



MARTYR IN TIBET

The Heroic Life and Death of **FR. MAURICE TORNAY**,
St. Bernard Missionary to Tibet

by **ROBERT LOUP**

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of

Father Maurice Tornay

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by ROBERT LOUP

Translated from the French
by CHARLES DAVENPORT

DAVID McKAY COMPANY, INC.

NEW YORK

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JOHN A. GOODWINE, J.C.D.
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Imprimatur

✠ FRANCIS CARDINAL SPELLMAN
Archbishop of New York
May 14, 1956

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Manufactured in the United States of America
Van Rees Press • New York

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Martyr in Tibet

CHAPTER 1

Land and Village

The Route to the South

THERE are scenes that always keep coming back to me. . . .”

Maurice Tornay, missionary to Tibet, remembered every detail of the landscape of his beloved Switzerland.

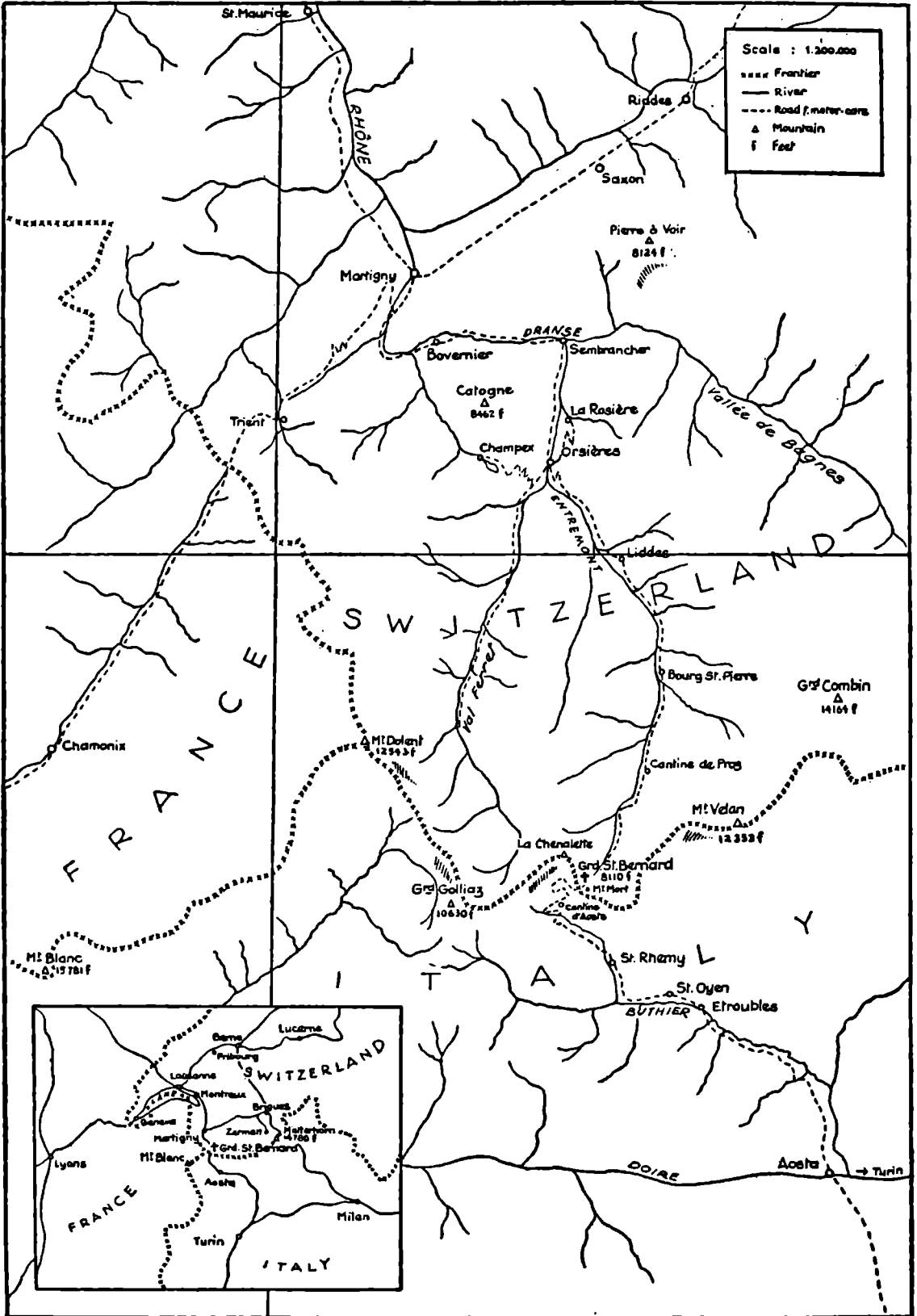
“The Crêtes ¹ that you can see so well when you go up from Orsières . . . the Lower Crêtes and the big rock just beyond the cabin . . . La Rosière [his own village] and the ash tree below our house . . . I used to look through its branches at the shadow that fell from the Catogne, and I was so happy.”

Let’s take the road that young Maurice, the mountain lad, followed so many times to go down to the parish church in Orsières and to go back home to La Rosière, the village where he was born and that clings to the craggy slope.

This is the Valais, that part of Switzerland where the Rhone River flows out onto an alluvial plain, while on the right and left, rocky mountains, slashed by deep torrents, make one tumultuous thrust up to those lofty summits of Europe: Mont Blanc, Mont Rose, and over on the Bernese side, the Jungfrau, the Eiger, the Mönch.

At Martigny, the Dranses Valley opens up toward the South. It forks at Sembrancher. On the one hand, toward the

¹ An Alpine chalet and pasturage.—*Tr.*



East, is the Bagnes country with Le Châble and Lourtier. On the other is the Entremont, an historic route, an international road that goes up to Grand St. Bernard Pass and descends into Italy through the valley of Aosta and Turin.

From the plain to the mountain, this route has been traced out by the blood of soldiers and martyrs. The Theban Legion was massacred at Agaune toward the end of the third century. Saint Maurice gave his name to the city. Saint Sigismond founded an abbey there in 515. Saint Theodulus, Bishop of Octodurus (Martigny), consolidated Christianity in the Valais and was declared its patron saint. Around 800, Charlemagne went over the mountain pass to be crowned in Rome; the Saint Charles bridge at Bourg St. Pierre recalls his passage.

In the tenth century, the Entremont became a robber land. The Saracens plundered travelers. However, a legend states that Saint Martin, Bishop of Tours, was able to reach Italy without being bothered—except by bears.² In 931, Bishop Robert, a distant successor, died with all his retinue at an inn of Orsières. . . . In 972, Saint Mayeul, Abbot of Cluny, fell into the hands of bandits and regained his freedom only at the price of a thousand pounds' ransom.

A half century later, Bernard of Menthon founded on the Mountain of Jupiter, Mons Jovis or Mont Joux, the hospice that was to become famous under his name and protection. Pagan gods bit the dust. An old engraving shows a young priest, vested in surplice and hood; in his left hand he holds a crosier, symbol of the archdiaconate, and in his right hand he grasps a chain that binds a mean-looking dragon that is crouching on the ground. In these high places, Bernard

² The town of Orsières carries a bear on its shield with the Latin inscription: "*Nomen dedi Orseriis*" ("I gave the people of Orsières their name"). [The town derives its name from *ursus*, the Latin word for bear; the French is *ours*.—Tr.]

liquidated the last remnants of pagan resistance. From then on, he and his followers would watch over the mountain. The route would no longer have any obstacles except the cold, storms, and the snow.

This is the route that Roman pontiffs and emperors took in the Middle Ages. It is the route that Bonaparte chose in May of 1800, to lead his forty thousand men to the victory of Marengo.

Life—Primitive and Pastoral

To get to La Rosière, one of the seventeen villages of the parish of Orsières, you take the rough path that runs along the hillside on the right bank of the Dranse. The whole valley extends below. Orsières is no more than a cluster of slate roofs that sparkle like old silver. The stone steeple with its spire in the form of an octagonal pyramid and its walls pierced with Roman or ogival windows shows both the village's center and at the same time its age. Stones crop out on the slopes. The land is poor, sandy. And yet nothing is neglected. Every plot, every flat place on the mountainside, every square foot of earth is worked, dug, sowed. Patches of potatoes or strawberries, rye or wheat fields, meadows for winter fodder—the peasant demands all he can get from the earth. But he has to pay for it, not with ringing coins, but with his patience, his sweat, his courage, his doggedness.

Women, their backs to the valley, gather strawberries and place them in white wooden baskets. A man and young girl are harvesting poor grain. He handles the scythe; she takes a bundle in her left hand and cuts it with a blow of the sickle. The grain is tied into sheaves and piled into shocks, the heads up. Here a farmer, carrying hay tied up in a tarpaulin, can hardly be seen under his heavy load. Farther on, a woman whose face is tanned by sun and weather keeps a cartful of

golden grain from sliding down the hill by holding onto the body of the cart with both hands and digging her heels into the ground. Over there, a man goes back and forth to the flow of water in the irrigation channels, using his long *torgneux* (a kind of wooden hatchet) to stop and direct the current from one section of a field to another.

Such is the primitive and pastoral life of this valley.

Such was the life of Maurice Tornay, a peasant's son. It is a school of strength and honesty, because you have to keep at it despite the poorness of the soil; you have to keep at it, joyfully accepting, without guile or malice, the harshness of each day.

Maurice wrote to a relative this strong and significant plea: "For me you'll love the meadows we loved so much. . . . You'll teach your children love of the land, won't you?—respect for those who have their hands soiled by work."

La Rosière

You walk among a few houses. This is Chez-les-Addy. You stop at a barn door to say hello to Jean Tornay, one of Maurice's older brothers. You look at him—medium build, square shoulders, browned face that sparkles with kindness and life, strong lips, determined chin.

"Hay in?"

"This is the last."

You glance at the full hayrack.

"Good crop."

"Always got to be satisfied."

The path goes on up. Orsières is about 2,900 feet in altitude; La Rosière is about 3,900. Up there above a roof, you see the round dome of an ash tree in front of the Tornays' house.

A path rises to the right and goes between the houses. A

lane leads to the left. At this fork is a chapel dedicated to Saint Ann. The hamlet is a compact group of dwellings, barns or storehouses, and granaries. It does not have the architecture and layout of a village on the plains which is simple, harmoniously conceived to meet the needs of men and beasts, with its farmhouses neatly set out at the edge of the fields. On this part of the land that their ancestors picked out, it was necessary to get along with little space, to fasten onto a spur of a rock, to take advantage of a slight platform, and to build the house, stable and barn according to the vagaries of the terrain. The gray stone house, covered with thick whitewash, crowds the storehouse with its blackened boards and shingled roof, and the tottering shacks that rest on stilts. Additional precaution has been taken with the barns: in each stilt a large flat rock protrudes and forms a real obstacle to the invasion of all kinds of rodents.

The Tornays' house faces the valley.

Family and Home

You enter a dark corridor. At the other end, to the right, a door opens onto the kitchen.

Maurice's mother died in 1948. His father,³ a man in his eighties, is still alert. He has a short, solid build. In his hearty simplicity he greets you with a smile.

There are seven children in the family. The oldest, Cécile (Mme. Gay), lives at Martigny-Bourg; Jean at Chez-les-Addy; Louis at Lavey Village; Marie lives with her father;⁴ Maurice left home in 1931; Marie Joséphine (Mme. Formaz) is at La Rosière; Anna, the youngest, entered the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of La Roche under the name of Sister Jeanne Hélène and is at Chambéry in France.

³ He died March 4, 1953, after this book was written.—*Tr.*

⁴ She is now Mme. Delasoie.

The first three children and Marie Joséphine have established their own homes. A harvest is growing, a new generation is flowering. You know that out of the twenty-odd nephews and nieces, some of them, if they are faithful to grace, will give themselves completely to God after the example of their uncle, Father Maurice Tornay.

Mme. Formaz and her sister Marie join you. The conversation is lively, joyful. Witty remarks and replies follow one another as do the laughs. You are struck by the easy-flowing language and the southern accent. Their minds are keen, sharp.

While you listen, you believe you hear another voice, the voice of Father Tornay. You recognize his voice in the numerous letters you read. The turn of phrase is brisk, the expression strong; jests flash through the lines like a sparkling stream. If life is serious, if events cause reflection, just in the nick of time the stroke of his pen overcomes sadness. This is the sign of a healthy, strong nature that insists on keeping secret the deep, uncontrollable feelings of heart and soul.

In the kitchen you sit down at the long family table. A narrow window lets in a little daylight. The walls and ceiling are black with soot and smoke. The wood stove squats under a mantelpiece. On the walls are hanging pots and pans that shine in the half-darkness. An old china closet with paneled woodwork stands against the wall that separates you from the corridor.

M. Tornay is a little deaf, but that does not lessen his vivacious spirit. You lean over close to his ear:

“You’re all alone now!”

“Oh! I’ll be joining my wife soon.”

“There’s no hurry. You’re still hardy.”

“Hurry or not, we have to wait. Blessed be God! He is giving me the grace to prepare myself for the next world.”

It is here that Maurice as a child, then as a young man,

lived part of his life. When he came back from the Abbey school where he was studying, it sometimes happened that he was alone for a while. The whole family was scattered; some were up at the mountain pasture, others were down in the vineyards on the plain near Fully. Since his wavering health called for a respite, he stayed there to rest up until the day when he felt better and could join the others in their common tasks and help them in the fields.

He took full advantage of this short period of solitude; he made his own meals with vegetables from the garden. Then, with his books under his arm, he went a little distance from the village to meditate leisurely under the shade of the fir trees. He took a path that slips beneath the house and rises between a large section of a wall on the right and the ravine on the left. He then skirted an old house of beautiful unhewn stone with an arched door and an inscription of the year 1610. He crossed a meadow, went under the larch trees and sat down a little farther on in a fir forest on a level spot that dominates a deep gorge.

This easygoing sort of life—good meals and long siestas—surprised a neighbor woman who called Maurice a lazy glutton. His mother, in whose presence this cavalier judgment was uttered, simply laughed. Isn't there a time to work? Isn't there also a time to prepare for work?

Beauty of the Mountains

To get to Maurice's room you go up by an outside stairs. You linger over the familiar things that were the framework of his happiness and education: that old stone stove with the date 1865; the corniced walls browned by time; the beam that supports the ceiling and bears the inscription "Praised be Jesus Christ. . . . 1776"; religious pictures: the Sacred Heart, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, a colored picture showing Saint

Francis of Assisi receiving the stigmata; an image of a great heart, red as blood, in a glass case. . . . On the chest of drawers, a large swinging mirror with a minutely carved wooden frame. . . . An armchair. . . . Then two photographs of a nun: Sister Jeanne Hélène.

At the double window you remember Maurice's words: "The ash tree below our house . . . the shadow that falls from the Catogne."

What a beautiful landscape! On the right, the Pierre-à-Voir lifts its solitary crag above the forests and pastures of Levron. You can imagine the Bagnes Valley at the bottom. Towards Martigny, the high hill of Chemin is furrowed by twisting mountain paths that lead to Vens and the des Planches Pass. Straight ahead is the Catogne with its enormous bases which delimit the Dranse, from Sembrancher to Les Valettes, the Dranse of Entremont and Ferret up to Somlaproz, and the Champex Valley. Seen from La Rosière, the Catogne is not the great green conelike mountain that fills the Rhone Valley when you see it from St. Maurice. Here you see a rocky wall, gray and brilliant, a triangle 980 feet high. Torrential waters and avalanches and the falling of stones into fissures have caused gullies that grow and fan out all the way down the valley. From 6,500, and even from 5,000 feet downward the land and forest offer habitable slopes again. Villages that make up the commune and parish of Orsières are situated in the most hospitable places. The land, slashed by hedges and alders, held up by retaining walls, descends step by step to the road below. Toward the south the country rises again.

All you have to do is to stretch out your arms. This immense landscape is yours. Now you know what Maurice meant when he said of it: "I was so happy!"

The Parish

Maurice Tornay was born on August 31, 1910. He was baptized in the church at Orsières on September 11. His godfather, Lucien Gabioud, was from Chez-les-Addy; his older sister, Marie Cécile, was his godmother.

He was given Nicholas as a middle name after the patron of the parish.

Thus from birth, Maurice had the privilege of being surrounded, and as it were, borne by the saints of the country and the living piety of the faithful. Saint Maurice would teach him Christian courage and the way to offer himself as a holocaust in the service of the Lord, even unto death. Saint Nicholas of Myra would never stop saying to him: "Love children—go bring those young pagan souls to the Truth."

Moreover, every Sunday when he came down to the church at Orsières, he saw the images of the patron saints who would repeat their plea to him. The main altar is made of brown wood in modern Gothic style and has three niches. Saint Nicholas is in the center; on the right is Saint Maurice dressed as a Roman legionary; on the left is Saint Theodulus, Bishop. Saint Nicholas is pictured again in the stained glass in the apse, on the Gospel side; on the opposite side another stained glass window shows Saint Bernard of Menthon.

The church dates from 1896. Built of porous stone, it is divided into three naves with vaults that are supported by ogival mullions. The side altar on the right is dedicated to Saint Joseph, the one on the left to Our Lady of the Rosary. This church replaced a fifteenth-century edifice of which two noteworthy parts still remain: the pulpit and the baptismal font.

I like to think that young Maurice, who loved wood and stone, the honest work of the artist or craftsman, had a pre-

dilection for these two objects. The pulpit, attached to one of the columns, symbolically rests on a crouching armored warrior, his face haggard and his mustache as pointed as a lance. The pulpit itself is decorated with double twisted columns, between which, in the metopes, decorative motifs are inscribed. A sculptured hand comes out of the top edge and presents to the people a crucifix with realistic expression and color.

The baptismal font is on the same style. Little angels with folded wings form the columns of the lower part. The middle section is hollowed out: on the inside, Saint John the Baptist pours water from the Jordan over Our Lord's head. The whole is surmounted by a great crown, a globe, and a cross.

In receiving the baptismal waters, the newborn baby was inscribed in the church and in the parish along with the legion of the living and the dead that from bygone centuries to our own day make up the City of God.

But the family gave the blood, the land, the customs and the inclinations.

During our visit to La Rosière, we noticed their liking for down-to-earth, strong, gay language. Hospitality is not an empty word to them. Welcoming people is an obligation. The white tablecloth is thrown over the kitchen table. The meal they get together—pot luck—is as varied as it is tasty: sparkling wine from their ancestral vineyard; rye bread as hard and delicious as nuts; ham; smoked sausage; and a square of homemade cheese. A liqueur adds its spicy flavor to the already excellent coffee; the liqueur is made from grape skins mixed with some bunches of Alpine wormwood. I can testify that these products of the land satisfy your appetite as much as they gladden your heart.

The family's openhanded welcome even at the first meeting is only a sign of a greater perfection: their love of the land,

tenacity in labor, dedication to a common cause, and spirit of faith.

Maurice had ancestors he could take after. He was descended from ancient families—the Tornays, and on his mother's side, the Rossiers—which since the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries have given the Church and the community men who have gone down in local history. Philibert and Mermet Rossier were notaries; one in 1482, the other in 1518. Another Rossier gained distinction as *métral* (town treasurer) of Orsières in the sixteenth century. Jean Nicholas, a priest, died in 1870; Father Séraphin, a Capuchin, in 1928.

The chronicle tells us that three of the Tornays were monks of St. Bernard: André was prior at Martigny in the sixteenth century; Jean Nicholas served as the order's treasurer at Martigny and died in 1866; Etienne Louis, pastor of Sembrancher, had the present chapel of St. Eusèbe built near Somlaproz—he died in 1917.

Maurice had the qualities of his race.

Look at his picture. His large open eyes shine behind his glasses. They are searching eyes that rest on things with insistence, observe at length, and retain the essential facts. With that look, Father Tornay won the affection of the souls he was working for and brought to life for us the sites and customs of Tibet in a colorful, brisk style. While kindness is revealed by that mouth with the long well defined lips, his broad forehead under his dark chestnut hair, the jutting of his lower jaw and the clean cut of his chin attest to an uncommon energy that perhaps goes all the way to stubbornness.

He never forgot that he was the son of a peasant, a son of Orsières. *Noblesse oblige*. For him there was only one way to live—to go upward always, like the mountain climbers and skiers of his country, to the top of the mountain. To love a

cause is good. To devote yourself to it fanatically is still better.

Maurice always kept an undying love for his little country and for all the greatness it symbolized. He was to say proudly: "I'm from La Rosière!"

CHAPTER 2

From Home to Boarding School

The Shepherd

TO GET an idea of what Maurice's childhood was like, all you have to do is to climb one of the roads that lead to those villages lost on the slope. You meet boys with tanned faces and dark, smiling eyes: they have a serious, playful, mischievous way about them. You ask them questions. They are a little embarrassed but answer you with gracious assurance.

Very soon Maurice knew the mountain life—all of it. He was hardly a year old when his sister—to give his mother a little rest—was taking him up to the pastures and guiding his first steps in front of the chalet. At the age of three or four, the little fellow knew all the animals and went after them when they wandered from the pastures.

Thus every summer, from May to October, he went with his family, first to the Lower Crêtes; then, later in the season, to the Upper Crêtes.

The path comes out above the village of La Rosière. It rises through a meadow, then abruptly runs into the woods.

“That path was made by a lame man,” Father Tornay wrote later. It really is hard, painful, and long. Finally after an hour-and-a-half walk, you come to the Lower Crêtes. The chalet squats on a flat place, at the edge of which stands a large cross. The stable runs the full length of the chalet. The

kitchen, living room and bedroom form one floor out of half the space.

When the cattle have eaten the grass during the first weeks of pasturage, the herd moves on to the Upper Crêtes. Here the stable is separate from the living quarters. The rough stone walls harmonize with the gullies and rocks that spot with gray the landscape dominated by green: the somber green of the firs, the softer green of the larches, and the yellow-green of the meadow.

You are told: "Papa built these chalets at the Crêtes."

Since leaving La Rosière, you have ascended about 2,600 feet. The pasture of Moaye, where the chalets of the Lower Crêtes are set out in echelons, is over 6,500 feet high. Lying on Six-Blanc, the pasture stretches out before coming to the ridges and forms a kind of basin where the most vigorous cattle of the region fight in the famous battles of the cow queens.

Maurice loved animals. As a child he made little stables where large fir cones were his cows in their stalls. But his brothers and sisters sometimes were not too kind to their little brother. They scattered his cones, pulled off the scales that were used for horns, and they were even so mischievous as to stack the cones one on top of another. The wrath of the little cowherd was terrible. His own cattle! Was it possible? He looked closer. "Aw!" he cried, "they have even dehorned them!" He stamped his feet, grabbed his hair, and screamed with rage.

Later, he enjoyed making horns out of juniper wood, and holding a pair in each hand, with the perfection of an actor he mimicked all the stages of a battle between two cows.

He knew the characteristics of each animal thoroughly and the qualities of choice cattle. He talked about them to his father who had an expert's eye.

One day when he was watching the cattle, one of them fell

over a cliff. The little herdsman threw himself into his father's arms and told him in tears: "Don't scold me. I let a calf fall over the cliff."

His intense sorrow, his promptness in telling the whole truth, touched M. Tornay's heart, and he gladly forgave the boy's blunder.

During the summer of 1922, constant rains made life in the pastures very hard. The master herdsman walked off and the steers wandered off.

"Well, Maurice," his father said, "do you want to go up there?"

"Sure."

"You're too young."

"Oh, no. Don't worry. And besides, I want to see Violette fight." Later he wrote: "You don't come down from the pastures in the middle of the summer."

This twelve-year-old bit of a man had a will of steel. He did his job like an adult and drove the cattle back with a stick. If any disagreement—or any quarrel—brought him to grips with the herdsman of neighboring mountains, he was perfectly capable of protecting his rights. And if a trick were needed to get him out of a spot, he was not afraid to pretend he was sick, which never failed to soften his adversary. They ended up with friendly words.

Basically, Maurice revealed a rich, spontaneous, willful character; but it was also violent, irascible, and cunning. Witness the little disputes that his older brothers took great pleasure in starting. Such indignation from the little one seemed to them laughable and splendid. His jokes were so funny that he entertained his listeners royally. He could not stand a master herdsman nicknamed Sempaille. About him, he said: "When I grow up, I'm going to let my horns grow and run Sempaille through the belly."

This exuberance of temperament sometimes created rather

serious situations—a shoe thrown at his sister's head, blows with a stick, bitter-sweet words. . . . One day a neighbor got tired of his acting and put the rascal in his place: "Will you stop wagging that tongue of yours and shut up!"

Maurice was at work early. Life at the Crêtes demanded exertion and application. At dawn, from four-thirty to six, he milked the cows. Then he had to make cheese, watch the cattle, milk them again in the evening, shovel manure, and bed down the herd for the night.

In that country, work is often hard, such as carrying dirt. The slope of the fields is so steep that each season it is necessary to dig up the lower end of the field and carry the dirt in boxes to the higher part.

Imprint of the Country

Maurice was quite familiar with all the mountain tasks. His memories were so vivid—like his love for his home—that he constantly kept coming back to them with affection and pleasure in his letters from the St. Bernard Hospice and Tibet.

He wanted all his labors, all his troubles to be sanctified as an offering so that they might retain their eternal worth, their divine meaning, their force of prayer. "When you are hungry and thirsty, when you are tired, give it to the good Lord; give Him your tears, for yourselves, for your sins, for the missions, for those poor people that are going straight to hell and whom you could save by a single suffering well endured. And then, I beg you, make me a saint!"

On February 22, 1934, he wrote to one of his sisters: "Now they have gone down to Fully. You're alone. . . . You've got a lot to do. The light in your bedroom is the first to be lit. At dawn you hurry when the sky is a cold yellow over the Catogne. At noon you hurry when you come back from Mass. In the evening you hurry when the setting sun throws its last

rays into the house. In the evening when the wind roars in the winter night, you sit down to read, but fatigue and sleep close your eyes. . . . Isn't it nice to hurry for your spouse? . . . Now, Christian soul, the good Lord is your spouse. Well, when you hurry, do it for God!"

The man did not lose a particle of the images incrusting in the child's memory. He exclaims: "My soul is still chock-full of memories. I see the shadow behind the larches on the Lower Crêtes, the deep blue sky like a vault over the glade of Proz Pâtot. I hear the little bells ringing and the torrent that flows over the white rocks of the Theu." He recalls his father admiring the setting sun, and his mother standing between "two rays of the trembling sun."

Distance only made those luminous projections of his native land on the screen of his heart clearer and more indelible. He told his parents about the domestic animals in Yunnan in western China, about their qualities, their care, the feed they got, the little milk they gave. He described to one of his brothers, who was skillful with his hands, the natives' tools, comparing them with those in Switzerland, and asked him for a diagram of a circular saw.

In the spring of 1937, he could not keep from recalling the past to enjoy its pervading charm which nourished his poetic soul as with an ever-present happiness. He saw La Rosière turning green again. The sun was shining on the school windows. Part of the Crêtes stuck out, black in the snow. He heard the wind in the trees and smelled the moss. His family was at Fully. In the evening, they came home, their hands purple from the cold.

Then in his exile he cried: "How these pictures cheer me up! And I forgot to tell you all the things that haunt me—the last evenings up in the pastures, when night is coming on, you light the fire and warm yourself. Then, when the animals look up, you know they don't want to eat any more. You drive

them back. If you can, you take an even path so that the cowbells will ring better. You're happy. When you get back, you milk the cows. Then you drink some milk. When you're going to sleep, you hear a bell once in a while and you say to yourself, tomorrow I'll have to take them off."

What seemed to have made the greatest impression on Maurice's imagination was the duration of the soil and the village, the continuity of like generations, the sameness of work at each season, and above all the rapid succession of men who come and go, while the house remains. "The land you are clearing," he wrote, "you will one day have to leave. What you love will fall into other hands. We have to be attached to the earth, yes. But only so far as it leads us to God."

A Vocation Is Born

It's true that little Maurice had an explosive nature; but when he did not find the big folks standing in his way to take a mischievous delight in riling him up (most often it was out of affection for him), he indulged in peaceful reveries, which sometimes even had a tinge of melancholy. The thought of death bothered him. It runs through his letters like a musical motif, from his school days to the last months in Tibet. His tone as a youth is bitter. Maurice wanted to cover up his feelings with a laugh: "My dear Louis," he told his brother, "we're both going to get old, we who drank wine at midnight last Christmas in the kitchen. We've got to die to relieve those around us. . . . I advise you to drink a glass to our happy death. Let's do all we can to die happy and make the world glad."

In 1937, he wrote to one of his sisters: "We're like autumn fruit about to fall. Each day the sun dries us up a little more; each year fades us. It's plain we're passing on. But we do not regret it. We know where we're going, don't we? Since all

things are leaving us, let us leave all things. Let us expect nothing more from this earth. Let us renounce everything and attach ourselves to Jesus Christ forever. That's my whole philosophy and my whole heart and my whole future."

"If death is a penance," he wrote in 1948, "God does not punish just to punish. He does not make us weep for the pleasure of seeing our tears flow, but to satisfy His need for possessing us more and more. We love God above all things when we have no affection for anything that is forbidden. Then we have that purity of heart needed to see Him. Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God."

This seriousness of the child, then of the man, before the tragic problems of our eternal destiny, is certainly one of the most real, the most marked features of Maurice's character. Despite his games and work, his outbursts of temper and arguments with his brothers and sisters, he often stayed off by himself, motionless, staring out into space.

One day while he was carefully arranging things on the great green stove, he suddenly stopped and asked: "Mama, is it better to become a priest or teacher?"

"It is better to become a priest."

"All right. I want to become a priest."

The little fellow was only four years old then. Later, recalling that scene, he maintained that his vocation was born on that day.

Generally, vocations come from thoroughly Christian families, and we might add, from families where the mother is the personification of charity.

To the Tornay family, Mme. Tornay was the queen, the inspiration, the saint. Good-humored, stoic in trials, energetic, she had that inborn psychology, that delicateness of heart and conscience that enabled her to pick out the essential from the accessory, the primary from the secondary, the necessary from the superfluous. She had placed her marriage under the

protection of Our Lady. To her she confided her entire family. Her first preoccupation was to inculcate the principles of faith, honesty, and charity in her children. If any of her little ones seriously failed in his duties, she made him kneel down and make an act of contrition.

One of her sons told me: "She used to make us walk the straight and narrow and would never put up with the slightest resistance. She was boss, but she had a heart of gold. When the poor knocked at the door, she never refused them alms. I didn't like it, because we were poor ourselves. She taught us quite clearly that alms are not a matter of choice but a formal obligation."

For Mme. Tornay, duty meant one thing: confidence in God, work. The spiritual illuminated the material world. A strong soul inspired this active woman, the peasant, the mistress of her household. Gifted with an iron constitution, she brought heroic courage to serve her family, to carry on the work, to cultivate the fields. During the summer, she went back and forth from La Rosière to the Crêtes. At the village: the hay, the fields, the gardens, the harvests. At Fully: the vineyards. At home: housework and caring for the old grandmother who died in 1916, at the age of 83. In the evening, she went up to the pastures to see what had happened during the day and to lend a helping hand. In the morning, she came back to the house.

The statement of one of her children is very touching: "Our mother's life was one long suffering, a continual sacrifice, an act of devotion."

She used to tell them: "You don't know how happy I will be to die."

It would be foolish not to see in the greatness of that soul the origin of the two vocations: those of Father Maurice Tornay and of Sister Jeanne Hélène.

To be faithful—especially if the call requires giving up everything for God—a young man must have a right will and a sense of honor. Maurice had it.

From the time he started to school he revealed a quick mind and a pronounced liking for study and books. His older brother, who was his teacher from 1922 to 1924, says that he was best in catechism, history, and French. Before entering the St. Maurice Abbey school, young Tornay went to high school at Orsières.

When he was fourteen, a breeze of folly swept through his head. The carnival was going on. Everybody was having a good time. The boy didn't want to miss anything. He and a friend left for the dance hall. Each ordered a glass of white wine. Some people—somebody is always around to play a practical joke—bought them a few extra glasses. Maurice went home deathly sick. He spent an awful night.

One of his sisters took care of him. "Now," she said, "we have to get him well. But when he gets well, I'm going to teach that good-for-nothing a thing or two. He'll get what's coming to him."

But at dawn, in spite of being dead tired and having a splitting headache, he got up and went bravely off to school down at Orsières.

This little act of courage kept the storm of family justice from crashing around his ears.

In September, 1925, he entered the boys' school at the Abbey of St. Maurice. "Time is going by," he wrote. "Therefore, childish desires and boys' games have to give way to hard work."

From the beginning, he figured that everything would go all right and that he would get his studies done easily. This feeling—it even bordered on conceit—made him lose his liking for his vocation for a time. He confided his new plans to his older brother: "I want to be a lawyer. I'll take part in the

political life of the Valais, of Switzerland. I'll be somebody and I'll make money. And I'll be able to help my family which has to work so hard to keep from starving."

"How about St. Bernard?"

The crisis—or revolt against the call—did not last very long. When one of the teachers greeted him with, "Good morning, Canon Tornay," Maurice was thrilled.

"Let's hope that it happens!" he replied.

He received excellent grades. The plays in which he took several important roles, the concerts that acquainted him with "the great waters" of eternal music, the discussions with his teachers, the literature courses gave him a deep, diverse and rich culture. Nourished by Léon Bloy, Péguy, Claudel, Maritain, and all the great Christian thinkers and poets, he had a beginner's passionate love for letters and art. The testimony of his teachers is unanimous: "He was a very intelligent student, hard-working, good-humored, fervently religious. He took the highest honors and yet for all that did not lose his fine simplicity. He was a good mixer. On the other hand, he was not inclined to sports or noisy merrymaking. This mountaineer from the Valais clearly had a vocation. You could almost say with certainty: he's going ahead."

Revelation of Lourdes

"Eternal life was never more unveiled to me nor has the present life ever seemed so beautiful."

The next to last year of his studies, in May, 1930, Maurice visited Lourdes. Everything about the place impressed him almost to the point of tears: the sick that went by; paralyzed, crippled children; little ones that screamed and cried when they were put in the pool; old folks who knew only pain.

The torchlight procession spoke to him with overwhelming

eloquence. He is standing on the esplanade. Candles are burning like stars in a summer sky. A banner appears . . . it is followed by brilliant, waving streams . . . a black winding comet, sprinkled with flamboyant roses, divides into two columns. It is as long as from Orsières to La Douay. Those shadowy stalks that bear the roses chant *Ave Maria*. The river that flows along beside them, and Jesus in their hearts repeat *Ave Maria*. *Ave Maria* echoes in the mountains. The procession goes on. Then the basilica lights up as though by magic. "I can't speak. I can't even cry with my eyes of flesh. My heart and soul are only sobs and prayers!"

End of a Period

The last trimester at school, from Easter to July, 1931, Maurice got permission to share a room in town with his brother, Louis, who was working at Lavey. Those three months were a period of perfect joy for him—hard work, talking over a glass of beer, walking back and forth in his room with a book in his hand. He enjoyed his freedom to the full.

"God leaves us kneeling before happiness," he told his brother.

"Yes," Louis replied, "but I'm afraid your studies are going to suffer from it. I'm a little sorry that I took you in with me."

"We'll see."

"And then you're not too healthy. It's too bad."

"Why?"

"You could work more."

"On the contrary. I'd certainly work less."

"Afraid of the exams?"

"You never know. Anyway, I'm going back home as soon as I can to help our sisters. You can telephone me the results."

Some days later there was great joy at La Rosière. Mau-

rice Tornay and Angelin Lovey shared the first prize. The parish of Orsières was honored!

Maurice's health was wavering. He suffered from a stomach ulcer during his last years in school and his first years at the St. Bernard Hospice. An operation in 1935 was uneventful; but he recovered slowly, thanks to a great deal of prudence, a strict diet, and I suppose, the will to get well. He believed in certain remedies—open air, a temperate and well regulated life—more than in the velvety silence of hospitals and the mysterious magic of drugs. He liked to give the following prescription to any sick person who asked him: the chalet, the mountains, nourishing food . . . and some glasses of good wine. He wrote about one of his sisters: "She needs a vacation at the Crêtes. In hospitals you never recover. Sickness creates an atmosphere that is almost impossible to overcome."

Besides, the hospital left only sad memories in his soul. Certain little acts of kindness humiliated and bothered him. This trial found him ready to fight and conquer.

His sister Anna entered religious life in 1928, at the age of sixteen. He was then twenty-one. Their two souls understood each other. Their correspondence had the flavor of sanctity. He wrote her: "On the road that leads to heaven, let us look a little ahead so that our features and our hearts may take on the lines of mature fruit. We're young, we are twenty, we love God, we have nothing to fear from death. Let's be happy. . . . We have to hurry, don't we? At our age, others were saints. If the stem grows too long, the fruit can't ripen before the cold and death. And there are so many sinners, so many pagans that are calling us. We want to answer them. Our blood, our flesh are for them. I say to you again: We've got to hurry. The longer I live, the more convinced I am that sacrifice—it alone—can give meaning to our days."

Maurice Tornay entered the novitiate of the St. Bernard Fathers on August 25, 1931.

We add a few striking excerpts from letters which young Maurice wrote during the six years he spent at the Abbey school in St. Maurice:

What then is this world here below where flowers and fruits are so plentiful? It is a place where we are to try to travel in the right way along the path of our life, over which armies and peoples, kings and bandits, pilgrims and paupers, merchants and captains have already gone. And all has passed, and all has fled to the realm without death. . . .

It's really strange: blossoms, fruits, and man's death! We must hasten to grow, work, and die, so as to make way for the buds that will come after us. So there is no reason to become attached to life. It is better to live right than to worry about living a long time.

Sometimes I wonder whether hell is possible, in the sense that there should be men so crazy as to rush into it, when Jesus is there, with His Heart open, ready to enfold us in the flame of His everlasting love.

God requires a minimum of suffering from the world, and some people—those who see and believe—pay for the others.

What a good thing a retreat is! Afterward we know ourselves, and we have respect for life, suffering, and sacrifice.

CHAPTER 3

Charity on the Heights

Toward the Summits

ALL you who, having chosen me for your guide, on a sure path, climb the Alps, ascend in my company, all the way to the palace of heaven.”

This prayer to Saint Bernard comes to my mind when I think of Maurice’s vocation.

The ascent to the St. Bernard Pass at the end of August, 1931, symbolically marked his definitive departure for the heights of prayer and charity.

At each stage along the road, he contemplated those mountains toward which he was going. From Rive Haute, he looked back to see his beloved Catogne, a solid triangle on an immense base. At Liddes, the Vélán, with a glacier about its head, stood up against the blue sky. Then historic memories added to the fullness of his emotions. The Roman road, covered with grass, ran along the Dranse. At Bourg St. Pierre, a military column of the year 338, standing against the church, bears an inscription: “Emperor Constantine, pious, happy, invincible, son of the divine Augustus.” In Carolingian times, there was a hospice in the village probably kept by the Benedictine monks and consecrated to Saint Peter; its mission was to aid travelers. The Saracens destroyed it. Hugues, Bishop of Geneva, rebuilt the church in the eleventh century. Popes and emperors, pilgrims bound for Rome, mer-

chants, the Lombard hordes that Guntram of Burgundy cut to pieces at Bex in 574; the caravan of Pope Stephen II who in 753 went to France to ask Pepin for aid and protection; Charlemagne who recrossed the Alps in 774, after being crowned king of Italy; Norman troops who forced a passage through in 1020, despite Saracen resistance—all Europe on the move north or south went up and down at Bourg St. Pierre.

On May 20, 1800, Napoleon Bonaparte stopped at the inn which from then on carried the sign: "*Au déjeuner de Napoléon I^{er}*." The innkeeper, Moret, met him on the first floor. The young general sat in an armchair, eating an egg and cheese, and giving orders to Murat, Duroc, and Marmont. Then "at exactly two o'clock," while his troops continued their painful advance, while the soldiers and peasants pulled the dismounted cannons over the snow in hollowed-out tree trunks, Bonaparte rejoined his muleteer, Jean Nicholas Dor-saz. Always accompanied by Canon Murith, Prior of Martigny, by Canon Terretaz, Procurator of the St. Bernard Hospice, and by Bourrienne, he went over the gorges of Valsorey on the St. Charles bridge and arrived at the summit of the pass the same evening. He stopped there only long enough to eat.

