

THE MOST REVEREND J. S. ALEMANY, O. P., FIRST ARCHBISHOP OF SAN FRANCISCO

Part II

WE have already remarked that the seventh Provincial Council of Baltimore held during the month of May, 1849, proposed a list of candidates from which the Holy See was asked to select a bishop for California. After mature deliberation the Holy Father Pius IX chose the Very Reverend Charles Pius Montgomery, O. P., ex-Provincial, and requested that the bulls be sent to him immediately. In vain was Father Montgomery begged to accept the dignity, preferring to labor as a simple priest on the missions of Ohio.

A General Chapter of the Dominican Order was holding its sessions during the summer of 1850 in Naples, and Father Alemany, as Provincial, represented the American Province. Here was a man eminently suited for the position. A Spaniard by birth, though an American in spirit as well as by adoption, his ten years of experience had made clear to him the situation confronting the Church in the United States. The blending of the old and the new would progress more easily under his administration than under any other. Consequently, on May 31, 1850, he was appointed to the See of Monterey. The bishop-elect spent the following month in preparation for the awful burden of the episcopacy; and on June 30 he was consecrated in the Church of San Carlo, Rome, by Cardinal Fransoni.

It was an arduous problem which now confronted Bishop Alemany and one which he immediately undertook to solve—the acquisition of worthy laborers for the new diocese. Father Vilarrasa, O. P., who had acted as his Socius to the Chapter, volunteered to accompany him and to establish the Order of

Saint Dominic in California. Together they left Civita Vecchia on the evening of August 5, 1850, crossing to Marseilles, whence they proceeded to Paris. In spite of the earnest representations made for co-workers, the bishop's Parisian quest appeared, for a time at least, almost fruitless; the only one to answer the call being Sister Mary de la Croix Goemaere, O. S. D., the first nun to labor in the present State of California. Ireland, too, seemed to turn a deaf ear to the pleadings of the young prelate, but in Father O'Connell, Vice Rector of All Hallows' College, and later Bishop of Grass Valley, he found a sympathetic friend. Not only did this zealous Irish priest promise to enlist young men for the mission, but he himself gave up a brilliant professorial career to work in the Sacramento Valley.

On September 11 Bishop Alemany, Father Vilarrasa, two Dominican nuns from Toulouse and Mother Mary embarked from Liverpool for America, on the sailing vessel "Columbus." The voyage was long and tedious. But its monotony was somewhat relieved through the kind offices of the captain, who fitted up a suitable chapel for the celebration of Mass and the administration of the sacraments. The Bishop preached frequently, and a large and respectful congregation attended the services.

One month later (October 11) they arrived at New York, and after a brief stay with Archbishop Hughes, Doctor Alemany proceeded to Baltimore, there to interview the Primate of the American Church, Archbishop Eccleston. In the meanwhile Father Vilarrasa hastened on to Ohio, where the two French nuns were exchanged for Sis-

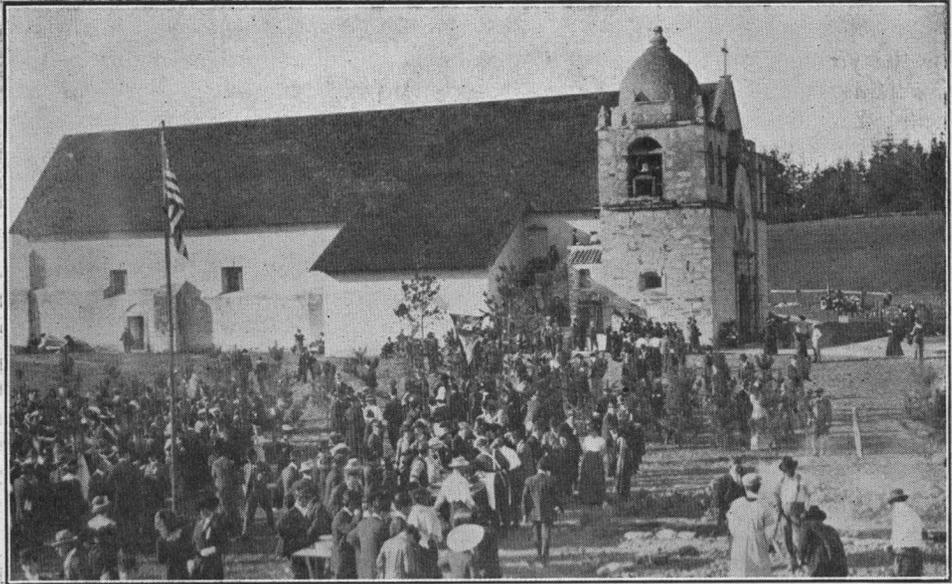
ter Francis Stafford and Sister Aloysia O'Neil who were to come to Monterey as soon as provision could be made to receive them.

