and published in Paris in 1652, we read of the faithfulness of the Christians under heavy afflictions, and specially of the martyrdom of Andrew, the first catechist in those parts to suffer death for the Faith. While in both these books the author has very little to say of his own doings, the general picture provides ample defence of the sound designs which were forming in his mind. The presence of foreign missionaries was uncertain, and was liable to call unfavourable attention to the native Christians. There were many trustworthy catechists, who could keep the local congregations together, if they had Priests' Orders; and in hard times they could go about unobserved, and minister to the scattered flocks. But Rhodes knew that the Portuguese Government would not favour an independent Christianity, which would tend to disconnect the native Church from that close dependence on Portugal, whereby she maintained her exclusive prerogative to have dealings in these parts. Already, owing to her decay, and the alarming rivalry of northern commerce, her privilege was seriously threatened, and she was no longer able to supply the ever increasing demand for missionaries, as the evangelization of the East made progress by self-propagation, and by the scattering of

the Christians under persecution. Rhodes was a Frenchman, and it was more easy for him to view missionary policy through other than Portuguese spectacles. But he was also a Jesuit, and must act cautiously.

He determined to come to Europe and make an appeal. He must have realized that he was facing a great undertaking. To provide a native secular priesthood was a different thing from receiving Japanese and Chinese Christians into Western Orders; to ask Rome to withdraw the privileges that it had granted in the past to Portugal would certainly cause trouble. But when one has found a real man, one is dealing with some one to whom difficulties are an incentive. Among these difficulties an arduous and dangerous journey counts for little. It would not be prudent for the purpose of a campaign, the character of which would be suspected from his known opinions, to travel by the usual route and to trust to the Portuguese ships. Rhodes evidently thought it safer to commit himself to the wild regions of Asia, the dangers of shipwreck in whatever vessels he could light upon, the experiences of deserts, and the risks from barbarians and Turks. He arrived at Rome in 1648, having started in all probability soon after he had signed his last 'Relation' in Macao on October 16, 1645.

Only in 1651 did he find fitting occasion to open his mind on so delicate a matter, and one in which he would be acting contrary to what many of his brethren in the Society conceived to be desirable. Papal bulls, repeated at intervals between 1514 and 1616, had given and secured to Portugal the privilege of confirming all episcopal appointments within her sphere of influence, and of requiring that all missionaries should sail to the East from a

Portuguese European port. But if Portugal was likely to cling to those prerogatives all the more strongly that her power was waning, there were two reasons why the Roman Curia should be more ready to modify its policy than at any earlier time. Her interest lay with the effective evangelization of the world and not with the prestige of a particular royal dignity. If Portugal could not fulfil its obligations, the Pope must see if it were not possible to get his work done by some one else. But, while it sometimes happens that a spiritual authority may desire a good end, and yet lack effective means to accomplish it, the very decline of Portuguese power opened the way; Rome could begin to ignore its previous acts. Already it had done so tacitly in Canada, but the case there was rather that of not applying a policy than of changing a policy. Here the challenge would be direct, and Spain would be affected by it, since by reason of the long union between the two countries Spain had adapted itself to the conditions: if it was not now Spanish honour that would be offended by a Portuguese grievance, yet Spain had no wish to see any introduction of French influence in the East to be added to the troublesome Dutch and English. Portugal held the keys of the situation in Goa and Macao; Spain in the Philippines might be a rival of Portugal in commerce, but she would rather join hands with her than let in another. And what other could there be than France, always a potential enemy in Europe, and at present very happily not bothering about the East?

It is not to be supposed that any of these considerations was lost sight of in the papal councils, or that the strange confusion between national advantage and the Ministry of the Church would strike men there as a thing to be denounced. It

was what men were used to; it had grown up naturally. If any one thought of recalling the privileges, on the ground that they were conditional on teaching the Faith in these lands, it would have been difficult to prove that Portugal was not doing its best. We are fortunately in a position to appreciate the delicacy of the situation, for we have already seen the daring defiance of the Portuguese mission in China towards Mgr. Maigrot and de Tournon. Actually those unhappy conflicts were not yet begun; it is this courageous mission of the Père de Rhodes, and all that followed from it, that was to make the battle of the Chinese rites possible.