Maurice Tornay undoubtedly knew every historic detail. Every stone of that country recalled the past to him. Not only the stones that men's hands had arranged for the worship of the gods or of the true God, for the passage of pilgrims or soldiers, but also, on those inhospitable slopes, the innumerable walls that formed gray, horizontal streaks against the green vegetation, those millions of stones picked up from the mountainside one by one, set one on top of the other against the earth that slips and slides toward the valley. It is the work of generations that has gone on as the centuries went by, so

that man might have a meadow, a field to farm, find something to feed himself and live.

Leaving the Cantine de Proz, the valley spreads out. It is a vast pasture punctured by rocks, a green triangular slope that rises to a stone basin at the foot of the Points des Rayons de la Madeleine. You would say that a world ends there, that a barrier of sharp, blackish, insurmountable rocks marks the end and extent of a valley. The Roman road snakes through the meadow. Buses and automobiles go to the left, then to the right. They look as though they were rolling playfully on an immense billiard table.

At the foot of the mountain, on your right, on both sides are little rough stone houses with slate roofs. They are the refuges for travelers in distress. They tell you that up higher is the great refuge of St. Bernard. At Marengo Pass, a deep gash, with a beginning you can hardly guess, indicates the opening between the Pointe de Barasson and the Pointe de Lacérandes. A road that almost twists back on top of itself leads you to the pass.

There is the St. Bernard of the tourists. There is also the St. Bernard of the monks.

Every day in the summer, beginning in the morning, buses and automobiles by the dozens pour out visitors all over the place. People from every country show up in strange dress. If the majority have good taste, while at the same time dressing to get the benefit of the sun, some with great assurance bedeck themselves ridiculously. Men fear not to flaunt their lean snowy-white legs or stress their corpulence with thin clothes in out-of-this-world colors. Fantasy and extravagance have a field day with certain women—jockey caps or Mexican hats, trousers that reach their knees or only halfway to the knees, hands in their pockets and cigarettes in their mouths. . . . Some think they are at the beach and are relentlessly turned away from the church door. They show their surprise

by openmouthed disdain. It's no longer St. Bernard. It's Monte Carlo or Capri lost in the Alps.

The crowd squeezes into the Hospice, takes a quick look at the museum, the church, wanders into the store to buy souvenirs, goes up to the kennels, writes postcards, takes pictures. At noon, the rocks around are speckled with motley, noisy groups. It's picnic time.

A little later, when the sun goes down towards the Fenêtre Pass, the city of Saint Bernard, the city which the waves of the world have not been able to touch or trouble, falls back into silence and peace.

On entering this city, Maurice Tornay had only one desire: to die to the world.

His mother wrote him this very natural letter, one which portrays her affection for her son: "When you are far from us, we will no longer find joy in the coming of Christmas."

Maurice answered: "I must not take God's place in your heart. I give it up to Him, because He alone deserves it. You have given me to Him; each of you have given me, each of you deserves eternal life and the hundredfold in this life. For, whether the brother leaves his sister or the son his mother, or whether the sister and mother give their brother or their son to God, the sacrifice is the same. . . . Remember that all pleasures are deceitful, all, absolutely all. Heaven alone will bring us pleasure not only without sadness but beyond all our expectations. . . . And we are so close to attaining it!"

The Spirit of an Order

"Father Prior, what do you think of all the fame your monastery now enjoys?"

Canon Gabioud looked at me through his glasses. The

priest's vivacious spirit and enthusiasm were in that look and that voice.

"What do I think of it? A total reversal of all values, a pitiful misplacing of interest. Many of the tourists are undoubtedly drawn by the extraordinary beauty of the place."

We were walking along the level road—the promenade—that was created at the same time as the canal that brings water and which, after leaving the Hospice, runs along the lake and ends at the Italian frontier. Extraordinary beauty indeed!

Dominating it all are rocks, silver-gray or brown like a plowed field, rocks that are slashed, cracked, eroded, abrupt, with walls that rise hundreds of feet into the air. At the bottom of the amphitheater lies the monastery with the lake at its feet, a deep green lake that sparkles when a light breeze passes over it. The road to Italy veers toward the customs office, passes the Albergo Italia (Italian Inn), and slips between two crags before winding down to the city of Aosta.

On the spot where once rose the temple of Jupiter Peninus, on the platforms that rise tier upon tier toward the west, stands a statue of Saint Bernard. Erected in 1905, it is on a tall stone pedestal. The archdeacon, hooded and holding a crosier in his hand, has the monstrous dragon of hell bound at his feet. He looks toward Switzerland. All round, you have to raise your head to see the summits. To the right, the Chenalette faces the Mont Mort. The Pain de Sucre throws up a blue-green massif with sheer walls, while beyond, on a pedestal of gray-black rocks, bristling at more than 9,000 feet are the Aiguille de Lesache, the Grand Golliaz, and the Mont Fourchon. You can imagine the depression of the Col de Fenêtre that leads to Ferret Valley. If you turn around, you see the gray-white line of glaciers and peaks: the Grand Combin, the Vélán, and closer the brown line of the Babylone and the Pointe de Barasson.

The Prior continues: "They've made the Grand St. Bernard a sort of world-famous attraction."

"You don't seem too happy over it."

"No, I'm not. Here's why. The outsider stops at details, the accessories, and generally is not at all interested in what constitutes the real reason for our existence. We've existed for nine hundred years. Now, is our justification before the world to help advertise vegetables, cheese and chocolate? Or is it even to raise dogs? Certainly, those famous rescue dogs were very useful to us. Through the centuries they have rendered us valuable service. Without them, how many pilgrims would have died . . . !"

"That makes me think of your famous dog Barry that the movies have taken over. . . ."

"There again," the priest said sharply, "we might make some critical comments."

I broke in: "No doubt. They could have stressed still more the source of that heroism that Pierre Fresnay tried to capture. But nonetheless that film stirred crowds throughout the world. Since then, no matter where you go, clothed in your cassock with its white cord over your shoulders, you are recognized. They know your work is great."

"Precisely. But why is it great? Why have the great of the world and the least come to the Hospice? The roughness of the landscape, even the location of the pass is not enough to explain that universal attraction for this solitude. Neither is our house with its massive structure, its somber corridors, its low vaults. You spoke of heroism. I agree. It's not too strong a word. The mountain has its splendors. But when you have to live continually in the cold, amid snow and fog, then it loses all its poetry. And only those that God calls can stay here. It's a life of perpetual renunciation which the visitor for a day doesn't suspect. You have to have a burning charity in your heart to leave the world, family, and friends, and go up

into the mountains to consecrate yourself to prayer, to wait for and help pilgrims.”

“But isn’t your life one of prayer above everything else? Isn’t that the very pivot of your devotion?”

“We are a religious community. I want to stress that we are before all an order whose primary mission is the celebration of Mass and the chanting of the canonical hours.”

“Father Prior, the *laus perennis*, that perpetual praise, is a duty under one form or another of all the clergy, secular and regular. In your congregation you follow the Rule of Saint Augustine, and you are bound by spiritual ties to the canonical chapter of the Lateran.”

“Our founder, Saint Bernard, was a canon regular, archdeacon of the Cathedral of Aosta. The constitutions he gave us are therefore those of the canons regular.”

“Father Prior, would you mind telling me the essential elements of your constitutions?”

“I’d be happy to. Especially since there is so much confusion about it. First of all, our main duty is the conventual Mass. It is the solemn sacrifice that the community as a whole offers to God each day. The second obligation is the Divine Office—the public worship offered in the name of the entire Church.”

“That means that the monks assemble at the foot of the altar several times a day?”

“Yes. Matins sanctify the night. Lauds recall a triple resurrection: that of nature, of Our Lord, and of the sinner who regains grace. Prime prepares you for the labors of the day as the sun rises. Tierce, Sext, and None are landmarks along the day’s road. They are like stopping places that let the body relax and the soul lift itself up to God. Finally, Vespers and Compline invite you, as night falls, to thank God and then to put yourself under his protection as under the shadow of his wings.”

While evening was falling, with the towering mountains taking on a slatelike tint and the lake at our feet turning dark as ink, the prior in his warm voice that conveyed the soul of an apostle tried again to stress the true nature of the monastery.

“You see, our kingdom, so to speak, is the choir and the altar.”

Canon Gabioud knew how important and enduring this subject is. Let prayer, the first ideal of the monk, weaken or lessen, and you will see religious orders lose their reason for existing by that very act. No compromise is possible. With this essential requirement recognized, it remains a fact that every order has its own spirit and that it takes on social responsibilities: teaching, preaching, the ministry, charity.

The St. Bernard monks from the beginning chose as their secondary mission the assisting of pilgrims and travelers who cross the pass.

“But, Father Prior, other times, other customs. At present, you have especially during the summer season a crowd of tourists coming here in cars and buses. It certainly isn’t up to you to lodge them.”

“Our constitutions oblige us to this: to see that the poor, the pilgrims, and all who go across this mountain do not lack food, clothing, or any other necessity. This obligation, as you see, in no way concerns summer visitors, but only workers, pilgrims, the parents or friends of the monks. Thanks to the initiative of Msgr. Bourgeois, former provost, there is now a large hotel across from the Hospice. Anyone can find good fare and wine there.”

“Father Prior, what about the famous rescues performed by the dogs that figure so much in the fame of your monastery?”

“In the last two centuries, our monks, aided by the dogs, have rescued hundreds of people. Barry is credited with having saved forty-one persons. The last one, a soldier who had

served in Russia, mistook him for a wild animal and shot him. In 1774, seventeen out of twenty victims of an avalanche on Mont Mort were saved. In 1874, in an avalanche on Combe Marchande, two monks, one servant, and five workers died.”

“And in recent years?”

“At the beginning of this century, from November eleventh to May first, two servants used to go down each morning, one on the Italian side all the way to the Cantine, and the other on the Swiss side to the Hospitalet. They used to be called *marroniers*. They carried bread, cheese, and wine to refresh those they met. Today, with the telephone, things have been simplified. When the mountain is heavy with snow, that is, when there is serious danger of an avalanche, we telephone the two Cantines that travel is forbidden until conditions improve. If any traveler absolutely has to come through, one of our religious goes out to meet him. But in any event, we stand ready to fulfill our mission, no matter how dangerous it is.”

“Father Prior, do you have happy memories of some of the rescues?”

“We have to take action at every season, but more particularly in the winter. Travelers or skiers who have informed us they are leaving the Cantine de Proz or St. Remy are suddenly caught in a storm or fog. The prior gathers the monks. ‘Who wants to go?’ he asks. Every one of them steps forward. The most robust and experienced are chosen. Their cassocks rolled up, they put on their skis and go down the slopes, carefully following the stakes and pegs we have set out to mark the trail. How many pilgrims have been saved by being brought to the Hospice by our monks at the cost of great efforts, no one will ever know. Charity keeps no records.”

Taking of the Habit

The St. Bernard monks—canons and brothers—form an exempt congregation, that is to say, one attached directly to the Holy See. Their Superior, chosen for life by the chapter, bears the title of provost; the signs of his office are the mitre and crosier. His residence, like that of the procurator general—the treasurer—is at Martigny where the order has a retreat house for its older members. The Hospice itself is the mother house, the rallying point of all the religious; it is governed by the claustral prior. The novice master is in charge of training the novices. The infirmarian takes care of the sick; the guest master receives the guests; and the *clavendier* (keeper of the keys) has charge of provisions.

When Maurice Tornay took the habit in 1931, Msgr. Théophile Bourgeois was provost of the order. Always active, in spite of being seventy-six years old, he was a living example of fidelity to duty for the novices. Canon Joseph Rouiller, present pastor of Orsières, held the office of prior. Canon Nestor Adam, provost after 1939 and Bishop of Sion (Switzerland) since 1952, was then novice master.

There were about fifteen novices and professed religious at the St. Bernard Hospice.

In addition, the order is in charge of a dozen parishes. The young man who asks to be admitted must spend a one-year novitiate at the St. Bernard Hospice so that he will know the mountain life, how harsh the winter is, and thus cannot later plead ignorance as a reason for leaving.

The taking of the habit is always a moving ceremony. Maurice Tornay's family and friends drove up in two cars on August 25. In the church choir, burning candles lit up the gold tabernacle. Msgr. Bourgeois began Mass while the

monks, clothed in red mantles that stand out against the somber brown stalls, intoned the Introit.

After the Gospel, the prelate sat down, his back to the altar, and asked the postulants:

“What do you ask?”

“I ask you, Most Reverend Father,” their young voices answered firmly, “to admit me into your illustrious congregation, in order to test during a year, by means of the religious habit in which I humbly beg you to clothe me, my vocation as a canon regular.”

Msgr. Bourgeois asked: “With what intention do you make this request?”

“I make it solely to please God, to advance in virtue, and to test my vocation so that at the required time I may make my religious profession, if Your Reverence finds me worthy.”

“Do you know the grave obligation that religious life imposes?”

“I know. I know that of myself I can do nothing, but I confide myself entirely to the grace of Our Lord. For he has said that his yoke would be sweet and his burden light for those who, renouncing the world, follow him with all their heart.”

“Can you tell me the purpose of our institution?”

“After the example of the apostles and the first Christians, it is to have all our goods in common, so that possessing nothing of our own, we may form only one heart and one soul in God. The congregation also has another purpose which is the exercise of hospitality.”

“What do you hope to obtain by practicing these virtues?”

“A hundredfold and life eternal.”

“Are you resolved to renounce your own will?”

“Yes, I renounce it.”

After their reception into the order, Msgr. Bourgeois in a series of prayers blessed the clothing the novices were to re-

ceive: the cassock and the cord. Then earnest prayers were offered to heaven that these young men who had put their hands to the plow might never look back, that they might be given renunciation of the world, a spirit of obedience, purity of action, wisdom, humility. . . .

“O Lord, enkindle in their hearts a love of their vocation, detach them from the shadows of error, heap upon them Thy graces, so that living in mortification, piety, and holiness, they may be docile to Thy desires, resist with all their strength the attractions of sin and the desires of the flesh, to live a life wholly supernatural. . . .”

The prelate then helped the postulant take off his coat:

“May God strip you of the old man and his deeds.”

Then he clothed him in the cassock and cord:

“May God clothe you with the new man, who has been created according to the designs of God, like unto Christ in justice and holiness.”

The organ played the prelude to the *Veni Creator* that was chanted by strong, vibrant voices, lifting its melody up like a Gothic arch. Finally, after asking the intercession of Saints Nicholas, Bernard and Augustine, the patrons of the order, Msgr. Bourgeois intoned the *Credo* and continued the celebration of Mass.

A Haven of Friendship

Maurice Tornay was entering not only a spiritual family but also a place where real friendship reigned. Behind those walls which winter would soon enfold, prior and monks, professed and novices, formed a team—the word seems to me to be exact—that with all its intense prayer and study could still find time for joking, art, singing, mountain climbing and skiing.

Their bright eyes open wide to the beauties of nature, their

hearts dedicated to their vocation of devotion and charity, these youths, these men can laugh, argue and throw out sharp unexpected remarks that brighten their periods of recreation. They tease their companions with skill and charity. In the choir, all voices—tenors and basses—blend with singlehearted fervor in the liturgical chant. All stop while a single voice sings out and two others respond, then the whole choir takes up again the flowing rhythm of the Church's worship. They enjoy celebrating the religious and secular feasts that mark the seasons of the year. With their friends the customs officers, they stand before the traditional bonfire to observe the Swiss national holiday on August first, their black habits mingling with the gray-green uniforms. When the occasion arises, they like to gather around to sing popular songs of different countries and ages.

Their mission of hospitality imposes a special task on them: keeping fit so as to be able to face the dangers of the mountains under all circumstances. The majority are mountain climbers. And top-notch ones at that! They make frequent trips up the peaks and over the passes. They know the summits and ridges of the whole region. They climb the Vélán, the Grand Combin, the Aiguilles of the Mont Blanc Massif. And the winter snow, instead of thwarting their need for the open air, invites them to a dizzy *schuss*; sometimes the snow is twenty to thirty feet deep with drifts from fifty to sixty feet high. Then every slope is a good skiing trail. They can go right out the second story of the Hospice and slide over embankments and walls down to the level surface of the lake. They glide down from the summit of the Mont Mort or the peak of the Chenalette to the road to Italy. One of them is a seasoned guide, and if he were not a priest, he would be winning prizes in the national competitions.

But all of this activity, this sport, has only one purpose: to prepare them to fulfill their mission better. Their physical

condition is only an adjunct to their spiritual condition. This enthusiasm for effort is found again in their fervor and recollection at Mass and the Divine Office. Both forces are united in the service of God and neighbor.

Thus the monks keep ready to fulfill their mission, for these mountains, you must remember, are eternally treacherous and full of traps.

“It’s always with deep anxiety,” the prior told me, “that I watch winter come on. I always wonder what will happen to us.”

“Father Prior, I understand that you yourself were caught in an avalanche in which three of your fellow monks died and you were carried out practically dead.”

“I have escaped more than once. I attribute that good fortune, let’s say our good fortune, to Saint Bernard’s intercession, for he has visibly protected us. How often an avalanche has come down just before or just after we went by!”

“But tell me, Father Prior, why do you go out when the mountains are so dangerous?”

“Quite simply, out of duty. It often happens that travelers are so self-confident that they believe they can make the passage despite our warnings by telephone. Sometimes, too, the weather turns bad all of a sudden. You can’t imagine the violence of the storm or the density of the fog. A sixty-mile-an-hour wind, cyclones of snow, every road, every path is covered, often our markers blow down or disappear. There is absolute solitude and certain death. Whatever be the reason, if a traveler is coming up to the Hospice, he has to be saved. I call two religious. They leave. A heavy uneasiness rests over our hearts, over the whole monastery, until they come back.”

“I see that you need all your moral and physical strength for those dangerous rescues.”

“Especially our moral strength that comes from prayer and grace. For, if you will pardon my coming back to this point,

our order is both contemplative and active. Our monastery is also a hospice. This is perhaps a unique fact in the world. We have to keep our strength, our joy, our enthusiasm intact. But before and above all, there is and there has to be that very reason for our existence: the service of God, the service of the altar, the holy Sacrifice, the perpetual praise. The Hospice is nothing if the monastery is not a living community. During our leisure hours, we relax, exercise, broaden our vision of the world. But this leisure is only a tiny part of our time.”

The monastery bell rang. The prior rose.

“That bell,” he said, “calls us to the church many times a day. Our own wills, our own personal desires, our various words—everything gives way before the essential. It is no longer a question of mountain prowess, songs, or conversation. We appear as we really are: religious prostrate at the foot of the altar. Community prayer, canonical prayer is our real life.”

CHAPTER 4

“The Sacrifice of Myself”

Days of Prayer and Study

THE novitiate lasts one year. It was a time for Maurice Tornay to test his vocation under the spiritual guidance of the novice master, Canon Nestor Adam, now Bishop of Sion.

The schedule has been slightly modified since that time. The monastery bell rang at five o'clock in the summer and at five-thirty in the winter. The novices, who were assigned all the secondary tasks, had to get up a quarter of an hour earlier. After a visit to the church, they went to the refectory where for a half hour they knelt on the floor, facing a picture of the crucifixion, and prayed and meditated. A novice read a few lines from the Gospel followed by a commentary taken from the fathers of the Church.

Canon Jules Gross recalled his impression: “You were supposed to reflect. You were supposed to pray. But to my confusion I must confess that I was preoccupied most of all with twitches and pains in my knees, since I was not yet used to this uncomfortable position. Will I have the courage to make it to the end of the exercise? I take a quick look at my neighbors. Some of them have their heads in their hands and are as still as statues. . . . I try to remember the words of the Gospel. Everything is confused. The clock tells me I have to wait another fifteen minutes before the end of this penance. . . .”

Today this exercise is made in the oratory.

The community then goes to the church for the little hours which are immediately followed by the conventual Mass.

After breakfast, the novices have a half hour of spiritual reading. On Sundays, they give the novice master an account of what they have read.

Study follows until ten o'clock when the master conducts a class. At eleven, the novices practice chant and prepare for church services. The method of the monks of Solesmes is followed; the order used to send priests to study under the Benedictines when they were still on the Isle of Wight before they returned to Solesmes in France. The study of polyphony or secular music is left to recreation periods.

After fifteen minutes' relaxation, the novices go to the church for the particular examen.

Dinner is not always a time of ease for the novices—they have to read publicly, wait on tables, and if I may say so, gulp down their food. At two o'clock they visit the Blessed Sacrament, recite the Rosary, then work (study, class, reading the lives of the saints) until four o'clock. In Maurice's time, they then chanted Vespers and Compline, and anticipated Matins and Lauds. Altogether this takes a good deal of time. Now Compline, which is really night prayers, is said at 8:40, just before retiring; Matins and Lauds are said on rising.

Before supper they make the Way of the Cross, which keeps in their hearts the fruitful memory of Christ's sufferings.

At eight o'clock and before night prayers (now Compline), the novices read books of general culture or semi-spiritual works: treatises on sacred eloquence, commentaries, different books that deal with literature and religion at the same time. The monastery's rich library is an inexhaustible mine.

On certain feast days—Saints Nicholas, Bernard, Augustine, and Cecilia; Shrove Tuesday and August first—this schedule

is relaxed. An atmosphere of cordial joy then pervades the community. Recreation is longer, and the monks go to bed later.

Once a week, usually on Thursday or whenever the day is nice, if the weather has been bad, the novices and professed monks leave the monastery about nine o'clock in the morning and return only about five o'clock in the afternoon.

What does the novice study? Since the chanting of the Divine Office is one of his primary activities, it is essential to teach, explain, and comment on sacred Scripture, especially the Psalms. To this is added a thorough study of certain treatises on the spiritual life, the constitutions of the order, liturgical rubrics, the life of their founder, and the history of the monastery.

I like to think of young Maurice going, as the hours and days went by, from his books which he paged and searched so carefully, to the church where he intensified his sacrificial vocation, to the museum where every article spoke to him of the monastery's past and glory, to the morgue where some of the frozen bodies of unidentified mountain victims stand upright, to the Plain of Jupiter over on the other side of the lake where once a pagan temple rose among the rocks, and finally to Saint Bernard's cell hidden among the cellars and foundations. On this host of age-old witnesses and eloquent stones his gaze rested in long, silent meditation.

The Founder and the Hospice

One summer between 1040 and 1050, some priests and workers climbed up the Roman road out of Aosta. After a day's journey, they came out on the Plain of Jupiter at the Mont Joux Pass. Bernard was their leader.

Where did he come from? A late tradition has it that he was born in 923 at the Château de Menthon on Lake Annency

in Savoy. Modern historians have disputed the date and the place.¹ Bernard, born perhaps in 996, was probably the grandson of Boson, Viscount of Aosta, and the nephew of Ermangarde, wife of Rudolph III, King of Burgundy. Without going into the debate, let it suffice to give a few arguments in favor of this thesis. The manuscript, signed by a self-styled Richard de la Val d'Isère, which gives the traditional story of Saint Bernard, dates from the fifteenth century. It is full of errors, confusion, and mythology. Bernard was canonized shortly after his death in 1081. If he were born from a Savoyard family, we would very soon have seen shrines rise in his native land to honor him. The de Menthon family would have given that famous first name to its members. But the name appears only in 1465 and then continues uninterruptedly.

Anyway, whatever be Saint Bernard's origin, we know a certain number of undisputed facts about him. He was an archdeacon of the cathedral of Aosta who lived and labored in northern Italy during the eleventh century. At that time many archdeacons were not priests. However, they were active preachers and served as influential prelates and assistants to their bishops. Saint Bernard acquired fame as an extremely ascetic and apostolic preacher of missions in towns and villages not only in the plains of Lombardy but also in the numerous mountain villages. He was a leader in the struggle against oppression of the poor by usurers. A few weeks before he died, he warned the Emperor Henry IV that his plans to capture Rome and destroy the power of Pope Hildebrand would fail; the saint's prophecy was fulfilled. Bernard was preaching in Novara in 1081 when he fell ill and died. His reputation for sanctity was so widespread that his tomb there soon became a shrine, and within less than fifty years he was given the honors and cult of a locally canonized saint in

¹ André Donnet, *Saint Bernard et les origines de l'Hospice du Mont-Joux* (St. Maurice, Oeuvre St. Augustin, 1942; 163 pp.).

northern Italy, though he was inscribed in the Roman Martyrology only in 1681. On August 4, 1923, Pope Pius XI, who was also a distinguished Alpinist, designated Saint Bernard as patron of mountain climbers.²

Before the fifteenth century, Saint Bernard is pictured in surplice and hood, holding a crosier in his left hand as a symbol of his dignity and a lectionary in his right hand as a symbol of the diaconate. He is shown this way in a bas-relief in the Aosta cathedral and a reliquary of the St. Bernard Hospice. Only after the fifteenth century, due to the influence of Richard's book, do we find him conquering the bound demon.

He founded the Hospice of Mont Joux which he put under the protection of Saint Nicholas. By 1149, hardly seventy years after his death, it was called the Hospice of Saint Bernard.

Why did he decide to build his house on the highest point of the pass instead of on the Plain of Jupiter, as a refuge against the Saracens and the winter storms? It seems that near this place there was a spring and furthermore it offered better protection against avalanches and dominated both sides of the pass.

Bernard marked off the site near the Roman road. As a first refuge and shelter, he built cells for himself and his companions, using nearby rocks for the purpose.

Then the building went up.³ One of the cells, cut into the wall of the foundation, was kept and venerated from the beginning. It is called Saint Bernard's grotto. When you go into the cellar, you recognize stones taken from the temple of Jupiter and bearing Roman inscriptions. To enter the cell, you go through a rectangular opening so low that you have to stoop. The cell is about six feet in height and length and about

² *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (Rome) v. 15, 1923, pp. 437-442.

³ Louis Blondel, "L'Hospice du Grand-St-Bernard," in *Vallesia* (Sion) v. 2, 1947.

four feet in width. It has a stone vault, such as is often found in buildings erected high in the mountains.

You cannot enter this room without feeling a supernatural presence. The dim light of the candle falls on rough walls built over nine hundred years ago. The stones are sharp, small, jutting, closely set, reminding you that they were laid in the eleventh century. You are deeply moved to recall that Saint Bernard came here to rest and pray between periods of work, while his companions in holiness occupied the neighboring cells. Here was written the first chapter of the saga of the order; this was the first step on that long road of solitude and sacrifice.

All this was done so that the Cross might take Jupiter's place, that pagans might know the true God, that the mountain might be pacified, the plundering Saracens brought under control, travelers assisted, and the charity of Christ taught by deeds and example.

In his *Treatise on the Love of God*, Saint Francis de Sales wrote: "There are different signs of perfection—to lend to the poor out of the greatest necessity; this is the first degree of the counsel of almsgiving. A higher degree is to give to them; a yet higher degree is to give all, and finally still higher is to give one's self, dedicating one's self to the service of the poor. Hospitality out of extreme necessity is a counsel: to receive strangers is its first degree; but to go out on the roads to meet them, as did Abraham, is still higher, and still higher is to dwell in dangerous places to rescue, aid, and serve travelers. In this the great Saint Bernard excelled. . . . Coming from a very illustrious family, he lived many years among the ridges and peaks of our Alps, and gathered several companions there to await, lodge, succor, and save from dangers and storms the travelers and passers-by who often would have died in the storm, snow, and cold if it had not been for the hospices that

this great friend of God established and founded on the two mountains which bear his name for that reason.”⁴

The museum reveals the scientific and missionary activity of the monks. Collections of Gallic and Roman coins, found on the Plain of Jupiter, fill the showcases. Some of the priests have earned real distinction in the fields of botany, entomology, and geology. One of them, Father Murith, whose picture hangs on the wall, was the first to climb the Vélan and was one of the best naturalists of his time. Every day since 1817, the Hospice has sent a meteorological report to the observatory at Geneva.

Near the Hospice, at the foot of the Mont Mort, is a building of large rough stones, covered with a stone roof: the morgue. During the Burgundian wars, in April, 1476, the Piedmontese made a stand here at the pass in an effort to stop the Valaisans, who were allies of Bern. This building was erected to receive those who fell in the savage battle that followed. Since then, the monks have placed there, with a Mass and ritual prayers, the frozen bodies of avalanche victims that have not been claimed by their families.⁵

You open an iron door. At the other end, against the wall an image of Our Lady of the Hopeless watches over this house of death. Corpses, wrapped in winding sheets and strapped to boards, stand upright. You see their sunken eyes, bared teeth, their skin stretched over their bones, their clothes hanging in tatters. They are not skeletons but human beings frozen in the hopes and expectation of the resurrection. Their heavy heads droop, their hands hang at their sides or else are in the last wild gesture they made just as they died in the

⁴ The foundation of the Hospice at the Petit St. Bernard Pass between France and Italy is generally attributed to Saint Bernard, but there are no explicit documents to this effect.

⁵ Burial in the rocky, frozen ground at the pass is physically impossible.

snow. A mother clasps her baby in her arms; her face still has that terrible expression of horror she had out on the mountainside. It is a haunting sight that makes you think of the visions of Ezekiel. On the floor against the walls, intact skeletons lie on a heap of skulls.

I went through the obituary list at the monastery and noted a few entries at random in this stirring necrology:

1820, during the night of October 24–25, Sophie Ferré and her baby were found dead from the cold on Valdotain slope.

1866, during the night of November 24–25, Charles Skinner and his wife, peddlers of devotional articles, froze to death near the Cantine de Proz.

1877, December 7, Jean Sonney was found frozen at Plan des Dames.

1937, September 12, Victor Cerisey of Etroubles froze to death in a stone basin at Barasson.

That was the last victim laid to rest in the morgue. It is unusual that the body is not claimed by the family. The obituary is a veritable anthology of mountain dramas: avalanches, falls over crags, deaths caused by the cold. . . . But it tells nothing of the even more numerous rescues. The charity of the St. Bernard monks still remains active and watchful.

Chained Violence

Maurice Tornay completed his year of novitiate in August, 1932. His novice master, Msgr. Adam, tells us: "That year, I had four novices: Angelin Lovey, Maurice Tornay, Paul Lamon, and Henri Nanchen. Only one is left: Father Lovey, a missionary in Tibet. . . .⁶ Father Lamon, pastor at Liddes, died suddenly. Father Nanchen, a missionary in Tibet, drowned in the Mekong River.

⁶ Elected provost in 1952.—*Tr.*

“Maurice had a deep desire for perfection, and during his novitiate he tried in a very evident way to correct his impulsive, violent, tumultuous nature. He possessed a pleasing and very strong originality. Lovey and Tornay, both from Orsières, were outstanding: Lovey, by his deliberation, prudence, the sureness of his judgment; Tornay, by his quick mind, his sudden answers, the correctness of his insights. Maurice Tornay had the temperament of a fighter, characterized by a certain violence and a somewhat sharp frankness. But I must admit—and I say it not because of the heroic death that crowned his heroic life—that Maurice Tornay was the one who of all the novices changed himself most, who disciplined himself best, and climbed further toward perfection. Despite his independent character, he was admirably obedient.”

Maurice Tornay took his simple vows on September 8, 1932. The course of studies ahead of him comprised two years of philosophy and four years of theology.

He studied philosophy under Father Gabioud.

“Father Prior,” I asked, “were you satisfied with your student?”

“He had a clear mind. He was quick to grasp even the most complicated problem, and he went straight to the solution without taking the long way around. A few solid arguments and the truth sparkled in the conclusion.”

“Did you feel that the young monk, who seems to me at first sight to be more inclined to action than to speculation, was interested in the development of the theories you were teaching him?”

“He was passionately interested. For him, to reason was to act. Thought had no other end but to govern life, to regulate one’s conduct, and all in all to inspire and guide one’s whole being and all men.”

“Father Prior, from these snapshots you have given me, I see that at that time you were not only the philosophy pro-

fessor but you were also in charge of the students when they went out for walks or sports. Here you are with a pipe in your mouth and surrounded by your students. You are all wearing black jackets, leggings, belts that make you look a little like Cossacks, and either woolen caps or berets. You are ready to start. Maurice Tornay, with his arms crossed, his chin out, and his gaze lost on the heights, seems a little impatient to get to the summit. How did he act on your weekly outings?"

"He was a good skier and a very cheerful companion. He loved to laugh and joke, play tricks on his companions, and use up his youthful energy by daring feats in the snow."

"You took a walk each week. Where did you go?"

"All over the country, as a matter of fact. Most often we went down to La Pierre. It's an old refuge on the bank of the Dranse above Marengo gorge. How did we amuse ourselves? By sliding over the snow, playing cards, cooking out. . . . But when the weather was good, we went up to the summits. We scaled practically every peak around us. One of the best outings is to go up to the Fenêtre Pass by the winter trail."

For Maurice, these long walks were a real holiday. He got so much joy out of them that he could not keep from talking about them over and over as though they were moments of great happiness. The mere climbing of the Chenalette was enough to give him an impression of immensity. The giants of the Alps, near or far, formed a grandiose panorama that plunged his soul into silent thought. Mont Blanc shot up in a single thrust against the blue sky. Mont Emilius indicated the location of the Aosta Valley lying at its feet. Look over there and you see the Grivola, the Grand Paradis. Farther on, under a foggy cloak are the Pelvoux, the Meije. Turn around and behold the Dents du Midi, the Grand Chavalard.

One day, Maurice went up to the Sonadon Pass that threads among the glaciers at the foot of the Aiguille du Déjeuner and the Aiguille Verte and leads into the Bagnes

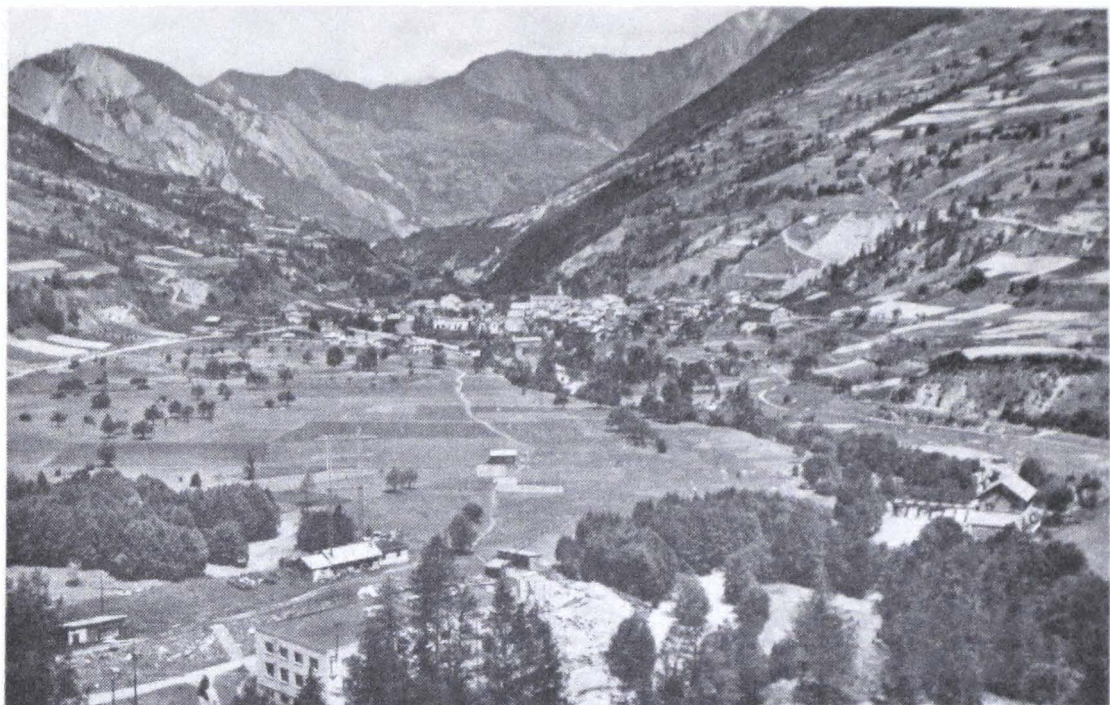


Photo Perrochet

Orsières. The winding path on the right leads to La Rosière

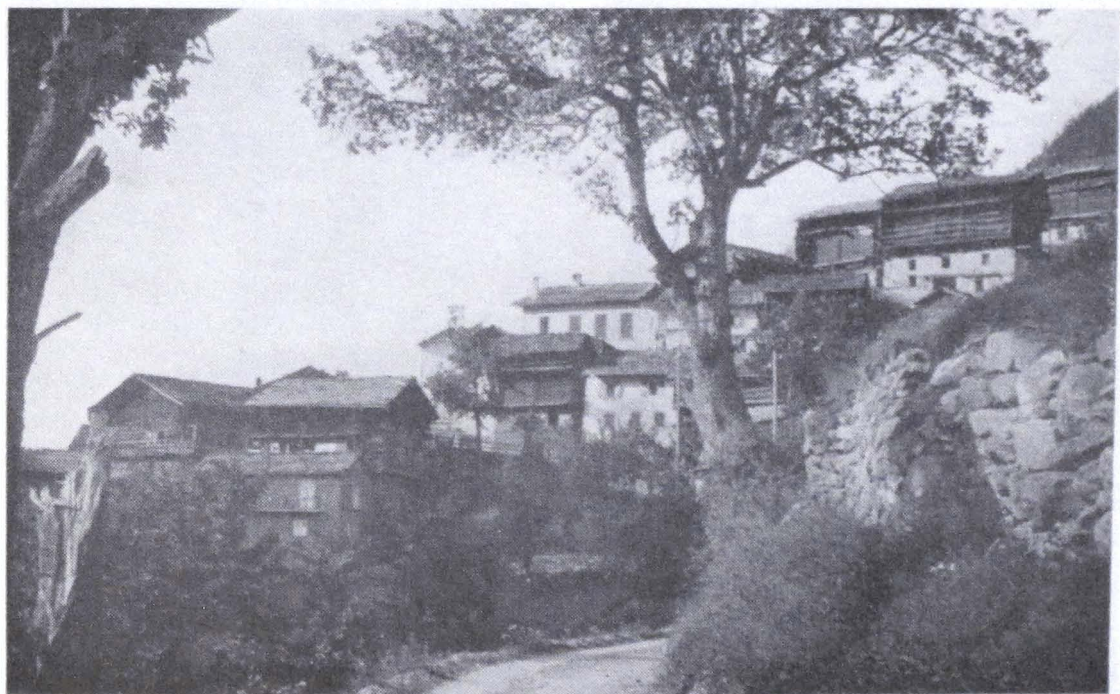


Photo R. Loup

La Rosière, Father Tornay's village



Photo R. Loup

The Chapel of St. Ann at La
Rosière

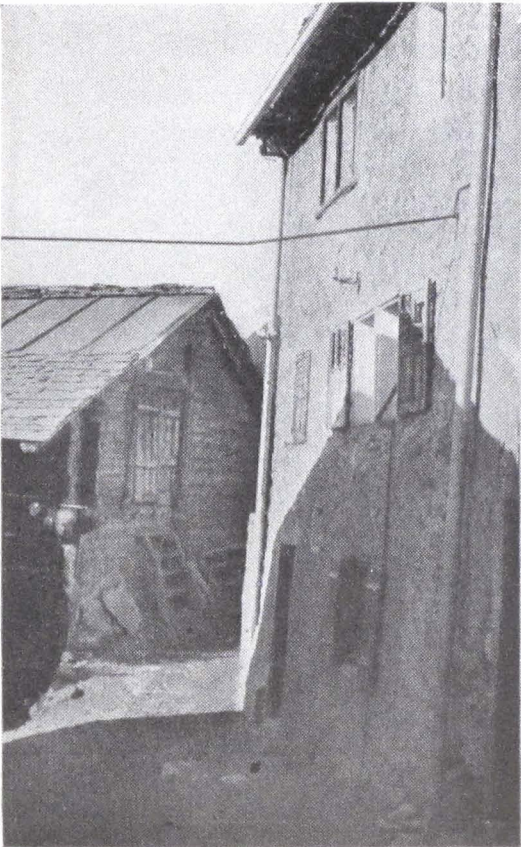


Photo R. Loup

The Tornay home at La Rosière

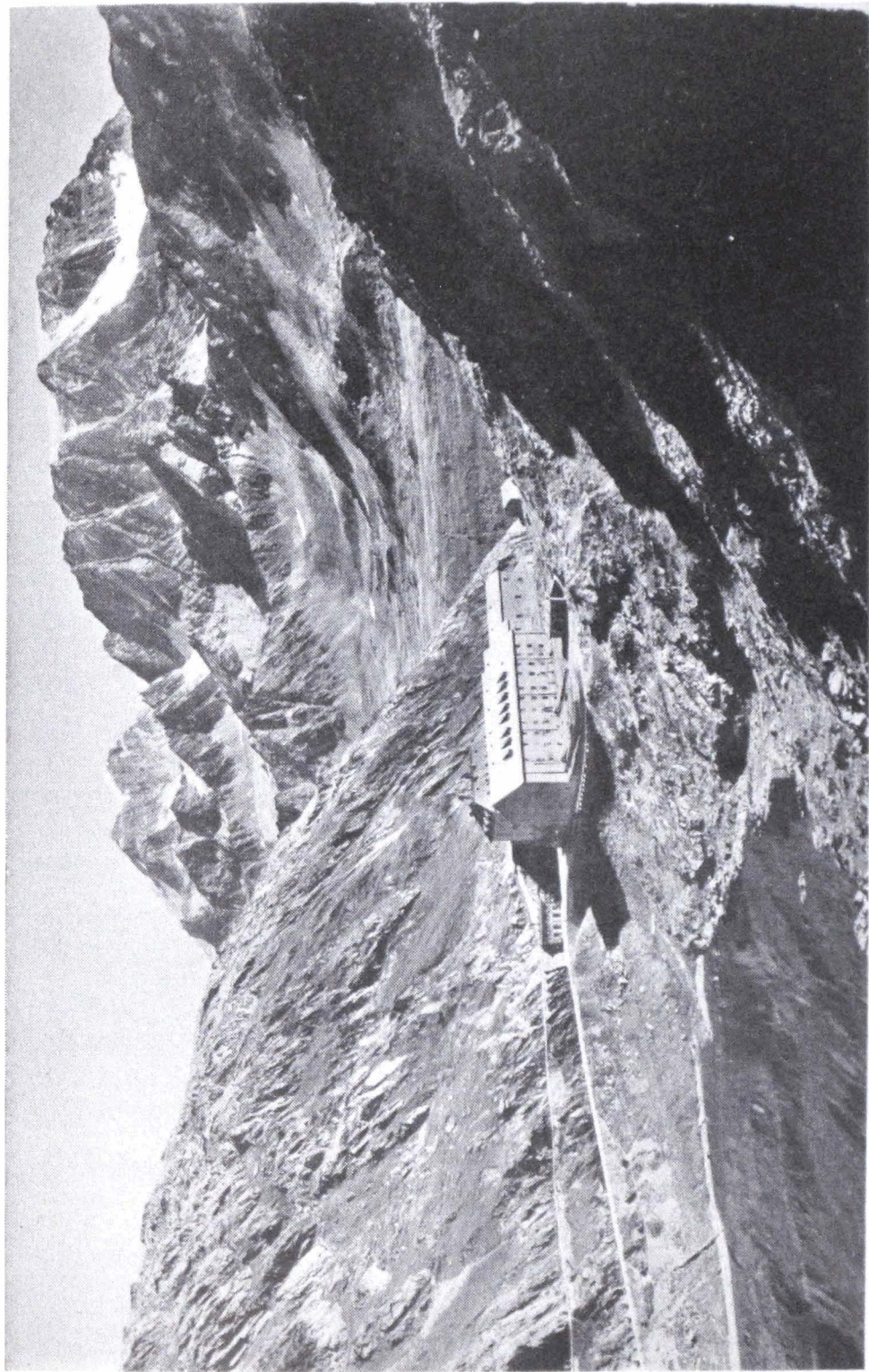
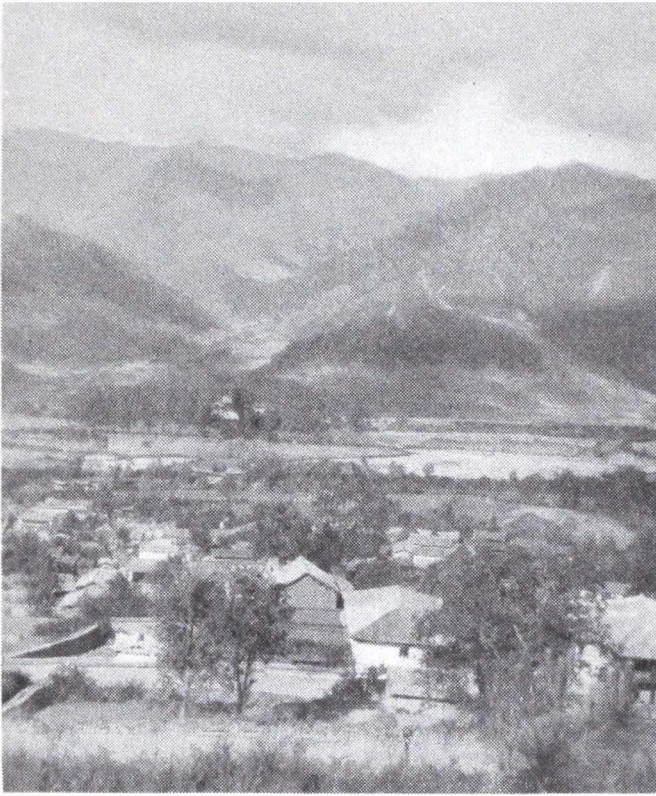