The little company, now reduced to three, left New York October 28 en route to San Francisco by way of Panama. At length, after a dreary and uneventful journey of thirty-nine days, Bishop Alemany and his travelling companions entered the harbor of San Francisco a little before midnight December 6, 1850.

From every quarter of that cosmo-

action would be for them and their spiritual advancement.

True to his word, he left at once for Santa Barbara to obtain from Father José Maria Gonzalez Rubio, O. F. M., who had acted as vicar general of the diocese, an exact account of the ecclesiastical affairs in California. From the lips of that venerable Franciscan he learned of the strong opposition which Mexico made to a citizen of the United States having authority over any portion of Lower California. And after taking counsel with the Fathers of



Mission San Carlos, Monterey

politan town Catholics hastened forth to do homage to the newly appointed prelate, whom they greeted with ejaculations of praise and benediction. This demonstration deeply touched his kind heart and awoke a sympathetic chord in the soul of the Bishop. At a public reception given December 10, in the small schoolroom attached to Saint Francis' Church, he thanked them for the honor they had shown him and promised that henceforth his every

Santa Barbara he determined to appoint Father Rubio his vicar in that part of the diocese which lay south of the Mexican frontier. Spring was now advancing and anxious for his flock, he turned homeward, bearing the official documents and what little money his predecessor, Bishop Diego, had left.

Innumerable hardships and inconveniences awaited him. The presidio chapel of San Carlos, at Monterey, at present the best preserved and most

beautiful of all the missions, if we except that of Santa Barbara, was in a state of decay. Father Ramirez y Arrellano, a Dominican from Mexico, acted as pastor, but how the good Father managed to exist was a problem to all. There was then no episcopal palace, not even a small adobé, that Doctor Alemany could call his own. In his diary he notes his arrival in the following terms: "I established myself at Monterey, receiving board and lodging from the kind hospitality of the Gonzalez family, and of Don Manuel Jimeno and others."

The Bishop from the first had cherished plans of educational institutions for the youth of California. The task of raising colleges for young men he confided to the Jesuit Fathers, reserving for himself the no less difficult one of acquiring a building suitable for a convent of nuns.

Don Guilermo Hartnell, an English convert and a man of culture, had in 1834, together with Father Patrick Short, a member of the Picpus Congregation, established on the Hartnell Rancho of Patrocino an academy which for two or three years was attended by the sons of a few prominent families. The attempt was a failure. Nevertheless, Mr. Hartnell was now willing to deed over for a small consideration a house which he owned in Monterey, if it could in any way promote the cause of Christian education. The Bishop purchased it, and in March, 1851, Father Vilarrasa and Mother Mary arrived to begin the work.

The following year Bishop Alemany attended the First Plenary Council of Baltimore, and on the advice of the Delegate Apostolic, Most Reverend Francis Patrick Kenrick, and of the assembled bishops, the particulars connected with the Church in California were forwarded to Rome along with the recommendation to divide the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the State.

In answer to this petition San Francisco was made an archdiocese, July 29, 1853, while Doctor Alemany was transferred thither to become its first metropolitan.

