Vocation

By Rev. Victor Van Tricht, S. J.
Catholic Truth Society of Oregon No.voc014 (1914)

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

"PRETRE ET RELIGIEUSE," as the French title runs ('Priest and Religious'), forms one of a series of popular conferences given in the latter part of the nineteenth century by the Rev. Victor Van Tricht, S. J., of Saint Ignatius' Institute, Antwerp, Belgium. It tells how a vocation to the priesthood and to the religious state may be ascertained and followed out. The importance is vividly shown of every man and woman finding out what will please God in their choice of a state in life. The published conference has a wide circulation in Europe and will doubtless prove interesting and helpful to many in America, where every year numerous souls leave the world for a more perfect following of Christ. In every family, as one child after another grows up, the question presents itself to each: "In what state of life shall I please God best?" Father Van Tricht shows us how to find out and thus set our souls at peace, contentedly working out our salvation either in the world or by embracing a higher life.

In order to adapt the work to this country the translator has availed himself of permission for some verbal changes and omissions. Moreover, in an appendix is reprinted a decision given in 1912 by a Commission of Cardinals and approved by the Sovereign Pontiff regarding the priestly vocation. It will thus be seen that in the present work there is no statement at variance with this decision.

VOCATION.

A SHORT time ago, I read a touching account of a poor woman who had lost her mind. It seems that she had become a widow soon after her marriage, and was left alone with an infant son. From that time forward she made it her sole purpose in life to bring him up well, and she was succeeding in her work, for at eight years of age the little fellow was so gentle and good that everybody in the village admired and loved him. The venerable pastor had told the mother that he would soon want her child to be one of the altar-boys, and it then became the dream of the poor widow's life to see her son in the little red cassock and white surplice swinging forth from the silvery tinkling censer clouds of incense before the altar of God. With her own hands, she made him a cassock and surplice. It was a long task, for she wished that even the lace should be the work of her own fingers. Now, when the preparations were made and the great day fixed, she heard one morning at her threshold the sound of muffled footsteps. Upon opening the door, she beheld some neighbors tenderly bearing to her the dead body of her little boy. The poor child while playing with a companion of his own age had fallen into a large pond where the herds were watered. Help soon came, but it was too late. Silent and motionless, she riveted her startled eyes upon the wet and pallid form. She did not cry out, nor did she shed a single tear, but in the shock of her sudden loss, her reason vanished with her hopes.

Since then she has been living in solitude, gentle, pious, and cheerful. Whenever the poor creature goes out, she wears a red gown, like a cassock, with some white shreds for a surplice. Holding in

her hands three cords fastened to a vase of flowers, she goes across the fields incensing the trees, the wheat, and the thickets of wild rose and hawthorn. They call her the crazy-woman of the censer. But there is not even a child who will laugh at her, for all the mothers know her and have told their little ones her sad history.

This tale touched me deeply from its sad issue and, while thinking about it and about this tender mother's hopes for her child, I began to reflect upon the ambitions of mothers in general in their children's regard. In former times when families were profoundly Catholic, a mother's aspirations were high indeed. It was not merely in the little cassock of the altar-boy that she looked forward to seeing her son. No, she hoped even greater things, for she would picture him clothed in the sacred vestments of the priest. To have one of her children a priest of God — this seemed to her the noblest object for her ambition, the most precious gift that her love could crave, and she prayed for it every day, in secret, lest her hopes might be disappointed. And when her dream was accomplished, when she had seen with her own eyes her son at the altar, and had received upon her bowed head the blessing of her boy, then when her hour came to die, fortified by the knowledge that God's grace dwelt visibly in her family, she departed this life with peace and happiness of soul.

At the present day, together with a weakening of faith, these sentiments that spring from faith are weakened also. This desire is more rarely to be observed among mothers. The halo which surrounds the priest grows dimmer day by day; and yet it is of him that I propose to speak to you. But if I speak to you of the priest, why not also speak of the nun? Nuns, it is true, are not called to the ministry of the altar; still they share with the priest the honor of a like sacrifice and similar works. When God takes from you your sons, He makes them priests; when God takes away your daughters He makes them nuns. You do not separate them in your hearts; I shall not separate them in my discourse. I shall tell you how God chooses them and the part that He makes them play in this world. I shall omit as far as possible all considerations of the supernatural and religious side of the matter, and endeavor to discuss the subject as a thoughtful man of the world would do, in a calm, philosophical manner.

In choosing this topic I find a twofold advantage: in the first place, I shall be treating of a subject about which I know something — a thing quite rare nowadays, when the custom is becoming more and more widespread of speaking on subjects about which the speaker knows nothing; secondly, I hope that by it your present lofty estimate of the priest may even be heightened.

I was speaking to you just now of the desire of Catholic mothers of former days when great faith was put in signs. Among these what sign could be more trustworthy than one associated with the tenderest recollections of childhood? Let us take one of these. One day a little boy, impressed by the solemn ceremonies of the altar, goes home filled with the pious wish of imitating them. To encourage him a little black cassock and white alb are made. Then out of an old silk dress, whose colors are perhaps altogether unknown in the vestments of the Church, a stole and chasuble are made, and behold the little priest is now ready. For a congregation, besides some comrades, he has his mother and perhaps a grandmother, already deeply affected at the priestly appearance of their little Levite. The Mass, having been begun, is often served, contrary to all rubrics, by a little sister. The altar is a sideboard, cleared of its table service. A large dictionary answers for a missal. The young priest chants the Latin as best he can, and the responses are given in like manner. At the Gospel, he preaches. Thus, the ceremonies go on to the end. Celebrant and assistants vie with one another in their reverend piety and devotion, losing for the time all thought of the unreality of the service in the earnest endeavor to reproduce the sacred ceremonies of God's altar.

This is one of the memories of childhood that linger with us in after life. Whether it is true that many priestly vocations owe their origin to memories such as these, I do not know. At all events, it must be very easy to break from their enchantment, for I am acquainted with few men who, in their childhood, have not indulged in these pious fancies, and yet for all that have not embraced the clerical state, but have become good and worthy fathers of families.

The little girls, too, on their part feeling a like impulse, put on a black gown, bind a fold of linen across their foreheads, throw a veil of linen over all, and in attitudes of charming mysteriousness, with downcast eyes and hands devoutly crossed upon their breasts, become with much grace, little nuns. Yet all have not entered convents. And what is more, a quarter of an hour after having sung his Mass, the little pastor will be beating his drum and drilling his leaden soldiers, and the little nun, in the midst of five or six dolls, will be playing mother; and, if one of the dolls is of a size sufficient to permit the illusion, she may even pretend to be a grandmother. In things such as these, then, it would be foolish to be always finding a pledge of future vocations, and the most timorous parents can with impunity, I think, allow their children these manifestations of piety. Nevertheless, I am far from denying that the character, the tastes, and propensities of a child show themselves from earliest years. A touching legend relates that in the workshop of Saint Joseph the child Jesus sought out some little boards, fastened them together in the form of a cross and, smiling the while upon his mother, saddened at this foreshadow of Calvary, lay down upon it with extended arms.