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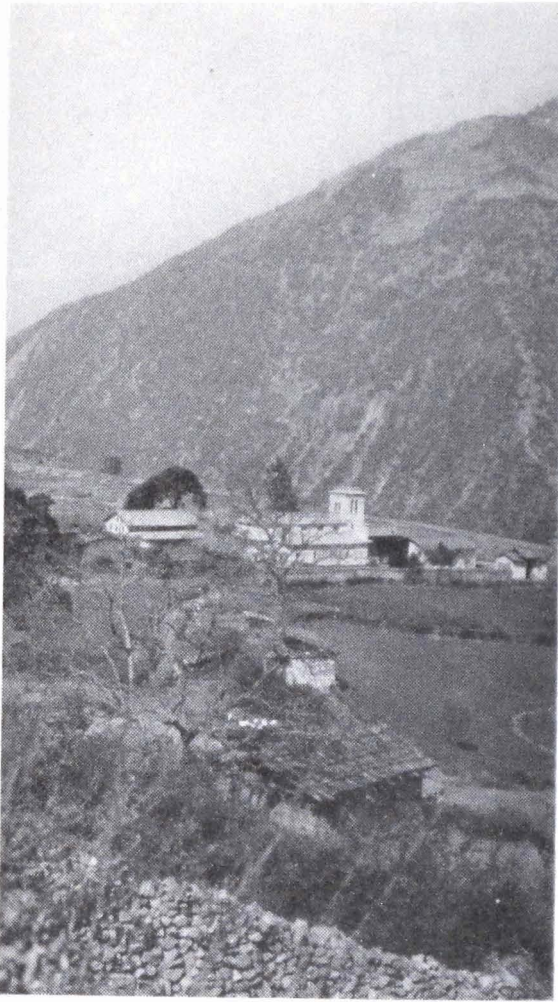
The Grand St. Bernard Hospice



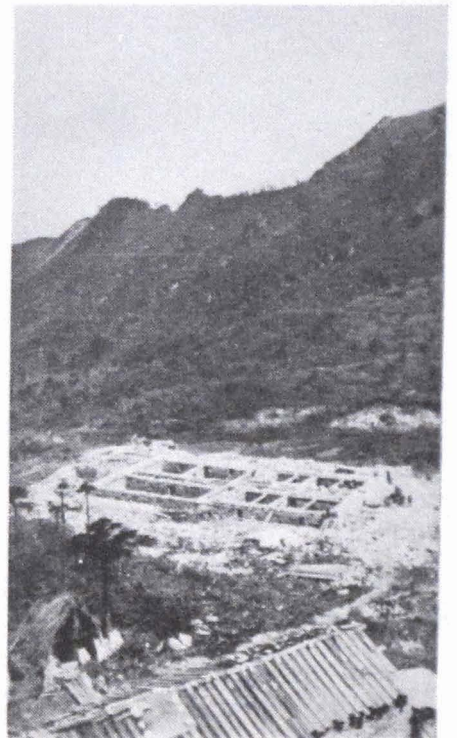
The St. Bernard mission at Weihsi



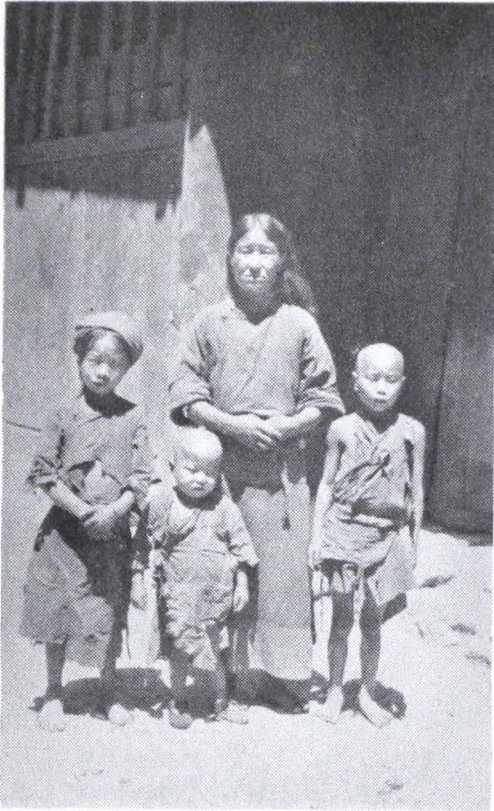
The Weihsi chapel and residence



The Catholic mission at
Tsechung



The foundations of the new Hos-
pice on the Latsa Pass with the
refuge in the foreground



A Catholic family at Yerkalo



Fathers Tornay and Lovey at Tsechung in 1947

Valley. Perhaps he thought of going on over to Ecône where there is a house that belongs to the order between Riddes and Saxon on the way past Verbier. This walk left such an impression on him that later in Tibet he could find no other words to express his happiness at certain moments than: “I am as happy as at Sonadon!”

Desire for Sanctity

Maurice pronounced his solemn vows on September 8, 1935, before Msgr. Bourgeois, and by a solemn and definitive oath was thus inscribed in the Congregation of the Canons Regular of the Grand St. Bernard.

The voice of the young professed monk, united to that of his colleagues, spoke out the words with a firmness that emphasized his full consent and interior joy: “Eternal and almighty God, I, Maurice Tornay, professed of the illustrious Provostship and Congregation of Saint Nicholas and Saint Bernard of the Order of Saint Augustine, prostrate before the altar . . . with hands joined and on my knees, not through force or fear, but through a holy movement of Thy divine inspiration . . . take the vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience. I place these vows in the hands of the Most Reverend Lord Provost and his canonically established successors. . . . May it please Thee, O my God, to accept this sacrifice of myself as an acceptable holocaust, and as Thou hast secretly inspired me to offer it to Thee, do Thou give me abundant grace to accomplish it. . . .”

At the end of the Mass, the *Te Deum* broke forth triumphantly.

Burning incense enveloped the people and the altars in fragrant clouds. Maurice, absorbed in overflowing joy and deep recollection, with the eyes of his soul looked beyond the flickering candles, out beyond and even higher than this sanc-

tuary that had just witnessed his promises. For a long time he had envisioned, as the lone route to holiness for himself, the royal road that crossed the oceans, touched Asia, and ascended to Tibet.

Undoubtedly, his heart was charmed by the beauty around him. This church above all! How many hours he had spent in those sumptuous stalls dedicated to the nine choirs of angels. Arranged like musical notes, little seraphs in graceful poses periodically break the straight line of the wainscoting. The backs of the stalls are ornamented with flourishes, ovolos and arabesques carved by a skillful hand. The black marble altars from the Aosta quarries have twisted or curved columns. Our Lady of the Assumption is framed over the main altar. Two walls that reach to the vault cut off the view of the chapter choir on the right and left; the communion rail blocks the entrance. Four altars in the nave occupy the side walls. Saint Bernard's altar on the Gospel side contains the relics of the Holy Founder in a golden case; opposite it is the altar of Saint Augustine. Our Lady's altar belonged to the old church, as did the tabernacle; it is in renaissance style that has an extraordinary mobility. Gold and white interlace to emphasize the curve of the floral or geometric decorations and the pompous attitude of personages: Saint Bernard mastering the demon, Saint Maurice clothed in vermilion, Saint Catherine, Saint Michael, and high above all the triumphant Madonna in a robe of many folds. A reproduction of Raphael's famous painting of the Espousals of the Blessed Virgin occupies the reredos.

No doubt, Maurice often used to stop before the last altar where the reliquary of Saint Faustina, a martyr, was kept. This young girl—a very gentle soul, the Roman inscription in the catacombs tells us—was the patron saint of his mother, Hélène Faustine Tornay. The wax figurine, dressed in a mauve robe, lies on pillows. The reliquary contains the mar-

tyr's bone which Pope Leo XII gave to the St. Bernard monks in 1828, at the request of the Swiss consul to the Holy See.

The white marble mausoleum, containing the remains of General Desaix, the conqueror of Marengo, was erected at the left side of the entrance to the church in 1806, at the desire of Napoleon, who said: “I want him to have the Alps as his footstool and the St. Bernard monks as his guardians.”

Maurice had a special veneration for the famous relics and works of art kept in the sacristy: a tenth-century crucifix, Gothic or modern reliquaries, the venerated reliquary of St. Bernard, his large ring, his pilgrim's and archdeacon's staves.

Such were the sacred objects and the sanctuary that evoked fruitful meditations in the mind and soul of Maurice Tornay. He became attached to them as to his native land, to the religious family that had just adopted him. But in his heart there was a rendering force at work. People and things are nothing if sanctity does not elevate and illuminate them. Would he have to leave everything to become a saint?

On January 10, 1933, the first four missionaries from the St. Bernard left Martigny for Tibet. Maurice attended the departure ceremony of his fellow monks. We can be sure that he was only waiting for permission to join them.

Their Superior, Canon Pierre Marie Melly, realized as soon as they had settled in their mission that they were far too few to cope with the large field that had been entrusted to them.

He therefore wrote to Msgr. Bourgeois for reinforcements. For three years, until 1936, an exchange of notes kept up between Martigny and Weihsi in Yunnan.

Msgr. Bourgeois told him: “Alas, I have no one to send you.”

Father Melly insisted: “Please survey the problem again. We are swamped with work. There would be so many posts to look after if we want to do good!”

In 1935, the provost made this proposition: “I have a priest,

Canon Lattion; a theology student, Maurice Tornay; and a lay brother, Nestor Rouiller. Tornay's health does not seem too good to me. His doctor has absolutely advised against his going."

We must remember that Maurice had just had a stomach operation.

Father Melly was not discouraged: "We would need priests, not seminarians whom we would have to take care of, direct their studies, and prepare for ordination to the priesthood. This risks taking too much of one of our missionary's time."

Finally, Msgr. Bourgeois' last answer was: "Tornay insists. His health has improved. The doctor thinks that he will be able to stand the trip and the Asian climate. As for his training, don't worry. He is an excellent man. He will work alone and you can be absolutely sure of his tenacity. A minimum of supervision will be enough. These three missionaries will leave Martigny in February, 1936."

Some weeks before their departure, Maurice Tornay and Father Lattion stayed at Fribourg with Doctor Clément and a local dentist. They were initiated into the secrets of medicine, surgery, and dentistry. This stay enabled them to make valuable friends among the priests and professors in this university town, in particular with Canon Charrière, the present Bishop of Lausanne, Geneva, and Fribourg.

When this period of preparation was over, Maurice had to say good-bye to his colleagues, his family, and the beloved Entremont region. He was anxious to see his sister in the convent and thus traveled all the way to Moret-sur-Loing, France.

On his return, he told his brother Louis: "I have clearly received in my soul the following intuition: in order that my ministry be fruitful, I have to work with all the intensity of my soul, for the pure love of God, without any desire of see-

ing my labors noticed. I want to burn myself out in the service of God. I am not coming back.”

He could not sleep the last night he spent at La Rosière. Next morning, he said good-by to all the family. Everyone kept back his tears. When Mme. Tornay was alone she burst into sobs. Later, Maurice was to write: “I felt the agony of all our sufferings.”

On the eve of their departure, he was at the provost’s residence in Martigny. All restlessness, all impatience, were gone. The hour had come. No longer could he look back.

He was walking down the corridor when he met Canon Gabioud who was coming up the stairs.

“Hello, Maurice,” he said.

The young missionary rushed to grasp the hand of his old friend and professor.

“Well, Maurice,” Father Gabioud said, “you must be happy. *Haec dies quam fecit Dominus*. . . . The day of the Lord has come. . . .”

“Father, I am really happy.”

They walked down the corridor, chatting. The evening shadows were falling through the windows.

“Maurice, you’re fortunate. I would have loved to have gone to the missions. In fact, I asked three times. But the plans of God and of our Superiors are unfathomable. But tell me, my friend, what is your motive? Why do you want to go to Tibet?”

Silence. Only the flat noise of their footsteps on the flagstone floor. Suddenly, Maurice said: “Father, let’s go to my room.”

A monk’s room: a bed, a table, two chairs, a few religious pictures on the wall.

Maurice thought for a few minutes, then said: “My motive?”

He was trying to analyze himself, to find in the depths of

his soul the reason that had led to his decision. Father Gabioud tried to help him.

“I understand you. You’re young. At your age, you love adventure. Who hasn’t wanted to travel . . . ? Journeys, new sights, cities seen only in books which you’d like to see in person . . .”

Maurice smiled and interrupted him.

“Father, you’re wrong. That’s not it at all.”

“I know. I’m leaving out the essential. I know quite well that above everything else you wanted to be a priest and a missionary. But at times, in the attraction to a distant apostolate there are human elements which are quite legitimate. . . .”

“I don’t believe they have any part in my case. Even preaching the Gospel to pagans . . .”

He was silent, not knowing whether he should really say what he was thinking. How would he be judged?

“Would you venture to say,” Father Gabioud continued, “that the missionary apostolate is not the first goal of your sacrifice?”

Maurice suddenly straightened up as though he had had a flash of insight into his own heart.

“Well, no,” he calmly said. “I believe my ideal is different. We’re on earth to sanctify ourselves, aren’t we?”

For a long time he looked at the other priest.

“You could sanctify yourself in Switzerland,” Canon Gabioud replied, “in our order, by the work and obligations you have as a monk.”

“Father, I know myself. I’m terribly inclined to routine, to the easy way. What kind of a situation would I be in, if I stayed here? A nice quiet little life, an assignment at the St. Bernard Hospice or elsewhere, an assistant or pastor of a parish. Many others have found the road to sanctity there.

But me, you know . . . I’ve got to have other stimulants to get out of the rut. . . .”

“A need of the absolute?”

“That’s it. Perhaps I have some kind of presumption or secret pride. I beg God’s forgiveness for it. But I have to tear myself away from everything, if I want to try to become better.”

Canon Gabioud understood that evening that his young student had chosen Tibet with the sole intention of being able, through devotion, suffering, and mortification, to climb the royal steps to sanctity there.

Here are some significant passages from letters which Canon Maurice Tornay wrote to his family while living at the St. Bernard Hospice between 1931 and 1936:

Before entering the novitiate, I used to say to myself: “You will be somewhat a prisoner behind those walls way up in the mountains.” And I have never been so free. I do what I want. I can do all I want, for God’s will is before me every minute, and I want to do nothing but His will.

Remember that all pleasures have so far disappointed you. . . . Only heaven will bring us a pleasure that is not merely without sorrow but beyond all hope. And we are so close to attaining it! So let us hurry and love Jesus before we die.

Look back. . . . What is left of the past? Of all the worries that absorbed your heart, of all the preoccupations that turned you away from God—tell me, what is left? Nothing—nothing at all. You hardly recall your tears. . . . So I come and urge you to live a holy life, not to drive Jesus from your home or from each of your hearts, but to think of and to long for

the day when He will come to ask you for your soul. How happy you will be on that day that you lived right. . . . Live right!

Nothing happens, nothing occurs without God having either willed or allowed it. And in all that God allows to happen, He seeks only an opportunity to seize our hearts.

The good God asks for only one thing: His will. He shows His will by means of events, and when events are illegible, by the priests to whom we confide ourselves.

CHAPTER 5

Toward the Land of the Gods

The Tibetan Marches¹

WHAT is Tibet?

According to Maurice Tornay: "It is a land above our land, held up by two walls that rise above it, at an altitude of twelve, fifteen, eighteen thousand feet: the Himalaya in the south and the Kunlun in the north. From there, says the legend, all you have to do is to climb the steps of the heavens, pass beyond the roof of the world, and come to the dwelling of the gods. Formerly, it must have been an interior sea among the mountains. Then, through a depression towards China, the water flowed out in four rivers: the Irrawaddy and all its ramifications, the Salween, the Mekong, and the Yangtze. Now the ancient sea is nothing but glaciers and marshes; but from them the four rivers receive their eternal birth. They form four valleys which are almost parallel at first. You might call them four Valais as in our region of the Conches, but with steeper and much higher slopes.

"Thus on the plains you have interminable rice paddies, then higher up the fields, the forests, and the snows. In a short distance you have all kinds of crops. So you see that Tibet takes in two different regions: the high plateau region or terrace, and a lower region, the depression of the terrace."

¹ "Marches" means borderlands.—*Tr.*

Take a look at a map of Asia.

North of Indo-China is the Chinese province of Yunnan. Rivers and streams cut their way through deep valleys, but the country narrows in the north in the region near Assam and Tibet; these latter are the extremely elevated regions where the four rivers flow out of "the land of the gods," sending their torrents southward to fill the gorges with a perpetual roaring. In the west, the Irrawaddy comes out of Tibet, goes through Burma, and forms the broad Rangoon delta as it empties into the Indian Ocean. In the center, the Salween and Mekong run parallel, then separate before leaving Yunnan; the Salween waters Burma, and the Mekong meanders through Indo-China, forms part of the border of Siam, and then empties into the South China Sea near Saigon and Cho Lon. Finally, the Yangtze, after much hesitation, strikes an easterly course across China for about 1,200 miles, passes Nanking, and reaches the East China Sea at Shanghai.

In their upper course, these rivers form four deep gashes from north to south, separated by towering mountains and high passes that are almost inaccessible in winter.² Although side valleys add to the diversity of the land, this is a rough picture of the layout of the terrain.

From Yunnanfu or Kunming, the capital of the Yunnan province, you go about 250 miles west to reach Tali, situated on the edge of a lake. About 175 miles farther on to the northwest is Weihsi, in a side valley of the Mekong. This is the headquarters of the St. Bernard mission territory.

This wild, rugged, mountainous country constituted the Tibetan Marches, under Chinese control. There was only one Christian settlement in forbidden Tibet itself: Yerkalo, way up north on the Mekong.

² This area became known as "The Hump" in World War II, when American airmen flew over it repeatedly; see the article in *Life* for September 11, 1944.—*Tr.*

For centuries the Tibetans and Chinese have fought over this borderland territory. The fight has not yet ended. It gets worse year by year. Formerly, British influence (against Tsarist Russian influence), today Chinese and Russian Communist influence (against the West and the Asiatic "neutrals") have made this region a crossroads where enemy troops have repeatedly met with Tibet as the stake.

While Christianity has spread over the entire world, Tibet has always formed a wall of opposition due to its lamas and theocratic government.

Nevertheless in previous centuries, Christian missionaries have tried the great adventure of penetrating into Tibet—and with some success. In the seventeenth century, Father Antonio d'Andrade, a Portuguese Jesuit, won over to his cause one of the most powerful kings in the country. But the lamas fomented a revolution which led to the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1652. Their twenty-five-year apostolate was destroyed in a few days.

Two new attempts were made in the eighteenth century. The brilliant Jesuit Ippolito Desideri spent several years in Lhasa, the capital, which means "land of the gods" or "land of the spirits." And Father Orazio della Penna, a Capuchin, reached the "holy city" in 1722. The Dalai Lama himself, the religious head of the country, agreed to allow the Gospel to be preached to the people. But in the years that followed, he saw that the Christians refused to receive the Buddhist blessing. They were arrested, beaten, and forced to render homage to the Living Buddha. The missionaries had to leave in 1745. The only remnant of their labors is a bell in the vestibule of the Potala temple, the mother lamasery of Lhasa. The bell bears the inscription: *Te Deum laudamus, Te Dominum confitemur* ("We praise Thee, O God: we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord").

How then was the Cross to be planted in a land where

Buddhist authorities held the political power to exile or persecute the missionaries? Entry through the South and Nepal did not seem very favorable. How about through the East? Right at the gates of Tibet lay what is now the Sikang Province of China, which had been entrusted to the Foreign Missions Society of Paris. In 1846, Pope Gregory XVI made Tibet a vicariate apostolic and appointed Msgr. Perrocheau to study ways and means of getting past the forbidden border.

Thus the priests of the Paris Foreign Missions received one of the most difficult and dangerous assignments in all mission history—to enter Tibet and introduce Christianity there. For a century they labored, fought, suffered, and poured out their blood. Ten priests gave their lives as witnesses of the truth; more than ten died there in the service of God. This society by its splendid apostolate and by the heroism of its missionaries served the Church well.

Father Alexis Renou succeeded in founding a Christian community at Bonga. But only for a time. It ended in pillage and fire. But in 1865, Fathers Biet and Desgodins led their faithful followers to Yerkalo and established themselves juridically on a few bits of ground, thanks to the connivance of the local populace and the silence of the native chiefs. Yerkalo had been conquered by the Chinese Empire; but in 1932, a band of Tibetans, paid by a lama, took over the district and returned it to the control of Lhasa. This reassertion of Buddhist hegemony marked the beginning—or rather the renewal—of persecution. “Yerkalo,” Father Lattion wrote in 1945, “is still one of those posts where martyrdom can crown an apostolic life.”

The St. Bernard Monks

In 1929, missionary work in Tibet took a new direction. Msgr. de Guébriant, Superior of the Paris Foreign Missions Society, realized the hardships of the work in the high moun-

tains and regretted that he did not have enough priests for this dangerous undertaking. He laid the problem before Pope Pius XI. The latter thought of the St. Bernard monks and suggested that he take up the matter with their provost, Msgr. Bourgeois. At the beginning of February, 1930, the two prelates met at the headquarters of the Foreign Missions Society on the rue du Bac in Paris. They decided to send two Swiss priests to study the land and the problem.

This important task was assigned to Fathers Pierre Marie Melly and Paul Coquoz. They sailed from Marseille on November 20, 1930. On their route were Port Said, Djibouti, Colombo, Singapore, Saigon, and finally Hanoi. From there, they had a three days' train ride to Kunming, capital of Yunnan province. On leaving this modern city, they started their adventure. It was a very long voyage by horse, on foot, and finally on skis. They counted their progress by daily stages. Father Victor Nussbaum of the Paris Foreign Missions Society met them at Huilicheu on the left bank of the Yangtze. For the next four months, he was to be their guide.

To get into the Mekong basin, they had to go up to Lutien, cross over the Litipin Pass, then go down to Weihsi. They arrived there on February 15, 1931. Ten days later they left and went along a river that flows north and empties into the Mekong. They stopped at Siao-Weihsi, Father Nussbaum's residence. Father Francis Goré, regional superior and in charge of Tsechung, was waiting to give them a hearty welcome.

Fathers Melly and Coquoz spent three months exploring the region in every direction. One of their special duties was to select a suitable site for a hospice "where the divine praises might be chanted unceasingly and travelers be given open hospitality."

They chose the Latsa Pass. But why this particular pass instead of one of those farther north, the Dokerla or Sila?

Father Melly had his reasons: "The Latsa Pass—not to be confused with Lhasa, capital of Tibet—is located in Yunnan province, on the triple frontier of China, Burma, and Tibet, at twenty-seven degrees latitude north, and is a direct connection between the Mekong and Salween valleys, northwest of Siao-Weihsi. It takes two days to reach there and four days from Weihsi, the present headquarters of our mission. It is exactly 12,464 feet in altitude. This pass was preferred to the other two, situated respectively about sixty and ninety miles farther north, because it is the natural trade route between China, the Salween Valley, and Upper Burma. Even before we began to lay the foundations of the hospice, everything indicated that Latsa was going to be the route of the future. However, it was enough for us to know that this pass was well traveled, long, and dangerous for the numerous persons who brave it."

On their return to Switzerland, Fathers Melly and Coquoz gave a detailed report of their investigation. The chapter of the Congregation of St. Bernard decided unanimously to accept their recommendations and to prepare at once to send the first band of missionaries. Besides Fathers Melly and Coquoz, there were Brother Louis Duc and a lay volunteer, Mr. Robert Chappelet. They left Marseille on January 13, 1933.

The Second Group

Three years later, the second group of missionaries—Father Cyril Lattion, Maurice Tornay, and Brother Nestor Rouiller—were ready to leave. On February 26, 1936, they too sailed from Marseille.

"Reinforcements at last!" rejoiced one of the first group in Tibet. "At this moment, they are on the Indian Ocean. Each day brings them a few hundred miles closer. Soon after Easter, Brother Duc will be meeting them at Tali."

“Look at the map,” Maurice wrote. “We left Marseille, sailed between Corsica and Sardinia, between Italy and Sicily. We had a glimpse of Crete and tomorrow, March 2, we will stop for a few hours at Port Said. . . . Our ship is painted red and white and is called the *André Lebon*. . . . It is a building bigger than the church at Orsières. . . .”

He gave his parents full details. His cabin was wooden except the floor and ceiling which were of iron. The bunks faced the portholes through which he could just put his head. How did he spend his time? Mass in the morning, the breviary, breakfast, lounging on the deck.

“You talk,” he wrote, “yawn, get bored, have a good time, sleep, watch the children (for there are some), but you don’t even have the courage to read, you have no strength; it is as though you had just recovered from a long illness.”

After a little joking about seasickness which he had for three days, his thoughts abruptly rise and soar to a higher plane: “This separation which we have voluntarily accepted will draw us closer together in heaven and already here on earth. It is only the life of faith that counts. So let’s live our faith. We may weep, but let’s offer our tears to God. . . . I feel that a new life is awaiting me in a new world. Now, this will entail a great deal of labor and suffering. I know that you help me bear it. In God, we come closer together.”

Colombo . . . Saigon . . . During the trip, he made the acquaintance of a Chinese man named Chang. While on the river near Saigon, the wind blew his hat into the water.

“Damn it!” he cried. “A bad sign!”

Chang gave him his own hat without a word. This first act of welcome from China made a happy impression on him. There was a welcome too in the wide winding canal with the mangrove trees making its banks inaccessible and in the distant silhouette of the cathedral. After four more days on board ship, they docked at Haiphong. A three hour train ride

brought them to Hanoi, the capital of Tonkin. A few days' stopover at the Paris Foreign Missions Fathers' residence gave Maurice the opportunity to grasp a little of the missionaries' customs and way of thinking.

"This residence," he explained, "is a house for traveling missionaries. . . . They're really funny. They come in and sit right down without asking your permission. They smoke without wondering whether smoking bothers you or not. To be an acquaintance, they just have to catch sight of you. You don't have to shake hands. When you're visiting them, you're supposed to make yourself at home; when they visit you, they make themselves at home. They offer you a smoke, but hope you'll say no, because they're short on tobacco. That's what I'm going to become. Will you still love me?"

The trip from Hanoi to Kunming lasted four days. The train did not run at night. The first stop was Lao Kay on the Tonkin border. Then into China. The young missionary's heart felt a certain pang of sadness and the uneasiness of insecurity. It seemed to him that a barrier had risen up behind him and that he was entering an alien world where from now on nothing could shield him from the excesses of human brutality. They stopped at Amitchou, then reached Kunming, the terminal. The unknown was becoming even darker. Maurice was now at the edge of the rough and primitive hinterland.

"Two days in a truck to Tali, and ten days by caravan to Weihsi, our home. There is a road between Kunming and Tali."

This so-called road, laid out by engineers and made by forced labor, is only a trail through the fields, a highway without a bed or stones. If it rains, it's a sewer. If the weather is good, it's a ribbon of dust. It is regularly cut by furrows which let irrigation waters run across from one rice paddy to the other. A wider ditch is covered with planks.

The driver gets out and looks the bridge over. He thinks he can make it if he guns the truck. Then he runs into another obstacle—the ditch is wider than it ought to be. He shakes his head, then concludes: “*Ko te ne. . .* We’ll make it.”

He crawls back into the cab and the truck shoots forward like an arrow. They made it! But after the trip, Father Lattion swore he had a headache for four days. As for the chinaware the missionaries took with them, well, part of it was smashed, naturally.

The truck itself didn’t exactly inspire confidence. It was overloaded to double its capacity and was treated like a mule. It worked all right for a year but it lasted ten years, thanks to the ingenuity of a mechanic who kept it together with sticks and wire. The lights went out. The driver’s helper picked up a stick, rubbed it with resin, and lit it. He then sat on the hood, but the flames blinded the driver. So they made the helper get off the hood and walk along in front of the truck. Luckily, they had less than sixty miles to go!

Red Terror

Civil war broke out in Yunnan in 1936. Communist bands, fleeing Chiang Kai-shek’s troops during the Red Army’s famous “long march” to northwestern China, were devastating the countryside. What road would they take after they went beyond Kunming and Lake Tali? Would they go up the Yangtze? Or across the Litipin Pass and up the Mekong? Days of uncertainty. A vanguard came into Lutien. If the villages along the Mekong were rich and easy to plunder, the army would go over the pass, and then all the Catholic missions, from Weihsi to Yerkalo, would fall prey to the bandits.

The young missionaries were some hours ahead of the Communist troops who, instead of going to Tali, went along the north side of the lake.

“Up to April 25,” the chronicle reported, “everything went along normally. At the beginning of the month, a telegram from Kunming told us that our missionaries had arrived and that they were going to leave for Tali where they expected to meet one of us. So Brother Duc left for the south on April 13, Easter Monday. Here the news has already been passed on. Fathers Goré and Coquoz and Mr. Chappelet will be at Weihsi to greet our newcomers.”

The Reds' advance upset this plan. Father Melly's first thought was to create a void and thus discourage the pillagers. A single course thrust itself on them: to flee, taking with them all their poor riches—records, sacred vessels, vestments, and altar linens. Weihsi was in chaos. The mandarin could not protect his people; he admitted his complete powerlessness and advised the foreigners to take refuge in the mountains. Father Coquoz was urgently summoned from Siao-Weihsi with two mules and arrived at Weihsi on April 28. The next day at dawn the monks, accompanied by their “boys,” went down the side valley that opens up on the Mekong and after a seven hours' forced march came to Anando. They had just finished eating when two messengers ran into the courtyard of the inn and began to shout at the owner: “Who are those people? How many are they? Where do they come from? Where are they going? Does that baggage and gun belong to them?”

The situation was clear. Some spies, like others no doubt, were looking over the possibilities of plunder in the Mekong basin. Their report would determine which would be the most profitable route to follow. For Fathers Melly and Coquoz there was not a minute to lose. They set out for Siao-Weihsi at a furious pace. But Father Coquoz couldn't take it. His companion suggested that he cross the mountain and meet him at Bahang on the Salween. He hurried on and met two youths who agreed to go ahead of him to give the alarm.

Then he encountered a Tibetan caravan in full flight, rented a horse, and reached Siao-Weihsi in record time. The Christian men and women schoolteachers and everybody else in the village were ready to leave. They fled to the East, thus getting away from the route the Communists were sure to follow. Father Melly and Mr. Chappelet went up the Mekong, sent a messenger to Father Goré at Tsechung to warn him of the danger, then crossed the river and took the trail to Latsa. At the top of the pass they stopped and looked at each other for a long while. There they were, stripped of everything: only a few coins in their pockets, windjackets over their shoulders, standing in the snow with their pipes in their mouths and only a little tobacco left. Down below in the distance their home at Weihsi was perhaps in flames. Was there any room for hope? However, Father Melly could not keep from exclaiming: "How happy we are!"

On May 3, they arrived in Bahang where a French priest, Father Bonnemin, gave them a joyful welcome and provided them with the clothes they needed.

But where was Father Coquoz? Two days of waiting and worrying followed. Finally on the evening of the 7th, he came riding in on his mule, a smile on his face, his pipe puffing and his rifle on his back. Everything had gone all right, or just about, for several times he had to threaten with his gun in order to get something to eat. On the same day, about twenty porters arrived with Father Goré's provisions.

So the Mekong Valley was empty. The Reds could go through but they would find only ghost towns. They didn't like the prospect and gave up the small profit of a breakout across the Litipin, and without waiting any longer, they headed north along the Yangtze.

Now reassured, Fathers Melly and Coquoz went over the Sila Pass and down to Tsechung to visit Father Goré. A letter reached them there. The new arrivals were at Weihsi.

What had happened? Maurice Tornay tells us: "We finally arrived here yesterday evening, May 8. And there was no one to meet us. We had to start off by forcing the door open, but all the same we were happy to be at home. The Communists were two days away from here. . . . Some of them are really terrible men. Four days ago we went through one village they had pillaged so thoroughly that we could not find anything for ourselves or our mules. Two Protestant women had a mission there. The Reds were able to seize only their servant; they burned him with a low fire. He was not yet dead when we arrived. Other bands that were less cruel pillaged and put to death only the wealthy. They like to capture missionaries in the hope of getting huge ransoms for them. If the ransom does not come, they kill them or let them go.

"We made the trip from Kunming to Tali just ahead of them. Our truck was the last one that was able to get through. Brother Duc who was supposed to meet us at Tali arrived late. We had to wait three weeks. . . . The trip on mule from Tali to Weihsi lasted nine days. We set out about five o'clock each morning and camped about five o'clock in the afternoon. We slept in Chinese inns, which correspond to our barns, except they have many more lice and bugs. The country is wild. We went up and down places as steep as the paths at the Crêtes. Our horses and mules eat only rice straw and three times a day what we call a 'mess' of beans. As for ourselves, we ate the provisions Brother Duc had brought and the rice we bought. The other Chinese dishes are a pain in the neck. They have tasteless, bitter cheese mixed with beans, rice cakes, and wheat cakes like bread dough."

The writer had the happiness of meeting Brother Duc in Switzerland. He is a very good man with a broad beard and a peaceful expression. Behind that calm face you can discern an uncommon strength of soul.

“Brother Duc, weren’t you worried about the Communists during your trip to Tali?”

“I made forced marches. It took me only six stages. I believe the Reds were a little to the north. At Tali, I met government troops.”

“Did they let you through?”

“A sentry shouted: ‘Are you a Communist?’ But a very friendly officer intervened and I was able to go the house of the Betharram Fathers.”

“That’s where the newcomers were waiting for you. I suppose they were glad to see you.”

“They certainly were. They were worried about me.”

“What had they been doing in the meantime?”

“Msgr. Magenties hired a Chinese professor for them. They had been studying.”

“How did you come back?”

“I took the shortest route. But it was also the hardest. We were more certain of not falling into the hands of the Communist rear guard.”

“Your arrival at Weihsi was certainly a disappointment. No one to meet you!”

“I knew absolutely nothing of what had happened while I was away. Anyway, we had to get into the house. It is a square house with the church on the first floor and a wooden balcony running around the second floor. I found the keys in Father Melly’s room over the porch. We made a ladder to get to the balcony and then forced a door open.”

“What were Father Tornay’s reactions during all these unusual events?”

“He took them in his stride. He felt it was something to be expected in a mission country.”

On May 18, Fathers Melly and Coquoz were finally able to end their travels. They had covered more than 250 miles. From Siao-Weihsi to Weihsi is about thirty-five miles. A long

day's trip. It was hot, very hot. The travelers pressed their mounts. Suddenly, they couldn't believe their eyes . . . the newcomers were up ahead to meet them! There they were on the trail at the edge of some bushes, four white caps. They shouted with joy. Both groups ran and embraced one another.

Later, Father Melly said: "I would gladly make the trip from the Salween all over to live through a moment like that again."

CHAPTER 6

On the Latsa Pass

Weeks at Weihsi

WHAT a language this Chinese is!" Maurice Tornay groaned during his first few days.

After some rest, the work at Weihsi was organized. An alarm clock went off somewhere in the house at five-thirty in the morning.

"Be proud of us," Maurice wrote. "Even those of us who were not good sleepers in Europe have a hard time here getting out of bed so early."

Devotions, adoration, meditation, Mass and Divine Office lasted until seven-thirty.