What a contrast between the conditions which the first metropolitan of the Far West had to face sixty years ago and those of the present day! From Santa Cruz to Oregon and from the Ocean to the Rocky Mountains were the limits of the archdiocese. San Francisco, now the proud metropolis of the Pacific Coast with its five hundred thousand inhabitants, its commerce with the world and its magnificent buildings, was then little more than a struggling miners' settlement.

And yet he of whom we speak achieved through careful toil, through much labor, results whose very enumeration would extend far beyond the limited sphere of this article. His life and his labors are his best eulogy. For thirty-five years Archbishop Alemany devoted all his energy to the extension of the faith in California. He saw San Francisco grow from a town of tents to a city of marble palaces and churches of stone. He directed the interests of Catholicity until they expanded from the condition of scattered missions, with a few half-hearted communicants, to the possession of two hundred churches with a membership approaching a quarter of a million souls. The active work of Archbishop Alemany continued down to the year of 1884, when failing health and advancing years warned him to rest. At his own solicitation he was relieved of the burden of office and permitted to retire to the home of his childhood in Spain.

There is no page in California's history more beautiful or more pathetic than that upon which is inscribed the record of the saintly prelate's departure—the severing the chain which bound the people of the Golden State

to their first archbishop. The voluntary laying down of the mitre by a high prelate; his retirement to the seclusion of a monastery; and the self-abnegation involved in such a surrender of ecclesiastical authority is beyond the comprehension of ordinary mortals. It belongs to an heroic age. The deed-ing to his successor of the vast aggregation of property amounting to many millions of dollars in value which he had so long held in faithful trust, and his grateful acceptance of a few thousand dollars to pay his expenses back to Spain, seemed to his contemporaries like the act of some apostle of olden times. It surely did not belong to the gay honor-loving life of America.

What more tender or loving words could have been uttered than those of his final address to the people of San Francisco: "I am nought but a frail human being. If I remain among you to receive your honors and your adulations I shall forget that I am an humble disciple and shall learn to value the comforts and luxuries of life. It is best that I go back to the simple Order whence I came, and to which I have given my vows, that I may continue to the end in lowly submission to the will of the Great Master." Accordingly, during the month of May, 1885, he prepared to leave forever the beautiful City by the Golden Gate—a city that was dear to his heart.

Of all the receptions tendered him none touched him more profoundly than that given by the Chinese converts. Every province of the vast Empire was represented. An Italian missionary, who had spent some years in China, delivered the address to which the Archbishop responded. Nor was his English-speaking flock less appreciative. On the afternoon of his departure, Sunday, May 24, 1885, the old ferry building was crowded to its utmost capacity with citizens of every denomination eager to kiss for the last

time the hand that had become worn in their service. But the final triumph was reserved for Oakland. As the train on which he took his departure passed Sixteenth Street Station, the three hundred people who had gathered there fell instinctively upon their knees and begged his final benediction. In the National Capital, too, he was received with marked distinction. General Rosecrans presented him to President Cleveland and the State Department and the deepest reverence and respect was shown to the aged prelate.

But on reaching Spain he did not retire or take the rest he so well deserved; instead, he went about performing the duties of a simple priest. It was while hearing confessions in the Church of Our Lady of the Pillar, Valencia, on Saint Joseph's Day, March 19, 1888, that he suffered the cerebral attack which caused his death. He lingered on until April 14, when his pure and noble soul returned to the Creator whom it had served so well.

After the solemn obsequies in Valencia, the remains of the illustrious prelate were borne to his native place, where they lay in state in the chapel of the Dominican Sisters of Vich. On the morning of the 18th the funeral cortege wended its way to the Cathedral where Solemn Mass was sung for the repose of his soul. At its conclusion Canon Vilarrasa, a relative of his lifelong friend and fellow religious, preached the funeral discourse. Once more the procession passed through the city on its way to the Church of Saint Dominic, where the final resting-place was prepared. There in ground hallowed by the Saints, whose example he had ever striven to imitate, were interred the mortal remains of a worthy religious, a zealous priest, an apostolic bishop, a man beloved by all—Joseph Sadoc Alemany of the Order of Preachers, first Archbishop of San Francisco.

—Sebastian Bohan, O. P.