In the lives of many of the saints and especially in their legends you will meet similar incidents. But I would like today to set aside all that is marvelous or extraordinary, and follow in its plain reality the labor of the soul, which under the inspiration of God brings forth the priest and the nun. You have a word for defining it, a word that has entered into the language of the world, and those even of least faith among you could say to me: “But, this is a very simple thing; it is a matter of vocation.” I am of your opinion: it is a matter of vocation, though I do not see that this is so simple a thing. For, after all, what is a vocation? You, perhaps, will say it is a sort of leaning, a natural inclination, an irresistible impulse. Yet, as a matter of fact, a vocation does not necessarily mean this, for very often it runs directly counter to one’s leaning, inclination, and impulses; nay, it crushes them and grinds them to the very earth. Let us not mistake the meaning of a vocation.

We do not all learn our vocation by being struck down with lightning as did the Apostle Saint Paul. We do not read in this supernatural light the will of God in our regard. The dark night of uncertainty surrounds us, and groping in its shade, we go in search of the path that He has marked out for us. A man’s choice appears, to me the more sublime in proportion to the liberty he enjoys in making it. Before the evident will of God, what can man’s will do but submit? But when the divine will conceals itself and remains shrouded in mystery, the human will is then determined by its own free motion, and if in this case its choice be noble, elevated and sublime, then to it belongs the honor and the glory of the same.

In reality, this is the way things come to pass. The young man, or the young woman, arrives at the age of seventeen or eighteen years without receiving any revelation from on high. The hour is now at hand for deciding the future. He enters within himself, and endeavors to withdraw his mind and heart from all things here below. Then, in silence, alone before his God, he puts to himself the great questions of man.

What am I?

What are you, my child? A creature, upon whom God has bestowed the gift of life.

Why am I in this world?

God has placed you here in order that your intellect may know Him, that your heart may love Him, and that your will may serve Him, and for this and for no other purpose are you here. Every creature that is about you, on the surface of the earth, in the clouds of the air, in the waters of the ocean, your fellow-men, society, the whole world, all these are of secondary importance, my child; they are but lights and aids to conduct you to His knowledge, love, and service.

And by what road does God wish me to walk? How does He wish me to serve Him?

Your answer, my child, must come from your reason and your heart. My friends, examine all the treasures of ancient philosophy, look into Plato and Aristotle, go back even to the old wise men of India. I defy you to meet with anything which approaches this sight — a young man, I was about to say a boy, in the very bloom of youth, with a heart open to every passing hope and dream, ignorant of all that deception and treachery which enlighten us with their dismal glimmer, an honorable youth, pure and beautiful in the sincerity of his innocence and generosity, there alone, with his forehead in his hands, thus meditating and weighing the momentous problems of human life.

He is seeking, therefore. There is in his heart a desire whose spur from time to time he has felt. Is God calling him? And, always before God, keeping his will well in equilibrium, in one column he writes the reasons which urge him to follow this attraction, in another those which persuade him against it. He puts his desire on trial. This is the hour of debate. The hour for the verdict is to come. With regard to these reasons for and against, in what spirit does he weigh them, to what light does he go to judge his case? Ah! it is to the light of his life, is it not? — of this life which shines out from those clear eyes, of this fervid life in which one lives at eighteen years? No, it is to the light of death! My child, regard the life of this world as of little consequence, it passes so swiftly. You are very young, you believe, but you have already run at least a quarter of your course. You are young, yet it is possible that you may die tomorrow. Even supposing that you are to live a long time, still imagine yourself now at the entrance of the next life, the immortal one, and death it is that must open it for you. Place yourself upon your bed of agony; ask yourself how the contrary desires which now distract your soul will then appear, how you will then wish to have judged in the matter you must decide today. Do today what you would then wish to have done.

And in imagination, the youth places himself upon his bed of agony, and from the threshold of eternity, he judges this life which is passing. It is done. The young man or woman arises, a child no longer, but a priest, a religious, a sister of the poor, a victim whom God has chosen as a holocaust to be offered upon His altar.

Do you believe that in coming from this solemn tribunal the heart always finds in the decision of the free will joy and peace? No; human nature is not so easily disposed to make a sacrifice and here a sacrifice has been made. Often the poor young heart, at the moment when the will makes its decision, is rent asunder. For though reason and faith tell many beautiful truths about the transitory nature of this life, how fleeting and deceptive is the world, and how little we should esteem it, yet to flesh and blood this life does not appear the less beautiful nor the world the less fascinating.

The young man knows very little of it, but in the glimpses that he catches of it how much there is to enchant him — and precisely by reason of the little that he knows, it seems to him the more attractive. Take my word for it, his heart is the same in this respect as our own. He loved the world as you loved it. What to you seemed good and desirable, seemed good and desirable to him also. Like you, he felt the tender bonds of warm and holy family affection, he experienced the charms of

wealth, and thrilled beneath the intoxicating caress of glory. Did he succumb to these allurements? No; he has firmly seized the heart which was escaping him; he has brought it under the law of the new duty which has just become known to him; he has bent it beneath the yoke of his will, he has chained it there, he holds it there trembling but conquered. Once more I ask you to find me in all the history of philosophy, ancient or modern, anything to equal or approach in sublimity this spectacle in the case of a young man or woman of eighteen years — God, that is to say, truth, appealing to reason, reason commanding the heart, and the free co-operation of these powers of man resulting in the voluntary sacrifice of every human passion.

I would like to touch here upon some of the notions circulating in the world as sound currency on the subject of priestly and religious vocations. The first which comes to my mind is such as to make one smile. It represents the religious life as the city of refuge for despairing souls. It was in a book otherwise very serious, “La Propriété,” (‘The Property’) by Monsieur Adolphe Thiers, that I made for the first time this wonderful discovery. The religious life in his opinion is a kind of moral suicide advantageously replacing the other. Under this aspect, he blesses it. If a mind so elevated as was that of Monsieur Thiers, after considering the subject, comes to a conclusion so amusing, you can easily judge what are the conclusions arrived at by many others who follow his line of thought, yet have not his high character and mental culture to guide them in their reasoning.

There is a very simple answer to give these men. It is this. The vast majority of those who choose the priestly or religious life, choose it at eighteen years of age! Eighteen years is not, as far as I know, the age of final despair! It can happen no doubt that a soul, bruised and buffeted by the vicissitudes of life, a ship dismantled by the storm, takes refuge in the harbor of the religious life. But this happens rarely. The followers of Abbé Armand de Rancé (died in 1700), who was the repentant abbot of the Trappist Cistercians, or of Madame Louise de la Valliere, who was the ex-mistress of Louis XIV who ended her life as a strict Carmelite nun, can be counted on one’s fingers.

