particular, by which they vouched for the sanctity of the missionaries and the wonders operated by their means. It was thus that Providence arranged all things to work together for their good; for after four successive appeals, after eight months' intriguing at Rome, where neither money, chicanery, nor falsehood were spared, the only result was making known to the Pope the excellence of the Congregation they tried to calumniate, thus verifying the prophecy of Zacharias, "Thy salvation will come from thy enemies." But in the intermediate time Alphonso and his companions drank the bitter chalice of tribulation.

CHAPTER XX.

While the house of Pagani was agitated by the tempest, God opened a new field to Alphonso, destined to receive seed not less productive than that which had hitherto been sown. Don Dominic Fiori, professor of music in the cathedral of Naples, having no heir, determined to found a house in his native place, Madugno. The project pleased the Archbishop of Bari, Mgr. Gaota, who knowing Alphonso anticipated the greatest benefits for his diocese. He united with Fiori in inviting him to give a mission at Madugno, in order to excite the inhabitants to wish for their establishment. Alphonso accepted the invitation, and it was decided that he should

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go there in the month of November. When the prince of Castellaneta, Don Mathias Miroballo of Aragon, heard of this journey, he besought Alphonso to visit on his way his fief of Iliceto, to give the inhabitants the instruction and consolation of which they were so much in want.

This was no sooner known to Mgr. Lucci, Bishop of Bovino, than he dispatched a Canon of his cathedral, James Casati, to join in the invitation, which Alphonso accepting, he arrived there with his companions on the 12th of the month. This mission had the usual success. The Canon had a further object in inviting him. At the corner of a wood called Vallin-Vincoli, on a small elevation, stood an ancient church dedicated to the Virgin, under the title of Mary of Consolation. It had once belonged to the Augustinians, and in this church was a large painting of the Virgin Mary, for which the faithful of Iliceto and the neighbourhood had a great veneration. Canon Casati, who had a great devotion to the place, and above all to this picture, had resolved on establishing a community. The prince of Castellaneta having spoken much to him of Alphonso, he desired if possible to have him there, that the devotion to our Lady might be revived. Mgr. Lucci eagerly joined in this scheme, anticipating the fruits which his diocese would derive from it. Alphonso however hesitated to accept the proposal, because the distance between the church and any inhabited place was very considerable; but when, yielding to the entreaties of the Canon and the Chapter,

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he visited the picture, he was so captivated that the Fathers Cafaro and St. Severino easily persuaded him to accept the offer, to the great joy of the people.

Once settled at Iliceto, he saw in the Pouille the vast domains of the crown, where thousands of men were employed in keeping flocks and herds, and cultivating the ground to produce food for them. He sighed at the sight: in these territories were several hundred persons, who rarely received any spiritual assistance, and even on feast days had seldom an opportunity of hearing mass. Touched by their destitution he sent his companions out in different directions to distribute to these poor people the bread of life; and he looked forward to the house of Iliceto becoming the place from whence these abandoned people would derive spiritual succour in time to come.

Animated with a zeal always active, he exposed to the king of Naples the deplorable state of this population; and the necessity of assisting them. The king replied through the Marquis Branconi, that he had learned with great satisfaction the benefit the people had already drawn from these missions, and that he hoped to see them continue their labours with increasing zeal. His Majesty gave his approbation for the new house at Iliceto on the 9th of January, 1745.

After having arranged the affairs of this house, he assembled his companions and departed for Madugno towards the end of the same month.

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The mission was a difficult one, and cost much labour and fatigue. For many years no missionary had visited the place; piety was almost extinct, and sin dominated. But God blessed their labours; the whole town were touched by grace, and the most obstinate sinners came full of compunction to cast themselves at the feet of the missionaries and renounce their evil deeds. Good succeeded to evil, ancient confraternities were re-established, convents reformed, and many priests whose conduct had only been coldly regular, roused from their inaction by Alphonso, became ever after zealous and devoted to apostolic labours. As usual he succeeded in inspiring a great devotion towards the Blessed Virgin and the most Holy Sacrament.

This mission lasted forty days, so great were the wants of the inhabitants; all admired the zeal of the missionaries, and wished them to settle among them. In short the foundation was almost concluded, when Alphonso heard that the king of Naples had granted an establishment to the Fathers of St. Vincent of Paul in the town of Bari; and in order not to interfere with this mission he advised Fiori to make arrangments with these Fathers for Madugno. The religious of a monastery in this town attest that one morning while Alphonso celebrated mass in their church, he was raised several feet from the ground.