Rhodes was well received in Rome, and presumably he used his long period of waiting profitably; when the time was ripe for official interviews, he found a friendly atmosphere. The Pope was willing to supply bishops, and he encouraged the idea of the indigenous priesthood. It was an obvious thing to offer one of the bishoprics to Rhodes; it was natural that he should refuse. He was told to look for his bishops elsewhere, but to avoid France.

It is easy to account for this one exception. France was suspect of Jansenism, and yet more of Gallicanism, a national spirit in ecclesiastical matters which was not agreeable to the Roman Curia. The Italian papacy was, further, uneasy about the possible political alliances of France, and it was certainly very unhappy over the treaty which quite recently had ended the Thirty Years' War. Rome had made ineffectual protests against it, not solely due to its concessions to the Protestants. France had lain outside the Empire; but certain conditions in the treaty of Westphalia contained the possibility of influence that might be

used unfavourably to Rome in imperial concerns, and the power of France was increasing.

Rhodes did his best. He could not find any of his bishops in Italy; he tried Piedmont and failed; so also the Catholic parts of Switzerland, and Alsace. Where was he to try next? And after all he was a Frenchman. He was at last obliged to come to Paris in 1653, and there he found himself in congenial surroundings. He was not concerned with the troubles of the Fronde, or with the policy of the Italian Mazarin and the Queen-Mother. He found his home in the circle of the revival, the friends of the Oratory of S. Vincent, and those parishes that were humming with life. He would get at once into close touch with the Parisian supporters of his own Society's work in Canada, bowed down but not disheartened by the sorrows of recent years. He got to know Père Bagot of his own Society, a great director of souls, who had gathered round him a little group of the clergy and of the laity, which he was helping along the ways of the spiritual life. People were talking in Paris of the Bagotites, much as later in our own country people were to speak of Simeonites or Puseyites. Through Bagot he would get to know his friend M. Olier.

It was among the Bagotites that Rhodes was to find his bishops, and yet more. We need not concern ourselves further with him. He was sent by his Society next year to take up the work in Persia. A Jesuit history suggests that he was sent to this country because the Portuguese would not be ready to convey him to his former mission. He was now about sixty years old. He did his best, making a gallant effort to learn another language, making light of the mirth which his blunders caused, receiving kicks and cuffs cheerfully. When he died

in 1660 he was planning work in Georgia and Tartary. It seems difficult to find any place where these missionaries were not penetrating.

The little association that was being directed by Père Bagot was concerned solely with the cultivation of the life of sanctification and of good works. Its members were not conscious of any vocation to work overseas. Rhodes told them of the neglected condition of the Christians in Tonquin and Cochin China, and of what he was seeking with the Pope's authorization. He unfolded his plans for bishops, directly representing the Pope; he expounded his idea of turning the native catechists into priests, and of thus providing permanently for the needs of the Church. He foresaw some day native bishops, and a Church united with the Western Church, but not Western in character or under the tutelage of foreign missionaries. The Bagotites had found their vocation. We are now on the verge of the *Société des Missions Étrangères*, and, out of courtesy to its strongly expressed opinion, we must be careful to avoid speaking of Rhodes as its founder. But he was certainly its inspirer, as Fénelon called him.

The Propaganda, with which through its whole history this Society has worked in closest fellowship, and under its guidance, heard what was stirring in Paris, and instructed the Papal Nuncio in Paris, Mgr. Bagni, to look into the matter, and choose three bishops from this company. The Nuncio's selection was Pallu, a Canon of S. Martin of Tours; Laval de Montmorency, who had been an Archdeacon of Évreux; and a holy and learned priest named Pique. There were delays: the Pope died; Bagni was called back to Rome. In the interval François Xavier de Laval-Montmorency was called to Canada as Vicar-Apostolic in 1659,