I shall now give you a further argument and one that you will readily grasp. The despair of man is not of long duration; the illusion that has been dispelled soon again charms him. The Jews raised their heartrending cries beneath the lashes of Pharaoh. Moses came to their relief, led them out of bondage, and nourished them with manna. What hymns of deliverance and joy went up the first few days! But soon the manna seemed to them insipid; and, as the memory of the lash gradually faded away, they again sighed for the flesh-pots of Egypt. And so it is for the most part with the shipwrecked mariners of the world; the quiet of their haven soon wearies them. Similarly, the manna of the religious life soon grows insipid, and without much delay, they seek again with sighs the flesh-pots of Egypt.

We often hear another opinion expressed which in the main is the same as the first; yet the shading in the picture is somewhat softer, for it makes the religious life the refuge, not indeed of despairing souls, but of those crossed in love. However, if all the cases of disappointed love found their only remedy in the religious life, we could never stop enlarging our monasteries. This heart ailment seldom calls for so severe a treatment. Knowing that it is not likely to prove fatal, it is dealt with somewhat as a cold in winter; it is left to be cured by the gentle hand of time. No; the religious vocation has not its origin in the dramas of the heart. It springs, as I have shown you, from a calm consideration of life and eternity. It is not the passionate determination of a mind troubled by sorrow and suffering, but it is a duty recognized and freely accepted.

But here arises what seems to be a more serious objection. “A calm determination, do you say? How can that be? You fill the mind and feverish imagination of a child with thoughts before which even a man shudders — and then you talk about calmness and tranquility. You bid him place himself in his last agony or at the door of his tomb and there from that point of view form his judgment of the world and life, and then you talk to us of his liberty of choice! Why your very attempts to rescue him from his perplexity have driven him straight to fanaticism. The young man no longer has a clear view of things, nor the liberty to come to a rational decision. He is delirious, or I might say hypnotized, subjected body and soul to the influences of another.”

First of all, let me reassure you: this frightful specter that you have conjured up can harm no one, but vanishes before the clear light of facts. For the fact is that of these poor young people, whom you have pictured as affrighted, delirious, hypnotized, by far the greater part, though making their election on the brink of the grave, not only prefer and choose the goods of this world but devote their life’s energy to the strenuous pursuit of them. Indeed our very number, forming as we do, even in the Christian world, so small a minority, ought to reassure you. Furthermore, even admitting the truth of this great agitation and trouble, I maintain that your concept of the religious vocation is erroneous, seeing that the decision taken under these circumstances is by no means irrevocable. The troubled soul will grow calm, the victim of delirium will regain his senses, the hypnotic sleeper will awaken, and, if it then seems good to him, he can change his resolution. Nor is this without precedent.

But now to go to the heart of the matter. You reproach us because we consider life and choose our path in it, as men who are doomed to die. But how would you wish us to consider it and to make our choice? As men who are not going to die? No, this is not your idea; but it is rather as men who, destined to die, do not care to reflect upon the fact. This is a very strange proceeding. Surely, you ought not to disregard the conditions of the problem to be solved. And yet in every instance among these conditions there is one which, because it annoys you, you strive by every means in your power to keep in the background. This condition is death. Now I ask you, which of us plays the franker part? Surely, it is I. This may seem strange to you, but this is not all. I also play the truer part. What is the length of man’s life upon earth? Thirty years, forty, sometimes fifty or sixty, rarely more than seventy. Let seventy years then be the period of our life here below. This is one part only of our life, remember. There is another part to follow after. And how long does this last? You answer me yourself: For eternity.

Ah yes! I, too, would say for eternity, but eternity in my opinion is an unsatisfactory word. It speaks to the intellect, but says nothing to the imagination, and it is by the imagination that words appeal to us. I remember that in my youthful days preachers met the difficulty by astounding comparisons, such as the boundless sea to which a child came every century to take away... a drop, - and when drop by drop the sea was drained, what was this immeasurable series of past ages? Nothing, if put face to face with eternity. Another favorite comparison was that of an immense tower of bronze, upon which a little bird rested for the space of a second each century. Calculate the unnumbered ages that must elapse before the pressure of the tiny feet has worn this vast structure to the earth. What are they to eternity? Nothing, absolutely nothing.

Let me mention yet another comparison and one which I like to make use of during my retreat each year. Astronomers tell us that out on the confines of space there may be stars whose light, though it has been steadily traveling since the beginning of the world, has not yet had time to reach us. Yet light travels about one hundred and eighty-five thousand miles in a second. Now imagine a ray of

light setting out from one of these stars across that immense distance thousands of years, it may be thousands of centuries, ago; during all these myriad ages it has sped, it has flown swifter than lightning, without a turn, without a rest, at the rate of one hundred and eighty-five thousand miles a second — and it has not reached us yet! Go over the route on foot at the rate of a mile an hour: try if you can realize the sum total of centuries during which you must travel in order to reach the end. Nevertheless, this would be a mere nothing beside eternity. And the reason is obvious. In all these figures, whether the sea, the tower of bronze, or the passage of light, there is a measure, an end, a terminus; while in eternity there is none. Time and eternity are ideas that have nothing in common: they belong to two distinct orders of things.

After all I have just said, surely you will not refuse to admit that seventy years when compared to eternity is a quantity which, without being absolutely nothing, may, however, in the presence of the infinite be wholly neglected. In this light then, consider what I say to the young man: “My son, do not think of these seventy years alone, the first part of your existence. Think also of the remainder; it is eternity.” And then notice what you say to him: “My friend, think of your seventy years, and do not worry yourself about the remainder — it is only eternity.” Which of us, I ask you, succeeds best in placing the young man face to face with the truth? I have played the franker part; have I not also played the truer one?

Or again, let us suppose that I wish to settle down in a foreign land without any intention of returning, and I ask directions of a friend. He conducts me to the station, and finds me a seat in one of the forward cars. “One moment, please! Where is this train to bring me?” “Oh, don’t trouble yourself about that. You have five whole hours to spend in this car, so make yourself comfortable. Here are some cigars, newspapers and a novel. Put your feet on the heater there and keep warm.” “This is all very good, but where am I going to get off?” “Oh, don’t think of that now; it is too bothersome. Besides, this is no time, man, for that. You are traveling now. When you get to the end, that will be the time to find out where you are.

You would say that a man who would talk like that had no sense. And yet is not this the very counsel you give, fatally, alas! to a young man seeking advice? Following your directions, he looks no farther than the present life. Prosperity in this world he makes his final end and to attain this end, sparing no effort, he works and toils unceasingly at the law, in politics, in the army, in the sciences, in literature, or in the arts. At length behold him at the summit of his ambition. He has gained position, wealth, and glory; he is the possessor of everything that makes life desirable, he has attained what the world calls success, and in the sumptuous magnificence of his mansion, surrounded by his wife and children, he is about to repose and enjoy himself.