For breakfast they had coffee with milk (often it had a watery taste), also rancid butter and wild honey, or at times, eggs. And then they smoked their pipes.

"Between the two mortifications, that of smelling the bad odors or of getting dizzy with the tobacco, I prefer the latter. All missionaries do the same."

At eight o'clock, the study of Chinese and theology began. At ten o'clock, their Chinese professor arrived. He was an elderly Protestant from Szechwan province who was well-disposed toward Catholicism. He entered gravely, "his mustache twisted like horns and glued with bouillon." He read a text; his students carefully repeated each syllable, hammering the accents to get used to them. The theology class at

eleven o'clock was the noisiest of all. Maurice loved a debate, not for the sake of arguing but because he wanted to attain the full truth by overcoming obstacles and refuting objections.

"If your classes are as lively as ours, I pity your neighbors."

Study began again at two o'clock and lasted until six-thirty.

Of course, this strict schedule suffered modifications and interference: excursions, visits, invitations—not to mention Thursdays which were set aside for games and sports.

Maurice had one preoccupation: to get to know the land and the people of the Tibetan Marches as soon as possible since these were the people he dreamed of converting.

He first of all described the building where he lived. The entire edifice was made in the form of a Greek cross, with the chapel forming the upright beam. On the second floor were the rooms of Fathers Melly and Lattion, Tornay, and Brothers Duc and Rouiller. A balcony ran the length of the doors and windows. The kitchen and stable were behind the house, while the school was a few steps from the church door.

Weihsi is at an altitude of approximately 11,000 feet. It was a subprefecture administered by a mandarin of the second class. There was no use in looking for any typical secular or religious building that might stand out in the silhouette of that village of 2,500 inhabitants. The low squatting houses have dry mud walls and paneless windows. The cedar or fir shingles shine like slate on the sloping roofs. The streets are narrow, winding. It is a large sprawling village that lies at the bottom of a valley like a mass of brown bark lost among the leaves of the oaks and walnuts. All around, the mountains lift up their peaks and domes, cutting off the horizon like the high walls of a huge amphitheater.

Weihsi is situated at the summit of a valley that slopes towards the north. The river that waters it—the "Eternal Springtime"—empties into the Mekong about fifty miles away.

The population is very mixed. The Chinese are there by right of conquest. They rub elbows with the Lissus who belong to the Tibeto-Burman group, the Mossos, the Lutses and the Tibetans—all are former owners of the land.

Maurice gives us his first impressions: "The men and women wear trousers and a kind of sleeveless jacket. The women tie their trousers at their ankles with strings so that they look like bicycle riders. They are all dirty and ragged. Our worst-clad paupers would make a good showing among them."

The Chinese Soul and Ours

Mission work is terribly difficult here.

Go to the marketplace in the center of the village. In this milling crowd, in front of stands with green vegetables, furs, saffron, cloths, matches, coal, wild honey, wood, salt, rice, wheat, butter, you see yellow heads and smiling faces bowing in a respectful greeting. Many talk to the priest and are gracious about it. His passing by seems to arouse sympathy and admiration. But what is going on behind those flat or wrinkled brows? At Weihsi, there were only eighty Christians! What causes this almost universal indifference to Catholicism? Pride and badly understood nationalism. The leaders cannot admit that their religion—even if they think it is ridiculous to adore idols—is inferior to that of the "foreign devils." And the poor too often put personal interests ahead of every other consideration. To this basic egoism, you have to add a lack of frankness which makes all relationships cloudy and uncertain.

"When a Chinese comes to you to study religion or when a bad Christian becomes better, what are you supposed to do?" Maurice asked. "Thank God? No. Be happy? Not at all. Agree to instruct him or get a better idea of the man? Still

less. The first thing to do is to distrust and say: He is coming; therefore, he is angling for something. He needs money or he wants medicine. That's the case ninety-eight times out of a hundred."

He wrote to his fellow monks back in Switzerland: "This is the work we have to do. Bring to Christ these souls who perhaps are farthest away from His spirit, who understand nothing, absolutely nothing, of the simplicity of the Gospel, who are satisfied with the goods of this earth, who have no need of God, who value the missionaries only for their money.

"But our work is your work too, isn't it? And we are going to encourage one another. At least, the little we do will be done for God. . . . And God will give us opportunities to do much. . . . We are all right, we are happy in our mission. We get depressed here more than elsewhere, but then the sunny days are brighter here."

Maurice was getting to know the Chinese soul and psychology. He meditated on these words of Father Renou and made them his own: "We will have to save the people in spite of themselves. For their natural life is only an 'explosion of instincts.' Their reason: perfected instinct. Their defense against evil: the fear of another threatening evil. I have never seen or run across any trace in their moral life of revolting against their fallen state, of trying to go against the current, of asking help and forgiveness. The Fall? Paganism admits the Fall, and the inevitable damnation, and the uselessness of trying. . . . The authorities are still worse. They have no idea of the ways of God—but those are the only ways I want to know. The best authorities I can hope for are indifferent ones. Friends? Too far away—our appeals to them will never reach them or will come too late. Enemies? Numerous wolves. So then? I look to the left: nothing to expect. I look to the right: nothing to hope for. Conclusion: no help from men to effect the salvation that comes from God alone."

The blood of martyrs is a precious offering. It will save China. Maurice Tornay foresaw this. The Spirit blows—and we see these people who had been sunk deeply into sin for centuries rise up spontaneously and attain the heights of heroism. When eleven Christians of Yerkalo were shot to death on April 18, 1905, astounding statements were heard—as always happens in such persecutions:

“I prefer to die rather than deny my faith!”

“With all my heart I forgive my executioners, and I will pray for them in heaven. Be firm in the faith!”

On the Trail to Latsa

These anxieties and worries that echo in Maurice's letters did not prevent him from being optimistic and a joyful worker. He dug stubbornly into his theology and Chinese. Father Melly, who knew the drive of his temperament, laid on him, as his first obligation, a total submission to the rule of the house. No late hours, no studying at night. Though Maurice might try repeatedly to get permission, Father Melly was inflexible. Maurice's health left much to be desired, he had to be moderate and realize that he couldn't learn everything in a day. As a perfect monk, he obeyed without question.

On August 20, he took his first dogmatic theology exam. During the space of one year he memorized 7,000 Chinese characters—a real mental feat. He never laid his dictionary aside.

From September 1 to October 20 he was at Latsa Pass. Father Melly forbade him to take his theology books. Maurice must rebuild his strength and further his study of Chinese. The rest, for which he longed so much, would come later and in its own good time.

The route from Weihsi to Latsa bound together the head-

quarters and the hospice that was now under construction. For nine hours—or to use the words of Father Nussbaum of the Paris Foreign Missions Society, for fifteen pipes and three Rosaries—they descended toward the northwest along the Eternal Springtime River. The trail was overgrown with bushes and briars which were cut down only for the passage of a mandarin or other important person. In about an hour, they came to the village of La Ho Chu, a name which indicates that the people once had the custom of feeding live babies to the hogs when they wanted to get rid of them.

Merchants, lines of porters and mules, come up to Weihsi to sell their merchandise. They chat for a while, each tries to understand the other and make himself understood, if not by word at least by gestures and expression. The Chinese often stop a caravan, ask prices, haggle and buy. . . . The native merchants are happy to make a big sale and are willing to let their goods go at a lower price. They can get home sooner or stop for a drink at an inn or the house of one of the inhabitants.

The valley closes in beyond Anando. The path plunges through narrow gorges and threads in between high walls. Along the trail a plank bridge hugs the winding rock wall above a ravine.

On coming into the Mekong Valley, they still had three more hours to go before reaching Siao-Weihsi, a village that was almost entirely Catholic. Father Coquoz lived there. The houses were built on a slightly elevated area at the edge of a stream. Walnut and pine trees alternated with fields of corn and grain.

Maurice wrote of the three hours along the Mekong: "It's the little trips like this one that bring us our greatest, if not our only pleasure. But to enjoy them, I am very happy to have given all that I have given. And if it were necessary, I would give still more. The river roars like far-off thunder. Traces or

outlines of villages seem to people this valley which the river has dug out between steep sides, without caring about men, as though it wanted to reserve this part of the earth for itself. The animals trot to the singing of the birds. Walnut trees furnish cool damp shade. You forget everything and expect nothing and would not be surprised if you saw the veil between God and us ripped apart. And you understand a little the well-being of souls in nirvana.

“But finally, here at least, you feel in the depths of your being an agony that seems to bore right through you: the rope bridge has come into sight.”

The Rope Bridge

In this region where rivers and streams form a close network, the natives have found simple but none too safe ways of crossing. When the space is only a few yards, planks or stones are enough. But where it is one of those rivers that either floods the plain like an inland lake or narrows and goes through a deep gorge with vertical walls almost a thousand feet high, then the following methods have to be resorted to: a ferry or a hollowed-out tree trunk, a plank bridge held up by iron chains, and finally a mere rope.

Since the waters are often swift and tumultuous, especially from May on, it is quite a feat to handle a boat. Near the banks, the river is quiet but out in the channel it rolls on rapidly. The way to cross is to take your boat upstream until you feel the current catching you, then you turn the boat around as quickly as you can, go downstream but guide the boat towards the other side, then row upstream again along the edge where the water is calmer, back to a place opposite where you began.

The plank bridge seems safer even though it moves and is light as a swing. But its constant swaying back and forth and

the frightening way it gives under a heavy load scares the horses and mules which are hard enough to control even on the open road. On the other hand, the little boards that form the bridge floor are not tied together or fixed to the suspension ropes. When they tip under the animals' hooves, you have to be careful lest you disappear into the abyss with all your baggage.

The three-strand bamboo rope that stretches from one side to the other is tied to and rolled around large posts planted in the ground and buttressed by a pile of rocks. A piece of gouged-out wood serves as a pulley or slide. The "boys" attach the traveler with a strap that runs under his arms and seat; he joins his hands around the slide, makes himself comfortable on his straps, takes care to keep his head and shoulders away from the rope so he won't get cut, and in less time than it takes to tell it, he is thrown out into space like a sack of flour. The rope smokes if the load is heavy. The natives carry a hunk of butter or a bottle of water in their hands which they hold in front of the wood so that the bamboo will not catch fire. If the acquired speed is not enough to carry them all the way to the other side, they have to use their hands to move along. You can readily imagine that the animals have no liking for this dangerous sport. The moment they shoot out over the abyss, the horses, mules, and yaks neigh and scream desperately. Their four kicking legs dance crazily over the water hundreds of feet below. If they do not slide to the opposite side, a "boy" climbs out along the cable, ties a rope to the slide, and returns. Then they pull the animal to the bank.

Sometimes you reach the other side so fast that you may crash against the rocks that buttress the post. If the cable or strap breaks, you drop straight into the river.

Father Melly nearly lost his life there once. For greater security, he had chosen a leather strap. He was flying over

the void, when all of a sudden the strap broke! He spun over and stopped. His feet were caught but his head was hanging downwards into the abyss. His companions on both sides shouted. Calmly, cold-bloodedly, the priest made himself swing like a pendulum to try to swing up and grasp the cable with his hands. Up he swung. And missed! Again. And missed! Again. This time he caught the cable! Hand over hand, he reached the bank.

When they came to the Mekong, Maurice knew all about these events. That explains why he referred to his "agony." He wrote: "Fathers Melly and Coquoz were looking at me, trying to discover under an apparent calm my hidden and too human emotions. I had a big surprise waiting for them. Should I keep my pipe in my mouth or put it in my pocket? If I keep it in my mouth, they will know what to expect from me—I will have passed the test. But if I do, I run the risk of biting it too violently and letting part of it drop, and I would end up with only the stem in my mouth. That would be an anticlimax. So let's put the pipe down. I rope myself in. . . . Off I go. And there I am on the other side of the river, saying to myself: Now, why didn't you keep your pipe? General feeling: a little more than a fast run on skis."

Through the Lissu Country

After that exciting crossing, they still had to ascend for eight or nine hours to reach Latsa. The first village was Tapintze, inhabited by Chinese and Lissus. A second hamlet, Kiatze, was about half the size of La Rosière, but as important as a capital city since it was the residence of a Lissu chief.

What is a Lissu? Maurice asked and then answered with his usual verve: "He is a seventh century inhabitant of the Valais. Because of his longing for freedom and solitude or his fear of fever, he cannot live down on the plains. He has

to make his home in the mountains. He clears out a plot hanging on a crag or finds an almost inaccessible flat spot and there he builds his home. When the ground is exhausted, he finds another one, since he is at home anywhere provided it is on a mountain. He lives on buckwheat, corn, and wheat. He enjoys his liquor. Since the earth easily produces the little he needs, he spends the greater part of his days scouring the mountains, hunting and pillaging. From time to time, he goes down to the plains. Liquor is more plentiful there and he takes as much as he can. The Lissu is about our build; his dried face is ravaged by his wrath, passions, and hard life, as his earth is by the rain; his large dark eyes gaze out at I know not what; he is erect; has long legs, bare and marked with beautiful blue veins; his feet are callused and cut by the bamboos he has tread on. The men wear trousers and a robe made of hemp; the women wear a simple, pleated dress. Both carry a sword at their side and never take it off except when they undress.

“Is that all? No. The Lissu is really a good fellow. He seems to flee from society and yet he loves company. He welcomes guests, unless he is too savage; in that case, he kills them. His language is rough like our dialect, but is less difficult than Chinese.”

At Kiatze, the chief—the *besset*—liked to receive the missionaries. He was named Djamba. His face, under his tight-fitting felt hat, lit up with a smile when the caravan appeared on the path. He led his guests to the barn (which was worth more than his house) and offered them, with affectionate deference, a chicken, corn, and beans. The evening was spent in front of the hearth. The travelers went to sleep as the last glow of the embers died out.

The next day was the last stage. They plunged into a forest that stretched all the way up to the summit of the pass. “At first it was a rough climb,” Maurice said, “through oaks and

ferns as big as our firs. Then we went through enormous cedars (three or four yards in diameter), rhododendrons and raspberry bushes." The trail had been marked out by Father André of the Paris Foreign Missions Society from 1930 to 1932; this missionary had more than 125 miles of trails to his credit.

"Finally," Maurice says, "some glades allowed us to see the pass that was opening up like a funnel. It was Latsa. Rhododendrons adorned the slope; we were still walking in the shade of the firs. A large plateau where a stagnant pool sleeps is sheltered between two grass-covered peaks. This is not the end. Another small plateau: there is the refuge."

The Hospice and the Pass

Authorization to build the Hospice was granted only after eighteen months of negotiations, and thanks to the intervention of M. Spalinger, the Swiss Consul at Canton. The work began in 1935. The refuge, a three-room stone house, served as a temporary lodging for the priests, the workers, and any of the fifty-odd travelers that went across the pass every day.

Maurice invites us into the monks' quarters: "If you are thirsty, there is a jug of Chinese liquor in the corner. But don't hurry, otherwise you may break your nose on the enormous stove that stands in the middle of the room. Over the stove, you see a ham, some pieces of dried meat, and a little sausage. . . . That mattress of fir branches in the corner is our bed. Turn around towards the entrance: the horse that brings us wood casts an enlarged shadow on the wall. In the other corner, a chicken is dreaming—a future Sunday meal. Look up and you see the shingles of our roof. In the other rooms, the engineer and workers sleep, eat, gab, and spin tall tales."

About thirty yards farther down, the Hospice was slowly rising from the ground. The workers, according to Maurice,

didn't know too much. Somebody had to be there to watch the laying of every stone, the mixing of the mortar (lime and clay), the straightness of the lines, the solidness of the walls. They dug with picks similar to those used by mountain climbers; then they carried the dirt away in baskets. They used levers to roll the stones and were not paid by the day but by the number of stones they carried. Some of the stones needed ten men; the foreman of the undertaking then received the equivalent of two dollars for the job. The carpenters were more skillful and were able to make good boards with simple tools: plane, saw, jointer.

The Hospice was not built at the top of the pass. But if you ascend for about "one pipe of tobacco" (to use the missionaries' terms), you come out on a large valley—Alo. A half hour farther on, you reach the summit. This is Latsa, from which you can slide down to the Salween in a dizzy four-hour descent. The site chosen by Father Melly had many appreciable advantages: it would be easier to maintain the building, to obtain electricity, and to keep it supplied with provisions. And since the ascent to the summit presented no risk, the Hospice was in a position to render to the natives all the services that they could expect from it.

There is an interesting parallel between the construction of the Hospice of Mont Joux in the eleventh century by Saint Bernard and the Latsa Hospice in the twentieth century by his disciples. Both were set on international routes. The Asian one binds China and Burma with Tibet, the Far East with Southeast Asia. Convoys, travelers, merchants, porters and pilgrims of medieval Europe find their counterparts in these Tibetan Marches where caravans of porters bearing sixty to eighty pounds file along transporting merchants' supplies of cloths, knickknacks, rice and tea. There are also travelers in search of adventure or work, long lines of pilgrims on their way to pray at the shrines in Lhasa or on the holy mountain

near Tali. One last similarity: just as Saint Bernard had to fight both paganism and brigandage at the same time, so his followers at Latsa have to deal with the Buddhism of the Chinese and lama sects and in addition cope with wild bands of robbers and assassins.

These considerations couldn't fail to arouse the enthusiasm of a young missionary familiar with the rhythms and cycles of history. Maurice expressed his exuberant joy: "Tell me, wouldn't you love to descend the Alo Valley, black with forests, wild as a desert; travel along the rugged banks of the Salween; climb the crags, your head as heavy as lead, your lips hot as a furnace, so exhausted you have to scramble on all fours? Yes, but also to make church steeples go up on these peaks and in these hollows, to drown out the thunder of the rivers by hymns, and to die unknown and ridiculous one night in a village surrounded by kneeling savages. That is the bread waiting for us. . . . Who wants it? I have not yet thoroughly tasted its bitter flavor, but I know nothing that I prefer to it. Or it may be that we will work without results, without seeing the steeples, without hearing the hymns. But it seems to me that to work for God is a big enough achievement, beautiful enough in itself, to do without results.

"Dear brethren, as I write you my fingers are cramped with cold. It is so quiet that I can hear a piece of falling bark as it strikes branch after branch on its way to the ground at the other end of this clearing. The sky remains infinitely blue as the shadows of the valleys rise. A soft, silent breeze makes green waves surge through the rhodos and bamboos. It is grandiose. I will be silent after inviting you to meet me here on this pass where we sing out our hopes."

CHAPTER 7

To the Priesthood

Dispensary and School

THE mission chronicle for October 20, 1936, reads: "Maurice Tornay arrived here as happy as he could be. We do not believe that we have ever seen him so well. On the arrival of Father Melly, he left Latsa with Mr. Chappelet."

At that time, the seven St. Bernard missionaries had divided their responsibilities as follows: Canon Melly, the Superior, resided at Weihsi; he supervised the various undertakings of the mission, directed the work at Latsa, tried to maintain good relations with the authorities, and took care of the financial needs of the different posts. With him at Weihsi, Father Lattion was learning the language, preparing himself for the apostolate, and was in charge of the boys' school. The third priest, Father Coquoz, was pastor at Siao-Weihsi; Mr. Chappelet, the layman, worked with him. Brothers Duc and Rouiller were at Weihsi. Brother Duc was a great pilgrim, a caravan master who went all over the country, transporting provisions, baggage or money. He was in charge of the gardens, orchards and animals. Brother Nestor Rouiller was a "fireside Martha." Chinese customs left him openmouthed with amazement. He set an evident good will to learning them, but he could never reconcile himself to the idea of adopting them forever. "What a country!" he cried. "When

I'm an old man, blind and crippled, I'm going back to Europe."

Maurice Tornay began his third year of theology under the direction of Father Lattion. He had pushed his study of Chinese to the point where, beginning in the fall, he could give some courses to the students at the school.

We must remember that all the missions rest on two essential works: the dispensary and the school. The dispensary lets the missionaries cure bodies, meet people, and make friends, and this opens the doors of villages and families more readily. Fathers Melly and Coquoz had studied medicine at Lille before their departure. They could diagnose common diseases and give proper remedies. Thus with the help of nature, they were able to cure many sick people. If the sick person were a mandarin, all difficulties were straightened out at the same time and official red tape—Chinese style—disappeared as though by magic. At times, old folks with one foot in the grave came to them; often they were converted. If it were a dying child, baptism opened the gates of heaven for him. In any event, this social work, which is good and necessary in itself, was the prelude to action on the people's souls, preparing for it and making it possible.

The school is undoubtedly the surest means of training new generations. All governments know this and want schools patterned on the ideas of their statesmen. His Holiness, Pope Pius X, used to say: "I would rather close the church than the school."

In the Tibetan Marches there are grave difficulties. In the first place, there is the instinctive repugnance which the children—and the people in general—feel to being shut up in a classroom. The Tibetan especially is born to drive mules, travel the roads, handle the bow, cross rivers, maraud, riot. The minute you put him inside four walls, he begins to look around to see where the light comes in and how to get out of

the place. If the student, bent over his books, hears the shuffling of a caravan on the road, he lifts up his head and watches the line of men, horses and mules with longing and envy. All the virtues of his nomad race lie dormant at the bottom of his heart and will rise up suddenly at the slightest provocation: the murmuring of a stream, a light breeze blowing through the bamboos, the rhythmic trot of a mare on the trail. Then, if there are no reprisals to face, if he can count on a welcome from his family or among traveling merchants, he escapes into the great outdoors he has been dreaming about.

The chronicle reports: "Two students ran away. Are you surprised? Don't worry, it's not serious. It would be hard to find one student in this country who has never tried to run away from school." Maurice and Brother Nestor set out after them and caught them the next day about three hours from Weihsi.

A second difficulty is the mentality of an earthy people who work and suffer to eat, with no other ideals than the pleasures of the senses. Their own religion—and all other religions—become interesting only when the gods place themselves at their service. A child learns early how to graze goats, cut wood, dig the earth, sow grain. His presence at home is all the more necessary since for several months of the year the father is away, trading on the highways. When the boy at the age of fifteen begins to go with the caravans, the girls at home have to work doubly hard, along with their mothers, taking care of the animals and laboring in the corn, rice and grain fields. Thus there is not much place or use for study and books in this way of life.

A final difficulty is the maintenance of the children. If some of the parents consent to turning their children over to the missionaries, it is understood that this sacrifice is not going to cost them anything. The "foreign devils" are rich enough

to house, feed, and instruct the children they take into their schools. However, the rich—who are rare exceptions—are asked to contribute to the expenses.

Under these conditions, a school is a costly proposition. At Weihsi, counting monks, personnel, and students, Father Melly had fifty mouths to feed.

There had formerly been a catechism school at Weihsi, but it was transferred to Siao-Weihsi and eventually was replaced by the new *Probatoire* or preparatory school.

Msgr. Giraudeau, vicar apostolic of Tatsienlu, had asked for this kind of school in order to develop native clergy in the Mekong region. This institution was supposed to prepare young men, who believed they had a religious vocation, to enter the minor seminary. “About twenty little savages,” Father Melly tells us, “came to us one fine day.” The chronicle added on November 15, 1936: “The two ‘recruits’ have started giving courses in the preparatory school. Father Lattion is teaching Latin, gymnastics, and singing. Maurice Tornay teaches religion. Students and professors are both about equal in Chinese. Let’s hope they finally get to understand one another.”

Tolo, a Christian, a former seminarian and a well-educated Tibetan, taught language.

Vacation Camp

The winter passed uneventfully. The seven missionaries were getting “China-fied”—to use the expression of one of them—to a point where there was not much to distinguish them from the natives. Each wore a beard, smoked during free time and work, chatted in the streets, haggled over prices, led caravans and hunted pheasants. . . . Maurice Tornay had also begun to study Tibetan. “I am completely acclimated,” he said, “so much so that nothing surprises me anymore. When

food is not cooked, I eat it raw. When it's cold, I smoke my pipe. When I don't know what to do, I study. When I can, I pray. I have Chinese down pretty well, Tibetan is coming. . . ."

On July 15, 1937, Father Melly presided over the final examinations.

During vacations, the students did not go back home. Msgr. Valentin, successor to Msgr. Giraudeau in the post of Tatsienlu, would have liked to see the boys go home and get some village air, but he ended up agreeing with Father Melly's opinion: "Let these boys go home for two months and you will lose half of them. It is better to keep your eyes on them, give them distractions which they enjoy, and not take the chance to seeing them go off for good."

But what were the boys going to do? A photograph shows sixteen of them with Fathers Melly and Lattion. Good round heads and smiling faces. They wear loose pants, a light vest with large sleeves and a collar that ties under the chin. It looks like an Oriental robe.

About two hours up the valley from Weihsi was a large farm that Father Monbeig of the Paris Foreign Missions Society had bought in 1907-1908 with the idea of inviting in the Carthusians. The plan fell through, and so on July 19, 1937, the little future seminarians went there to put some life into the solitude by their games and prayers. This region, which the missionaries called *La Chartreuse*, was called Hua-lo-pa by the natives.

Maurice said, "We're turning our students out to pasture." They were tired, not from work, but from lack of open air and freedom. These wild rabbits longed to play in the rivers, wander through the woods, or do nothing. For months they had had to learn Chinese characters and even to think and reflect once in a while—which was enough to make them lose every ounce of fat on their bodies.

On three mules that chance had brought their way, they loaded their baggage. One mule sagged under a sack of rice and a huge tent, which the French explorers Guibaut and Liotard had given them when they passed through the previous April. This tent was ten feet high and twenty feet in diameter; it would be their summer home. The second mule carried the bedding and—Maurice added—the fleas of all the students. The third mule bore the kitchen equipment—rice and soup pans, tea pot. . . .

The students walked in front. With elbows and knees showing through their clothes, bows and arrows in their hands, their eyes shining with joy, they had the appearance of a platoon of penniless conquerors on their way to the moon. The Tibetan dog, Chung-Kai, acting as though they were going to Lhasa, ran around the mules. Maurice and Father Melly, who carried a rifle on his shoulder, made up the rear guard. The village was still asleep. Some Lissus stuck their noses out the door and gazed with open mouths at the caravan disappearing up the trail.

The trail rose, zigzagged, went down through valleys, rose again to end in the pastures of Hua-lo-pa.

To work! While Father Melly was putting up the tent, the lads were bringing in bundles of ferns. The chain of the Litipin goes down into a jumble of little hills all the way to the Eternal Springtime River. About ten minutes farther up begins a dark forest cut by ravines. Bears, parrots and monkeys wait there to come out when the corn is ripe under the sun.

The tent was up. It was round and white so that it looked like a huge mushroom on the immense green mountainside.

Father Melly went back to Weihsi. Maurice was in charge of the camp. Morning and evening the silence was shattered by the loud chant of the *Ave*, *Pater*, and *Credo* sung to native melodies.

If the mind and heart of the Chinese are sometimes taken up with a network of complicated propositions and counter-propositions, contradictions and approximations, his hands are able to work more simply, more effectively and directly than anyone else's. Sixteen students on vacation meant that Maurice had sixteen part-time cooks, tailors, cobblers, bakers, pastry cooks, butchers, cheesemakers and pharmacists.

"These Orientals are way ahead of us," he wrote, "when it comes to meeting the material needs of life. They take care of themselves. They possess all the skills they need for their existence."

The fireplace was a pile of stones with a hole for each pot and pan. Nearby was a tree, one branch of which carried an exceedingly strange cargo: about twenty little animals, black as coal, with tiny lean faces and haunting white needlelike teeth which Maurice declared he would never forget as long as he lived. They were rats. The boys caught them in the field, cleaned them, and baked them in oil. "They offered me some," Maurice said, "but I was hardly enthusiastic about it. However, they convinced me that these rats, which do not eat village garbage but feed on grain, are quite good. I ate some and I'm not dead. . . . One day I bought a lamb. The boys did a wonderful job of cutting it up from head to foot. If it had had horns, they would have found some way of making preserves out of them. They know all the different kinds of mushrooms and cook them with a little oil over the fire. They have great feasts. There is only one idiot here who doesn't know how to do any of this," Maurice concluded pleasantly, "and that's myself."

The people in the neighborhood were Chinese, Lissus and Lolos. The former lived in the valley, the latter up to the lower edge of the forest. On walks with the boys, Maurice met them and stopped to talk so that they might know him better and he might get to know them.

“Sir, won’t you come in and take a rest in my home?”

In that country, there is an art of saying what they don’t mean and then of getting behind the words to what they do mean. An invitation to come in, unless it is friendly and pressing, is only a common formality to save face. They are polite and amiable but in the bottom of their hearts they wish the foreigner were a million miles away.

But Our Lord has said: “Whatever town you enter, and they receive you, eat what is set before you.” So Maurice relied on his Western naïveté and still more on his mission as an apostle to enter their homes.

“They offer me tea,” he said, “and I drink tea. Or they offer me nothing and then I ask for a little water. Out of the household cup from which the grandfather, the father, mother, children, and all guests have drunk, I in turn drink, making myself one of them since I have come only for them. I have never been refused a little water. But a little water will receive its reward. I know quite well that this water is not given me in the name of Jesus whom no one knows; however, it is given out of love and devotion. God will do all He can to pay it back a hundredfold. Then, since these pagans feel they have done me a favor, they open up more and talk about everything. When they trust me, we talk about God.”

What was the outcome of these talks?

The missionary was under no illusions. You have to sow before you reap. And who would be the reaper? The Chinese are patient, they listen politely, but their unctuous indifference is a painful trial, the most painful that waits for the missionary. The voice of the Spirit echoes in the wilderness.

Maurice was not discouraged. He was not surprised at anything any more. If the man to whom he suggested a remedy for taking away his sins eagerly asked for the medicine, Maurice only smiled without taking offense. If he met an old man or woman who seemed to have hit the bottom of misery in

his lightless, windowless wooden hut, he hoped to redeem him with baptismal waters.

His students themselves tried to help him. Little Auguste went up to a pagan boy and gave him the following lesson: "At the end of the world, the good Lord will come on a cloud to judge you and all men with you. Then, if you are still a pagan, He will send you to hell where the devil will burn you and eat you without ever finishing with you."

Threatening gestures punctuated these terrible words. The little pagan was scared to death. He said he would become a Christian if he could get his parents' consent.

One day Maurice had a tremendous consolation. A Christian woman came to him. "Father, the only son of one of my neighbors is dying! I'm going to the mission to get some medicine, but will you go down and baptize him a little?"

"I found the child almost purple. His lungs were completely congested. I baptized him, not only a little as the good old woman wanted, but completely, as I was supposed to. What name would we give him? My students were for Joseph. All right! The Patron of the Universal Church deserved the honor of my first baptism. 'Joseph, I baptize thee. . . .' And little Joseph became a Christian just before he went to join the choirs of angels. My little Joseph, you who are now a little angel, you were lucky. You owe me something. Won't you help me baptize your father and your mother?"

For his boys, life in the open air was perfect happiness. Was it possible to imagine an existence more joyful, more natural, more in conformity with their ancestral traditions than to play, hunt, sing, and watch the caravans of one to two hundred mules go by?

Maurice too was captivated by these pleasures and wrote: "If I were created to gain heaven only by the sweat of my brow, I would become a Tibetan muleteer. Our students are Tibetans, therefore, caravaners. We pretend that we are a

caravan on a voyage. In the evening, we light a fire near the tent, and while red and black flames and shadows play on our faces, we sing and tell stories. We sing Tibetan songs that describe the vastness of the desert and we tell stories in which the devil always plays the villain. When it rains, we stay inside the tent and enjoy listening to the drops striking the canvas like hail. It's so much fun to be so close to the storm and yet protected from it. We burn ferns, and the smoke drives away the mosquitoes. It makes us cough some, exchange a few words, and then sleep well."

But the rains kept on without any letup. Father Melly, fearing for the health of his charges, ordered them to break camp. The campers returned to Weihsi on August 18. From then on, they were to have chores around the house and take walks with Maurice so they would not get out of the habit. Brother Nestor was worried: "How am I going to find jobs for all those boys?"

They dug potatoes, cleaned the yard, worked the garden. Father Lattion watched them from his window. They were kind but full of life. They were playing on the mud walls or in the garden. Little Ditté, the liveliest of the band, was singing a song he had heard on the phonograph, then all started to chant a *Kyrie* or *Tantum ergo*, then went right on to sing a Chinese melody or Tibetan dance. Well, what's up now? They are silent. Two or three boys begin a conference. A delegation is selected to ask Father Melly for something. What do they want? Just some string to fix their shoes. They take care of all their needs with an ease that makes us blush.

China Priest

From the autumn of 1937 to the spring of 1938, Maurice Tornay continued studying and directing the preparatory school. A professor's or student's life in Europe would have

been calm and peaceful; in the missions it was a constant adventure. Anything that concerned one of the missionaries was of interest to all seven; the mission's progress had to be the result of collective efforts.

When bad weather forced the laborers to leave Latsa and the Hospice that had risen nine feet from the ground, Father Melly was studying the possibilities of erecting a house at Hua-lo-pa for the preparatory school. The altitude of 8,000 feet was favorable; pastures alternated with corns and grain fields. The school would find food right on the spot. The buildings would cost 17,000 Yunnan piasters. The builder, in a contract signed on September 17, promised to start the work as soon as possible.

The Sino-Japanese War, brigands, a man falling into the Mekong while attempting to cross it, visits from explorers and magistrates, the official fight against opium, the replacing of silver by paper currency, the threat of expropriation—all of these matters provided topics for conversation and brought anxious or happy moments in the months that followed.

Maurice was nearing the end of his studies. Examinations followed semester after semester. Three of his fellow monks formed the examining board; they portioned out the subjects and proposed the most difficult cases for debate. They had pipes in their mouths, their chins covered with beards, and wore black silk cassocks without a belt; they looked like ancient disciples of Confucius.

Maurice was completely at ease. He slowly smoked his pipe which, as with all the others, had become second nature with him. The day he started teaching in the preparatory school, he thought that one pipe after dinner would be enough. He asked Father Melly's advice and was wisely told: "Do as you wish. There's no point in smoking without a reason. . . ."

Between classes the students were allowed a few minutes of recreation. Father Melly saw Maurice hasten to the door,

pull out his pipe, fill it and light up. In the twinkling of an eye he was merely a silhouette in a white cloud. At noon after they had eaten, Father Melly turned to Maurice and said in a mischievous tone: "I think you are in a hurry to smoke. . . ."

Maurice looked up surprised, and like a child caught doing something wrong, he asked: "You saw me?" Then they both began to laugh.

During the exams his pipe was a good adviser. In the cloud rising up, his mind and memory could search for an idea as though on a blank page. Besides, this smoking had an additional advantage: it could calm down a debate, for in these sessions, with a student like Maurice Tornay, and furthermore in a country like Yunnan, there were bound to be outbursts, mimicry, and raised voices. Maurice knew his subject from A to Z, and his examiners took a hearty delight in trying to find a chink in his armor. But he bounced back: "The question you raise is in such and such a book on such and such a page. . . . There is a footnote. Personally, I don't agree with the author."

Then he presented a precise, rigorous dissertation without an error and that left no objection unanswered. Perfect! The board deliberated: *Summa cum laude*.

In spite of the pressing demand of Father Melly, Msgr. Chaize, vicar apostolic of Hanoi, thought it absolutely useless to repeat the exams within the framework of the diocese.

On March 26, Maurice, accompanied by Mr. Chappelet, started on the road to Tonkin. On April 5 they were at Tali, on the 9th at Yunnanfu, and on Good Friday (April 15) at Hanoi, where he attended a retreat preached by the Canadian Redemptionist Fathers. On the 20th, he received the subdiaconate; on the 22nd, the diaconate. On Sunday, April 24, 1938, he was ordained to the priesthood.

His joy was overflowing. The same evening he wrote to his brother Louis: "Since this morning I have been a priest.

What we have been waiting for, for fourteen years, has arrived. . . . Day after tomorrow I will say Mass for my relatives. All of our tears, all of our sorrowful separation will be there on the altar with Christ immolated, and with my two hands I will offer it to God for our salvation. I know of nothing more beautiful.”

To his parents he wrote: “Your son is a priest! Glory be to God! This news will cause you only mixed joy because I am not in your midst. But you are Christians and you will understand me. There is a God whom we have to serve with all our strength. For that reason I left, and for that reason you have borne my departure so well.

“And now, I bless you with all my heart. I will say Mass for you and your children. Jesus Christ Himself in my hands will pray for you. Be happy amid all your troubles and your sicknesses and your hardships, because God loves you. How many people would be happy to have a son who is a missionary! Do not fear any longer. I can help you more than ever, and I will.”

The celebration of his first solemn Mass was set for July 3, not at Weihsi where the number of Christians was rather small, but at Siao-Weihsi which also offered the advantage of being the geographic center of the mission district.

The day before, caravans began to arrive from all directions: Fathers André and Bonnemin came from Tsechung and Kionatong; Father Burdin, pastor of Bahang on the Salween, crossed the Latsa Pass and had to use an ax to clear his way through the forest where the rains had destroyed the path. Fathers Melly and Tornay and Brother Nestor arrived about ten o'clock in the morning. A crowd of Christians were waiting for them at the entrance to the village. As on all Chinese holidays, firecrackers were exploding all over the place. But the mules were frightened and stampeded down the path between a brook and the steep slope of the Mekong. The trav-

elers who had just dismounted were sent sprawling. A mule hit Father Coquoz with its head and knocked him several yards off the path. Brother Nestor took a foot bath in the stream. Then the loud Chinese laughter and gaiety subsided and gave place to more serious things. Father Tornay went towards the house, blessing the crowd on his way.

The next morning, the young priest ascended the altar, assisted by Father André. Fathers Melly and Burdin acted as deacon and subdeacon; Father Coquoz was master of ceremonies. Father Lattion directed the choir of students from the preparatory school, while accompanying them on a harmonium brought from Weihsi; he also delivered the sermon. After Mass, the schoolmaster read a congratulatory speech; then gifts were offered. Father Tornay stood on the veranda and in a voice vibrant with controlled emotion he thanked all those who had contributed to the success of this celebration, congratulated the many Christians who had received the sacraments, urged the pagans in a tactful and affectionate way to seek the true religion, and finally called down on China the blessings of Almighty God.

After solemn benediction, the Christians and pagan guests had a banquet at which everybody was in a friendly good mood. Several high officials were there: the head of the militia of the Weihsi subprefecture, the head of the second district, and the ruler of Kang-pu.

That evening the crowd jammed the balcony, filled the windows and elbowed one another in the yard in the midst of garlands and palms to see the slides and movies that Father André was showing.

When the noise of the crowd finally died out, Father Tornay went to his room. The same thoughts kept coming back to his heart and pen: "Here we are foreigners in a foreign land. Since this side of things cannot satisfy us, knowing that

it will always be the same, we expect nothing more; we no longer have any future here below, we no longer want any. We do not have any future on this surface of life, we leave it to others; but we attach ourselves to God. One by one the ties have broken. Only God is left for us.”

CHAPTER 8

The Price of Charity

Insecurity

ALREADY at the beginning of 1938, Father Tornay knew that he would have to learn Tibetan. From Weihsi, he wrote: "My studies are ending. I am going to a place about seven days from here, in real Tibetan country, to learn the language. I am looking forward to it very much. I will lead the life of the savages. I will enjoy this as much as living the life of a millionaire in Europe. Don't say a word about this at home because it would frighten them."

Why did Father Tornay have to learn Tibetan when he was destined to direct the preparatory school in Chinese territory? He was in a tower of Babel. Even though Chinese was the official language, the people of certain regions spoke Tibetan, Lutse, Lissu. The missionaries had to learn these languages if they wanted to expand their apostolate in all directions. As director of a school where the majority of the students spoke Tibetan, Father Tornay had to know two languages, one to understand the new students, the other to teach them so that they could continue their studies in a Chinese seminary.

On July 5, contrary to what they had done the previous year, the students went home. Father Tornay went with Father André to Tsechung and from there went on to Patong, two hours to the south. The village was lost in the mountains, at the mouth of the Sila Valley. There he found about eighty

Christians to whom he gave the first fruits of his ministry. From time to time he went over to Tsechung to confer with Father André.

“How’s the Tibetan going?” Father André asked him.

“Oh! I’m just beginning.”

“Good. I need a preacher for August 15th. You’re going to offer your first sermon to Our Lady in honor of her Assumption.”

“Me? Preach a sermon in Tibetan after a month’s study?”

“Why not?”

“All right. You can count on me.”