After their return from Madugno, Alphonso and his companions suffered much in their new establishment at Iliceto. Besides their voluntary

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penances, they experienced on all sides suffering and affliction. The person who gave the house, reserved the revenues for himself during his life, and there remained nothing for the fathers. A priest who was there during that winter describes in a letter the state to which they were reduced. The bread, he says, was of rye, mixed with bran, black as a coal, and ill baked, and sometimes they had none at all, and were obliged to accept the charity of an old man who lived on the produce of his goats and the culture of a small field near his cottage. For pottage they had a species of broth or panada, or bruised beans, so old that they had the colour of bread. They never tasted meat, except when some sheep or cow died of exhaustion. They had no fruit but wild chesnuts or crab-apples. They rarely had wine, and then but in small quantity, and very bad. On feast days they had a large cake made of the same flour as the bread, but seasoned with a little cheese and salt, for sugar or pepper were luxuries they could not afford. They had no linen, and no money to buy it. They were almost shirtless, and could only change once in two or three weeks. There never was a religious house where greater poverty reigned: their clothes were ragged and patched, their pocket handkerchiefs a wisp of straw or rags. The house was an old convent, suppressed during the pontificate of Innocent XI., and was but a mass of ruins and filth. The wind blew more keenly within than without, the walls were full of cracks, the partitions brick without mortar.

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The windows were of oiled paper instead of glass. The roof was bad, the cells were without ceiling, so that the snow covered the beds during winter: in short, the misery was so great, that one of the fathers lost courage, and returned to the world.

Alphonso himself wrote at this time to a friend, "If God does not help us speedily I shall be obliged to send away my companions, for we have nothing on which to live. Though we eat only beans and drink dirty water, yet we have nearly six hundred ducats of debt."

Among all these miseries, or rather in consequence of these miseries, Alphonso had the misfortune to lose his dear Vitus Curzius. During the month of July, being without food in the house, he was sent to beg a little corn. Although the good brother was unaccustomed to traverse the country during the burning heats, he nevertheless obeyed; but one evening being refused a lodging at a convent of nuns, he slept in the field, and during the night was seized with violent fever, and not being able to drag himself to his own convent, was taken into the house of a charitable priest. After forty-nine days' intense suffering, he went to receive the reward of his labours in the mansions of the blessed. His death occurred on Saturday, the 18th of September, 1745.

This death afflicted Alphonso deeply, though consoled by the reflection that he had died rich in merits and virtues. The chapter of the Cathedral and many priests joined the missionaries

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in paying him the last honours. All the confraternities with numbers of the faithful also assisted, imploring his protection and invoking him as a Saint. Alphonso sung the mass amidst torrents of tears, which frequently interrupted him. Mgr. Amato, Bishop of Lacedogna, had a great devotion towards this holy brother, and would have his skull for a relic, preserving it during twenty years on his prie-dieu. After the death of this prelate it was brought back to the house of Iliceto, where it still remains. An abridgment of his Life has been written by Alphonso.

CHAPTER XXI.

The fury of the inhabitants of Pagani was not abated, and new plots were invented to ruin the missionaries. It is thus that God permits His elect to be tried by heavy afflictions, in order to exalt them the more at last, allowing those enterprises which tend most to promote His glory to be crossed and combated, that afterwards the strength of His powerful arm may be more clearly displayed.

After their successes at Naples and Rome, every one thought their troubles were over, but they were deceived. Cantaldi continued to look coldly on them, and did not disguise his animosity, hoping to attain his object through the instrumentality of others, until finding himself disappointed in this, he threw off the mask

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and openly attacked them. Scarcely had Alphonso returned from the Pouille, when he openly revoked the donation he had made in their favour, and in concert with his sister cited them to appear before the council of the king. Not knowing how to justify this step, he pretended that the missionaries had deceived him in usurping the title of Congregation, when they had neither been recognised by the king nor the Pope; he demanded in consequence that they should be forbidden to build, protesting he had made the donation not for a Religious Community, but for a College of Priests.

The affair seemed of such importance, that the council sent a royal auditor to verify the facts on the spot. The claims of Cantaldi were found insufficient, and on the 11th of January, 1745, the auditor, in the name of the council, confirmed the missionaries in possession of the property, the donation being found valid and irrevocable.