Suddenly his door opens; he turns around. There in his winding-sheet stands pale Death with the dread announcement that he must die. Die! Die! Ah! how this word pierces him to the heart! What! Die! Why he has not yet thought of dying! Die! But he has made no preparations for death. He has prepared everything for living! Oh, how his feelings and his mind shrink back in horror from the thought! How he struggles and writhes in the clutch of that bony hand! But his struggles are all in vain, for who was ever able to cope with Death? Without delay, without pity, the stern tyrant has laid him low. See him, as he lies there, cold and rigid in his coffin. His life, his earthly life, that life on which you had him fix his every thought, which has been for him the only end of all his labor and all his trouble — what is there of it now remaining to him? The love of his wife and of his children, what is this now to him? Fortune, luxury, fame, all are left behind. Already you may see the poor coffin, as he is borne away bereft of all these things that were his life and the passion of his

heart. And he comes terror-stricken and unprepared to the other side of the grave, to the portals of the other life, the true, the great, the immortal life. But, alas, no respite or reprieve is granted, no further chance is given to make ready for his entrance! The time of his preparation is forever past. Behold the awful agony of this wretched man, and see what your delirious and hypnotized persons have avoided. Though many of them, it is true, chose a career in the world, still in their choice they never forgot that this life was only a halting-place on their journey, and they shaped their conduct accordingly.

Turning from the scene of woe, which we have been contemplating, let us pass to the consideration of another view of our subject. Sometimes the world evinces a sort of compassion for the young men and women who desert it. “At eighteen years!” they say; “but one does not know what one is doing at that age!” Alas! how true this is! No, a person does not know what he is doing at that age; he does not know this even at twenty years, nor at thirty. He does not always know it at forty; and there are not a few persons who pass their entire lives without knowing what they are doing. This ignorance of the future and of the causes and inner nature of things infects all human decisions, and gives them an element of uncertainty at times much to be deplored.

But we must resign ourselves to it, and I see that you are resigning yourselves to it very bravely. Was it not at about this age, at eighteen or twenty years, that you also decided your life’s work, that you also, light of heart, your eyes sparkling with hope and your lips wreathed in smiles, chose a lot from which you were never more to free yourselves? Is it not at this age that you fettered your existence with chains that nothing, either in heaven or on earth, can ever break asunder? And is it not true that often in after life, as at the sad awakening after a beautiful dream, the illusion is dispelled, and when the brightly glancing sunbeams of early days have grown dim, has not a steadier light revealed to you a marked contrast between your youthful ideal and the stern reality? In the face of these tardy discoveries what is the course of action adopted by an honorable man or a woman of sense and character? They bear their misfortune patiently; and with the fortitude of great souls, with the fidelity of generous hearts, they courageously support the weight of their self-imposed burden. If it happened that later in life the priest, the religious, the nun, arrived at a like discovery, they would bear it as you do; they would support the weight of their duty with the fortitude of a great soul and the fidelity of a generous heart.

I have just been dissipating what I might call the legend and the romance of the religious vocation. The reality is of far greater interest and worth. In proof of this, I could tell you many a charming tale, full of simplicity, yet grand and touching in the extreme. Time does not permit me. Yet let me at least tell you of one incident that happened almost beneath my own eyes. In my native place, a quiet and somewhat dull little town of Flanders with a scanty but very devout population, any man who did not fulfill his duties as a Catholic was soon known to all, and the number of such men, I must say, was not large. Even the children got to know them and would look upon them with a peculiar half-sad, half-frightened expression of countenance. There was among these a man who received a special share of deferential pity. Belonging to one of the best families in town, honest and true, generous to the poor, he had won the respect and love of all, but in speaking of him, people always added: “What a pity that he has fallen away from the Church! He does not go to his duties.” His two charming daughters in their exchanges of confidences again and again deplored their father’s indifference in matters of religion. How often had they prayed God to change this beloved heart! One day a plan of action suggested itself to them. They embraced each other; their lot was cast.

Some time afterward the elder daughter addressing her father said: “Father, I would like to become a nun.” The father grew pale, and started back: “Oh, my daughter! Oh! my child!” he cried, and then remained speechless. But soon reassuming his wonted calm and firmness of character, he added: “My child, if you believe that happiness is there, I shall not oppose your design; but you should first consider the matter well. I ask you to wait one year.” She waited. In company with her father, she visited Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and various parts of France. Then, as she remained unshaken, he himself conducted her to a convent in Paris. He gave her a last embrace, the heavy iron gate closed upon her, and he returned alone, sad of heart, to the little town of Flanders. A year passed by and the younger daughter came in her turn to her father: “Father, I also would like to become a nun.” It was too hard this time; the father did not know how to answer. He took his child in his arms and wept over her. But he made no opposition; he went with her on the same painful journey that he had made with the elder child, and there in the great city of Paris the door of the cloister closed between him and the daughters whom he adored. What passed in the heart of the desolate father on his return to his empty home God alone knows. One day he was seen in thoughtful mood setting out for the old church. He went within. When he came out, he was again a Catholic. The same day a friend, who knew the secret, speedily announced the good news to the cloistered daughters at Paris. They opened the dispatch; a cry escaped them and with tears of joy, they threw themselves into each other’s arms. God had accepted their sacrifice, for both had offered themselves as victims for the soul of their father.

God was good to the old man. During the Franco-Prussian war, when at the eve of the investment of Paris the religious houses were closed, the two sisters came to seek refuge at the house of their father. A wing of the paternal mansion was reserved for them; one of the great drawing-rooms became their chapel and the lay sisters who had followed them formed there with them a small community. Once more, the old father could enjoy the society of his daughters. When peace was declared, they returned. The farewells were still sad, but sweeter than before; the parting was still a sacrifice, but it was offered with more resignation, with more of a Christian spirit, with dispositions more worthy of the reward. Some months afterward, the father went to receive it in heaven. This is the kind of romance, my friends, that may be found at the threshold of the cloister, but the convulsive drama that the world falsely imagines — never!

I have told you how priestly and religious vocations originate. Then come what are called the seminary and novice-ship. There for a long period the candidate is designedly subjected to many severe tests of his vocation. He drains there, if I may so express myself, the bitterest dregs of the chalice; he becomes acquainted with all the privations and trials of a religious calling, so that it is with a thorough knowledge of their obligations that young men or women bind themselves to their chosen life. And how different in this respect is their position from that of many young people of the world, who in binding themselves by the ties of matrimony have too often no conceptions of its trials and responsibilities! Some writers have remarked that if marriage had its novice-ship, it would count few professed. While I am by no means of this opinion, I do believe that a number before taking their final vows would desire a change of convent.

After the time of probation is over comes the solemn day when the young clerics pledge themselves forever to their freely adopted life. Behold them ranged before the altar in the choir of some grand old cathedral. The bishop, crosier in hand and clothed in all the splendor of his sacred vestments, addresses them a last time: “My dearly beloved children, reflect once more on the charge that you today presume take upon yourselves. Now you are free; it is still permitted you to return to life in

the world. A moment more and you will be no longer at liberty to reconsider our resolution. While there is yet time, reflect —" The bishop ceases speaking and for a moment, a deep and impressive silence pervades the church. It is broken only by the solemn tones of the bishop as he resumes: "But, if you persevere in your sacred wish, in the name of the Lord advance." And they advance, they take the step, that step which places forever between them and the world an unfathomable gulf.