On August 14, he went down to Tsechung. Father André said to him: “We’ll split the work this way—you sing the Mass and I’ll preach.”

“But you told me . . .”

“Didn’t you know I was only joking?”

“Not at all. You said you wanted me to preach. I’ll preach.”

Father André opened his eyes wide. “Are you serious? You can’t be expected to speak Tibetan after only four weeks’ work.”

“Trust me. I’ll preach.”

Father André agreed but feared a catastrophe. His fears were groundless, for the young missionary’s sermon had an authentic Tibetan ring, even though there were some Chinese expressions here and there. Some said it was a miracle!

The beginning of school in the autumn was anything but peaceful. The bandits—always the bandits!—had just sacked the village of Atuntze about two days north of Tsechung. The Chinese guard lost its chief and a dozen soldiers; the bandits left about forty of their men dead on the battlefield.

School was supposed to open on September 20. No one showed up, neither director nor students. What had happened? Finally on the 24th, Father Tornay, escorted by twenty-one students, came in to Siao-Weihsi, where Father

Coquoz resided. The bad state of the rope bridges and the inhabitants' slowness to repair them explained their tardiness. Some days later, the "traveling school" showed up in Weihsi. They set to work, while underneath the windows passed Chinese soldiers who boasted that they were going to exterminate the bands in the north.

"I'm afraid," said the mission chronicler, ironically, "that they will stay walled up in their camp where they will have a hard time defending themselves. . . . To reinforce the Chinese garrison at Atuntze, a national guard was called out without any training or equipment. These men have to feed themselves at their own expense in spite of the enormous distance that separates them from their families. They bear arms picked up by chance: rarely do they have a rifle, but only a lance, a bow, or a simple iron-pointed club. . . . Last year during the Lissu revolt, one of the soldier's entire baggage consisted of a fine bundle of tobacco under his arm. He was a sly fellow who planned to carry on a little trading with the enemy and was ready to use his tobacco as a white flag if things went bad."

This coming and going of national troops, these frequent incursions of cruel, rapacious bandits, this constant insecurity are a tradition in the history of China and of Yunnan in particular. The missionaries can adopt only one attitude: get used to it, not consider it anything unusual, resign themselves to it as a terrible but necessary evil, and finally and above all continue to live, preach, and practice charity. Only the works of God remain.

The Preparatory School

As director of the preparatory school, Father Tornay soon showed that he was a first-rate educator and a good psychologist. He introduced rational methods in the European style.

His two Chinese assistants had to go along with him. The shouting that punctuated each syllable stopped. He also put an end to the way the students did their reading—they had been scanning and chanting the texts—the louder, the less they understood. From now on, they were to use their heads, follow a path, go from the simple to the difficult, get into the mysteries of Chinese or Latin by starting with fundamentals. It was a revolution: the students learned in one year what ordinarily would have taken them two or three years.

But he had another difficulty with their education. Except for two Chinese, the thirty-nine students were Tibetans or Lutses. You had to admire their courage in certain situations. For instance, the group from Yerkalo arrived at Weihsi after twenty days on the march. To escape the bandits, they had gone along the right bank of the Mekong, which was a path that was longer, more dangerous, and laborious because of the ridges that blocked the valley and which had to be scaled almost constantly. The group came in on October 10, twenty days late, but there they were, safe and sound and in high spirits.

But alongside their virtue of tenacity, what indifference and nonchalance they had for the things of the mind or the heart!

Father Tornay did not sin by an excess of optimism. He had a poetic soul that responded to all the beauty around him, but he also perceived with cold realism the absurdity or ugliness that was equally around him. "I have to teach them everything—how to wash, dress, kneel, pray. I am with them all day long, because you have to inculcate religion into them every minute. . . . I have a devil to struggle with—their laziness, and at times, my own."

We need not be shocked that the boys were crawling with lice and other vermin. It didn't do any good to wash and disinfect them. Every house, every room in the whole country-

side would have had to be fumigated. Father Tornay wrote: "We are defending ourselves victoriously against the lice, but the fleas have conquered us." On another occasion, he said about Chinese inns: "The bedbugs kept us from sleeping." And another time: "We have a dozen cats and a hundred thousand times more rats."

The hardest obstacle to overcome was the boys' inability to concentrate since they had no love for study and felt the irresistible call of the great outdoors. Their director would be developing some beautiful theory when one of the boys would cut his eloquence short with: "Do they have bows and arrows in Europe?"

"Would a mountain goat be happy in a stable?" Father Tornay asked himself. It would risk its life to regain its freedom. So would the boys. At home they had nothing to do, almost nothing to eat, nothing to wear; but they were free—they played on the banks of the great rivers, hunted for nests of eggs, lived off their pillaging, warmed themselves by the fire. . . . At school, they were clothed, did not have to fear hunger or cold. But they had to obey and work.

"Decidedly," Maurice declared, "only charity counts. Let us never lose confidence!"

The house at Weihsi was much too small for the growing number of students. The stay at Hua-lo-pa in the summer of 1937 had shown that they would be able to do good work in the silence and solitude there. So Father Melly began to make plans and discuss them with the contractor. The man who had sold the land to the Paris Foreign Missions Fathers was a certain Hoadje who cultivated it. Since he did not pay his rent, he was replaced. Then he came back with his sons-in-law. The priest was unshakable. Then old Hoadje tried the well-known argument: "What if we all become Christians?"

It was wasted effort. Hoadje left the way he came. A little later he was in jail for threatening the new farmers. Finally,

when his sons-in-law made life unbearable for him, he was happy to seek refuge at the mission.

Father Melly spent days talking to the former owners, the neighbors, their descendants and collaterals in order to establish and mark off the exact limits of the property. At last the work could begin.

At the beginning of September, 1938, the kitchen and stables were completed. The mission bought a block and tackle. They hoped to save time, and as a by-product, to amaze the natives. Two hundred curious persons came to Hua-lo-pa to watch the machine that was supposed to be able to lift part of a house. Chinese, Mossos, Lissus, Lolos, Minkias, Tibetans, and some Pasos were all there to laugh, smoke, and convey the impression, "we shall see what we shall see." Everything was ready. They pulled on the ropes. The crowd, still and silent, waited for the miracle to happen. Nothing moved. The new ropes slipped in the pulleys. Bursts of laughter. But the Chinese are good fellows. They all grabbed levers and poles, gave the framework a lift, and up it went—the old way. "O Progress," Maurice cried, "this is not the first time you have made us lose face!"

In October, 1938, he wrote: "The school is not yet finished. It is a magnificent house with mud walls. There is a second floor and an attic. The dormitory is in the attic. On the second floor are my room and the temporary chapel. The school-rooms are on the ground floor. Only later will I have a rectory and a church."

In February, 1939, he went up to Hua-lo-pa. He came back nervous, somber and in a bad humor. He uttered a few dry, harsh words and went to bed. His fever rose beyond 105 degrees.

Somebody said: "It's typhoid."

"No," he protested. "It's a bad cold. Give me a pill."

Two hours later, he was up on his feet, ate, and smoked

his pipe. He then explained with contagious indignation that the work at the school was not going forward, that the contractor was no better than the one at Latsa, and that everything in this sorry world was going wrong. His fever had fallen, but it came back in a few weeks.

Medicines and Patients

This time it was serious. All indications were that it was typhoid. Father Melly found him as thin as a skeleton and thought it due to overwork.

In that country where sickness lies in wait for the stranger, the missionaries have to be nurses and doctors. When they get a fever, they only laugh at first and say: "Oh! it's nothing much. All you need is one pipe of tobacco less and a little more sleep."

That's the way typhoid began with Father Lattion. Maurice Tornay, his doctor, paged through his manuals and for weeks watched over his companion with excellent care. During the long sleepless night, Father Lattion talked with him and spoke of death and heaven. "At first," he said, quietly, "it would have been hard for me to die here. Now it would be easy."

"Sure," replied Maurice, "for the field in which we are working becomes another homeland."

When the patient wanted to change his position, he moved to a couch, and Maurice stretched out on the bed.

Brother Nestor Rouiller took Maurice's place as doctor and nurse. Injections, baths, quinine, specific remedies did not help the patient, who hovered between life and death for a month. Prayers were intensified. Many thought: "No. A priest does not come to this country to learn the language and then die. There is too much work in this mission—perhaps one of the hardest—for a young man to be lost."

But others thought: "The disciple is not above the Master. Death is a victory."

Father Lattion came back to life. For a while he was deaf. Then he began to hear and even—the joking Maurice added—to talk without saying too many crazy things. At the house they breathed easier, but Maurice, loaded down with his classes and deprived of sleep, suddenly found himself worn out and seemed on the brink of death. Three weeks of rest and he was up again, invited outdoors by the flowers in bloom under a warm May sun. He left his room, supporting himself with a cane in one hand, and holding his pipe in the other. Without any further delay, he set to work. In getting ready to return to Hua-lo-pa, he abused his strength and suffered a relapse.

On the evening of the 13th, he saw all his companions coming into his room. "Good news from Switzerland!" they shouted. "The Chapter of Grand St. Bernard in April chose as provost of the order to replace Msgr. Bourgeois. . . . Guess whom! Msgr. Adam!"

Father Tornay pulled his pale hands out from under the covers and applauded. A light was shining in his eyes. Msgr. Adam, his old novice master! The Holy Spirit had dictated the choice. The future of the mission was in the hands of a man who had been the first to ask to go to China. Glory be to God!

Turning Years

Toward the end of the month, Father Tornay felt strong enough to take up his projects and activities once more. Three days before, a dozen of the students had gone up to Hua-lo-pa to sow grain and plant vegetables. The opening took place on June 7, 1939. From then until 1945, Hua-lo-pa was to be the official residence of Father Tornay, director of the preparatory school and pastor of the neighboring villages.

The arrival of reinforcements—Fathers Nanchen and Lovey—made it possible to expand the mission's activities. Father Lattion was appointed pastor of Kitcha which was on the right bank of the Mekong, south of Pekisuin. But a departure filled the missionaries with sadness: unexpectedly Father Melly had begun to suffer from frequent, dangerous heart attacks. He went to Hanoi to meet the newcomers and get a medical checkup. The diagnosis was a blow: he could not stand the high altitudes and would positively have to give up living in Yunnan. Since Father Goré, who had accompanied Fathers Nanchen and Lovey, was going to Hong Kong, Father Melly stayed with him for a week, then went back to the mission. He stayed at Siao-Weihsi, hoping that the altitude—over a mile high—would agree with him. But he got worse. Soon the courageous missionary, knocked out by his illness, was only a shadow of his former self. He had to give up the struggle. Lying first on a sedan chair, then on a truck, he made the hard journey back to Hanoi and then on to Europe.

The entry in the chronicle, dated May 15, 1939, echoes the sadness which his departure caused: "For us it was a sword thrust into our hearts. Thus God was taking away our Superior and our father at the very moment when we need the greatest help. . . . What can we do but submit entirely to the divine good pleasure? We hope that this severe trial will turn to the good of our mission and to our own good. Finally, we hope that God will restore our dear companion's health. We are certain that Father Melly will never forget us and will work hard for our mission in the new circumstances where God's will places him."¹

¹ Since 1939, Father Melly has served the St. Bernard mission very effectively as procurator, with headquarters in Fribourg. He is also editor of its interesting quarterly magazine (in French), *Grand-St.-Bernard-Thibet.—Tr.*

Brother Nestor Rouiller, who had always suffered from the climate of western China, went back to Switzerland with Father Melly. Thus the missionary band still kept the symbolic number of seven. Five priests: Lattion, Superior and pastor of Weihsi; Coquoz, pastor at Siao-Weihsi; Tornay, director of the preparatory school at Hua-lo-pa and pastor of Tsamuti and Kutsongwan; Nanchen and Lovey, the newcomers, were studying the language (Father Nanchen was destined to die tragically in the waters of the Mekong; Father Lovey was to be Father Goré's indispensable assistant at Tsechung). Brother Duc was at Hua-lo-pa; Mr. Chappelet was working on his "model farm" in the Salween Valley with the pastor of Bahang, Father André, who was very happy to take up his old post after Father Goré's return. In the north were the priests of the Paris Foreign Missions Society: Father Nussbaum, pastor of Yerkalo, was assassinated by the lamas; Father Burdin took his place. Father Ly was pastor of Tchongtreu.

From 1939 to 1945, World War II and the Japanese occupation of China, the defeat and expulsion of the invader created an instability and insecurity which were a great trial for the mission. The interruption of correspondence with Switzerland, scarcity and famine, financial harassing by a government on the lookout for taxes, the coming and going of regular troops or conquerors, the unleashing of a spirit of revolt among the people, banditry and pillaging—all of these trials had continual and direct repercussions on the St. Bernard monks and the development of their work.

Famine and Distress

The buildings at Hua-lo-pa were finished in 1940. Twin whitewashed houses stood side by side with a chapel in the space between them. The houses had two stories and an attic;

the roof sloped just a little and the windows were arched to give harmony to the whole ensemble which was practical and well ventilated. The school and farm should be self-sufficient, at least in normal times. Brother Duc was in charge of the grounds; he also found himself promoted to professor of arithmetic, geography, and history.

The food shortage presented problems that were difficult, almost impossible, to solve. In the autumn of 1939, Maurice wrote: "I am still alive, I am well, quite satisfied, very happy. But I'm thin because there is a great shortage of food here. I'm tired because my head is full of worries. Think of it: twenty-five boys to feed and no rice! It's like a master shepherd who doesn't have enough grass. After all, you don't come down from the pastures in the middle of the summer."

In March, 1940, he wrote: "Out of the three hundred families in my neighborhood only four or five have enough to eat. The others eat—guess what?—fern roots! Today, I was asked if I wanted to buy some children! From time to time, some people die. 'From famine, deliver us, O Lord!' I understand that prayer better this year. I have only twenty-one students. Four of them will be going to high school soon. But the funny thing is that no one will accept them, so I have had to become a high school professor. Could it be that one of them will become a priest?"

The destitution was such that the seminaries, especially the one at Kunming, could not accept any more students. Six candidates from Hua-lo-pa were refused entrance. "We cannot send back to their families," the chronicle reads, "these children who for four years have studied with us, nor can we send them to Tatsienlu which is forty-two days from here. The problem has been submitted to Msgr. Valentin and Father Goré. The latter would like us to plan a minor seminary. Could Tali undertake it? They have lost three priests in one year."

To find something to eat, Maurice scoured the countryside in quest of merchandise. The mandarin ordered him not to buy grain along the roads. He had to fall back on the provisions of Kitcha where the mission owned some land.

Discontent grew everywhere. Murders and attacks on caravans increased. Hua-lo-pa feared an attack from bandits. Father Tornay provided himself with good weapons. Wolves and bears devastated the fields; hunts had to be organized. At Weihsi, they had to prepare for a real emergency. A group of two or three hundred ruffians planned to swoop down on the mission, take over, empty the storerooms, and leave only after they had gorged themselves. The monks let it be known to all who were interested that they had to feed a large family: the boys and girls in their schools, the preparatory school, all required a great deal of provisions, and they were not going to put up with any robbery. To these reasonable arguments they added some pointed threats which carried considerable weight: the mission had arms and would use them.

The authorities were soft. For one murderer they captured and executed, they let a hundred more remain on the loose.

With its dispensary, the mission was not only the center where the sick converged but also the place to which the wounded and dying were brought. A Lissu soldier escaped from jail, then was caught. He was tied naked on the ground, face down, his arms and legs drawn out as though for quartering. His left leg was beaten three hundred times with a flexible board made for the purpose. From his shoulders to the soles of his feet, he was one frightful wound. He died at the mission. At other times, they had to extract bullets, bandage up sword cuts, sew up wounds . . . and each day waves of beggars beat at their door. The buildings at Hua-lo-pa became the fortress and refuge of the frightened populace.

Many tried to get ahead by prospecting for gold on the

river banks. The Chinese merchants bought the few grains of gold on the spot. Thus each worker earned a dime or a quarter a day. During the April and May floods, the rivers would rise to fill the innumerable holes left by the prospectors.

That tiny profit which the poor of all different races in the country tried to get from the Yangtze, the Mekong, and the Salween rivers every year—as they have done for centuries—could in no way lessen the horrors of their destitution. It barely kept them from dying of hunger.

During the war, the situation got still worse. Prices rose sky high. Rice went from fifty cents to sixty (Yunnan) dollars and then to ninety dollars. Fortunately, the missionaries had been foresighted enough to start stocking up on goods in 1941, which they could later exchange for grain.

Nevertheless, their work suffered seriously. In 1944, Father Lattion wrote: “We have closed up the boys’ school at Weihsi. Catechumens attend the girls’ school. At Siao-Weihsi, the mission pays the schoolmaster but no longer feeds the students as it used to do. To pay our bills we have to sell part of our clothes. Taxes have reached astronomical figures. This year we paid thirty thousand Chinese dollars for the taxes at Weihsi and Siao-Weihsi.”

Hua-lo-pa

In spite of these difficulties, Father Tornay went on doing his job without ever getting discouraged. He was in charge of financial affairs, food, the farm, the souls around him, and the school. But first and foremost, he looked after his essential work: the moral and intellectual training of the boys entrusted to him.

He wrote plays for them. In one he attacked avarice, in another the smoking of opium. They were put on at Weihsi

before an audience of three hundred. The novelty of a show plus the naturalness and verve of his young actors made them a real success. This kind of play was basically similar to the medieval mystery dramas. It had interventions by angels and devils, direct appeals to the consciences of the pagans and Christians, and a moving dialogue that made them both laugh and cry. He was hatching up another project that he had very much to heart—a band. He asked his brother to send him some brass instruments.

The preparatory school was often on the road. The students attended the major ceremonies and sang under the direction of Father Lattion who had formerly been choirmaster at the St. Bernard Hospice. They gathered fruit or roots and climbed mountains. At the beginning of their vacation, Father Tornay went with them to Tsechung or Yerkalo. Since transportation of rice cost money, the preparatory school moved in a body to Kitcha and ate the rice there. Their director, who was full of energy, made himself more than ever a Chinese among the Chinese. “He is a great Chinese scholar,” wrote Father Lattion. And a great educator too. The superior of the mission continued: “He tries to inculcate in his students not only a little knowledge but also the possibility of reflecting and living a life of Christian faith.” Father Lovey wrote: “It is certain that he has too much work, with his preparatory students and the minor seminarians, and only two native schoolteachers to help him. . . . We wonder how much longer we can keep the students that we have with us. The cost of living is high and it is hard to get the money we need for our work. God will provide. Let us have confidence!”

Brother Duc, his principal assistant, admired Father Tornay’s devotion, sense of mortification, and tenacity.

I asked him: “How did he spend his day?”

“Father Tornay got up about 3:30 A.M., went to the chapel, said his office, celebrated Mass. At eight, classes began and

we all went to our work. In the evening, I used to hear him in his room. He went to bed very late.”

“Didn’t he have a pretty violent character?”

“No, no!” Brother Duc insisted. “It wasn’t violent, just tenacious. He had to get things done.”

“How did he accept the privations, the annoyances, the hardships that filled his life?”

“With joyful optimism. He knew how to make strong decisions and was not afraid of anyone or anything.”

“How were his relations with the natives?”

“The best in the world. He was very devoted, without compliments, a little rough in meeting people, which made an impression on them. The filth in that country was terrible. Father Tornay found a chance to practice mortification, even heroism.”

“Do you recall any instance?”

“Yes, a little thing, but it shows his will power. Once he was called to the bedside of an old woman. He was asked if he wanted some tea. He said yes. Her husband took the cup in which the sick woman had spat, emptied it, rinsed it out with his dirty finger, poured in the tea, and handed it to the priest. He drank it without hesitation. I always admired his self-mastery.”

Father Tornay wrote: “We have to carry the cross. It’s not at all pleasant. To carry our cross! I have found out somewhat the grave meaning which those terrible words, so often spoken and so seldom taken seriously, have for our poor heart. To carry our cross means: not to know which way to turn, to hope against all hope, to believe against all appearances, to love when nothing is lovable. It’s hard, isn’t it?”

CHAPTER 9

Glimpses of the Tibetan Marches

IN Tibet, Maurice Tornay wrote a series of sketches entitled "Go, Teach All Nations." I am going to take passages from it which will give us a colorful glimpse of things and people and will also show us Maurice's penetrating and easy-flowing style, his sensitivity, his taste for direct observation and his skill in painting and description.

"Now we must penetrate the soul of our people," he wrote. "You never know anyone unless you have lived with him. Here then are a few fragments of human lives, some pages cut out for you from that book which men are untiringly writing on earth. . . ."

Good Moon

He was a young pagan who stood out from the crowd because when the priest went through the village smoking his pipe and astride his white mule, the boy did not go away but looked at him with an air of lasting friendship, unconscious perhaps but which a trifle might bring out.

One morning the priest was on foot and met the boy, as usual.

"What's your name?"

"Good Moon."

"Good Moon, give me something to drink."

Those were the words that Christ spoke at Jacob's well and which He often repeated in His burning thirst for souls. The little fellow ran off as fast as he could and came back with a wooden dipper filled with fresh water. The priest drank it without even pouring a little over the edge that his lips would touch. Then he handed the dipper back and said: "You're very kind, Good Moon. What does your father do?"

"My father is dead."

"And your mother?"

"My mother is dead too."

"Then who takes care of you?"

"My older brother."

"Good. Some day I'll come to see you. Do you want me to?"

"I would be very happy."

The priest walked on alone through the village that was completely pagan, perhaps hostile. Since nobody talked to him, he talked to himself. . . . "Perhaps that child might be the reward for fifteen apparently fruitless years. . . . He would open the door for me and I would have all of them! Pray! Pray!" And he began: "Our Father . . . Thy Kingdom come. . . ." He thought again: "Yes, I must instruct him. I will instruct him!"

The waters of the Mekong in the distance sang against the rocks. A light wind played with the leaves, tossing them from place to place on the ground, like funny little black beasts, extraordinarily agile and capricious. The priest pushed against the large door of his residence, the "guests' door" which every important house has.

Before the people could cry "Father is here," White Breast, the Tibetan dog, leaped to his master's side for a pat. He accompanied him to the threshold of the office where he lay down. Then the *Kwan-se* (businessman) appeared, spoke to the priest, and led him into the office where people were waiting for him. The office was a room open to everybody. A large crucifix occupied a prominent place; there was a table near the window (to save on oil), some chairs, medicines, and books.

Four men were sitting on boards, talking. The priest saw that he would have to settle a case. Returning their greetings, he took

out his adviser, his pipe, which kept him from talking too fast, sat down, listened to both sides put forth and muddle their respective arguments to their hearts' content. Then in a few words, he offered a solution that pleased everybody, and they all drank the *Kiong* (wine) of peace. After this came a crowd of the sick and hopeless whom the missionary patiently consoled and cared for as best he could, because he did not want to refuse any one of those to whom he had dedicated his life.

That evening while he was tossing restlessly on his bed, Good Moon's face kept coming back to him, chasing all other thoughts away. He slept more lightly than usual that night because a great hope had laid hold of him.

He lost no time in getting back to the village. Perhaps the boy was waiting for him. They came face to face. He went with him to his older brother. The whole matter was easily settled. Good Moon left the place, and the priest did not go home alone.

It was unbelievable how quickly the child understood his religion lessons. Four months had hardly gone by before the priest baptized him. From now on, Good Moon was called Paul. With his new name would he also receive a new soul? No one knew, but no one could find anything to scold him about. Each morning he looked at you with open clear eyes, and our eyes are the windows of the soul. He played with the priest like a little savage who has been completely tamed. For a long time they laughed at his naive replies. Yes, Paul was living with a father whom he loved and who loved him. He was a Christian, he was happy. Suddenly, one day the child was called to the office.

The priest asked him point-blank: "Paul, what do you want to do?"

"Whatever you want me to do, Father."

"Really? Then, you are going to study."

"Gladly, Father!"

And he studied, not with too much liking for it but without any trouble. The birds in the garden heard a new language: *rosa . . . rosae . . .* as Paul began Latin.

Three years later, the priest wrote in his diary: "I have detected only one fault in him—often, in the midst of his laughter or games,

he will stop, and gloom and sadness will come over his face like a cloud, then he brightens up again. . . . Therefore, since he consents, since he even wishes it, I can send him to the minor seminary. God will do the rest. "*Confirma, Deus, quod operatus es in nobis . . .*" ["Confirm, O God, what Thou hast wrought in us." Ps. 67, 29].

One day the young seminarian went far away to the minor seminary. He was entrusted to a caravan, and especially to a good, honest muleteer whom the priest knew. Paul wept. It was hard. His heart bled. The priest felt the separation too, but as a missionary he had to be able to take anything.

Finally he received a letter. It was from the vicar apostolic who told him: "Your boy is a consolation and hope to me." Paul spent seven years in the minor seminary with the same ability that he had shown at the beginning of his studies. He was so docile and submissive that he rarely had to be corrected.

In the eighth year he went to the major seminary. Everyone found him a likable young man. When the foreign priests came back, Paul went to see the vicar apostolic. He wanted some time off to go home.

"Well, you certainly deserve it. You haven't seen your people for over ten years. When were you thinking of leaving?"

"Tomorrow there is a caravan."

The bishop thought his departure rather abrupt. But with the young man's perfect conduct, how could he suspect anything?

Paul left. He never came back—never came back to receive minor orders and the subdiaconate. They never saw him again.

The priest did not weep. A missionary must be able to take anything. The bishop's fondest hopes were cruelly shattered. He is an old man now, but I'm sure he still remembers Good Moon in his prayers.

A Caravan

In the distance, a long black line is coming toward us. No doubt about it—it's a caravan. Soon, one by one, a hundred mules file past. They're in no hurry. They walk as though they were made to walk, and to walk until they die. These sure-footed ani-

mals, not much bigger than donkeys, with long silky hair, are carrying tea, salt and cloth to the four corners of this desolate land.

In front is a beautiful, strong mule, a female, the leader. Over her forehead she wears a mirror carefully trimmed with black cloth and on her neck is a little bell. She guides the mules, is responsible for them, and at the same time trains another mule who will later take her place. She knows the route and can even hazard it at night. Without hesitation she can choose the best trail out of three or four or even more. Besides, if she hesitates, the man who watches her will goad her on with curses and pebbles. This, of course, stimulates her instincts and she quickly and surely picks out the right path. When they meet another caravan, she decides who should yield the right of way, and as the case may be, stops or goes on. Finally, in the evening when she whinnies, it is a sign that they have traveled six hours and it is time to pitch camp.

When her old legs begin to tremble and her eyes grow sad, she is given a lighter load, her bell and mirror are taken off, and she once more becomes "second." They never kill her. She kills herself. She will walk on until she is exhausted; then one day she will sink down on the trail. With her half-closed eyes, she will watch the last of her companions going off and listen to the last echoes of their footsteps. Then she will go to sleep as the jackals and vultures begin to claw at her corpse.

Sometimes yaks are used. They are powerful beasts, like some of our Valais cattle, but with shorter legs. Their hide is so tough that considerable skill is required to pierce it with a knife. Their hair is so thick and long that neither the wind nor the rain can penetrate it. The yak is the ideal animal for Tibet. It works, carries wood, and does all kind of hard jobs. Moreover, the female gives about four or five quarts of milk a day which the people make into a yellow, savory butter like that which we make in the Alps. Its excellent meat is one of the main dishes at big feasts. Clothed in its skin, you can face the terrible winters. The yak is afraid of heat; and it will die if it does not drink some fresh mountain water every day.

The yak never travels in a hurry. It has no ambition for speed. It covers from six to nine miles a day. But then, the man on the trail with it is in no hurry for he spends his life on the trail. I have never seen such travelers as these Tibetans. They certainly know the roads better than their own homes. Their wives and children can plant a few fields and bring in some grain. The husband spends his time on the road. Once or twice a year he comes back to warm himself at the home fire, give some money to his wife, pass out the gifts he has brought to the children, tell them what he has seen, and then leave again as soon as their interest slackens. If the wife finds the separation too long, she can successively marry each of her husband's brothers, but to avoid jealousy and quarrels, only one husband can be home at a time. . . .

Buttered Tea

Let's eat . . . Tibetan style. In my sheepskin bag I have barley flour; in a linen bag I have tea—coarse tea that is half leaf and half stem, which the natives prepare in small cones after they take out the first juices and which are brought by merchants from a region about a hundred days from here. This pig bladder—which is not very appetizing—contains some very good butter. Let's tell our native servant, our "boy," to prepare the meal. A rich person always has his servant; and every European here is always rich! So the "boy" lights a grass or wood fire, if there is any grass or wood; if not, he uses dry dung. He cooks the tea, then pours it into a churn with salt and butter and churns it fifty times, no more and no less. Now, you will taste the delicious "battered tea" which is consumed here daily. The bread I will make myself out of a spirit of . . . cleanliness. I put flour, which we call "*tsampa*," into a bowl and sprinkle it with tea, then I knead the dough, making a ball as big as an apple. This bread will be our meal. . . .

If you have eaten well, you will sleep even better. When night is falling, the "boy" builds up the fire. He lays out your two blankets in between which you slide, then, respecting your noble person, he goes off a few steps and gives himself over to a sleep

that nothing on earth can trouble. You do three things: you sleep so you can get up in the morning with the sun, fresh and ready; you take care of the fire so you won't freeze; and every now and then you turn from one side to the other to present your cold side to the heat.

The Chinese Hermit

The Chinese youth was crazy. One fine day he showed up in Lhasa, loaded down with medicines and books. You could understand the medicines. But what the devil was he doing with his books on the road? What would he use them for here? Yes, there was no doubt he was crazy. But he was an unusual lunatic. He healed the sick, yet made no money out of it. He visited only the poor. In vain the rich begged him. Money he laughed at, and at honor too. However, he was always careful not to scandalize anyone.

There wasn't much flesh under his skin because he ate only a few handfuls of flour once a day. He spent his time with his books or with those to whom no one gave a thought, except the good Lord. Did he know where he was from? He never said anything about it nor about his father. He did know his age, and that surprised everybody because he was only thirty but had white hair all the way to the roots. But what is foolishness in the eyes of men is wisdom in the eyes of God, as Saint Paul said.

He knew that some Europeans—very strange men—had just arrived and were talking about religion.

He came to see them. They were saying the breviary in a chapel-room. He did not mind. He waited, politely. But then his eyes fell on the crucifix hanging on the wall. When the priests closed their breviaries, he asked them what it meant. When they told him, he gazed again at the crucifix. For a long time he wept. With his arms stretched out toward Christ, he fell on his knees, struck his forehead three times on the floor, arose and said: "There is the only God that all men should adore." He then turned to the priests and added: "You are my masters. Teach me." Shortly afterwards, he was baptized.

White Light

The day she was born, her father was unhappy. He did not want another girl. He already had three girls. He was a poor man. He had to think of three dowries. No, even a rich man couldn't make it. He thought of a very simple solution. The neighbors knew little about the new arrival. He would suffocate her rather than throw her in the river, and then he could say—as people always did—that she got tangled up in the swaddling clothes.

“Have I nourished her with my own flesh and blood just to kill her? Did I carry this burden nine months to destroy it?” the mother asked furiously. “I'm telling you, I'll die before she does!”

So White Light lived because her mother would not let her die. She was a good baby. Wrapped up in a cloth which her mother carried on her back, she bobbed her little head up and down as her live cradle went here and there during those first days.

There is not much more to say about her baby days, except that she merely existed but hardly grew because, being unwelcome, she was poorly fed.

When she began to notice things, her eyes hurt her. It was some little trouble which her tiny fingers scratched in vain. The father was still pouting, except when the mother complained of being tired. The mother was too busy to notice the child's minor affliction. Finally, the baby began to walk. She played, but not much, for she was afraid of the sun—she who was called White Light. The sun felt so good on the rest of her little body, but it hurt her eyes. Nor did she like the inside of the house because the smoke made her cry. When you have learned to walk and play and then you grow, what do you do? You work. So White Light learned to carry water. Her tiny shoulders cracked under the bamboo pole that went across them and to which two buckets were suspended by chains. As she struggled along, the buckets knocked against her legs and her feet got wet. Her big sister laughed and her mother scolded her for bringing in nearly empty buckets. But soon she could carry water the way she was supposed to. Her big sister stopped laughing; the big bucket was quickly filled again. “Mama,

see how I can carry water." "Yes, my child, you can carry water very well."

Every day at dawn she went up on the hill to get dead wood to cook breakfast with. Her basket was stacked high as a mountain. During these years, her little soul had one desire and one hope: the desire to work well and the hope of being cured of her eye trouble.

Shortly afterwards, she began to work in the rice paddies. It was the springtime of White Light and the springtime of the year. Then the rice, and the grass among the rice, forms a sort of oriental velvet, a somber velvet with a bare space here and there made by a pool of water which reflects the blinding sun. With a large bamboo hat on her head and her trousers carefully drawn up, she stepped into the mud. Frogs, tadpoles, and little fishes brushed against her legs. White Light didn't feel them. She was pulling up the grass blade by blade. From time to time, she would straighten up to rest her back and look at the sky. But before her eyes she saw only a black cloud in which stars danced. She took a breath and bent over again to work, her head almost even with the water.

That evening, no one understood. White Light had pulled up the precious rice or stomped on it. She had to leave ahead of the others.

"Go away—you're blind," her brother-in-law said to her.

For the first time, she realized what it was and was afraid. No, she could not see any more. The road disappeared. That night at home her mother sat up while the little blind girl slept.

The next morning, White Light received some consolation. Her mother took money out of a cloth and whispered: "I'm going to buy some medicine and you will get well, child." A muleteer was going to town. He offered to get the medicine. A month later he came back to give the mother some salve which she put on the child's eyes. Silent tears flowed, but her eyesight did not come back.

"Well, you know the house and where the pond is. You can carry water and cook rice," her mother told her. The father had

this to say: "If your mother had listened to me, you wouldn't be blind now."

White Light understood but she did not cry. She cried only for her eyes.

She cooked rice but it was never done right. She carried water but spilled it all over the place.

Then one day her parents had a fight because of her. White Light went off to get water. She didn't like to hear ugly words. She heard a crutch, went to get a corn cake, and gave it to the poor man with the words: "Here's something to eat but go on."

She was going barefoot even though her feet were cut. Some days later when she was going for water, without knowing it she walked in the steps of the poor man who had leprosy. It was the very morning that they had taken her old mother out of the river. She had promised she would die before her daughter. She kept her promise. But why did she choose the very kind of death she had not wanted for her baby?

When White Light learned what had happened, she felt utterly alone in the world. Even if her sister and brother-in-law did not despise her, they considered her useless, superfluous. The rice she cooked did not make up for the rice she ate.

Her father tried to marry her off. There are always some disinherited men who will accept a disinherited girl. It was long and laborious. However, one day she was told that she was to go away, far away, to be married. Her sister began to sew and her brother-in-law began to bargain with their future relatives.

Then White Light's eyelashes began to fall out, one by one at first, then all at once. There was no doubt in anybody's mind: White Light had leprosy. Fear ran through the house. They did not have to drive her out. She left of her own accord.

"Go into the forest. On the other side of the stream. We'll throw corn cakes to you."

They threw corn cakes to her.

In the winter she had a house. To silence gossipers, her brother-in-law got the wood together. On the edge of the river—in the river itself when the water rises—they built her a house in one morning on a large flat rock.

“White Light, from now on you will live here. We will throw corn cakes to you,” her brother-in-law cried as he hurried off.

She had heard the noise of the building. She remembered the place from having often seen it when she was young. And so she came to her new house. . . .

I was riding along the river bank on my horse. Suddenly, my dog dived into the water. He came out with the head of a woman who had had leprosy. My companion looked at the head for a long time, searching his memory. Then he exclaimed: “Yes, that’s it!”

I asked, “Did you know her?”

“Yes, I’m sure—that is White Light’s head.”

CHAPTER 10

Land of the Martyrs

“Thrown to the Wild Beasts”

TOWARD the end of November, 1944, Father Lovey was at Atuntze to visit some Christians. The topography of that part of the country, as we have said, is simple in broad outlines but complex in details.

You leave Siao-Weihsi and go up the left bank of the Mekong for about seven miles to Gain-wa, the point of departure for the Latsa Pass. From there you advance into regions where the Tibetan element dominates: Kangpu, Yetche, Badu, Tseku, and Tsechung, the residence of Father Goré. The distance between the two Catholic posts of Siao-Weihsi and Tsechung is about sixty miles or about three or four days of traveling.

From Tsechung to Yerkalo the road goes through Kiape, up a side valley to Atuntze, over a pass and down to Dong, where it again follows the banks of the Mekong to the villages of Kochu, Kiong, Napu, and Tso. Then it swerves away from the Mekong and goes along a stream to Pamé. Finally, it reaches the frontier of forbidden Tibet at Zeulon, enters the “land of the spirits,” and comes to an end at Petine and Yerkalo.

From the Catholic parish of Tsechung to that of Yerkalo—the only one that had been able to survive in Tibet—it was about 130 miles or six to eight days. Thirty days more had to

be added to get to the center of Sikang Province, passing through Batang and Litang to Tatsienlu, the residence of the vicar apostolic, Msgr. Sylvain Pierre Valentin, who was responsible for the Tibetan Marches. Those three important towns are located on the thirtieth parallel.

Father Lovey had no intention of prolonging his stay at Atuntze. With his mission completed, he planned to go back to Tsechung where Father Goré needed his services. But he felt an irresistible desire to go on to Yerkalo to see Father Burdin who had not received a visit from his brethren for five years. On December 1, he crossed the forbidden frontier of Tibet. After that, events followed one another rapidly and tragically. They were to determine the fate of Father Maurice Tornay.

Just before Christmas, Father Lovey fell seriously ill with typhoid. Thanks to the devoted care of Father Burdin who used up his supply of medicines, and thanks also to the vaccination he had received at Hanoi, he recovered. But then Father Burdin, worn out by his long vigils, had to go to bed. Typhoid, liver trouble, acute nephritis, and angina took their toll. He died on February 16, 1945. He was thirty-six years old. The pagans at Petine declared that on that day they saw flowerlike clouds in the limpid blue sky and a luminous rainbow over Father Burdin's residence.

Father Lovey took over in the interim until a successor could be appointed. Who would be the priest who, according to Father Goré's expression, would be "thrown to the wild beasts"? The superiors' choice fell on Father Tornay. "I'm a little to blame for it, I must confess," Father Lovey wrote. "For I told Father Lattion and Father Goré that somebody with the will power of Maurice Tornay was needed to subdue those devilish lamas."

Father Tornay's departure from the preparatory seminary dealt it a death blow. The scarcity of food and lack of re-

sources had put the institution into inextricable difficulties. Father Lattion took charge temporarily, but it was impossible for him to continue very long. So the school was closed; the seminarians who wanted to continue their studies were sent to the seminary at Kunming. The rest went back home. Most of them became good fathers of families and devoted catechists. Brother Duc continued to work the farm and serve the natives and Christians with all his missionary fervor.

After a stay at Tsechung to brush up on his Tibetan, Father Tornay left with his baggage for Yerkalo where Father Lovey was waiting for him. The official welcome—and how stirring it was!—took place on the Petine plateau. Father Lovey and some of the Christians came out to meet the new priest, while firecrackers punctuated the exchange of good wishes. Later, the mission wine flowed at the rectory and the lamas had a good time. The missionaries in turn went into the Buddhist monasteries. Their welcome was officious, all smiles, courteous almost to the point of sycophancy. Thus face was saved. But behind it all were evil intentions, unleashed ambitions, the thirst for gain, and the desire to drive out the foreigner. War had been declared from the time the Christian village was founded at Yerkalo in 1865. It continued under various forms: financial harassing, threats, guerrillas and banditry, outrages, persecutions. The leader who bowed three times before the newcomer was the same who planned to destroy him. The hand that traced in the air an arabesque of affectionate good will was the same that pointed him out to hired assassins.

Yerkalo

From 1940 to 1945, Father Tornay—like all his brethren in Yunnan—received no news from home. As soon as communications with Europe were re-established, he wrote from Yerkalo: “Can I believe that papa, mama, and aunt are sitting

next to a good fire or must I think that some of you are kneeling in black beside a fresh-dug grave in the cemetery I remember so well? I still hope in spite of my feelings; but I pray as though I have given up hoping. . . . I haven't forgotten you. I remember your last laughs and your last tears. . . . How are my nephews and nieces? When I left, some had not yet reached the age of reason, others were not even born; soon they will all be grown up. Grow up, little plants that I know so little and love so much. Take root in Christ and in the soil, for you have to have good roots to withstand the wind. You take roots only once, when you are young and where you were born.