This disappointment did not abate the animosity of Cantaldi; at the instigation of his partisans he presented a claim to the king filled with malignity rather than reason, to which thirty priests put their signature. In this instance they refrained from attacking Alphonso, but levelled their batteries against his companions. The Syndic of Pagani and three other Syndics undertook their defence, and the indubitable integrity of Alphonso and his companions made his majesty withstand all the numerous attempts against them. The Marquis Branconi bid them

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be of good courage and fear nothing, for the king was too much scandalised by the conduct of priests, who, established to be the mediators between God and the people, ought to have been most zealous in promoting such a work, rather than undermining it. When an army besieges a town, they first attack it boldly, in the hope of intimidating the inhabitants; but if these defend themselves with courage and boldness, they next proceed to undermine the walls. It was plain, however, that these men acted entirely at the instigation of the devil. They introduced two barrels of gunpowder under the foundation of the house, and had not one of their accomplices, stung by remorse of conscience, revealed the plot, the whole would have been destroyed. Father Mazzini from that moment was obliged to keep a strict watch nightly.

Alphonso was then at Iliceto, and far from being discouraged by this barbarous attempt, his confidence became greater from having escaped so many imminent dangers. Meantime the fathers at Pagani remained, as it were, shut up in prison in the house of Cantaldi. Living under the same roof with him they necessarily often met, but their salutations were almost never returned. Placed under a continual restraint they sighed for the moment of their deliverance; every minute seemed a year until the buildings were finished. F. Mazzini in writing to Alphonso, expressed himself thus: "I am dying with desire to quit the house of Cantaldi, where we are an object of contempt to all the secular priests. I

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would be contented, my father, to live on the grass of the field, in order to save something to forward the buildings; but this is morally impossible, for we have no other revenue than what is derived from three masses, and the provision of grain is small indeed."

The new Bishop, Mgr. Volpi, was not less favourably disposed towards them than his predecessor, Mgr. Dominicis, had been; far from taking part in the animosity of their enemies, he protected them on every occasion. It was determined that they should assist at processions, and like other priests obey the chapter of the cathedral, but the Bishop freed them from these obligations, and also that of assisting at conferences on moral cases. He liked to see them directing the confraternities of gentlemen and tradespeople. He used to attend the sermons delivered to the former, and often called upon the fathers to fill different offices in his diocese.

Enjoying the protection of the Bishop and also of the king, Alphonso nevertheless would have yielded so far to obtain if possible a truce with his enemies; but the prelate with the elite of the inhabitants of Nocera would have him remain firm, as all were convinced that on the establishment of the Congregation at Pagani depended the education of the young, the instruction of the clergy, and the general reformation of the people. They protested their determination to defend his cause to the last, until justice should be triumphant, and although their

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firmness rejoiced him, he yet regretted the continued disputes, which became more bitter than ever.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE daily vexations at Pagani took away all courage to remain longer than was absolutely necessary in the house of Cantaldi, where they were even threatened with death; accordingly the walls of the new building were hardly finished when they resolved to remove thither without heeding the risk they ran from damp and other inconveniences. On the 24th of September, 1745, they entered the new premises during the Octave of the Archangel Michael, protector of the Congregation.

When Alphonso at Iliceto heard of their installation, he rejoiced exceedingly, and wrote to urge them to a still stricter observance of the rule, which had been somewhat interrupted by all the previous proceedings. He assured them that God would bless them and make them become Saints, only inasmuch as they observed the rule in all its strictness.

The malcontents, provoked to see them established in their new house, again conspired against them, and obtained an order from the council forbidding them to proceed to do any thing new. Their intention was to interdict their entrance into the Church of St. Dominic,

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where they exercised their ministry, and to prevent the completion of the little church in process of building. By this they would have obtained all they desired; for finding themselves hindered from performing the functions of their ministry, they would have lost hope and definitively abandoned the foundation. Very little was wanting to the success of this last plot; nothing being finished in the new church, the scaffolding even being still about the arches of the roof. The day came on which an answer to their request was expected, when they would immediately signify to the Fathers that they had gained their cause. Preparatory to this, they had seized the keys of the Church of St. Dominic. Informed of all this by the gentlemen of Nocera, Father Sportelli besought them to seize the king's officer and detain him for one night only. All was done as he had desired. During the night he sent for the workmen, and in spite of the protestations of the architect, he boldly took away the props, smoothed the earth, erected a portable altar, and arranged as well as he could a sort of confessional. They ornamented the altar and the walls with hangings and tapestry, placed garlands and artificial flowers about it; and the previous evening having obtained permission to bless the Church, at day break he celebrated mass, preached, confessed, and gave communion to the people. During these proceedings the officer arrived with the despatch, and followed by a crowd, with an air of triumph he called for Father Sportelli and those of the

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