And the young maiden? The Church has surrounded her sacrifice with ceremonies still more touching. These vary, it is true, in different Orders; but their symbolic leaning is ever the same. Let us take, for example, the reception and profession of a Poor Clare. On the appointed day, arrayed like a bride, she comes forward leaning on the arm of her father. Upon her white gown some flowers may be seen, the flowers of the world; upon her brow are flowers also, woven into a crown, from beneath which falls her long flowing hair. Following her come all whom she loves upon earth, her mother, brothers, and sisters. As the little procession advances the choir sings one of those inspiring hymns with which the Catholic Church from of old has loved to add beauty and impressiveness to her sacred ceremonies, invoking aid and a blessing from on high:

"Come, Holy Ghost, Creator blest,
And in our souls take up Your rest;
Come with Your grace and heavenly aid,
To fill the hearts which You have made."

The maiden has arrived at the altar. "My child," asks the priest in kind though solemn tones, "what is it that you desire?" The answer comes in accents distinct yet full of feeling: "The grace to give myself to God." "May God grant it to you," responds the priest, and he hands her a basket containing her true wedding presents. Here are the long coveted treasures, the gown of coarse cloth, the black veil, and knotted cincture. And while the chanting is resumed, she withdraws to remove her worldly apparel, the silk dress and lace ornaments, the jewels and the flowers. "My child," says the abbess, "may God strip your heart of the love of the world and instill into it the holy desires of the life that does not end." While she is speaking, the sound of shears is heard, and her beautiful hair falls to the ground. She soon returns bearing in her hands a large crucifix and preceded by a procession of all the nuns. Look, father and mother! Do you know your child? Do you recognize her there beneath the homely folds of this coarse gown? "My child," again asks the priest, "do you persevere in your desire?" And she with a brave heart replies: "I wish to separate myself forever from the world."

Then before the altar, upon the blue flag-stones, is spread out the black funeral cloth. The young maiden places there the large figure of our Savior that she was carrying in her arms. She turns around for a last time; then, upon this funeral cloth, she lies down at full length, her arms on the cross, her lips on her Savior's feet. The funeral knell is tolled, the choir chants the Litanies, and over her prostrate form, the priest sprinkles the holy water and swings the incense of the tomb. Finally, she rises, and taking her divine Betrothed in her arms, she presents herself to the priest to receive the crown of the spouse of the Crucified. The 'Te Deum' is intoned ('You, O God we praise') and the bride of heaven, crowned with thorns and bearing in her arms the image of her Spouse, turns toward the silent corridors of the cloister. As the procession moves on, the chant dies away in the distance, the old gate swings upon its hinges, the iron bolt slides into the stone, and all is over. The young woman no longer belongs to earth.

And now let us look at them in their new life, and try to see what manner of life it is, and what the influence they are to exert upon the moral progress of humanity. The answer to all these queries is not far to seek. The nun will instruct the young and ignorant. She will care for the sick. She will become the mother of orphans, the friend and consoler of the destitute. She will gather together the aged poor and shelter them. She will watch beside the dying, and attend them even to the tomb. On the battlefield, she will hasten to the wounded and dying. In short, there will be no pain, no suffering, no bereavement, no misery that she will not sacrifice herself unsparingly to alleviate. In all the great body of mankind, sick, feverish, and convulsive, there is not a wound or an affliction that has not its nun to dress and cure it.

And the priest is no less active and untiring. His duty it is to teach men the law of their intellect, truth; and the law of their will, duty; and not to teach them in some merely theoretical discourses, but to lead them to it as it were by the hand, by the force of his example showing them how to make truth and duty the abiding principles of their life. And when they have fallen away from this standard, his office it is to bring them back to the right path, by counsel and exhortation fortifying them against despondency at the weakness of their nature; and in attaining this end he will spare himself no fatigue or sacrifice. He will instruct the ignorant, he will console the suffering, he will assist the poor. In fine, like the nun he will devote himself to the alleviation of all forms of misery.

We need go no further. Let us suppose that the priest's work stops right here: that it is only to infuse light into the intellect, energy into the will, and resignation into the heart of his fellow-men. Let us ask ourselves what this means. It means nothing more nor less than the salvation of society. It means this, because it is directly opposed to the vices and evils that tend to undermine and destroy society, namely, darkness in the intellect, sluggishness in the will, and rebellion in the heart.

In this complicated organism that we call society every function or office that in any way concurs, be it ever so remotely, to the attainment of the common end is honorable and entitled to respect. There is an old proverb that says very well: "No trade is useless." The hod-carrier who passes me by in the street in his rough, lime-stained suit, with his hod upon his shoulder carrying his load of bricks, has a right to my respect, and I, if I am a man of sense, do not refuse it to him. For he performs his task in society as I do mine; and if I have a heart, I shall not hesitate to put my hand in his, for he is a fellow-man, a brother of the same flesh and blood as myself.

Nevertheless, though I owe honor to all, I do not owe it to all in equal measure. It stands to reason that the varied functions of society have a scale of order and pre-eminence, and there is a very simple and practical rule given for calculating their relative position in this scale; namely, that the dignity of any function is to be measured by the dignity of the object. Accordingly, the cook who prepares our meals has a just claim on our respect, but certainly not to the same extent as the legislators who frame our laws or the judge who interprets them.

This, you will say, is all perfectly clear, and you need not be reminded of it. Very well, then; let me ask where on this scale you are going to put the priest and the nun. This will have to be determined, you answer, by the object of their office. But this is the human heart, the human will, the human intellect, the human soul; aye, everything that is great, noble, elevated, I might almost say divine, in our human nature. For in fact what is the rest of man? Muscle, nerve, and bone, the material for an amphitheater. Where, then, is the place of the nun and of the priest? Upon the heights with heaven above their head and the earth beneath their feet.

Thus far, I have looked upon the priest and the nun and their mission in society only from a natural point of view; for I wished to make myself understood even by those who, not sharing our religious convictions, shut themselves up in a strict naturalism, and never venture outside of their narrow circle of philosophical opinions. By taking this course, I failed properly to set before you the full character of the priest. I pictured him to you not so much as a priest but rather as a wise man, who after the manner of the ancient philosophers devotes himself to the moral alleviation and perfection of his fellow-men and of his country. Still even from this incomplete view of his character, he deserves our admiration and love.