“As for me, I am the most unusual pastor in the world. My parish is bigger than France; but it has only two hundred parishioners who make their Easter duty. I am the only missionary allowed here. My nearest white neighbor is eight days away (Tsechung), and on the other side thirty (Tatsienlu). So you see I have plenty of room to walk and a battle on my hands. The people are proud ruffians and expert bandits. The country is magnificent: limitlessly white unknown mountains, woods, little plains, slopes and crags, all unite to give an impression of unimaginable strength and beauty. It hardly ever rains here. The wind blows very hard. The fields produce barley and buckwheat; the gardens: potatoes, pear trees that bear dry fruit, and apple trees. . . . Don't worry about me: God has always treated me better than I've deserved.”

The Tsechung region along the twenty-eighth parallel was an ethnic and climatic boundary. The people basically were Tibetans and Tibetanized Chinese. The climate was dry; the high massives of the Khwakarpo and the Pema to the north held back the rains, and on the other hand, the strong winds kept the monsoons from driving the clouds that far.

Yerkalo (also called Tsakha or Yentsing) was a subprefecture.

It was a land of saltworks. By the river bank, wooden terraces were built with a packed clay floor and raised edges. The salt workers filled huge buckets from the Mekong and poured the water onto the terrace. The sun evaporated the water and left the salt. Little stalactites of pure white salt formed under the terrace floor; this was the best salt which was saved for the workers and their friends. The salt they swept up had a different color depending on the seasons: pink during peach blossom time, gray or purple or red at other times.

These "salt meadows" were the Yerkalo people's fortune. They went through the valleys with their loads of salt and were very jealous of their product. The merchant would take his measure—a little wooden case—and put the salt in by pinches, slowly, being very careful that it did not pack down. That much more gained! Heaven help the stranger who protested against this procedure and wanted to shake the case to pack down the precious commodity!

In the springtime—the second day of the first moon—the salt workers, wearing lace-trimmed robes, swept up the salt on the terraces. This was an occasion for a twenty-day feast. Incense was burned on the heights and they spent long hours at banquets. The young people danced and played, got drunk and fought. Work was not completely neglected. The men checked the irrigation canals and pools, and repaired the trails.

Wedged in between the Chinese provinces of Sikang and Yunnan, the district of Tsakha has for many years been the scene of bloody struggles between the Chinese and Tibetans.

The mission residence was built on a plateau that dominates the ravine where thirty or forty white cubes—the Christians' homes—are scattered among the graded fields and meadows. The southern side rises until it comes to the level area where Petine is located. The church, rectory, personnel

quarters and outbuildings form a cluster like a fort. The flat roofs and terraces emphasize the length of the light-colored façades. There are few windows, few trees, little grass. It is an austere, grandiose and desolate country. Nearby, the Mekong flows between sheer precipices. In the distance the Damiang glacier indicates where the Salween basin lies.

Father Tornay adds a few strokes to this picture: "A rare kind of plant. It is hardly out of the ground when the sun and wind spoil it. It crackles under your feet like frozen grass. The flowers have vivid colors; they blanket the whole ground. They are not delicate, but hardy, like the edelweiss (which abounds). They reflect all the heat of the sun which they receive. Their perfume makes your throat burn. . . . Suddenly a flock of crows—very black crows—fly across the blue sky. You hear them before you see them. It seems that their cawing never leaves your ears because you will not hear anything else all day long. An antelope, a deer may go by; but they go by silently, without bothering anyone. That long straight line of trodden grass where you see pebbles and horseshoe marks is the trail, the main trail, that month after month the peaceful caravans follow. . . . Tibet is solitude itself, a solitude that makes you afraid, for nothing else brings us so near to God. Can we approach God and not be afraid?"

The Power of the Lamas

Father Tornay might have added: Tibet is also the land of the gods, the land of the spirits, the land of paganism. Satan's triumph is evident in the banners that float from the branches of the trees and over the houses, in the incense burners which each family has, in the rites and customs of a strange religion, in the lamaseries.

"Those white houses up there that are so well exposed," he

explained, "are a monastery of the lamas; a village—sometimes a city—around a temple."

In Tibetan, a lamasery is called a *gompa* (solitude). It is usually built on a plateau on the side of a mountain or on top of a hill, rarely in a valley. The Karmda lamasery, whose evil power Father Tornay was soon to know so well, was located on the heights of the lateral valley that extends to the Mekong between Petine and Yerkalo. You pass through the gate that is surrounded by its watchtower. Narrow, tortuous streets thread between the lamas' houses. Each house, like the others of this country, has a ground floor with a woodshed and stable, a first floor with a kitchen, some rooms, and a domestic chapel. The temple is separated from the confusion of the city and located in a square where meetings are held. There is a long vestibule decorated with Buddhist pictures; its whitewashed earthen walls support a terraced roof, a dome, golden pyramids, and on the edge, a worked frieze.

You enter. Father Tornay tells us: "Nothing can give you a better idea of the temple than the choir of our churches, or if you prefer, the church without a nave. At the farther end are the main altar of the principal god and the altars of the secondary gods. Flowers are in bloom, bowls of lustral water are evaporating, pots of incense are burning. On a lower level, in side stalls, the lamas chant psalms or sing their devotions. The older ones sit near the gods, the younger ones are near the door. They shout so much that the novices constantly have to pour tea into the wooden bowls which each monk keeps within reach. From time to time, the sound of trumpets, cymbals, and drums sustains the flight of their prayers."

Tibetan lamaism is a particular form of Hindu Buddhism. Buddha is the creator god, source of all life, universal soul; he is surrounded by divinities who symbolize the virtues and powers of the Master. In the middle ages, the reformer

Tsongkhapa enlarged the pantheon and perfected the liturgy by borrowing from the Nestorian Christian Church—which existed in western China in his time—the dualism of man inhabited by a divinity and certain external objects of worship. It is due to this borrowing that Catholic missionaries on entering a Lamaist temple cannot keep from being surprised and sadly touched by the resemblance—entirely exterior—of the ceremonies to the canonical office. These pagan monks, called to prayer three times a day by a lama blowing a sea shell, sit like tailors before their cups of tea and chant their sacred texts. There is a certain grandeur in it. And if the breath of the Holy Spirit passed over the country, suddenly transforming souls and the meaning of things, these ceremonies, some of the festivals, and many of the customs could be kept and used as a liturgy for the worship of the true God.

The Tibetan religion accepts the theory of reincarnation. The Dalai Lama, sole head and sovereign, is the *avatar* (incarnation) of a divinity and is himself a god. Each lamasery has a Living Buddha, who incarnates the soul and virtues of a saint, a celebrated lama, or a god. He is not necessarily the abbot; however, the prestige of his birth makes him a protector and defender of the lamasery. The real director is an intellectual or *gueshi*; if he belongs to the official sect—the Yellow Caps—he is appointed by Lhasa for three or six years. In the other sects—the Red or Black Caps, who manifest a certain independence in regard to the Dalai Lama and do not impose celibacy—he is chosen by his fellow monks.

In Tibet, the lamas are all-powerful; it is an authentic theocracy where absolute power is in the hands of a reincarnated god. The lamas are not only, as in druidic times, the judges, teachers, and doctors; they are also rich landowners, political leaders, fortunetellers, and above all, the interpreters of the will of the gods. It might even be said that they are the dictators of the gods whom they claim to induce to fulfill

men's desires by their prayers, dances and exorcisms. "This system," wrote someone who spent many years in Tibet, "produces a small elite of learned men, a large number of block-headed good-for-nothings, likable and jovial high-livers and picturesque braggarts; also a handful of mystics—a tiny minority—while the whole gamut of sorcerers, diviners, necromancers, occultists, and magicians meet in Tibet."

You might call the people of Tibet, who are wholly given over to fetishism, the most religious in the world. However, their formalistic piety has only one purpose: to win the good will of the gods and demons, to placate the powers of the complex supernatural world which they fear, and to ask them for success and well-being. Prayers must be perpetual. They get things to pray for them. Banners float throughout the land, bearing cabalistic inscriptions which no one clearly understands, such as, "*O mani padme hum.*" Father Huc, who traveled from Peiping to Lhasa, gave one among many translations: "Oh, may I attain perfection and be absorbed in Buddha!" Prayer wheels turn in the temples and homes. Besides the income which the lamas receive from the farmers, they require gifts and money for each ritual visit, each blessing, each ceremony. Simony is a rigorously enforced law.

However, the people's piety has something impressive about it—the morning offerings, the incense that burns in the turret on the roof, the drops of tea that they flick toward the household god, their prostration before the home altar, the family evening prayers on the village terrace—all of these have an undeniable beauty.

"In this deeply rooted religion," Father Tornay wrote, "the people have no standing with the gods. Being incapable of honoring the spirits whom they fear, they delegate this duty to the lamas who make a living from their labor. After they have finished their office, the lamas call on the families who have invited them, say some prayers, and perform exorcisms.

Then they have nothing to do but amuse themselves. They are excellent horsemen and skilled warriors; they have made even the Chinese authorities respect them.”¹

Persecutions

To its own people, Tibet is the land of the spirits. For Christians, it is a land of martyrs.

The new pastor of Yerkalo wrote beautiful pages on the heroic epic saga of the missionaries in this hostile region. When he went to the little graveyard near his house, he bent over a fresh grave: “Father Burdin, I count on you to do my hard job.”

Two other priests slept at his side: Fathers Corroux and Nussbaum. In the eighty years from 1865 to 1945, there had been fourteen pastors at Yerkalo. Father Tornay was the fifteenth. Three vicars apostolic had been pastors there: Biet, Giraudeau, and Valentin.

He thought of those legions of martyrs who had given their lives for the new faith in the Tibetan borderlands. He recalled the glorious list Father Goré had given him. The priests of the Paris Foreign Missions Society had seven martyrs.

Father Brioux was killed in 1881. On April 6, 1905, at Batang, Father Mussot was stripped of his clothes, insulted by the people, scourged with thorns, and shot point-blank.

A few days later, on April 14, Father Soulié fell at Yaregong, shot through the head and heart. A fanatic cut off his arm with a sword, then the pagans covered his body with stones and branches.

¹ Most Tibetan lamaseries have a kind of police or guard force composed of tall, surly, athletic “warrior-lamas” who keep order, serve as the abbot’s bodyguard, and perform other custodial duties. It was no doubt these armed “warrior-lamas” of Karmda who were given the assignment to execute Father Tornay.—R. B.

On July 19, near Nakhatong, Father Bourdonnec was riddled with poison arrows. While the aconite was obviously taking effect, a sword gleamed, and the martyr's head, cut off just above the mouth, rolled onto the ground.

On July 26, Father Dubernard was taken prisoner near Lomelo. They forced him to walk barefoot. The stones on the trail cut his feet so badly that he could not go on. A man carried him on his back until they reached a narrow terrace above the Mekong. The Lissus decided to camp there for the night. Throughout the evening, the lamas made fun of the priest, asking him where his almighty God was and suggesting that he apostatize. Father Dubernard showed only a calm courage. The next morning, the caravan took to the trail. They stopped on the edge of a torrent. Three men accepted the job of executioners, for which they would be paid the price of a bull. They took off the priest's clothes, except his shirt and trousers which he begged them to leave on. The martyr knelt down. It took three slashes before his head fell off. They immediately cut open his torso and took out his heart and liver.

At the beginning of June, 1914, Father Theodore Monbeig left Batang to visit the Christian communities of Yaregong and Litang. Surprised by an ambush, he saw his horse fall from under him. His "boy" got in front of him as a shield but was shot to death. Father Monbeig was killed on the spot.

Yerkalo was the only post in forbidden Tibet, after Bonga had to be abandoned. The first baptism was administered there on Christian Day 1865, by Father Desgodins. The parish has had the fearful honor of undergoing several bloody persecutions. In 1905, while Fathers Bourdonnec and Dubernard were being pursued, the lamas and their paid assassins pillaged and burned the residence. Since the stars were unfavorable that day, they were afraid to attack the living and so, like sinister hyenas, they merely dug up the graveyard

and threw the bones into the Mekong. A Christian boy was watching over Father Courroux's grave. A skull was brought up. Taking advantage of the lamas' inattention, the boy took it and carefully hid it away. Eleven Christians were bound to the pillars in the chapel. The next morning, April 18, they were dragged out into a field which from then on was to be called "the field of murder." They refused the offer to apostatize. A hail of bullets cut them down. Their bodies were thrown into the river and became relics that sanctified the waters and countries of the Orient.

In September, 1940, Father Nussbaum, who had been pastor of Yerkalo for eight years and a missionary for thirty-two, stayed at Tsechung visiting his fellow priests. On September 10, he left for the North accompanied by his "boy" and three women teachers from the convent of Tsechung who were going to direct a winter school in the district of Tsakha. The caravan consisted of four mules, two horses and a donkey. On September 17 they went beyond Napu and stopped under a large chestnut tree that was near the village. Father Nussbaum saw a woman on the other side of the Mekong who was making excited gestures to him. He understood the danger and turned back. Six bandits overtook them. With a sword against his chest, they demanded three hundred piasters. Since the priest did not have enough to satisfy them, they wanted to take the animals and baggage, but at the insistence of the people, they were satisfied with eight packages of tea and two blankets.

The caravan started on again in spite of the quite legitimate uneasiness of the young ladies. It was a four-hour journey from Napu to Pamé. The travelers arrived there late in the night, and a Christian family took them in. Father Nussbaum went to a room on the terrace that formed the roof of the stable and led into the house.

About midnight, a man climbed the ladder, looked over

the situation, hurried away, and came back with his companions. They ordered everybody to get up, tied their hands behind their backs, and bound the priest to a column. The bandits then pillaged the whole place, loaded up the animals, and prepared the caravan to move. The priest was untied and retied to the ladder that led to the upper roof. When the bandits had everything ready, they went into the kitchen and made tea. Then they all started off to Pateu.

What happened then? Did Father Nussbaum, who was forced to walk barefoot, become exhausted and stop? The man guarding him put his gun into his back and fired it point-blank. The women and "boy" came out alive. Later the Christians found the priest lying face downward on the ground.

Father Burdin suffered for at least five years an underhanded, virulent persecution. Once he was poisoned at a meal to which he had been invited by the head lama. He did not die, but the effects that the poisoning had on him explain why he was unable to resist typhoid fever. Another time he was attacked by bandits; luckily his escort of ten armed men was able to drive them off. The chalice which he used at his first Mass and his ciborium were stolen. Two suspected youths were given time to get over the border before the administrator, Gun Akhio, condescended to look into the affair—just as a formality.

As Father Tornay bent over the crosses in the cemetery with Latin, Tibetan, and Chinese inscriptions, he relived with deep emotion this series of persecutions, murders, and slaughter. But the harvest would come without a doubt in the world. It would certainly come because the soil had been fertilized by the blood of martyrs. Had not the Latsa Pass, across which Father Dubernard had gone, become a new St. Bernard Pass? Was the similarity between "Dubernard" (which means "of Bernard") and St. Bernard only a coinci-

dence or did it in some way prefigure a spiritual rebirth? The catechist at Tseku was a former lama. At Lomelo, the village that before becoming part of Father Coquoz's territory had supplied the executioners of Father Bourdonnec and Dubernard, Catholicism was being implanted little by little. The church at Yerkalo sheltered a particle of the True Cross. The parish numbered 320 Christians. There would be thousands more if the conditions of life and the political situation were more favorable.

Father Tornay knew what he was facing. The lamas had in no way laid down their arms. The struggle would continue, either violently or underhandedly, in secret or out in the open. How many martyrs had already poured out their blood! Would not the hour for conciliation strike soon? Was not the measure of propitiation filled up?

Finding himself in the center of the battlefield, Father Tornay felt his strength increase, his enthusiasm revive, his faith grow firmer. This was the kind of ministry that suited him. Would he win the fight? He wrote: "Until now the lamas have always succeeded in ruining the missions to Tibet. For three hundred years the Church has made continuous efforts to take root. Now instead of a decisive defeat we must obtain a decisive victory. It is time that God avenges all that innocent blood, all that love poured out, all those lives cut off. . . . The hour of God will strike. The essential thing is always to begin again, despite everything and against everything, and never to be discouraged. Then, when we die, we have conquered."

CHAPTER 11

A Pastor Makes His Rounds

From Yerkalo to Batang

ON June 11, 1945, Father Lovey wrote: "Father Tornay has been here a week and he is already dreaming of other skies! I must confess that I have a certain connection with his travel plans. And then the Bishop himself has been strongly urging us to go as soon as possible to Batang to survey the material and spiritual situation of that post which no priest has visited in ten years. So let's get going! We ask the *Lamatsong* (the civil authority) for a travel permit for Batang and make our preparations. The travel permit has still not been issued and there is a rumor that a group of bandits have left the Yangtze for the region we are going through. Our patience has its limits and we seriously doubt the presence of the bandits. Finally, the *Lamatsong* gives us a letter of recommendation to the *gueshi* of Sogun, and on the morning of June 14, we weigh anchor. Four well-armed men are accompanying us and we are quite decided to show the world what the Swiss can do. Our Christians, as part of their good wishes, advise us not to be too bold."

Batang is about eighty miles northeast of Yerkalo, a five days' march.

The caravan went up the narrow Kiong-long Valley that commands the elevated Tchra-gu-chi Pass. The grain was already turning white, but as they went on up through the wal-

nut and willow trees it still had the green of spring. The climb to Ladatine took four hours of hard work, then it was another hour and a half to the Kiala Pass. This is the dividing line between the Mekong and the Yangtze watersheds. To the west, the white mass of the Damiang blocks the horizon. On all sides the crowded mountains thrust their summits up to an altitude of from 13,000 to 16,000 feet. The natives walk silently here lest they disturb the gods of the air. The lamas pick up a stone and toss it onto a cairn, a little pile which receives the propitiatory offerings of devout pilgrims. The path leads downward through pastures and then into a forest. The priests stopped in a glade between two hills to camp for the night. It was cool.

The Sogun lamasery dominates and watches over the high banks of the Yangtze. His Excellency, the Kongkar Incarnation, wields power—something not lightly to be overlooked—over the territory of Dzung-nghun and even beyond, all the way to the Tsakha district which includes Yerkalo.

The caravan threaded through the Ngul-Khio Valley, took the path to the right, and came out on the summit of a pass where they perceived, as though from an airplane, the fort-like monastery of Sogun, with its gates, close-packed houses and two temples. The place was a monastery, an intrenched camp, a market and a courthouse. The nearby ruins recall the fierce battles the lamas put up against the Chinese and the Church.

The *gueshi* welcomed the missionaries with kindness and put four pack horses at their disposal until they reached the borders of the States of Lamatsong, that is, practically all the way to Bongtin. While waiting for dinner they visited the Kongkar's apartment. The main room was a chapel and sleeping quarters. Father Tornay admired the beautiful frescoes, decorations and statues that covered the walls. In silent

wrath, he was sorry that the paintings in the church at Yerkalo were not of the same quality.

“Whenever he thought about it,” Father Lovey tells us, “he felt like being an iconoclast.”

In the early afternoon—it was June 15, the Feast of Saint Bernard of Menthon—the travelers again hit the trail. When they gazed at the lamasery’s hundred-odd houses, its protecting half-mile-long wall, its sheds that sheltered the armed guards, they could not keep from praying to Saint Bernard who had relegated the demon *in aspera montium* (to the mountain wilds), and they both intoned the hymn *Oramus te, beatissime Bernarde* (We pray thee, O blessed Bernard).

It was an honor to have pack animals put at their disposal by the munificent authorities. But they were not supposed to hurry. Tibetans, especially when they are doing government work, take their time with extraordinary nonchalance. Thus the priests had to camp on the Dzungtza Plain when the sun was still quite high in the sky; much later the caravan with their baggage wandered into camp. The drivers of the pack horses had the subtle art of losing time without appearing to do so. They drew lots to see who would carry the heaviest bundles; they did the same thing with the cumbersome objects: storm lanterns, pots, tools; they conferred for hours before setting out and then set off at a calculated slow pace. The foreigners’ tips did not put much more life into them.

On the morning of the 16th, they broke camp very early. At Walong, they stayed with Kunk’io, a *besset* of unvarying duplicity. He always went to the meetings at Lamatsong when important business was being considered; there he was rabid against the mission. Yet he assured the missionaries of his intense good will. He acted with the cunning of an old fox. He was an intelligent man, however, and was affable and talkative. The priests asked him about the Gartook country to the north, deep in Tibet. He answered: “It’s all right to

ask about those things. Perhaps you intend . . . However, I will consider your question as motivated only by legitimate curiosity.”

From Walong to Diagnitine, the route rose gently through fields and meadows and came out on a large plateau several miles long. This was the Bong Pass where they could look down and see the whole countryside. Behind them, the way they had come, with the Kiala Pass; to the north, the Kong-tse-ka Pass led to the Yangtze; in the northwest, Lha-ndun lay at the bottom of a basin and was a stopping point on the way to Gartok where Father Renou's grave lay.

At Bongtine, an officer, at the recommendation of Sogun, granted them servants all the way to Tchrupalong on the threshold of China. A gold earring, the insigne of a chieftain, shone from his left ear. He was from the north of Lhasa and spoke a kind of Tibetan that the travelers could hardly understand. They spent the night at Pa-tso in the middle of the Bong Valley. They slept on the roof because the vermin were rarer up there, but a storm came up and they were forced to take shelter from the downpour.

The next day they had long layovers at Kong-tse-ka and Tegatine because of the servants' delay. Against their will, the priests hired some animals. They were overtaken by a courier who brought them some newspapers and a letter from Msgr. Valentin urging them to visit Batang as soon as possible. The descent to Gunra, at the river's edge, was along a wet muddy path.

The missionaries met the sergeant of the post who was also staying with their host. They took the opportunity to complain about the servants: “What surprises us,” they said, “is that your people pay little attention to the orders their superiors give them.”

This *ad hominem* argument, supported by some glasses of

good arrack,¹ won the day. The sergeant assured them that the servants would be waiting for them when they came back and that the money they spent in renting the animals would be returned. He kept his word.

From Gunra to Tchrupalong, the trail wound along the river for about thirteen miles. Not a village, not a house anywhere. It was an ideal country for ambushes and attacks.

There was only one incident—fording the Chenkio River. “Our mounts were half submerged in the water,” Father Lovey wrote. “We got off with a good scare. But our companions were less confident about us than we were, because we were bending way over on our horses when we thought we were upright. This was due to dizziness caused by the swift current. The river comes from the land of Sangun and Tsongrong. On its inhospitable banks, bandits often hold up travelers. Forty minutes still separate us from Tchrupalong where the ferry is.”

The Yangtze marked the boundary between Tibet and China. Military posts and custom houses faced each other. A Christian from Szechwan was in command of the Chinese post.

The boat was about fifty feet long and seven feet wide. It was flat-bottomed, made of pine, and divided into six compartments. It was pulled by oars and directed by a long rudder. Without the slightest danger it could carry twenty people, a dozen horses and all the baggage of the caravan.

While naked children came to gape at them, the priests sat down on the river bank to eat their lunch. Then they started once more on their trek to the north, along the east side of the river with the broiling sun directly overhead. Near a torrent was a farm: this was the place where Father Brioux was

¹ A kind of Tibetan whisky.—*Tr.*

murdered in 1881. As night fell, the caravan halted at Lainang.

They had only a half day's traveling left. They came through the Kuku Pass, and there the plain and village of Batang lay before their wondering eyes. Their journey ended on June 19, at ten o'clock in the morning.

Batang—Christianity Without a Priest

The mission buildings were occupied by a grade school. They wouldn't argue about it! All that was left vacant was the gardener's kitchen. Fathers Lovey and Tornay took it over, had a foot bath, smoked their pipes and chatted, while some local dignitaries and Christian friends, hearing of their arrival, hurried to pay their respects.

The travelers asked pardon for receiving them in such a place and manner. The people took the hint. Hurriedly the schoolmaster cleared out two rooms on the upper floor for them. At five o'clock they went to visit the mandarin. Tea and cookies unloosed tongues. Cordial conversation touched on the most varied subjects: from the capitulation of Germany and defeat of Japan to Oriental languages and the speakers' accents. The Sikang accent is different from that of Yunnan. They admired Father Tornay's accent and were surprised at Father Lovey's knowledge of Tibetan. On the walls were pictures of those who were considered to be the great men of the times: Sun Yat-sen, Chiang Kai-shek, Lenin, Wilson, Hindenburg, Pasteur. At school, Napoleon had the honor of representing military France.

At the mission, things and ideas had to be put in order. The chapel had been transformed into a curious gallery of pictures and statues. One class was conducted in the balcony; full assemblies were held in the nave. On the altar, Sun Yat-sen was enthroned. First things first! Father Lovey

grabbed the liberator of China and put him on a wall. The schoolmaster could not believe the sacrilege that was taking place before his eyes. He boiled with rage.

The next day the round of invitations began. Everyone who thought he had a particle of authority wanted the honor of having the two missionaries dine with him. The vice-commandant of the place, the schoolmaster, the mandarin, the heads of the post office and telegraph office and the police—all had a smiling welcome for the messengers from the West.

Their happy relations came pretty close to suffering a severe strain after the chapel incident. But the priests had been called on from the time they arrived to talk to the school authorities, teachers and students. Father Tornay spoke with Chinese courtesy. He rose and in easy, correct language made a vibrant eulogy of courageous China, of Sun Yat-sen, and of the schoolmaster whose merits he stressed in typical Oriental style. Then turning directly to him, he said: "I did not believe that I was offending you. A man of great learning such as you knows that sacrifice can be offered only to God. On the altar, there can be only the Cross."

The reconciliation was sealed. During all the banqueting no further mention was made of Sun Yat-sen and Christ's pre-eminence in the Catholic chapel.

But the main reason for their trip to Batang was to bring the comforts of religion to the Christians there. A visit to the little graveyard reminded them that they were in the land of the martyrs. Of the five priests buried there, Fathers Mus-sot and Soulié were killed in 1905; Father Brioux in 1881; and Father Behr, born in Switzerland, met death in the Yangtze. A majority of the people were inclined to suspect that the latter had been murdered. Father Tintet, whose grave was a little to the side, had a natural death. A tombstone preserved the memory of Father Bourdonnec, pastor of Yerkalo, who was killed in 1905 and buried at Tseku. The little building

which covered the graves was half destroyed by fanatics from a nearby pagoda.

“After prayers each evening,” Father Lovey wrote, “we prepare the Christians for confession and the catechumens for baptism. On the feast of Saint John the Baptist, we baptized three adults and three children and were able to regularize three marriages. The evening before, about ten Christians went to confession.”

They had to admire the perseverance of the Catholics who, though deprived of all priestly help and living in the midst of paganism, nevertheless kept their faith.

“The Catholic community is not dead at Batang!” Father Tornay wrote. “If there have been some defections and some who stay away, the majority have forgotten neither the teaching of the Church nor their prayers.”

Batang had a Protestant mission. The pastors invited the priests to attend an evening meeting; they listened to the discussions, the prayers improvised by different persons, the hymns and the encouraging messages which the participants were asked to give.

When the meeting was about to break up, Father Tornay, half joking and half serious, approached the pastor and said: “Why didn’t you ask me to speak?”

“No objection,” the pastor answered. “We’ll extend the meeting.”

The people listened to the two missionaries not only with friendly curiosity but with rapt attention. The priests stressed in glowing terms the oneness of the Church and the necessity of laboring to bring about Christ’s desire: that there be only one flock and one shepherd.²

² In his book, *Trente Ans aux Portes de Thibet Interdit*, Father Goré includes a useful survey of Protestant mission efforts among the Tibetan population along the borders of China and India. It is indeed a noteworthy record, beginning in 1897, when the Reverend Cecil Pothill Turner estab-

On June 30, 1945, Fathers Tornay and Lovey were back in Yerkalo.

The Economics of Lamaism

Persecution of Christianity finds its real source in hatred of the truth: the battle between the good and bad angels continues on earth in the hearts and lives of men. The spirit of evil fights bitterly against the works of God. It is an enduring fact, verified since the creation of the world, that souls that have come forth from the hand of the Creator are the trophies and stakes of this far-flung, inevitable and eternal struggle.

But in each country this persecution is based on different pretexts. The Romans said the Christians were rebels against the authority of the emperor-god. In certain modern states they refuse to obey unjust laws because their enforcement is an insult to freedom of conscience and human dignity.

lished residence in Tatsienlu. The interdenominational China Inland Mission, the Foreign Christian Mission, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, the Moravian and Seventh Day Adventists and the Pentecostal Missions have been represented at various times in Tibetan work, although relatively few have labored in the Upper Mekong Valley. Most of the Protestant missionaries in the field have been Americans. Protestant missionaries converted many wild Lissus in the mountain ranges south of Latsa Pass.

The Reverend Albert Leroy Shelton (1875-1922) performed outstanding medical work for many years in Batang. He even hoped to obtain the Dalai Lama's permission to found a hospital in Lhasa, but his plans did not succeed, and he was killed by bandits. One of his successors in Batang, the Reverend Marion H. Duncan, was robbed by bandits near Atuntze in 1927, and has paid a warm tribute to the kindness and hospitality which he and his family received from the French Fathers in the Mekong and Salween Valleys.

Christian missionaries like to tell this story about themselves: A Chinese of the region, when asked what was the difference between the "pastors" and the "Fathers," replied: "It's simple: the pastor has a wife, does not have a beard, and does not smoke; the Father does not have a wife, has a beard, and smokes like a chimney."—R. B.

The situation in Tibet for the missionaries is aggravated by the presence of lamaism which is as powerful as it is jealous of its rights.

Tibet is a theocracy. Alongside the Dalai Lama with headquarters at Lhasa and all the Incarnations that rule the lamaseries of the country, there also exists a lay political government with rulers and governors, prefects and subprefects in the provinces, an army and laws. But this authority is often an arm of the lamas; it is inspired, guided and dominated by those who claim to be "reflections" of the divinity. Frequently a lama, besides his religious functions, holds political and juridical rights as well. He is a real sovereign, an all-powerful dictator, and sole master of a region. Thus it was with the Kongkar of Sogun.

It sometimes happens that the civil government acts—or wishes to act—against the plans of the lamas. Its decrees then risk being intercepted, sabotaged and made dead letters. The governor of Chamdo, about fifteen days north of Yerkalo, was favorable to the mission. However, faced by the power of the lamaseries of Karmda or Sogun, he never succeeded in enforcing his point of view.

Moreover, this religious influence, strengthened by an often undisputed political power, rests on a very ancient and solidly entrenched fiscal system.

The whole Tibetan population is divided into two groups: tributaries and farmers. The former in the beginning received a plot of land which was encumbered with taxes and statute labor. The farmers generally share the revenue from their lands with the owners—local chieftains, lamaseries, tributaries. Thus all the land belongs to the authorities—either religious or political—and to a few privileged groups.

In this country, a man belongs to the religion of the person on whom he depends economically. This is a cold hard fact the missioners have to face.

Therefore, one of the mission's first objectives must be to buy land, build on it, settle farmers, feed and take care of them.

Father Lovey made this frank remark: "If we had more land, the number of Christians at Yerkalo would run up to a thousand."

Another difficulty. The Orient does not have the same ideas as we do. For a Tibetan, and especially a lama, to sell land is not to sell it but to rent it for a number of years, to lend it, just as in Roman times the lands of the nobles or of the State were let out in tenure. From the juridical point of view, the mission is therefore always in an uncertain situation. If the lamas want to take back the lands they "sold," the missionaries may make a defense according to all their principles of justice and law, but they would only be fighting against clouds.

Thus when Yerkalo fell victim to persecution, there was not only hatred of a foreign religion to consider but also the spirit of gain and greed. The lamas live off their innumerable farms; if they sell some land, they reserve the right to take it back at the opportune moment.

Father Lovey summed it up this way: "You should realize that it is impossible for anyone who might be a tenant farmer of a lamasery or a pagan chieftain to become or remain Christian. They do not own land the way we do. It belongs exclusively to the lamaseries, to the more or less important local lords, or finally to the middle class who have received free land grants from the government, which can pass on from father to son on condition that they provide forced labor and pay taxes. The middle class cannot alienate their land by a true sale; at most they can mortgage or rent it out. All the rest of the people are farmers who share half of the harvest with the landowners or pay a fixed rent whether they have a good or bad year. The last class are the very numerous beg-

gars, who besides begging, make a living by peddling, by small trades and by robbery.

“I am telling you all this so you can have some idea of the conditions we are in and of the difficulties in spreading our holy religion. Note also that the supreme authority in Tibet, as also the local authority, is held by the lamas, the heads of a strongly organized religion, who consequently are not going to make way for a foreign religion, even though it is the true religion.”

In 1887 the mission of Yerkalo, formed by the Christians driven from Bonga in 1865, was legally established by right of purchase and with the support of the native prefects of Batang. The old residence was pillaged in 1873 and 1887, and the new one in 1905. Each time through the intervention of the vicar apostolic of Tatsienlu and the French authorities, the missionary was able to return to his post.

In 1932, the Living Buddha of Sogun revolted against China and routed the garrisons of the district. Then, threatened by a dangerous rival, he offered his loyalty to the government at Lhasa, which was happy to come to his defense and confirm him in his functions by giving him all political and judicial powers. When Kongkar died in 1934, a distant cousin, Gun-Akhio, succeeded him and appointed a Tibetan colonel, a friend of his, to confiscate the mission property. After a year's talks and negotiations, the Lhasa government recognized the mission's right to the property and restored it. The lamas got their revenge by expelling the American Protestant missionaries and by murdering the French Father Victor Nussbaum in 1940, at the village of Pamé which was really on Yunnan territory.

After Father Burdin's death in 1945, the vexations only increased. The lamas even pushed their impudence to the point of demanding things from Father Lovey that had be-

longed to the dead man or presenting him with imaginary debts.

Here is an incident that shows the diversity of means they use to harass and discourage the Christians. In May 1945, the head lama ordered a census of all persons and animals. The order came from Lhasa and applied only to Tibetan territory. It demanded public prayers to turn away from the land the scourges of war, plague, and famine. The truth was that the lamaseries, after having wanted Germany and Japan to win, were beginning to fear China and its reprisals for all the outrages they had committed against her. But, you may ask, what connection is there between prayer and the census? To a Tibetan, the answer is quite obvious. Since the lamas were going to pray, they had a right to honoraria. In order to be paid at the proper rate, they wanted to know what everybody owned. So everything that lived and breathed had to be counted and taxed. Moreover, each family had to send a representative to the lamasery to recite a certain cabalistic formula ten thousand times. Father Lovey remarked: "The fast talkers finish in a week, the thick-lipped take from ten to twelve days, the stammerers will keep at it for at least a month."

This decree applied to everybody, Christians included. They protested, asserted that they did not know the prayers, and that besides they had their own worship and sacrifices, and they were not obligated to pay money for the lamas' invocations. The chieftain was angered and accused them of insubordination. A substantial gift was needed to appease him. The Christians at the mission—the others had to submit to the general law—must repair the roads and bridges. "Otherwise," the lama cried, "you will have to clear out with your foreigner!"

During the summer, the mission had a new headache. A

certain tributary, Ajiong, being unable to meet his obligations to the state, thought of solving his problem at the mission's expense. The Lamatsong, who had taken the matter into his hands, tried to gain his objective by persuasion. For a week the mission had to open its gate and dine all the *bessets*, dignitaries, and tributaries of the region.

"You see," the visitors said, "it is not customary to sell in perpetuity. All Ajiong is asking are two fields that used to be part of his property. Since he cannot meet his obligations as a tributary, it would certainly be a favor to him to restore these lots. . . . Think it over."

"I see," the missionary answered, "but we have no right to give away the fields that belong to the Church, especially since those fields never belonged to Ajiong's property."

Since neither party yielded, the head lama trained his guns on another target. He threatened to expel the pastor of Yer-kalo. As his blackmail got no reaction, he told the Christians: "You tell the fathers that in the morning they are going to be driven out, and you with them. Our people who have guns will use them, the rest will bring their swords."

Tearful women and the notables rushed to the mission. "Fathers," they cried, "you've got to give up the land!"

"Now, friends," the priests answered, "just pray a great deal and be prepared for anything."

The next day and many days passed. The lamas fulminated nothing but threats and imprecations.

If Ajiong could not get part of the mission property, he was going to go away. The priests were ironical: "We will give up those fields only on a formal order of expropriation. But you still have one solution. Since Ajiong cannot furnish the forced labor and pay the taxes, give us what belongs to him and we will take his place."

"All right then," exploded Gun-Akhio, the head lama who

was thrown into a violent rage by these suggestions, "let the priests drive Ajiong away. As for me, I take no responsibility. You will see him come back with a group of bandits, and I won't answer for what happens."

"It's not a question of driving this man away but of letting him leave as he has been asking to do for a long time. Besides, Ajiong boasts that he killed Father Nussbaum. He told Father Burdin he would kill him. And he is always repeating that he will not rest until he has our hides. Head lama, what do you think of that?"

The scoundrel gave no explanation. He would have been very happy to see the missionaries fall under the blows of the cruel Ajiong and then slaughter him like a dog.

"An unsuccessful meeting," Father Lovey concluded. "God is the master of life, and we consider it worthy of our role as missionaries to offer Him ours, if He wishes it, in order to save the Christian community of Yerkalo. For we must not have any illusions. Under the inoffensive appearance of the proceedings over two little fields, the real issue is the mission's entire property, and consequently its very existence is at stake."

The story of the mill turned attention temporarily away from the quarrels over land. The Lamatsong, with Gun-Akhio at the head, arrived in Yerkalo, assembled all the inhabitants and recalled to their minds a certain paper which no one remembered.

"Yes, you promised not to take your grain any more to the foreigner's mill but to the one at Karmda. Well, you have gone right on grinding your grain at the Fathers' mill."

The villagers gently protested: "Oh, not often. Only when we were in a hurry and didn't have time to go up there."

The lama smiled.

"You admit it. That's good. Let's draw up the accounts.

The fines will be—let's see, let's be generous—eight hundred rupees. That's not too much for the forty families of Yerkalo.”

Cries, tears, groans—the whole noisy gamut of surprise and supplication—accompanied the wild gestures of the women who threw themselves on the ground and the men who put their heads between their hands.

Flattered by this moving scene, the potentate reduced the sum to three hundred rupees, which had to be delivered that very day. Then he produced a first document stating that those who brought their grain to the Fathers' mill would be driven out of the country and their homes razed to the last stone.

The second ordinance was more personal: “You are going to swear that you will no longer say anything bad about me. You will not accuse me of being unjust. Otherwise, you will have to pay a big fine. Be wise, my children; I wish only your good and that of your leader.”

Despite the conduct of such a sordid, lying and greedy potentate, the spirit of Christian charity continued to radiate over Yerkalo. Since the bishop allowed them to keep the Blessed Sacrament without a sanctuary lamp, more of the faithful came to Mass and evening prayers. The priests administered two adult baptisms and regularized two marriages.

However, the dominant note was sadness and low spirits. The pagans and backsliders secretly rejoiced, while the Christians were discouraged and agonizingly wondered what tomorrow would bring. The missionaries could not consent to the elimination of this Christian community that had seen so many heroes and martyrs.

“We have decided,” they wrote, “to go and plead our case before the governor of Chamdo. May God protect us! If this project goes through, it seems to us that the Christian com-

munity here in Yerkalo will derive immense good from it. At least, the question of the legal existence of the parish could no longer be brought up from time to time by our petty local chieftains—and that would be a lot for us and our Christians! May God and His holy Mother enlighten us!”

CHAPTER 12

The Pagan Gods Win Out

The Forces at Work

FATHER LOVEY left Yerkalo around the end of August, 1945. Father Tornay was alone.

The struggle grew worse from day to day. The fact that the pastor of Yerkalo was Swiss gave his enemies a new pretext. The descendants of the former owners of the mission property, taking their cue from Ajiong, joined forces in demanding the return of the family estate. Using their peculiar concept of buying and selling, they said: "We sold our lands to the French and not to the Swiss. Therefore, we have a right to take them back."