But the true priest, the priest who on the first day of your earthly pilgrimage has baptized your Christian brow; the priest who has placed upon your pure lips on the blessed day of First Communion ,the body and blood of Jesus Christ; the priest who has heard the trembling confession of your faults and the promises of your repentance; the priest who has blessed your marriage and who, beginning again his part in a new generation, has baptized your little children; the priest who, when the hour comes for you to say amid the tears and prayers of your loved ones a last farewell to this world, will pour the great waters of pardon over the errors and shortcomings of your life, who will console your dying hour whispering into your ear the words of immortal hope: “Depart, Christian soul, out of this miserable world, in the name of God the Father Almighty, who created you; in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, who suffered for you; in the name of the Holy Ghost, who sanctified you. Let your place be this day in peace - and your abode in Zion. May the noble company of angels meet your soul at its departure; may the court of the apostles receive you; may the triumphant army of glorious martyrs conduct you; may the band of joyful confessors encompass you; may the choir of blessed virgins go before you; and may a happy rest be your portion in the company of the patriarchs. May Jesus Christ Himself appear to you with a mild and cheerful countenance, and give you a place among those who are to be in His presence forever” — this priest, it is true, I have not shown you, for he belongs to the supernatural life, where the wings of Faith alone can bear the heart. The little that I have said, however, suffices to show you that in society the most active instrument, the firmest support, the staunchest defender of order, is the priest. And he does not fail you at the approach of new political crises which threaten the existence of well-regulated society. You remember the reign of the Commune at Paris in 1871. Well, at the end of the second siege this Commune, maddened by its defeats, was seized with a frenzy for fire. With floods of petroleum, it set in flames the Tuileries, the Louvre, the Hotel de Ville; just as it wishes to destroy and burn still, for it fain would reduce to ashes and cast to the four winds of heaven all that is good in the present order of society. But to return. After the rage for fire came the thirst for blood.

This is what the History books say. ‘At the head of the group of martyrs of the Paris Commune is the Archbishop of Paris, Monsignor Georges Darboy, to whom the discomforts of his prison life were peculiarly trying on account of his feeble health. His fellow sufferers were: the Abbé Deguerry, curé of the important parish of La Madeleine, an old man, well-advanced in years, but bright and vigorous; the Abbé Allard, a secular priest, who had rendered good service to the wounded during the siege, and two Jesuit Fathers Ducoudray and Clerc. The first was rector of the Sainte-Geneviève School, a well known preparatory school for the army: the second had been a distinguished naval officer; both were gifted and holy men. To these five ecclesiastics was added a magistrate, Senator Bonjean. After several weeks of confinement, first in the prison of Mazas, then at La Roquette, these six prisoners were executed on 24 May. There was no pretense made of judging them, neither was any accusation brought against them. This revolutionary party still held

possession of the east of Paris, but the regular army, whose headquarters were at Versailles, was fast approaching, and the leaders of the Commune, made desperate by failure, wished to inflict what evil they could on an enemy they no longer hoped to conquer.

‘The priests had, one and all, endured their captivity with patience and dignity the Jesuits, their letters prove it, had no illusions as to their probable fate, Archbishop Darboy and the Abbé Deguerry were more sanguine. "What have they to gain by killing us? What harm have we done them?" often said the latter. The execution took place in the evening. The archbishop absolved his companions who were calm and recollected. They were told to stand against a wall, within the precincts of the prison, and here they were shot down at close quarters by twenty men, enlisted for the purpose. The archbishop's hand was raised to give a last blessing: "Here take my blessing", said one of the murders and by discharging his gun he give the signal for the execution.’

Now, let me tell the story. One evening a mob of men, women, and children rushed into the corridors of the prison of La Roquette. From the depths of their solitary cells, the hostages could hear the clanking of their arms and their confused cries and ferocious laughter. Then for a moment silence ensued while a loud voice called out: “Bonjean, Deguerry, Clerc, Ducoudray, Allard, Darboy.” At each name, the door of a cell opened and a victim came forth. Then, between two rows of executioners, they were conducted to the roadway around the ramparts. Ah, what a procession! A corporal led the march; then came Georges Darboy, the Archbishop of Paris, who though feeble, gave his arm to Chief Justice Bonjean. Next, supported by the two Jesuits, Clerc and Ducoudray, came the aged Deguerry, venerable curé of the Madeleine, bending under the weight of his eighty years; and last came the Abbé Allard, followed by the eager and infuriated mob, already cocking their muskets and revolvers for the honor of the first shot.

Arrived at their journey’s end, the victims were ranged in a line against a high wall. Then all that array of weapons was leveled in disorder — the mob took aim — they fired, and the martyrs fell all wounded and bleeding. Lift up the dead, my friends, and see who they are. A magistrate and some priests: Religion and the law. When anarchy wishes to revenge itself upon society, this is where it strikes. It reasons shrewdly: it aims at the head.

There is still another phase of the life of the religious that I have not yet set before you. One night in a dream Francis Xavier saw our Divine Lord appear, accompanied by a poor savage, blind, naked, and starving. As he was gazing upon this strange vision, our Savior took the wretched man and put him upon Xavier’s shoulders. Still in a dream, Xavier carried him; he felt himself bending under the burden, but he bore it courageously. Some time afterward, Ignatius of Loyola, his superior, bade him set out for the Indies. Then he saw the meaning of the mysterious vision: Our Lord had called him to the service of the idolatrous nations of the East, and with joy and alacrity, he responded to the call. Taking his breviary and his staff, on the very next day, he began his journey.

The poor savage still appears to the priest and to the nun. They see him blind, naked, and famished still; they behold him ignorant, weak, and suffering, and like Xavier, taking up the missionary staff, they set out on long journeys across the sea, to far distant and often inhospitable lands, in order to carry to the poor heathen the light of faith and the strengthening and consoling teachings of the Gospel. Their part, as you see, does not change; it is always the great part of teacher, encourager, and consoler, of which I spoke a short time ago: it is the theatre and scene only that change. Let me follow them with you on their voyage to the land far away, where they are exiled and where without again seeing their native shore they are to die.

The Roman statistics report about six thousand as the number of European missionary priests spread throughout the world [at the time of Father Van Tricht's retreat]. Besides these, it may be mentioned, there are thousands of nuns and of men not priests employed in foreign missionary labors. The above figures suffice to show that the missionary is not altogether an exceptional personage in the ranks of the priesthood. His occurrence does not excite any astonishment. When one of our friends comes to shake hands with us and says, "Good-bye — I am going away on the foreign missions," our heart is no doubt touched, but we experience no sudden shock or surprise. The matter happens too frequently for that.

It might seem that after the sacrifice of family, worldly future and of fortune, after all the renunciations already made by the priest, the sacrifice of his native land should not demand a very great addition of courage. Ah, but you deceive yourselves! It is possible that I myself may receive at any hour the order to set out, and if it comes, I earnestly hope that with God's help I shall courageously obey. Nevertheless, when the thought of departure suggests itself, and the prospect of the new life is unfolded before my imagination, I can feel my heart instinctively shudder and grow faint. For this time, it is not honor or fortune, or the ease and comfort of life that costs to leave. No, the rice of China is as good as the wheat of Europe, and one can get used even to the heat of India's sun. But there is something better than this, is there not, in life? We have renounced the hope of a family of our own, it is true; but there remain our mothers, our fathers, our brothers, and our sisters. We do not live under their roof, but occasionally an hour for seeing them again arrives, when they may come to visit us in the parlors of our cloisters. Oh, how this hour is looked forward to and impatiently awaited! And when they do come at last, and their hands are clasped in ours, and our eyes meet! Ah! you do not know, you do not know, how sweet and comforting, even through the grating, is the sight of a mother's face!