The camps were clearly divided and the tactics decided on. On the one side were all the lamaseries of the district, with Sogun doing the planning and Karmda putting it into action, while the others were ready to lend a strong hand as the need arose. Behind this front line was Tibetan lamaism with all its cruel pride, sure of its strength, invincible—even to this day—and pitiless toward foreigners. On the other side, we can line up the rest of the world: China, France, America, England, India, all nations where a person's rights are respected. But these powers promised, discussed, pretended to act, got lost in subtle distinctions, and let months and years go by without giving their intervention the force of an ultimatum.

In the center, certain lay Tibetan governors—those of Chamdo and the central government—tried to confine the process within the framework of justice and law, but they were circumvented, won over, and perhaps bought by lama gold.

All the time Gun-Akhio passed from one camp to the other with disgusting duplicity. As head lama of Sogun, administrator and subprefect of the Tsakha district, he generally stayed in his lair at Petine on the plateau that faced Yerkalo on the other side of the torrent. As the uncontested dictator of the region, he commanded, promised, made excuses for not being able to keep his promises, went back on his decisions, made new ones without carrying them out, played the role of peacemaker, proclaimed his good feelings, assured the missionaries of his protection, and while he tried to palm himself off as an honest man, whipped up hatred on the sly, unleashed the lamas, and finally led the game when he was sure of winning. A short thick-set man, he wore a native coat that reached half way down to his knees, crisscrossed shoulder straps, a belt loaded with cartridge boxes and bags, baggy trousers stuffed into his soft leather boots that came to his knees, and a cone-shaped felt hat with a narrow brim. His fat face, broad chin and thick greedy lips expressed candor, brutality and cunning. One of the missioners who knew him well said: "Every time I met him I had the feeling I was in the presence of the devil."

From the human viewpoint, the outcome of the conflict was certain. Outside of papal diplomacy, what foreign government was going to take the little squabble at Yerkalo seriously? It was the chicanery of polite bandits, conflicts of interest in one of the remotest corners of this planet, a passing storm over some practically inaccessible mountains, a trifle not worth bothering with any length of time.

Father Tornay, therefore, felt alone, terribly alone against

everybody. On his side, he had the prayers of the Church, a fearless and irreproachable character, honesty of intention, and above all his spirit of faith. He could disappear, but the Church is eternal. Her persecutors pass away like autumn leaves. The truth remains. In the end it always triumphs.

The Threats Crystallize

When Father Burdin died, Gun-Akhio was at Lhasa but kept in close touch with Sogun and Karmda. In June of 1945, the two priests were at Batang. By chance they learned that a telegram that closely concerned them was going through the post office. Figuring that all was fair in the war that was going on, they arranged to intercept and read it: "To the lamasery of Karmda. I have learned that the priest at Yerkalo is dead. I will take steps with the government to ask the French and English authorities to recall their subjects from Tibet. For if another Father comes, we will be without means against him. Signed: Gun-Akhio."

A copy of this telegram was sent to Msgr. Valentin who communicated it to the competent authorities, asking them to put an end to the lamas' intrigues.

Japan's defeat made the Tibetans more cautious. Would China use its victory to take over this land of the salt-marshes? The waiting continued for some weeks. Father Tornay even began to hope.

In September the offensive broke loose again. Everywhere people were saying that the foreigner was going to be driven out of Tibet. The former owners of the land that had been sold to the mission at a stiff price began to agitate, band together and demand with might and main to have it back.

On October 2 Father Tornay received a visit from Rangti, the treasurer of Gakhia, the young lama of Karmda, who told him: "Gun-Akhio, our administrator, is still at Lhasa with his

adviser, Gun-Podu. He has delegated me to inform you that the Lhasa government has assigned all your lands to him and that you have to leave as soon as possible. Leave for Tse-chung."

Father Tornay clamped his teeth on his pipe and glared through his glasses at the insolent messenger who was smiling at him. Then, in a voice that was calm but vibrant with anger, he asked: "What about the furniture?"

"You are to leave everything. Nothing belongs to you."

"I will appeal to the big nations!"

Rangti smiled again. "The big nations? America, England, France, China are on our side. They will let Tibet stay the way it is."

"Very well," the missionary told him firmly, coldly. "But get this once and for all. I am at Yerkalo by the will of my superiors—I will never leave unless they give me a formal order."

The former owners made a new attempt. They realized that the lamaseries were going to win out, and they had no intention of letting their coveted lands fall into the hands of the Karmda lamas. They begged Father Tornay to give them back the titles to the property.

"No!" he hurled at them. "That would be the first act of despicable expropriation."

During the last months of 1945, the skirmishes increased. Gun-Akhio was back. With knavery and tenacity he carried on the fight. Msgr. Valentin was making appeals to the Tibetan and Chinese governments, and accepting Father Lattion's suggestions, advised Father Tornay to resist the blackmail and threats and to yield only to force. Meanwhile the lamas at Karmda were proclaiming to heaven and earth that the foreigner had to leave under pain of severe punishment, that the Christians would have to apostatize, and that their

children would have to become lamas for there must be only one religion in the land of the gods.

On November 16, three treasurers from Karmda showed up at the mission. They insisted: "Leave as soon as possible. We have paid the Lhasa government for the mission property. Therefore we are going to harvest the autumn grain."

"I will leave," Father Tornay answered, "only if you force me to do so by violence."

"We shall see, we shall see. . . . But in three days, on the 19th, you will be gone."

When the deadline arrived, the people of Yerkalo were anxiously wondering what was going to happen. The Tara Gueshi of Karmda, escorted by lamas, came to the mission. Was this the end of the drama?

"Father, stay at Yerkalo a while longer."

"Well, well," Father Tornay thought, "a change of tactics."

"Yes," the Gueshi told him, "you will stay until you have retracted an abominable calumny."

A sudden burst of virtue, the priest reflected bitterly, knowing what virtue could be expected from the lamas.

"The governor of Chamdo has received a letter accusing us of murdering and robbing you."

"That's a calumny, obviously. You haven't done it yet."

"And when you have publicly denied these rumors circulating about us, then a Tibetan chieftain will come to throw you out of the country."

"Show me the letter."

"We don't have it with us."

"Your imagination is rich. . . . But get this: I want to see that letter and I want to see the chieftain you just mentioned. . . . After that, we will talk."

What were the actual facts in the lamas' statements? The Chinese governor of the Sikang Province, General Liu Wen-huei, had asked Chamdo by telegram about the situation at

Yerkalo and had accused the lamas of attacking and overrunning the mission. The Tibetan governor at Chamdo had dispatched three couriers to Yerkalo to find out about Father Tornay and was soon able to report that he would stop the disorders in the district and would send a peacemaker there.

At Sogun, the head lamas and notables held a secret conference to decide what steps to take.

Father Goré reported on the situation as follows: "The news has just come to us from Chungking that China has granted autonomy to Tibet. . . . In that capital there is a Tibetan office in charge of relations between China and Tibet. It seems that the embassies of France and England made representations to that office with the request that the missionary be left at Yerkalo. A Christian going through Tsechung told us that the Karmda lamasery is reported to have offered a large sum (6,000 Yunnan piasters) to the Tibetan government for authorization to expropriate the Yerkalo mission."

The bitter conflict did not make Father Tornay lose his sense of humor. He followed up Father Lovey's former newsletter called the *Yerkalo Rainbow* with a new bulletin V (for victory) in which he gave his verve and style free rein. He told about his negotiations, gave a detailed report of the difficulties he had to put up with, laughed at himself while gently poking fun at his neighbor. Here is one example. He had learned that Father André was suffering from a hernia. He jokingly wrote: "For his hernia, better wear a truss and go on a strict diet right away. At his age, hernias are incurable. It is even to be feared that an operation would only make him still worse. I once had an uncle who after several operations found the only way to keep his intestines in was with his hand . . . and he died at a ripe old age. He should avoid tackling too steep crags. If he runs into one on a trip, he had better make a little detour. It's irritating but not as painful

as a hernia. Dear Father André, you have *hernia-ed* yourself for the Chinese. May they be grateful to you for it!"

Last Resistance

The year 1946 opened with a third threat of expulsion, with one week's reprieve. On January 6 the Tara Gueshi, followed by an acolyte, presented himself at the mission and flourished a document. Father Tornay examined it carefully. It was indecipherable. Even his scribe could not read it. And the seal? Was it the governor of Chamdo's? Maybe. But it wasn't very legible either.

"Well," the priest asked, "what does it mean?"

The Gueshi read rapidly: "Since the priest at Yerkalo has written to the governor and accused the lamas of murder and theft, it is evident that he can no longer remain in Tibet. At first I thought of sending a delegate to make an investigation, but this would cost the people too much money. Let the lamas do what they think best."

Father Tornay threw a quick look over the crowd of Christians and pagans that had come to see what was going to happen. Calmly he said: "The governor of Chamdo has written a letter to the governor of Sikang, informing him that he would put an end to the disorders at Yerkalo. Furthermore, I myself have a document—and it is very readable and bears an authentic seal—by which Chamdo assures me of its support and the sending of a delegate. Is that clear? And you, Tara Gueshi, what have you just brought me? No one, not even the best readers in the village—you can see yourself that they give up—can decipher this rag. And the seal? Where in the devil did you steal it?"

The Gueshi was startled. "Do you dare accuse me?"

Losing patience, despite the enormous scandal he was going to cause, Maurice Tornay smashed his fist down and

shouted: "Yes! You are a forger and those around you are forgers! I have nothing to add. Let's wait for the delegate from Chamdo, and then we shall see."

The lama was foaming with rage. He turned towards the crowd and shouted: "You are my witnesses. All of you are my witnesses. . . . The Father has treated an official act of the government as a forgery."

Then turning back to the missionary, he hurled these words into his face: "Dead or alive, you will leave! You will leave!"

A visit to Gun-Akhio, who had just returned to Petine, added nothing to the debate. The man smiled, claimed he could not act against the people, and reserved his judgment.

January 9 was the deadline. The lamas from Karmda came to the mills at Tschra-gu-chy; they were about three quarters of an hour from Yerkalo. Flags and banners floated over their heads; the noise of gongs, cymbals and trumpets accompanied their triumphal march. This was the great day. The pagan was going to overthrow the Cross. Two old nags brought up the rear of the procession: one for Father Tornay, the other for his baggage.

Thereupon Gun-Akhio, after forbidding the lamas to make any kind of a demonstration and asking them to go home, went into the mission residence. Father Tornay had him stay for dinner, for in that country, despite the conflict, etiquette has to be observed and face has to be saved. During the meal, the administrator clearly expressed his feelings: "No more Christians here. You Christians came from Bonga and there are no more Christians at Bonga. I want it to be the same here."

"My superiors," the priest answered, "have forbidden me to leave my post. At present they are discussing the question with higher authorities. The letter and telegrams from the governor are proof of it. I cannot remain since the lamas of Karmda deny me that right. What's to be done? As for not

tolerating Christians at Yerkalo, that doesn't depend on you or me."

January 12 was a Saturday. The Christians gathered at the mission. There was no doubt that the lamas would not lay down their arms and that Gun-Akhio, despite the extensions of the departure date which he granted like precious gifts, would prevail in the end. It was a tragic hour.

"Who wants to apostatize?" the priest asked.

The faithful unanimously answered: "We swear to be faithful to death."

"Who wants to follow me?" he then asked.

The crowd hesitated. All had been told they were specifically forbidden to leave Yerkalo. A mass exodus would cause trouble.

A couple of old men stepped forward. Then some youths. They were former students at the preparatory school.

The priest had decided not to take anything with him, for he knew that, despite their protestations, the lamas would attack the caravan as soon as it crossed the Tibetan border, just as they had done with the American Protestant missionaries in 1927 and 1939. He handed over his most important papers and the church belongings to two trusted Christians.

"Our most precious possessions are souls first of all," he wrote, "then the church property. The rest is of only secondary importance!"

On Sunday the 13th, the Christians crowded around the confessional.

Their pastor made his last decision. He informed Gun-Akhio: "I will not leave until the lamas tie me onto a horse and hit it with a stick. Not before. I will take nothing with me. I will hand over the keys of the house and the church to you."

The people of Yerkalo believed that all was over. They

began to weep and wail; they clutched the columns, rolled on the floor, leaned against the doors.

Father Tornay sighed sadly: "At the hour when I most need strength I feel crushed!"

Gun-Akhio hardly welcomed the priest's move. He didn't like to be accused of being a persecutor; still less to be taken for a political agitator. Everything should proceed in an orderly way. He granted a new delay of nine days.

Meanwhile international diplomacy was trying to find some way out of this painful situation. Pressed by Msgr. Valentin, Vicar Apostolic of Tatsienlu, and by Msgr. Derouineau, Vicar Apostolic of Kunming, the French ambassador at Chungking, General Peckhof, was sending appeals to Lhasa, and although he could not get the help of an American plane, nor the joint action of the British and American consuls, he persuaded India to intervene with the Tibetan government.

Father Tornay wanted to go in person to Chamdo. Since Gun-Akhio forbade him, he sent a courier with a letter and gifts. The young women teachers at the Yerkalo school were more in the way than helpful in such circumstances. He therefore sent them to Tsechung, and at the same time he buried in the mountainside all the precious documents and objects which he wanted to save from the greed of his enemies.

A member of the Pargong family from Kionglong, a cruel and presumptuous young fellow, ordered the priest to leave the next day. Father Tornay threw him out.

On Sunday, January 20, he went to Petine to meet the head lama. As usual, Gun-Akhio was benevolent, crafty, reserved.

Monday the 21st was the departure date. The missionary was heartbroken.

"All that I could do," he wrote, "I have done. All that is left is for me to let myself be bound. Pray for me."

He went around the mission, saw to it that everything was in order, locked the doors, and went back to his room where

he sat down by a smoking stove and took out his pipe. All of a sudden, the street was filled with a yelling, disorderly mob. The lamas with clubs in their hands were beating the Christians who had thrown themselves in front of the doors and were brutally clearing them out of their way. Father Tornay jumped up. Like madmen they threw themselves on him, held his arms, and insulted him.

“Are you going to leave or not?”

The priest was speechless. He thought: “The battle is lost. I will leave, if I have to.”

He handed the head of the group a bunch of useless keys. He made them give him back his hat and a bottle of medicine. The pillage started. They stole the sacred objects, carried off the straw for their horses, took the baggage he had prepared for his journey, threw his bed out of the house to show clearly that the foreigner was going to sleep somewhere else, then they went into the kitchen and gorged themselves.

At that moment, messengers from Gun-Akhio—always he—arrived to stop the disorder. They were happy to find Father Tornay still alive and gave him another five-day extension so that he could recover from what had just happened. Then they ordered the lamas to leave. The brigands refused, but as night fell, they went back to their lair.

Expulsion

Now the die was cast. Gun-Akhio seemed to have taken some pleasure in posing as a generous, benevolent magistrate. He thought that was enough, that the successive extensions would demonstrate his good will, and that he really could no longer resist the people's rebellion against the foreigner.

He informed Father Tornay that the lamas would take possession of the mission on January 26, but according to orders from the Lhasa government they would not have the right to

occupy it or live there. This was indeed a faint consolation in defeat!

The missionary was taking nothing with him. He filled up boxes and entrusted them to the Christians. "This solution," he said, "doesn't seem very good to some. Right now it seems to me to be the best among solutions none of which are good. To take the things with me would be to die my own death and that of my predecessors, whom all of these packed objects remind me of. And then, we have made such a courageous defense, we have prayed and fasted so much. . . . I am celebrating my last Masses in this chapel that soon will be changed into a lamaist temple. The people weep more than they pray, but for those who suffer, tears have more power with God than do words."

He sealed the doors and asked the Christians to watch over the granary, thus affirming to the very end his rights and his hope for justice.

On January 26, 1946, he celebrated Mass before dawn. All the Christians were there. Poor people! Gun-Akhio had forbidden them to leave the village. So they would be left in the midst of wolves without a pastor! Father Tornay was deeply moved. "O Lord," he prayed, "have mercy on those whom we have not been able to defend! Have mercy on those whom we have disappointed!"

He felt humiliated. For six months he had spoken out. To speak out was his duty, his only weapon. He had defended himself like a lion. He had met aggression with heroic, fierce resistance. He had stirred the Tibetan chieftains and local governors into action. He had tried to gain the sympathy—the active sympathy—of the victorious nations. . . . What had been their response? Useless words, unkept promises, futile negotiations. What had been the results? Nothing. He had fought alone. By using underhanded methods and money to

prevent any settlement, the lamas had won a sordid victory. Great was their cynical joy.

But the question of Yerkalo, Father Tornay thought, did not belong merely to local history. The missionaries had converted some pagans. By this fact they had thrown them into inevitable daily difficulties. Then at the moment when the new Christians were in danger of being robbed, mistreated, and murdered, the Fathers had no other recourse but to abandon them to their despair. What was Europe doing about these crimes against human beings and their rights? "This question," Father Tornay concluded, "becomes a terrible symbol."

About ten o'clock, the pastor of Yerkalo left his parish. Making his way through the crowd of Christians, he blessed them for the last time. Their sobs and cries were heart-rending; the women held up their arms or flung themselves onto the ground; the men wept in silence. A dozen of them, armed with rifles, opened up the way. Five soldiers that Gun-Akhio had just sent with money to pay the expenses of the trip made up the official escort. A lama constantly kept the muzzle of his gun aimed at the priest's neck. The little caravan left the mission, descended the slope to the south, and went up towards Petine. . . . A deadly silence crushed Yerkalo under a shroud of agony and despair. . . .

In six hours Father Tornay was at Peyongong, south of Yerkalo. He sent messengers to his parish to keep contact with his faithful. He would have liked to travel to Batang, which was part of his spiritual district, but Gun-Akhio refused to let him go. So he continued on his way to Pamé.

These events gave Father Goré grave concern. He wrote: "Who can be sure that persecution will not break out over our posts in Yunnan, as it did in 1905? It should not be overlooked that the natives from Batang to Atuntze are longing to free themselves from China's rule and to take administrative

power back into their own hands. The lamas of Yentsing (Tsakha) and their leader, Gun-Akhio, would like to make an ecclesiastical fief out of the whole Batang territory, detached from China in 1932, and out of the western corner of the Theking (Atuntze) district, which furnish a good number of lamas to the lamaseries of Karmda and Lagong. . . . The natives are probably going to watch the happenings at Yerkalo attentively and act accordingly. They have a good memory and a certain kind of logic. For them, every act of aggression that is not repressed authorizes all sorts of disorders."

Return to Yerkalo—a Setback

For Maurice Tornay nothing was settled. He was determined to return to his parish, even if it cost him his life. He stopped at Pamé. There an envoy from Chamdo overtook him and promised to restore him to his post. So the Tara Gueshi's famous letter had indeed been a fraud!

"You will go back to Yerkalo," this envoy informed him. "But I have only two men with me, and the lamas, you know, obey only when threatened with force. So I am turning to the government which will send a colonel with a battalion to bring those beasts to reason."

The man rode off to the north. On the road back, the lamas bribed him and added one more accuser to the enemy's ranks. "In Tibet," Father Lovey wrote, "the officials are corrupt from top to bottom. The only man who prevails is the one with money."

Father Tornay received no further news. He continued his way on to Tsechung, then Weihsi, where he brought Father Lattion up to date on the events at Yerkalo and in turn learned the steps which Msgr. Valentin, the Chinese officials, and the French diplomats had taken. Toward the end of April

he left for Tsechung. He received a letter from Chamdo that gave him back his confidence. The governor promised him his protection and invited him to return to his parish.

Without losing a minute, Father Tornay set out, on May 6, with some Christian merchants from Yerkalo. He hoped to upset his enemies' plans by forced marches. But spies alerted Gun-Akhio who immediately dispatched soldiers to meet the intruder.

"Halt! You are forbidden to go any farther!"

"Who sent you?"

"The head lama, Gun-Akhio."

"Well, then, I'll proceed because I have authorization from the governor of Chamdo."

And he went on.

But the whole clique of lamas stopped him on the doorstep of the mission. Night was falling. Gun-Akhio told him: "You shall not enter."

"I have a letter from Chamdo. . . ."

"That doesn't make any difference. We have just received opposite orders. . . . You will go back to the frontier at once, without arguing."

The poor missionary felt all his hopes snap like an overtaut string. He looked at those men—wild, well-armed, threatening. He felt utterly weak after his twelve hours' forced march with the inspiring prospect of again seeing his beloved Christians! There they were—behind the hostile mob. They wept and made signs. But they were powerless.

Gun-Akhio went on: "You're tired. I offer you something to eat. After that, we leave. I will go with you to the frontier. For I don't want you to lose your life. I don't want the bandits to get you."

They traveled all night in a storm. At dawn they came to Peyongong. The head lama on taking leave of the priest, said:

“It’s the people who do not want any foreigners or Christians in Tibet. It’s not my fault.”

Maurice Tornay didn’t have the strength to react, but his heart felt broken. He looked at his monkey-faced torturer.

“Hypocrite!” he angrily thought to himself, “Aren’t you the one that engineered the whole thing? Would the people dare budge without your order or permission? You scoundrel, we’ll see each other again on Judgment Day. Then your sordid intrigues will be revealed. Maybe before! For I have put all my trust in God and the Blessed Virgin Mary, Patroness of Tibet. She will crush the head of the infernal serpent that reigns over this unhappy country. No, she will not let Christian Yerkalo fall from her crown, that jewel of the blood and sweat of fifteen missionaries, that jewel adorned with the martyr’s blood of a dozen of its parishioners. Our Lady of Seven Sorrows, Queen of Tibet, pray for us!”

CHAPTER 13

Empty Hands

The Lonely Man of Pamé

I AM a shepherd without a flock in the midst of a people without shepherds and I search among wolves for sheep who are willing to follow me.”

Father Tornay spoke with the bitterness of a leader who had lost a battle. What was he to do? Give up the fight, lay down his arms? Take a post in Yunnan? Anyone who thought that didn't know Maurice Tornay! He was from Orsières and the Valais. He had more tenacity than was needed to attain his goal. But the enemy were not straightforward. They were crafty, they lied, went underground, rose up suddenly and struck from an ambush, then escaped.

The priest's tenacity was not stubbornness. There are causes that demand a complete giving of one's self. The cause of Christ is one of them. It must have fearless defenders, witnesses, heroes. Father Tornay, shamefully driven from his parish, had only one desire: to get back to his Christians. He gave his entire life to it. Prayers, thoughts, sacrifices, the ministry, long journeys—there was not a minute of that activity that was not centered on this goal: “I will go back to Yerkalo, cost what it may. My people are being persecuted there. My duty is clear.”

To be in a strategic spot, he settled at Pamé, at the doors of Tibet. This choice also allowed him to see some people

from Yerkalo every day when they came and went with their loads of salt. He talked to them, encouraged them, and strengthened them in their faith.

Before the difficulty of his task, facing the impenetrable wall of the lamas, he yielded to impatience, sometimes to pessimism. "To do so little," he asked, "do you have to come so far?" But his confidence always came back and drew strength from his fervor. "All the same I have had the consolation of leading to heaven some pagans who without me . . . That makes the longest trip in the world more than worthwhile."

The priest lived with the same family where Father Nussbaum was taken the night of his martyrdom. He occupied a small room with no furniture and a dirt floor. "There's little comfort," he said, "but there's poetry." There were only two Christian families in the village. The pagans liked to chat with the exile, ask his advice and take his remedies. They enjoyed going to the Catholic church, for they seemed to be of good will, but from the religious point of view they were dependent on the Tibetan lamaseries. And that meant that they would have to pay dearly if they became Christians.

For a while the missionary thought the difficulties might be ironed out. The government agent in Gartok was to make an investigation in the name of the governor of Chamdo, and the Chinese foreign minister announced that he was sending a delegate. Father Tornay wrote to his brethren: "I have good hope that we will come out on top; but it won't happen all by itself."

Weeks and months went by. But no one appeared on the horizon. No one but the enemy who were ever on the watch, ever aggressive. Pamé, which was two days from Yerkalo, was still too close to Tibet. The lamas didn't like it and wanted to drive him as far away as possible, for secretly they were afraid of his fervor and energy. But the local chieftain

and the people let them know that they were not taking orders from them.

Another visitor—the inevitable Gun-Akhio—showed up as usual to protest his good wishes and his concern for the friendly settlement of what he called “the conflict between the Catholic mission and the Karmda lamasery.” A neighbor of his, the mayor of Dachu, who was also an enemy of the Christians, had fallen off his horse and split his head open. Could that tragic death have induced Gun-Akhio to examine his conscience?

Perhaps. But his attitude toward Yerkalo did not seem to have changed. The Christians there were publicly molested, terrorized and persecuted. In February, 1947, Father Tornay wrote: “For a year they have been expecting to have to leave this world by tomorrow. And they are beginning to show signs of fatigue.”

Father Lovey summed up the situation: “Our dear Father Tornay is still staying at Pamé. But he is not happy there: his lodging and food are very primitive; for a chapel, he has a poor room where he spends his days and nights; and on top of it all, the sorrow of not being able to join his sheep, several of whom have already fallen into the mouths of the wolves! How pitiful our dear Father Tornay is, and how much we ought to pray for him and his Christians! Yet he does not complain; he counts his sufferings as nothing. He thinks of only one thing: to go back to Yerkalo. . . . He keeps up his appeals to the bishop and the consular officials; he accuses the latter of slowness or negligence, unless they lack authority. It has been a year since the French Embassy in China was alerted, a year since the Lhasa government was informed about the actions of the lamas! And what have we obtained? Beautiful promises! They are playing with us. Father Tornay would like to try a direct stroke: to go to Lhasa in disguise with some young native Christians, contact the

government, and explain what has happened. The lamas have slandered the missionaries and Christians. Thanks to a very large sum of money, they must have obtained a free hand."

In a note, Father Lovey adds: "The superiors have not given Father Tornay permission to go to Lhasa as they judge the trip dangerous and uncertain."

Lamas at Yerkalo

Four reinforcements arrived at Weihsi on February 19, 1947. After months of studying the languages, Fathers Louis Emery and Alphonse Savioz, who had to learn Tibetan, went north; the first to Tsechung with Father Goré, the second to Atuntze whither Father Tornay had moved. Father François Fournier was to work among the Lissus with Father Coquoz at Siao-Weihsi. Father Jules Detry toured the country, explored valleys and passes, made notes, observed the manners and customs of the people and took photographs and films of the province.

Nothing had changed for Father Tornay. Always the same uncertainty, the same setbacks! He summed up his disappointment in these words: "A land of iron and a heaven of brass."

News from Yerkalo was particularly distressing. The despots there forced the Christians to sign a document in which they promised not to inform Father Tornay of any decisions taken by the lamaseries. They summoned them and notified them of an order to apostatize under the severest penalties. The old catechist Luka was tied up for trying to resist. Those professional impostors wanted to rely on a written statement duly signed by the victims. The latter had to sign papers at every step. Being forced to do so, the Christians promised to walk the straight and narrow under the rod of the lamas and their representatives; they built incense burners on their

roofs; they burned incense on the hillside; perhaps one day they would profane the cemetery by digging up the bones and throwing them in the Mekong; they paid taxes on their fields to Karmda and exteriorly acted like silent automatons under the reign of terror. But not all. Rather only a minority. And should they be censured? "The majority," Father Tornay wrote, "have resisted the temptations, not as saints, but as the common run of believers. The only consolation I have had up to now is the one they gave me by meeting in a barn of the mission for their devotions after the lamas closed the church. . . . To save them, we would have to move them to Weihsi, which is about 175 or 200 miles away and in a totally different climate. Christianity certainly requires sacrifices from them!"

And what was Gun-Akhio doing? As we said, the *besset* of Dachu fell off his horse and split his head open. Redrine, the regent of the great lamasery of Sera, was shot to death by bandits. The sinister Ajiong, former owner of the mission property at Yerkalo, perished from some horrible disease. Meanwhile Gun-Akhio made the Christians state in writing that he had constantly aided, sustained, and defended them since the missionary's departure. Was he trying to get solid references before accounts were settled before the Judge in the next world? But that did not keep him from forbidding the people of Yerkalo from having any contact with Father Tornay.

The lonely man of Pamé, seeing that his efforts were getting nowhere, slowly matured his plan to go to Lhasa. But before taking the chance and plunging into the heroic adventure, he had to win the support of his immediate and higher superiors. And perhaps he ought to have personal interviews with the ambassadors and consuls whose intervention, it seemed to him, should be able to end the affair in his favor.

He set out during the summer of 1947. His first stop was

at Tsechung where Father Lovey welcomed him with brotherly affection. The two men from Orsières had always been great friends. A photograph taken at that time shows them in front of the mission. They were wearing Chinese cassocks without belts; Father Lovey has on a round Astrakhan hat. They look out through their glasses, straight at the camera, their hands behind their backs. It is a typical pose, but what strikes and touches us is Father Tornay's expression. No smile plays on those defeated lips, those lined cheeks, that strong chin covered by a light beard. The sun shines on his broad forehead, but his eyes are too sunken to receive the light; they are two dark orbits in which you discern from the way they are drawn—as from some unbearable torture—his heroic will and spiritual anguish.

From Tsechung he went down to Siao-Weihsi, then on to Weihsi where he discussed the situation at Yerkalo fully with Father Lattion. They both agreed that they should again take the matter up with competent officials; they also thought of asking the aid of papal diplomacy. Wasn't there any power on earth that could force the lamas to respect justice and law?

In November, Father Tornay was back at Atuntze. It was a former Christian community that had been abandoned for lack of missionaries. Here he found a twofold mission: the first was the apostolate among his parishioners who were always on the road, selling their salt; the second was to rebuild the parish and the mission.

Pause in Kunming

Father Goré, the regional superior, was invited by Msgr. Alexandre Derouineau, Archbishop of Kunming, to come to the provincial capital to confer with the Internuncio to China, Msgr. Antonio Riberi. Father Goré sent Father Tornay to

represent him and to use that occasion to explain the problem of Yerkalo.

Father Tornay arrived in Kunming on Christmas eve. Unfortunately Msgr. Riberi sent word that he was detained at Nanking by important business and would not arrive until the end of February.

In those parts of the world, it is wise never to be in a hurry. Father Tornay was too experienced to be surprised or disturbed. He had two to three months at his disposal. Appointments with the dentist to take some of the pain out of his mouth, medical courses at Calmette Hospital, visits to the major seminary where he met two of his old students from the days at Hua-lo-pa, talks with consular officials and correspondence occupied his time.

This pause in the anxious course of his life gave him a little breathing spell. He wrote a great deal to arouse public opinion concerning the troubles at Yerkalo, or to request a real crusade of prayer with an invitation to priests to offer Mass for his Christians and to recite the prayer *Contra paganos*, or to reassure his family and tell them about his plans. . . .

On January 7, 1948, he wrote to Switzerland: "I am only five or six stops (by plane) from La Rosière. I am much nearer to you than I am to my Christians. Will I see you again? To get here I rode a mule for sixteen days and then spent four days in a truck. I passed quite a few bandits. They didn't see me and I didn't see them. They struck either before I went by or afterwards. For me this protection is a sign that God will finally help me do something. On the contrary, the lamas predicted that I would go back to Europe!!! I would hardly be happy there even among you until I have brought peace to my flock. Please pray for them and for me. If you can, have Masses said by holy priests for that intention.

"At Yerkalo, the lamas have forbidden the Christians to pray, to bury their dead; they take the children by force in

order to make them Buddhist priests. Think of the sorrow of pious mothers who weep like sheep who have lost their little ones. Let us hope that God will not close forever the mouths of those little ones that praise Him nor deliver to the beasts the souls of those little angels!

“As you see, I already have some white hairs. Believe me, I am angry, for if I should die I would find myself with empty hands. Now I could effect a number of conversions. I would like to build an orphanage, a leprosarium, but money, money! The rich never lack it, but the poor give it.”

This clear language, bright as gold, is one of Father Tournay's great qualities. But he could also speak with extraordinary kindness to little children. When writing to his nephews and nieces, for a moment the missionary forgot the roughness of his existence to become their uncle telling fascinating stories: “You that romp in the snow or dream in your warm winter beds, someone you hardly think about is thinking about you and sending you an affectionate hello. I squeeze imaginary snowballs in my hands and bombard you on your heads, your noses, your cheeks. . . . Perhaps as you dream, you may see a bearded stranger writing on a piece of paper who is your uncle and whom you'd love to know. You will see me one day, if you are real good. In the meantime, prepare yourselves. May those who are studying be very smart. I have students here who can solve quite hard problems and who write Latin better than cooks do. It's a good thing they are not your teachers. May those who are going to be carpenters, kitchen helpers and joiners learn to use their hands, because here we have workers so skillful that they patch up their trucks with their shoes and build houses without mortar. May the housekeepers learn to get along with nothing, because here the good cooks fix us a banquet without lard or soup but with only potatoes and wild plants.

“But above all, my little ones, keep your catechism deep

in your heart. And keep your prayers on the tip of your tongue so that evening and morning they can fly off by themselves to God who always wakes up very early to hear the first prayers. Here the birds are about the only ones that pray. They are also the only ones that are happy.”

To one of his sisters who was thinking of a vocation of total sacrifice through expiatory suffering, he gave some wise and prudent advice, well seasoned with good humor: “I’m rather uneasy about you. May God quickly give you back the health you didn’t know what to do with, in your desire for holiness. . . . I hope you will take care of yourself. Hurry up and get well. Sickness, you see, works out only in rare special vocations. That’s why Our Lord cured all kinds of sick persons. . . . If the doctor is shrewd, he will tell you that the best tonic is some good wine. Take one or two bottles. Listen to me, go on a little spree. Then you can go back to the great ways of sacrifice.”

This joking tone was aimed at restraining her excesses in mortification. But then he became serious: “I have spent two terrible years without being able to settle in one place, especially without being able to make a single conversion. The world is wallowing in evil. It no longer wants to hear of justice and peace. We have nothing more to expect from men, but everybody expects us to devote ourselves utterly to them.”

He was still in Kunming when he received on March 25, 1948, the news of his mother’s death. Although he had expected it, this grief completely disconcerted him, like a little child, so much did the son love his mother. In spite of the years, his heart had retained a fresh, childlike tenderness for his home. “Mama,” he cried, “you’re no longer here on earth, I don’t want to be here any more either. Since you no longer find your joy among us, I don’t want to find any either.”

But the priest regained control of himself: “On the oc-

casion of this death, let us begin a new life of prayer and sacrifices for Mother. Once our life depended on her. We depended on her love to give us life, and later to rear us. Today the roles are reversed: on us alone depends the length or shortness of her sufferings.”

At the moment his letter went off to Switzerland, March 26, Father Tornay ended the first stage of what he called his “China tour.” In fact, his stay at Kunming was dragging on longer than he liked. In addition to his studies at the hospital and his visits, he was able to carry on the ministry, and thanks to his perfect knowledge of Chinese, he preached a retreat as substitute for a priest who had fallen sick. But he did not lose sight of the purpose of his trip and when Msgr. Riberi delayed in coming, he left to see him in Nanking and Shanghai.

He was given the money to take a plane.

Setback in Shanghai

Father Tornay was not interested in strolling the streets of those churning, swarming cosmopolitan cities. Nanking, the capital of the south, and Shanghai, the great international city, were opposite in race and spirit. At these great cross-roads of the oldest and most modern civilizations, trade, the play of unbridled instincts and human passions seemed to dominate man's fate. Cars and sedan chairs, low-built landaus with fenders that scrape the ground, crowds of Chinese, Russians, Japanese, Europeans—this whole movement of colors and noises filled the streets like the waters of an unchained river. Skyscrapers rubbed shoulders; in the evening on the giant façades of the glittering hotels the red, green and yellow lights of advertisements blinked and sparkled. The wide Yangtze rolled on towards the sea, flowed out and dumped its sediment for miles along the coast. Father Tornay had

seen it often. But now he saw it take on the appearance of a king of rivers, a great nourishing river, the indispensable artery that drains and gives life to the vast body of China. Sampans and junks glided alongside boats loaded with rice and tea; barges threaded their way between coasting vessels.

The missionary did not linger. He saw rising above the bamboo huts, the pagodas and the checkerboard of towering buildings, the steeples of Catholic churches and cathedrals. Here as everywhere, the message of Christ echoed in men's hearts. Was Tibet alone going to keep on stopping up its ears?

Father Tornay made one visit after another. Doors opened to him. He spoke of Yerkalo with the firmness and emotion of a mother who pleads for her children. He saw influential Tibetans, and in particular some members of the Pangda family, and even succeeded in putting them in touch with the Internuncio. The delegates of the Sera lamasery, whom he met at the Office of Tibetan Information, were more reticent.

Couldn't the Swiss government itself do something? What was the missionary asking except to be admitted to Tibet, just like the English who were there, in accordance with common and international law? He wasn't asking for any privileges and he promised, except for paganism, to observe the laws of the state. He had already asked Father Lattion to intervene with the Swiss Federal Council. Could not M. de Torrenté, the Swiss Minister, help him? The talk he had with the latter left him with little hope of gaining his goal.

Sympathy was not lacking; the diplomats hoped to effect a bold move. . . . But China was then in an upheaval. Europeans did not count any more. Communism and prejudice against foreigners combined to condemn them to public hatred. Chiang Kai-shek was too embarrassed in his defeat and too weakly supported by the Allies to dare to speak as a ruler, even to the least of the neighboring states. Msgr. Riberi, aware of the general inertia and the total inability of so-called

civilized nations to react to the official crimes of a despicable caste, advised Father Tornay to risk all to gain all—to go to Lhasa, see the government officials, and explain to them the claims of the Christians of Yerkalo. He gave him some funds to cover part of his long trip.

Pastor of Atuntze

Rocking along on his horse on the road to Atuntze of which by now he knew every stone and turn, Father Tornay thought sadly: “Kunming, Nanking, Shanghai . . . all wasted efforts! Blocked all along the line! More than ever I feel my terrible loneliness. . . . So I am going to Lhasa. Even if I have to let the lamas have my carcass, I’m not going to abandon the Christians entrusted to me. . . .”

He arrived at Atuntze in the spring of 1948. The mission was a shambles. A horrible opium smoker named Wang had occupied it. The furniture was gone; the place was filthy and stinking. It was not fit to live in. Whole sections of the walls had fallen out; the roof was caved in; the props in the stable were rotten. With no other means except his good will, the priest set to work to take care of the most urgent needs; he rebuilt the house, added a chapel, and made the abandoned dwelling look like new. The dispensary and church were the essential parts of the mission. He wrote: “I receive many people there because this village is an important trading place between China and Tibet. There I take care of many sick persons. . . . There I make few Christians, for even here the people are afraid of the lamas. It’s terrible to see how the devil has these people in his grasp! But that doesn’t matter. God’s hour will come. The main thing is always to start over, despite everything and against everything. And never to be discouraged. . . . My Christians at Yerkalo are mistreated

more and more. But in the end they will have the upper hand.”

At the beginning of 1949, banditry and pillaging broke out in the Atuntze region.

On the evening of February 17, Fathers Tornay and Savioz suddenly heard cries and shouting like an explosion in the village. They rushed out into the street. Men were coming back from the mountains, some of them wounded. They brought the tragic news: the caravan that had set out in the morning had been attacked! Ten were killed!

The missionaries bandaged the wounds, while the women learned from those who had escaped that they had lost a husband, a brother or a son. Despair and cursing poured out of those hearts that knew not where to find comfort.

“The gods are unjust! We have tried in every way possible to placate them. We burned incense on the hill, fired guns to the four winds. Streamers floated from the trees and houses with the eternal prayer: ‘*O mani padme hum!*’ Each morning, our children carried to the sacred mound in the middle of the village a ritual ladle filled with rice and poured it on the cypress fire. For the trip, our men suspended around their necks the *gau* [a silver-plated reliquary which was supposed to make them invulnerable]. What more could we do? The gods are cruel!”

Those rites were not able to save the caravan from Atuntze. A dozen Christians had met them on the road and joined them. They were all sitting down to drink buttered tea when suddenly the bullets began to whistle around them. The Christians begged God: “Save me!” Not one of them was touched. Muleteers and merchants scattered in all directions to get out of the line of fire, leaving their dead behind them. The murderers moved in, killed the wounded and searched the bodies. Each one put a bullet into the leader’s head. “You’ve got what’s coming to you now.” They were taking

revenge. About a month before, four of their comrades had been shot down by the militia. They withdrew with the mules and their loads.

This was almost a commonplace event for that region and time. During the days that followed the women wept, and according to their custom, rolled on the ground, clawing the dust with their frantic hands, letting their hair fall down in their faces which streamed with tears. Lamas came in crowds: they exorcized and prayed, and the blare of silver trumpets, cymbals and sea-shells led the funeral processions to the hill tops.