We have renounced the hope of a family, it is true; but we have brothers and sisters who have their little children to whom when young they have taught our names, whom we have seen grow up, whom we have even carried in our arms, who recognize us with a smile and who love us almost as though we were a parent. We have renounced a family, it is true; but we have not renounced friendship. "Friendship," says Lacordaire, "is a rare and a divine thing and the highest of visible rewards assured to virtue." How many hearts have come to us, wounded at times and bleeding from the experiences of life, and have become bound to our own hearts by sweet and tender links! How many souls are entwined with ours never more to be separated, because our affection for one another has its roots not in earth but in heaven, not merely in things carnal but in things spiritual! And what joys God gives us to taste in this "reciprocal possession of two minds, two wills, two existences, with no fear of ever separating and separating never."

Now tell me, do you think that you can realize the anguish of soul felt by a priest or nun, when God calls, saying, "Come, my child, leave those last consolations of your life. Leave them and come!" And the missionary leaves all and goes. Let us witness his last moments in his native land. The great engine of the ship has sounded its inauspicious whistle, the revolving screw dashes up the foam and sends out the yellow waves surging from the stern. See him there on the bridge, looking at the pier, whence his loved ones are crying out their last farewell. He sees them desolate and weeping as before the tomb. Quickly the sea widens between him and his dear ones — he can no longer make out their words; their voices for him are already dead, but his eyes possess them still, he sees their handkerchiefs and the hands which wave them. Priest! Point high your hand toward heaven in order that your aged mother may see it still, and that she may understand that it is God

alone that demands this martyrdom of the heart of man, and that there in heaven at least you will meet again! Oh! if you knew the sadness of these last farewells that have mingled with them no earthly hope!

Formerly in the life of the missionary, there was a peculiar feature which could give it a human charm, and genuine attraction, although inferior to those left behind. It was the life of travel across unknown regions; an adventurous life, disengaged from the enslaving conventionalities of our old European society; a life wider and freer, in which zeal and personal enterprise could soar at will. When the mind dreamed of it, it saw pass before its eyes virgin forests and guileless tribes. It is in the past, however, that one must put all this; all this poetry is no more. How often does the missionary, disembarking beyond the seas, find himself face to face with teaching the rudiments of Latin and Greek at Calcutta, at Zika-Wei (the Cathedral precinct of Shanghai), , at Alexandria, as he had to teach them here in our colleges! You will acknowledge that this is not a prospect very fascinating to human nature.

But let us suppose that he is fortunate enough to escape this old academic drudgery. Behold him in the jungles of India, in the forests of central Africa, in a village of China. He builds for himself a little hut of wood and clay, he erects with his own hands his little church with its thatched roof, he preaches and toils unceasingly, he makes conversions, he gathers a little flock of sheep around him, he saves souls! Ah! this is for him a great triumph and a great happiness! How fervently he thanks God! How gratefully he blesses Him! How he counts as nothing all his sacrifice and his suffering! But sometimes, on the other hand, his words, his prayers, fall upon sterile soil; sometimes whole years of preaching secure at most but one neophyte; sometimes, even when he has succeeded, and has formed his little Christian family, the gold of the Bible societies snatches from him one by one the souls whom he has at the price of so great pain brought forth to Christ.

Ah, this is a hard life, and one which demands hearts as strong as steel; for discouragement and sadness have their hour in this life as in every other, and you know well what they mean. Then, too, there are at times few things to encourage him. Look at the life of a missionary in the solitude of his exile, and tell me what human consolation you find there. I know of one, and only one: letters from home! Oh, the well-loved letters, the sweet pages written by the loved ones left behind! This is the language of the native land, these are the accents of the mother, of the brother, of the sister, of the friend, this is their soul found again there in the mute signs where lives the thought! Oh, yes, the blessed letters, how they are awaited with longing, feverishly opened, read and read again, and carefully laid by as a delightful reserve for gloomy days! Then when discouragement and sadness come, after consolation begged of God, he will go there, to seek and again read those blessed pages, yellow now with age, ever finding in them a fresh tenderness and sweetness. In them, he will see, for an instant at least, pass and re-pass before his eyes the beloved forms of those whom he loves and whom he has left forever.

But even his letters will not always bring him joy. One day, a letter comes. Even as he holds it in his hands, a cruel presentiment seizes him. He opens the letter and at the very first line, he grows pale. Far away across the ocean, his mother is dead, without his seeing her again or receiving her blessing or even being able to close her eyes! And alone, in his little hut, without a heart to whom he can unburden grief, he weeps. On the morrow, at the altar, still alone, he will celebrate the obsequies of his mother, and if some native assists at the sacrifice, he will ask in astonishment why his priest weeps and prays in black vestments, for there is no one dead about him. There is one thought drawn from faith which consoles the priest; the thought of seeing his mother again on high. This is what

consoles you also in bereavement; but it is sweeter to the missionary, because for him the hour of reunion is never slow in coming. Death arrives quickly in his life.

At times, there is what Lacordaire called the beautiful death on the scaffold, or martyrdom in the massacres of China and Tonkin, Vietnam. But these deaths have a glory and a luster about them, which seem to contrast too strongly with a life of such solitude and abnegation. There is one kind of death, however, that seems to me the true one for the missionary. Francis Xavier had passed ten years in India, Japan, and other parts of the far East; he had established the Faith in fifty-two kingdoms, had traversed on foot more than eight thousand miles of country, had baptized with his own hand more than a million neophytes; yet his dreams of conquest did not stop here; they went further, for he wished to evangelize the vast empire of China. He embarked in a Portuguese ship which was to convey him thither. As he arrived at the island of Sancian off the coast of China, he fell violently sick of a fever. Realizing that his death was near at hand and that he must give up his hopes of entering and converting China, he desired that he might at least die upon its threshold, and accordingly he asked to be put ashore. His wish was granted and he was left upon the beach with only an Indian boy, whom he had befriended, to care for him. He tried to walk, but his strength soon gave out. He was forced to stop, and, while his companion ran to seek some help, he folded up his cloak for a pillow and calmly lay down upon the ground.

Before him, almost hidden in the distance, lay the coast of China; on his left could be seen the lonely expanse of ocean; in the great tree-tops along the shore the wind sobbed and moaned; a gray sky extended above his head its dismal vault; no human sound came to his ear in all the immense wilderness so vast in its gloomy silence — “vasta silentio.” Xavier took up his crucifix, and clasped it fondly to his breast, while with upturned eyes and a countenance radiant with celestial light he whispered: “In You, O Lord, have I hoped, let me never be confounded.” Then his noble head sank upon his shoulder, and alone upon this desert shore, the hero who had electrified two worlds, the apostle, so great that he has been compared to Saint Paul, solitary and forsaken yet peaceful withal and even joyful, yielded up his spirit to the Master whom he had served so well.

I have given you in a few rapid strokes a picture of the priest and the nun. I have tried to describe to you their ministry and the place that they aspire to fill in society; and in doing this I purposely put aside, as much as was possible when treating such a subject, all supernatural considerations. But why not recur to them now — that is, to the motives, that inspire the priest and nun to undertake their heroic mission in society? Let us frankly examine what is the secret power at work to influence so many of our fellow-beings to lead lives so much at variance with the world.

Is it self-interest, the quest of ease and the comforts of existence, or thirst of fortune? This can not be; you know it well, after all that I have said.

Well, then, the desire of great influence d unbounded power, the passion for domination over men? But the priest has not unbounded power, and even the influence that he has over souls depends on their free will for acknowledgment! They are always at liberty to throw off the yoke.

What then is this motive force? Fanaticism? Ah, let us first understand the meaning of our term. The dictionary defines it: “Religious exaltation which has perverted reason,” and then it cites the following from Voltaire: “Fanaticism is to superstition what delirium is to fever, and what fury is to anger.” Now take any one of our country pastors living quite forgotten, unrecognized, and in poverty in his little parish in the wooded depths of the Ardennes, ten, twenty or thirty years of his life; observe the nun in the hospital and among her orphans; behold the missionary in his hut of mud

and rushes on the banks of the Ganges or beneath the torrid sun of Africa, and tell me where is the exaltation, the perversion, the fury? Where is even the fever or the anger? Search through the annals of pathology, and find me a single case of anger, of fever, of delirium, of exaltation, which lasted fifty, forty, thirty, or even ten years? Cases of fanaticism and religious exaltation do occur, I admit; but they occur rarely. Now to solve the problem presented to you in the lives of priests and nuns by declaring them all fools and fanatics would be to give a solution that any clear thinking man would set down as wholly inadequate. And yet we are fools, we are mad; but it is with the folly of Saint Paul, who makes this world which quickly passes away count as nothing, and heaven, which does not pass away, count as everything.

Yes, we are fools; but ours is a folly that does not intoxicate nor take away our reason, for what the soul has put to its lips is the wine of divine faith, hope, and charity.

Behold here is the secret of the priest and nun! Behold the wonderful interior force that impels them forward and strengthens them in their arduous life! They believe, they hope, they love. It is their spirit of faith, hope, and charity that sustains and invigorates them.

When at the first step in his career, at the ceremony of the Tonsure, the bishop cuts his hair, the young priest exclaims: “Dominus pars haereditatis meae et calicis mei: Tu es qui restitues haereditatem meam mihi.” “The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and my cup: it is You that will restore my inheritance to me.” Here, then, is what makes his soul brave and his will like iron; what gives him courage to sacrifice and forsake all; what makes him rend his heart in twain; what, when all enchanting pleasures revolve in his imagination and he feels his heart opening to their attraction, and his hands stretching out to grasp them, makes him restrain his heart and clench his hand and exclaim: “No! No! Later on! In heaven! In heaven!” He believes; he hopes; he loves.

APPENDIX.

In the Acta Apostolice Sedis, July 15, 1912, we find the following decision regarding the priestly vocation:

To the Right Rev. Charles M. A. De Cormont, Bishop of Aire, Aquitaine, France, concerning the book entitled “La Vocation Sacerdotale,” (“The Priestly Vocation”) written by the Very Rev. Canon Joseph Lahitton of the same diocese.

Right Rev. Sir:

On account of the controversies that have arisen occasioned by the two works of Canon Joseph Lahitton on the priestly vocation, and because of the importance of the doctrinal question involved, our Holy Father Pope Pius X has deigned to appoint a special Commission of Cardinals.

This Commission, after a careful examination of the arguments on both sides, in its plenary assembly on the 20th of last June gave the following judgment:

“The book of the illustrious author, Canon Joseph Lahitton, entitled La Vocation Sacerdotale, is in no way deserving of censure; moreover, for his statements that: 1: No one ever has any right to ordination before the free choice of the bishop.
2: The condition, which ought to be regarded in the candidate for ordination and which is called a priestly vocation, by no means consists, at least necessarily and ordinarily, in a certain interior aspiration of the subject or invitation of the Holy Ghost to enter the priesthood.
3: But on the contrary, in order that he may rightly be called by the bishop, nothing more in the

candidate is required than a right intention together with a fitness placed in those gifts of nature and grace and confirmed by that probity of life and sufficiency of learning, which furnish a well-founded hope that he may be able to properly discharge the duties of the priesthood and holily fulfill its obligations: he is deserving of the highest praise."

In an audience of the 26th of June, His Holiness Pius X fully approved the decision of their Eminences the Cardinals, and he instructs me to inform your Lordship that you may please communicate it to your subject Canon Joseph Lahitton, and have it inserted in full in the Semaine Religieuse (Religious Week) of the diocese.

I beg your Lordship to accept the assurance of my devotion in Our Lord.

Rafael CARDINAL MERRY DEL VAL.

Rome, July 2, 1912.

We cite this decision in full because of its importance as being approved by the Sovereign Pontiff and in order that it may be seen that Father Van Tricht, though writing some years ago, makes no statement contrary to this decision. In the case of every candidate for ordination, at least nowadays, there is a long period of preparation consisting in earnest reflection, prayer, entrance into the seminary or novitiate, followed by years of study and training. On all this, Father Van Tricht dwells at some length. The candidate now arrives at the time when the bishop is to decide whether or not to ordain him and at this point the decision above mentioned takes up the question. Can it be possible that a candidate may go thus far and still not be designed by Almighty God for the priesthood? It would seem so. What has the bishop to look to in the candidate? A right intention together with mental and moral fitness. If these are judged present, the bishop may rightly call the candidate to ordination and all concerned may rest assured that this candidate has a true vocation from God through the bishop. If, on the other hand, the bishop decides to refuse or defer ordination, the candidate is not to consider himself injured; he has no right to ordination previously to the free choice of the bishop, and he may be certain that God does not wish him to be a priest, or at least not yet.

But what about all those inspirations that he has been receiving for years urging him on to the priesthood? May it not be that God's evident will is being frustrated? While it is true that God wishes us to place no obstacles to the free working of the Holy Ghost in our souls, and moreover the vast majority of candidates who persevere to the time of ordination are ordained; nevertheless we are not to rely on our own discernment in interpreting the origin and nature of every movement in our soul. So far as the frustration of God's evident will is concerned, we need never be afraid that we shall be frustrating God's evident will when we are humbly following the guidance of His Vicar upon earth whom in His love and mercy He has vouchsafed to give us.

Thanks to Benziger Brothers, New York.