This was the time when the wolves were going at each other tooth and nail. In the North, the lamas and native chiefs were carrying on deadly warfare. In the South, from Siao-Weihsi to Weihsi, the lamas were revolting against the Chinese authorities. A man's life didn't count for much.

Despite these disorders that were turning the trail into a death trap, Father Tornay was secretly making preparations for his journey to Lhasa.

CHAPTER 14

Interlude in Washington and Geneva

by Raphael Brown

AT THIS point, just before the tragic climax of Father Tornay's life, a brief chronicle of the last fruitless appeal to the Tibetan government on behalf of the Christians of Yerkalo is not out of place. Due to a series of providential circumstances, Father Pierre Marie Melly, the founder of the St. Bernard Mission to Tibet, was able to make this appeal in person in Geneva, Switzerland, to a high official from Lhasa.

Late in 1947 a Tibetan Trade Mission, the first in the country's history, began a journey around the world, seeking to improve Tibet's economic and political relations with various great nations. Their route took them through New Delhi, Calcutta, Hong Kong, Nanking, Shanghai, Manila, and the United States. Father Tornay himself visited them in Nanking.

In June, 1948, while corresponding with Father Melly in connection with an article I was preparing on the St. Bernard Mission, I informed him that the Tibetan envoys were expected soon in Washington. He wrote that he would willingly go there to see them and make still another plea for Yerkalo. The Tibetans arrived in Washington on July 20. The follow-

ing evening I was in touch with them and learned that they planned to stop over in London on their way back to Asia. A few days later I made their acquaintance when they visited the Library of Congress, where I work. Later I had several interviews with them at their hotel and conducted them on a tour of the famous Franciscan Monastery.

The three principal envoys were Tsepon Shakabpa, Finance Secretary of the Tibetan Government and Leader of the Trade Mission; Depon Surkhang, an Army Colonel and brother of a Cabinet member; and "the Rockefeller of Tibet," Mr. L. Y. Pangdatshang, a wealthy merchant. Only Colonel Surkhang and the interpreter, Mr. K. Ratna, could speak English. These little men with dark hair and eyes and Mongolian features, though very intelligent and affable, gave one the general impression of being "babes in the woods" who had somehow wandered into twentieth-century America from "out of this world."

When I gave them some pictures of the Swiss Alps, they were fascinated and delighted. Soon they decided that they wanted to visit that neutral "little Tibet" in the mountains of Europe.

At the Franciscan Monastery they saw many Catholic pictures, statues, and replicas of shrines in the Holy Land, and they had the good fortune to be present in the church during a Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. The Franciscan priest who showed them the interior of the monastery had once been a Foreign Service officer of the State Department, and when Tsepon Shakabpa learned this, he told the Father that he admired him for having entered the religious life and even that he envied him. He also commented that the monastery was very much like Tibetan lamaseries, except that "it was cleaner!" After this visit I gave them some illustrated booklets on the lives of Jesus Christ and St. Francis of Assisi, as well as a New Testament and views of the monastery, all

of which they assured me would be of great interest to their lamas in Lhasa.

In sharp contrast to the bitter conflict prevailing between the lamas of Eastern Tibet and the Christian missionaries, the attitude of these representative laymen toward Catholic priests was one of cordial respect and friendship. This surprising fact is proved by the presence at that time of a number of children of distinguished Lhasa families in the excellent schools for boys and girls which are directed by Catholic priests and nuns in Kalimpong and Darjeeling, near the Indian-Tibetan frontier. Mr. Pangdatshang had a daughter in one of these schools and was most favorably impressed with the education which was being given to her by the sisters.

This important consideration threw a new light on Father Melly's problem: nothing should be done which might have a bad effect on those friendly relations between Tibetans and Christians. Meanwhile he wrote that if the envoys should come to Switzerland, he hoped that he would be able to take them on a visit to the Grand St. Bernard Hospice.

At a later interview, Tsepon Shakabpa informed me: "You gave us such interesting photographs of Switzerland that we are planning to spend a week there." I therefore told him about a very remarkable "gompa" of monks on a high Swiss pass who have for centuries been assisting travelers, and he replied: "Good! When we are in Switzerland, we will try to find that monastery." Later, in London, he again stated his intention of visiting the famous monastery.

For a while it even seemed possible that a Catholic priest might be allowed to go to Lhasa. Father Melly urged me to explore this possibility with the envoys. As Tsepon Shakabpa was intensely interested in the history of Tibet, I asked him whether a Catholic priest historian might perhaps be given permission to visit Lhasa in order to study the history and religion of Tibet. While insisting that he could not commit

his government without consulting it, he stated his personal belief that "there would be a good chance that an American Father might obtain an invitation—but not to change our religion!" He stressed that the priest would have to be an American, "because we want to be friends especially with America." Who knows whether an American priest might not be in Lhasa today if the Communists had not conquered Tibet in 1950?

From New York the Trade Mission traveled on the steamer *Queen Elizabeth* to Europe, and all its members were extremely seasick. Finally, after a few weeks in Paris and London, they arrived in Geneva. Unfortunately by then it was December, and as Father Melly wrote, "if they were to visit the St. Bernard Hospice, they would have to climb up to the Pass on skis." However, due to the complications of international politics, they found their movements strictly limited by the Chinese Legation in Switzerland. The government of Chiang Kai-shek had looked upon the Mission with intense disfavor from the beginning. Dispatches from Nanking described the envoys as "Chinese citizens traveling without passports." Actually China feared that the Mission was trying to obtain political recognition of Tibet's national independence, and was able to induce governments with which it had friendly relations to ignore or pay a minimum of attention to the Tibetan envoys. Perhaps this was the reason why in the United States the press did not take them very seriously, referring to them semi-humorously as "yak-tail dealers" and playing up the fact that Tibetan "yak tails are used as beards for superduper Santa Claus costumes." In fact on November 23, the United Press reported that "the United States has just about satisfied China that there was nothing behind those false beards that the five gentlemen from Tibet sought to sell here."

This political background explains the fact that when Fa-

ther Melly was at last able to meet the envoys at their hotel in Geneva on December 12, 1948, it was impossible for him to see them alone. He found them in the company of the Secretary of the Chinese Legation and was obliged to hand to that official his written plea on behalf of Yerkalo. Personally, the Tibetans acted in a very friendly way to him, and spoke with pleasure of our interviews in Washington. But they were not able to accept his cordial invitation to visit the headquarters of the St. Bernard Fathers in Martigny. The amazing aspect of their five-day stay in Geneva is that not a single line about them appeared in the Swiss press, although they were the first Tibetan envoys who ever came to Switzerland.

Nevertheless, though the results might be nil, Father Melly had done his duty in conveying to these officials from Lhasa one more plea for the liberation of the Christians of Yerkalo and for the return of Father Tornay to his parish.

CHAPTER 15

To Die Is to Conquer

A Taste for the Absolute

THE trails in the Tibetan Marches were strewn with corpses: bandits punished by national troops, national guardsmen surprised by Communists, merchants ambushed for the wealth they were carrying, caravan drivers assailed by bands who lived by robbery. How many men death caught and froze in a gesture of avarice, hate, or vengeance! How many men perished trying to steal the goods of this earth! How many fell to the earth and would never rise again to serve their unleashed passions!

Other men died because of their common everyday needs: selling their products, going from one village to the next with their loads of salt or grain, earning a little money to feed their families. Still others braved danger to save what remained of their earthly possessions, their shattered homes, corners of ravaged earth or shacks that would collapse at the first monsoon winds.

Those who died in their labors or for their labors, those who died for their country or what they thought was their country, all those who died without their wills fixed on revenge or their hearts full of hatred would obtain forgiveness from their Judge and a hero's crown. But there is another life and another death that covers a multitude of sins. To give yourself to your neighbor, to give yourself to God, to have no desire

in your heart for the comforts and cares of this world, but on the contrary to have a heart filled with an unselfish passion for good, with a burning charity, a thirst for pure sacrifice; and to die for all that, to die because of all that, is the stirring greatness of martyrdom.

If Maurice Tornay had followed the beaten path, he could have assured himself of a less dangerous ministry, and yet one that was fruitful and of exceptional merit. Since the Buddhist priests had driven him out and threatened him in no uncertain terms—there could be no doubt about the meaning of their words—if he tried to come back to Yerkalo, he could have withdrawn to a quiet post and given himself wholeheartedly to the work there. I might even say that this solution, while he waited for better days, would have been most in keeping with prudence and wisdom.

Despite the daily threats of the lamas, the situation at Atuntze seemed stable. There he was carrying on an apostolate that was very promising. Moreover, he was in permanent contact with his people from Yerkalo. It was a holy life, consecrated to the service of God and neighbor. Did he have the right to ask for more? No, if we consider the ideal of a fervent man, a devout Christian, an active missionary. Yes, if we recall Father Tornay's whole past, his desire for sanctity, that desire he revealed to the father prior before he left Martigny, the desire he talked about in all his letters. His was an absolute soul. If the mountaineer from La Rosière asked to go to the missions, it was because he feared—and he knew himself only too well—an easy existence that would have constantly confined him to flat mediocrity.

Now, at the beginning of the spring of 1949, he had a choice to make. Either to count himself lucky, after having performed his duty at Yerkalo to the full, to be able to preach the Gospel and still be alive; or in obedience to the requirements of the absolute and once more to tear himself away

from the temptation to mediocrity, to wage the battle to the end with the right intention—the sole intention—of returning to his parish, of routing paganism, and of serving God.

This second way was the only heroic one, the only one stripped of compromises, the only one that led to the goal without detours or turns. It was more dangerous, more difficult, but it was also more glorious. Finally, it was the only one that corresponded to Maurice Tornay's temperament. He did not even choose it; it forced itself upon him.

Did he perhaps not know the danger or show a certain naïveté, the ingenuousness of a good man threatened by wild beasts? Not at all. Father Tornay knew the whole situation very well. He was courageous without being reckless, strong without bravado, an idealist who kept his feet on the ground. He knew exactly the risk he was running: ambush, imprisonment, robbery. These were minor incidents on the Tibetan trails. Martyrdom perhaps? He accepted martyrdom. Would he even go so far as to desire it? When thinking of the failure of his negotiations and being on the point of leaving for Lhasa, he himself wrote this astonishing revelation: "When we die, we have conquered."

On the Road to Lhasa

Encouraged by Msgr. Riberi, Father Tornay obtained the necessary permission from his immediate superior, Father Lation. Father Goré, the vicar-general, who knew Tibetan customs thoroughly, hesitated, was afraid of this "adventure," and did not dare make a firm decision. In his June *Ephemerides*, he gave an evasive answer and without opposing the trip, advised the missionary to "trim his lamp well."

Father Tornay left Atuntze on the morning of July 10. Father Savioz, who went with him, wrote: "We ostensibly took the southern route to avert the suspicions of persons who

were too curious. We reached the caravan trail by a path that led us to Djirula, the Thunder Pass, at about 11,000 feet. Then we went down into the Dong Valley through a magnificent forest. Nature was having a festival; the implacably pure sky of Tibet had softened and taken on a gentle serenity. Father Tornay was full of enthusiasm and confidence; he gave me his last requests and told me his plans and his hopes.

“Time went by. Each of us felt the hour of parting was near. We stopped in a large glade where fresh pastures stretched out. Dossy (Dominic), the faithful Christian servant who had followed the Father everywhere since his expulsion from Yerkalo, brought us a few bites to eat and some wine; but a voiceless foreboding clutched our hearts; the food stuck in our throats. However, we drank a glass of friendship while singing the *Chant des Adieux*.¹ Father Tornay’s last words were to ask me to forgive him for his lack of charity and, he said, ‘for the bad example that I gave you by my lack of zeal and my pessimism.’ It was with this clear and joyful ‘no hard feelings,’ but with painful sorrow on his face that we separated, he to go towards the capital of Tibet to give up his life out of fidelity to his flock, and I to return to my work. Only his faithful Dominic, who was to be killed with him, was present at that last good-by and fraternal embrace in a glade in the Dong Valley, on the road to Lhasa.

“With his servant, he continued his journey towards the caravan which he would join only in the evening, to shave his beard and transform himself into a Tibetan in order to avoid being recognized as a foreigner. According to his ‘boys’ and the caravan drivers who accompanied him, he looked just like one of the anonymous trading chiefs (*tsong-pun*) that you meet on the Tibetan trails.”

Father Tornay wore a long tunic that reached to his knees,

¹ A traditional Swiss farewell song.—*Tr.*

a belt, baggy trousers and soft leather boots. His own caravan—with Dossy, Joan Siao, and Sandjrupt—joined that of young Setewang and the Christian merchants who were going to Lhasa. It was made up of five mules, two of which belonged to Sandjrupt; it carried three loads of wheat, a portable Mass kit, medicines, field glasses, some matches, a Mauser automatic and a revolver, vestments and articles for the trip, some books, a breviary in four volumes, and about six hundred Yunnan piasters.

The most important thing was to pass unnoticed, incognito. For it was evident that above everything else the lamas were afraid of a direct appeal to the Tibetan government.

If the political authorities in Lhasa, who were generally lenient toward the Buddhist priests, were fully informed about the affair at Yerkalo, if they had a suggestion—if not the certitude—of threats from Tibet's great neighbors, and if they were suddenly to oppose the attitude of the persecutors at Sogun and Karmda, then the latter would have to start all over again. Father Tornay could then return to his parish in triumph. The lamas must prevent that at all costs.

They were on the alert. The missionary therefore had to throw them off his trail, deceive their watchmen, and get through the network of their posts without his presence being detected or even suspected.

From Atuntze, their route went down to the Mekong, passing through Dong and Kochu. Then it rose to the Chula Pass, at about 15,000 feet, and again descended into the Salween Valley, or more accurately into a tributary of the Salween, the Yuchu, which it followed to Tchrayul, then veered to the west, going over mountains and through valleys to Tentho, near Pongda.

But Father Tornay was not destined to go beyond there. After seventeen days on the road, he was halfway on his journey between Atuntze and Lhasa. He had lived those two

weeks in prayer and hope. Each morning he celebrated Mass. They ate around the fire crackling in a pile of rocks, and then broke camp. Tongues were loosened; they talked about ordinary things—the weather, the coming and going of the bandits, the hardships of life. The sun rose higher in the sky, their fatigue increased, their conversations were farther apart, and finally silence fell.

Father Tornay had described the labors of the first pioneers in Tibet. Would it be forcing the texts too much to attribute to him these words of Father Renou: “Then in his heart, the missionary turned toward his God. While his body followed the trail of earth and dust, his soul made mystic voyages; in the mysterious divine realms, in the frightening human realms under the power of hell, it went begging: Lord, today I am going to cross my Jordan of vast solitude to go in conquest of nations stronger than I. Please go before me Yourself like a devouring fire and a fruitful rain. Have mercy, for the time to have mercy has come. Stretch forth Your arms, because by being a hidden God, You have become a despised and unknown God. . . .”

Father Tornay was recognized and reported. By whom? The Christians who accompanied him were all men of proven fidelity, so they were out of the question. The Christians from Yerkalo who were coming back from Pongda where they sold their salt in the Tsarong—the first province of the forbidden territory—undoubtedly had the opportunity of greeting their pastor, but it is certain that they did not betray him. The historical fact remains that a certain Atun, from Ngul-khioka, left for Tibet about the same time Father Tornay did. On the way he met a friend from Gunra whom he sent to inform the lamas of what had happened.

Battle plans were drawn up immediately. Gun Harang, a lama administrator, one of the ringleaders in the expulsion of Father Tornay in 1946, gathered his followers and sup-

porters, the band from Karmda, "the barons and retainers of pagan knighthood." They decided once and for all to do away with the intruder, the missionary and man of God. They made final arrangements: two men, Agye and Yuentun, from Kiong-long, set off on forced marches for Tchrayul to ask the chief to arrest the priest; another messenger left for Chamdo; finally, four lamas, armed with rifles, took up guard on the return route.

"If you kill the priest," they were told, "you will receive a thousand rupees. And you can keep all the booty."

On the Christian side too the alarm was sounded.

At Yerkalo, old Luka learned what was afoot. He knew that a man from Gunra had gone up to Petine, then to Karmda, with the news of Father Tornay's journey. He talked over the matter with the watchman at the mission, Paulo Diatchru, and entrusted him with a distressing message for the vicar-general.

That letter was dated August 2. When it arrived at Atuntze two weeks later, it was too late!

On the other hand, Father Savioz was receiving reports from various sources to the effect that armed men were blocking the trails in order to ambush Father Tornay. He informed the mandarin of this; the latter in turn ordered the Tibetan chieftain at Dong "to stay within legal bounds and bring the missionary to Atuntze safe and sound." But the chieftain at Dong was himself a bandit!

Nothing could stop the course of injustice and crime.

Setewang's caravan arrived at Tentho. On July 27, a band of armed emissaries from Tchrayul and Karmda fell upon it, surrounded it, and forced it to stop. It was a typical bandit attack. In the midst of the coolies' screams, angry cries, and cursing, they finally found out what it was all about. No shots were fired. The attackers evidently did not want their lives but their goods. Actually they were not even interested

in booty, because all they took—as a tip—was a good rifle. Soon their purpose became clear. The entire caravan could go on, except one Catholic from Tsechung, who would be kept as a hostage—and Father Tornay, the marked man, who had to retrace his steps with his three servants, his five mules, and all his baggage.

Tragic Return

While he was traveling toward Lhasa, Father Tornay had felt buoyant in hope and confidence. But today—at his first station of the Cross—he knew that the Judge of the next world had marked him with the seal of a victim and that the blood of his veins was going to water the pagan soil. He knew it with blinding clarity. Yet his heart never yielded to despair. Perhaps God would not permit this base crime! Perhaps He would cast an ounce of pity into the rotting souls of the Tibetan chieftains! Perhaps the lamas . . . But what was the good of so much debating? On to martyrdom, if God wanted still more witnesses to glorify Him!

The road was hard when against his will he had to travel toward an horizon he had not chosen. Each morning he said Mass as usual—then his breviary—then a little conversation with his jailers, who never let him out of sight. At Tchrayul they stopped. Father Tornay asked to see the local chieftain. It did no good to protest the honesty of his intentions, to appeal to a standard of justice, and to demand immediate authorization to go on to Lhasa. The chieftain answered with cold politeness that it was impossible for him to grant anything at all and that the priest absolutely had to return to Yunnan. He gave him a delegate—his assistant—with the mission of protecting the Father.

Setewang, the young caravan leader, would face charges of bringing a foreigner into the forbidden land, after he re-

turned from Lhasa. The priest tried to excuse him and even went so far as to give the chieftain a mule and a load of tea. . . . But nothing seemed to move him. A trial would have to take place before the governor of Chamdo.

A short distance from Tchrayul, two armed men, sent by the lamas of Yerkalo, met the group and informed the priest that they had orders to take him to Yerkalo.

"No," he replied, "I will not go to Yerkalo. The lamas drove me out of it. You have come to kill me. Otherwise two men would be enough to take me back home. And why so many rifles? The deputy from Tchrayul has orders to conduct me back to Atuntze safe and sound. I'm going to obey him."

Then he turned to the deputy: "Let's go back to Tchrayul. What can you do alone against four armed bandits?"

But the bandits held up their arms, fell prostrate on the ground toward the sacred mountain of Khawakarpo, and swore that they had received no other orders but to bring the priest to the lamas, their masters.

Maurice Tornay positively refused to follow them; and the two messengers set off for Yerkalo at top speed.

A sick woman joined the caravan. She wanted to go to Atuntze for treatment at the dispensary. The priest, who had brought a good supply of medicine with the idea of giving treatments on his trip, gave her the first injections which she needed.

One evening, this woman, who had to stay in the same room with the soldiers—the missionary and his servants were kept in another room—learned that Dossy was to be killed on the way. She secretly conveyed this information to him. When Father Tornay learned about it, he thought over the danger his servant was running.

"The soldiers," he thought to himself, "don't dare attack me. So they are going to take it out on Dossy who is guilty of having disobeyed the lamas and deserted Yerkalo. They have

taken the Mauser automatic from him. In case of a fight, the Browning which Father Lovey loaned me won't be enough. We've got to make it impossible for the soldiers to hurt him."

While supper was being cooked and everybody was watching the soup, the priest's servants jumped on the two bandits from Yerkalo and took their guns away from them.

"I know," Father Tornay told them, "that you have orders to kill Dossy. How can I go back home without him, and how can I report on my mission to my superiors, if I don't bring him back? If you want to kill anyone, kill me."

The soldiers swore by their great gods that they didn't intend to kill anyone. Then the deputy from Tchrayul suggested a plan that was accepted by both sides. He would take the breech out of all the weapons and put them, along with the automatic, in a sealed bag that he himself would guard.

They climbed the arid mountainsides. At the village of Sa, a day's march from Pitu, the priest said Mass—his last Mass. On August 10, the caravan stopped at Gialang, on the west slope of the Chula Pass. The soldiers had some business to attend to with a family in the country; they would not be back until evening. Father Tornay used this opportunity to take his mules to the pastures at Me-k'io Pongpong.

Why not escape? He would have time to reach Qua-bo, then the mission at Kionatong in the Salween Valley; or Longdire and Atuntze by taking the Dokerla Pass. The bandits would look for him in vain in the vicinity of the Chula Pass.

Escape? Why? Had he not received assurance, many times under oath, that his life was not in danger? Had not the chieftain at Tchrayul delegated his assistant to protect him? Were not the arms dismounted? Then too Dossy kept him back, for he preferred to brave ambushes on the trail rather than return home without his precious automatic.

But danger was no longer at his side, immediately around

him. The priest had overcome that threat. There was another menace arising on the other side of the mountain, one that he had to meet with courage.

From the human viewpoint, every minute was laden with despair. Each hour of that tragic return wore down in Father Tornay's heart his illusions and his conquering drive. Faced with the hard facts, the inevitable development of the attack, the detailed tactics closing in on him, the missionary realized that he was going to be struck down, but he also knew that victory did not lie in the hands of his executioners. The charity that inflamed his soul was stronger than arrows, bullets, or the sharp edge of swords.

On that ominous evening, what were Maurice Tornay's thoughts? Undoubtedly, he saw again his beloved family at La Rosière, the scenery of the Crêtes, his fellow monks at the St. Bernard Hospice, all his life that had been a search for sanctity in the absolute realm of action and faith. He thought of China and especially of Tibet which he had dreamed of conquering for God. A forbidden land? How long? Had he himself not written: "One sows and another reaps." How many pages had he written in which his soul expressed itself through the voice of the forerunners, the heroes, of that line of martyrs of the mission to Tibet, who were his predecessors. On that star-spangled night, blue as a sapphire, he felt the reality, the impelling truth of these words which he had written: "While the bandits are loading their guns, our pure hot blood cries: 'O Lord, avenge my blood by doing good. . . .' I must be on the watch this evening, and still more tomorrow, and so on, for the danger will always increase. Where will I obtain such strength? If the wolves do not attack me at home, they will attack me in the jungle. All resistance is useless. When death is inevitable, instead of seeking to avoid it, it is better to make good use of the time that remains by

entrusting one's self to God. . . . O Tibet, Tibet, may you have the first fruits of my joy!"

The next morning, August 11, at the crack of dawn, Father Tornay—who had done nothing but pray—arose and said he wanted to break camp right away. The silent caravan went over the pass. Joan Siao and Sandjrupt were in front with two mules, then came the priest, followed by Dossy who drove the other two mules, finally there were the two soldiers, the deputy from Tchrayul, and the sick woman. . . . They went down along a pasture. Down below, the trail entered a forest. . . . Down there was China! . . . Yunnan! . . . Would he be free after all?

They descended for about an hour. They met a merchant who told them to be on guard because he had seen a man on the lookout for a foreigner.

All of a sudden, four lamas rose out of the forest, their rifles leveled. . . . Father Tornay shouted:

"Don't shoot! Let's talk—"

The rifles crackled. Dossy dropped on the spot. Joan and Sandjrupt saw him lying on the ground. In one bound, they were in the bushes and escaped. . . . At that instant, Father Tornay was still on his feet. . . . He had turned toward Dossy and seemed to be giving him absolution. . . .

CHAPTER 16

An Account of the Events That Immediately Followed Father Tornay's Death

Written by Msgr. Angelin Lovey

for the English-language edition of this book

ON THE evening of August 12, 1949, two young men, Joan and Sandjrupt, arrived at the Atuntze mission (Tekhing), bringing sad news. As in the story of Job's misfortunes, they alone had escaped to report to Father Savioz, temporary pastor of that post.

Through their tears, they told how their caravan had been suddenly attacked at the edge of the forest, below the Chula Pass on the Mekong side; how, at the moment the lamas had jumped out of their hiding place and leveled their rifles at the caravan, Father Tornay had shouted: "Don't shoot! Let's talk!" and they had replied by a burst of fire, aiming at Dossy. The two youths made a wild flight with bullets raining behind them. . . . At a turn in the road, one last glimpse showed them Father Tornay still on his feet and apparently giving absolution to his faithful servant, who had just paid with his life for his heroic attachment to his pastor. For Dossy had

done this despite the threats of death that he had received more than once.

Was the priest killed then? Very likely, but they could not say for certain. Perhaps he had been taken back to Yerkalo to be tried and executed in front of his Christians . . . ? However, this hardly seemed possible after what their host at Merechu revealed to them. They had been careful not to go to his house until it was dark, for fear that people in the village would recognize them. They learned that another group of six or seven armed lamas were waiting there, ready to stop the foreigner's caravan just in case he should manage to escape the ambush set for him on the mountain. These lamas had the assignment to kill the priest and his Tibetan servant. After Joan and Sandjrupt had eaten and slept a short while, they left Merechu before dawn in order to slip through the net in which the murderous lamas hoped to catch them.

After telling this to Father Savioz, they gave him an old rattan cane which was well worn because Father Tornay had failed to put a cap on it. At the moment of the attack, Sandjrupt had it in his hand, and it was all that had escaped the disaster. Unfortunately, this precious souvenir was left at Tsechung when in February, 1951, the Communists forced us to leave our mission to attend a so-called meeting that was to be held at Weihsi. We were never allowed to return later to Tsechung to get anything, even when they announced our expulsion in January, 1952. Thus a statement of Father Tornay was fulfilled to the letter. I had reproached him for not bringing certain objects of worship from Yerkalo when he was expelled in 1946. "The most precious things we had at Yerkalo," he told me, "are souls. We couldn't bring anyone with us! The rest counts for little. After all, it's the good Lord's business. . . . Let Him take care of it Himself!" In fact, Father Tornay's cane does not mean too much to us who

have the living memory and picture of a man with unconquerable energy!

But it was time to act! Father Savioz immediately informed the Chinese mandarin and sent the tenant of the old mission residence at Atuntze, Joseph Ly, to bear the sad news to his fellow missionaries at Tsechung. It was Sunday, August 14, and High Mass was just over when, with Fathers Goré and Emery, the faithful and I learned what had happened. Words are powerless to express the feelings one has at such a time!

Because of the Feast of the Assumption and our priestly duties, and also because of the preparation required for the long trip and high water which made it difficult to cross the Mekong, I was unable to set out until the morning of the 16th; however, I made forced marches and reached the Atuntze mission in two days. I hoped to come in time for the funeral, but my hopes were disappointed and I arrived only to find two freshly filled graves. I did not have the consolation of seeing once more the two heroes who had just inscribed their names in the already long honor roll of martyrs of the Mission to Tibet!

The caravan sent by Father Savioz to recover the bodies was composed of seven porters and two members of the local Chinese police. They came to the scene after a two days' journey. In the trampled grass at the edge of the woods lay the stark naked, bloodstained corpses. Both men were stretched out, pale and rigid in death. Besides the bullet wounds, Dossy had a large sword slash through his right shoulder. Father Tornay had been shot three times in the chest, once in the forearm, and once in the temple; his eyes were torn out; one leg was raw with wounds. Had birds of prey perhaps done this?

Was he tortured or beaten after the attack? Only his executioners could answer that. According to some reports received by the Christians at Yerkalo, he had to suffer before he was

put to death. The same letters state that the lamas fired at him several times without succeeding in felling him. Attributing their powerlessness to some charm which the priest must have on him, they searched him and discovered a prayer book, undoubtedly his breviary. Then, like a cat teasing a mouse, they set to mocking him with sarcastic insults. . . . Just exactly what happened? Will we know before Judgment Day?

In any case, the birds of prey had been more respectful of the dead than were the "pious lamas" who in their voraciousness were not content to take the priest's and Sandjrupt's five mules and their loads, but even had the audacity to strip the corpses and argue over their bloodstained clothes! Contrary to the promises they had made to their two emissaries, Agye and Yuntun, the lamas did not give them the thousand piasters but only a tiny part of the booty. What difference did it make? Their plot had succeeded!

Soon after the lama thieves returned to Yerkalo, they ordered all the Christians to bring to the Karmda lamasery the boxes that Father Tornay had entrusted to them at the time of his expulsion. He had not been wrong when he said he would certainly be robbed on the trail if he took his things with him, just as an American Protestant missionary had been plundered several years before.

While the caravan was making its way over the rough trails, carrying the two bodies on crude stretchers, Father Savioz was having the coffins made. For this expense and for the porters' wages, he had to appeal to some Chinese friends in order not to be cheated too much, for the villagers do not hesitate to take advantage of one's extreme need to ask astronomical prices.

The funeral procession arrived at the Atuntze mission on the evening of the 16th. Several Christians who were there from Patong and Tseku to build houses observed a wake,

after having assisted Father Savioz in dressing the bodies in their best clothes and Father Tornay in his priestly vestments.

The next day at noon, the caskets were ready and not knowing whether I would be able to come because of the insecurity on the trail, Father Savioz went ahead with the burial of the two martyrs. After the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice, the procession, swelled by a crowd of friendly or sympathetic pagans, went to the garden of the old mission where two graves had been dug. Those who attended manifested their sorrow to Father Savioz and their severe disapproval of the lamas' action.

The rest of the afternoon was spent receiving those who had given a helping hand on this sad occasion. But the invitation to the officials and notables, both Chinese and native, was not made until the next day, after my arrival. Among our guests, there were some—such as the Kangongpun—who were not total strangers to the murder of the priest and his servant. But how could suspicions that were being whispered from group to group be proven on the spot? We should note that the mission received numerous marks of sympathy and that each guest, according to the native custom, brought gifts in the form of food which goes to lighten the budget of the stricken family.

When the rites were completed, Father Savioz and I visited the local authorities, the Chinese mandarin, the head of the district, the president of the Council, etc., to express officially the mission's grievances against the murderers and their agents, the lamasery of Karmda and the lama administrator of Yentsing (the district of the salt marshes, Yerkalo or Tsakha, in the native language). A detailed accusation was prepared by a Chinese scribe and addressed to the above-mentioned authorities. The Chinese mandarin had a letter of protestation written to the Karmda lamasery and to its Living Buddha, the Kongkar lama, who was in Lhasa just then with

Gun-Akhio, the great string-puller in this whole tragic affair.

Finally, on August 19, in a very detailed letter we informed His Excellency, Msgr. S. P. Valentin, M.E.P., Bishop of Kangting, who had jurisdiction over us, of all that had happened, of the steps we had personally taken, and asked him to intervene on the higher level with the ambassadors, pointing out to him the extreme danger that the entire mission in the Tibetan Marches of Yunnan would run if the audacity of the lamas was not curbed by a sanction from competent authorities.

Obviously all of this would probably remain just a dead letter, as happened at the time Father Nussbaum was killed. The lamas were laughing at us once again while waiting to deal us a new blow, perhaps at Atuntze or even at Tsechung. Under the pretext of defending themselves against the advance of the Communists, the Tibetans were dreaming of throwing out the Chinese and pushing all the way to Weihsi, or even to Likiang. What would become of our posts on the Mekong and the Salween?

The country was more and more disturbed, and our letter had hardly left when the three most important native chieftains of the Tekhing subprefecture went to the Yamen, asking "their Chinese big brother" to "lend" them the arms of his garrison, in exchange for which they promised him protection and a modest pension for himself and his aides. The opium-smoking mandarin bowed with the prettiest smile he was capable of!

The report to Msgr. Valentin contained an exact translation of a letter which the Christians at Yerkalo, through Luka the catechist and another prominent villager, had written ten days before the murder of their pastor, but which they had not been able to send in time to the addressee, Father Francis Goré, the vicar-general. Here is that letter: "A man from Gunra, on returning from Atuntze, having let Father Tornay's

departure for Lhasa be known, the lama administrator, Gun Harang (the same one who had expelled the priest in 1946), held a meeting with the lamas of Karmda and with Nongda Chierau from Gunra and decided that the priest must be killed; for this purpose, they sent two men from Kionglong, Agye and Yuntun, to the authorities of the Tsarong to have the priest arrested. At the same time, they sent a messenger to Chamdo and four lamas armed with rifles to kill the priest. 'If you kill the priest, we promise you 1,000 piasters; besides, the animals and all that belongs to the priest shall be yours!' Will Father Goré immediately warn the Bishop and the authorities of different places? Here, everyone is very afflicted, the Church is gathering only mockeries, the Christians are weeping. . . . Those who left to harm the priest have not yet returned. What will happen? God's grace be with you!" Signed: P'a Luka and Diapong Ajiong.

I recalled to my bishop the heroic courage displayed by Father Tornay since his arrival at Yerkalo and during the four years of persecution, how he had said to me on several occasions: "They will try to intimidate me, to make me leave. Leave—I will not leave! My soul to God and my carcass to the lamas! I will not abandon my sheep, the souls that the bishop has entrusted to me!"

Father Tornay had kept his promise: he had not abandoned his Christians and he had just given them a magnificent proof of his attachment. He himself had received the reward of the prophets and apostles! "*Vindica, Domine, sanguinem sanctorum tuorum qui effusus est!*" ("Avenge, O Lord, the blood of Thy saints, which has been shed!") "Avenge it, by doing good!" Father Tornay had added. How could God refuse to hear the voice of the blood of those who have died for His cause!

His two servants, Joan and Sandjrupt, had to be reimbursed

for the loss of their belongings—and Sandjrupt for his two mules—which they had lost in the robbery. Dossy's parents, who were deprived of their eldest son, had to be given assistance. And above all, we were anxious to learn how the leader of the caravan, Setewang from Ndongjines, would fare after his return from Lhasa, since the chieftain at Tchrayul had declared that he considered himself not competent to handle this case, and that since Setewang had taken it on himself to introduce a foreigner into the forbidden land of the spirits, he would have to give an account of it to the Governor of Chamdo. This prospect was not inviting, and normally we could expect that his entire caravan would be confiscated; or perhaps even worse, that he would be fined and imprisoned.

Knowing what had occurred, Setewang sold some of his mules and entrusted the rest to a friend, a caravan driver, and managed to slip past the customs posts during the night. Thus he came back home, safe and sound, without the slightest trouble. We attributed this favor to Father Tornay, because we had not stopped asking him to help the man who had agreed to take him on the trip to Lhasa, a trip that he imagined to be so beautiful and which, as a matter of fact, ended in such a tragic yet sublime way that one must praise God, the strength of martyrs, for it!

✠ A. Lovey, C.R., Provost of the Grand St. Bernard
Martigny, Switzerland, December 15, 1955

On September 22, Octave of Our Lady of Sorrows, Patroness of the Mission to Tibet, and the feast of Saint Maurice, Father Tornay's patron, a solemn service was celebrated in the church at Tsechung for the repose of the two martyrs' souls. Father Lovey delivered the eulogy of his fellow priest,

countryman, and friend. His theme was: "The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians."

It was only on September 21 that the sad news reached Switzerland. A telegram sent to Msgr. Adam, the provost, carried the laconic message: "Tornay murdered."

The mission magazine, *Grand-St.-Bernard-Thibet*, echoed the immense grief this death caused:

"The brutal disappearance of our dear missionary leaves our hearts inconsolable.

"Humanly speaking, we could not accept without a feeling of revolt the fact that such an apostle of the Gospel, who in that corner of Tibet had poured forth all his drive and stubborn energy, who for four years had ascended such a hard Calvary, should disappear like this from the list of valiant pioneers that the St. Bernard Order has sent there. . . . Truly we would be inconsolable if our faith did not enlighten our bitter sorrow with the supernatural view of Christian martyrdom in the Communion of Saints.

"Father Tornay had resolutely sacrificed himself to his vocation; we, his relatives, fellow monks, and friends had sacrificed him to God's will. In following step by step, in this magazine and in the priest's own diary, the stages of his life that was beset with dangers and grave threats, we seemed to guess that Our Lord had chosen him to follow Him along the road to Golgotha. We trembled for him and feared the worst, even while he himself courageously and serenely continued an unequal battle against a pack of fierce enemies filled with hatred. And now, suddenly, we learn that the sacrifice has been consummated, a sacrifice like that of Christ, by the resounding defeat of assassination.

"However, we have no doubt that this defeat is only apparent. Father Tornay's death marks a new dawn for the Mission of Tibet, even if, in God's designs, other victims should be added to the one whom we mourn. In Tibet, as in

the entire world, the Redemption blossoms in blood. Let us have no doubt of it! Canon Tornay's sacrifice will raise up other missionary vocations, and at the hour set by God, the hard trails into forbidden Tibet, jealously guarded by cruel hired assassins of the lamas, will have to open up to the peaceful messengers of Christ.

“Let us console ourselves, dear relatives, fellow monks, and friends of our missionary, and let us keep his precious memory alive by helping with our prayers, our sacrifices, and our generosity those who continue their hard labor in the Mission.”

In Switzerland, solemn funeral services were held in the church at Orsières on September 26 for the repose of the soul of Canon Tornay. On the other hand, as a result of this heroic death and the void it left in the missionary ranks, several young canons at once asked permission to go to Tibet and take his place. On November 22, 1949, Brother Duc, who had regained his health and was eager to go back to his distant post, left Martigny with Canons Lucien Droz¹ and Arnold Petoud. Unfortunately, when they arrived at Saigon, they learned that the Communists had invaded Yunnan. They could not stay at the other missionary centers which were already overflowing with refugees. Therefore, the Swiss consuls and foreigners advised them to return home; and they received orders to that effect from Msgr. Adam.

¹ When Father Droz returned to the Hospice, he was named bursar, and died on November 19, 1951, in an avalanche, a victim of duty. His death is vividly described in Ruth Adams Knight's *Halfway to Heaven*.

Appendix

RECENT EVENTS IN TIBET AND THE ST. BERNARD MISSIONARIES

BY

CANON P. M. MELLY

In 1950, Tibet was in the spotlight of world news. Beginning in January, reports concerning it followed one another rapidly and became increasingly ominous. Even at that time, the Russian press was announcing its early conquest. A rumor came from Bhutan that a Communist Tibetan government was being formed in Western China. Peiping ordered Lhasa to send ambassadors to the Chinese capital. In February, India considered Tibet lost and promised only diplomatic help.

Chu Teh, Mao Tse-tung's right-hand man, asked the Tibetans to assist the "liberation" army by building roads. Tsepon Shakabpa, Finance Minister, wanted to go to Hong Kong to negotiate with the Reds. But England would not grant him a visa. Meanwhile the brother of the Dalai Lama went to Formosa to see Chiang Kai-shek and appealed to the United States, while at the same time the Panchen Lama, a prisoner of the Communists at Sining, was being "brainwashed" and prepared to enter Tibet at the head of a native partisan army which was living within the confines of the country. Finally, at the beginning of August, the newspapers announced that that army was marching into Tibet from east to west. Four or five months were enough for the conquest, just enough time to travel across the country, drinking vast numbers of cups of buttered tea and eating the traditional *tsampa* at the expense of the inhabitants!

Tibet could not count on effective aid from the outside. Thus Russia, with the Chinese Communists acting as its agents, conquered one more country, a country with great mineral wealth and an important country from the strategic point of view. In fact, for Asia, Tibet is a kind of hub as Switzerland is for Europe, and the conquest of India has been greatly facilitated.

By the end of 1950, the traditional "forbidden Tibet" was no more. The sacrosanct bastion of the lamas had been violated. The Panchen Lama had entered his country at the head of some "progressive" Tibetans strongly supported by Chinese Communists.

Two armies made the invasion: one came from Sining and Ko Ko Nor, the other came from the south through Atuntze. The latter went through our mission district from Weihsi to Yerkalo. Only the fortress of Chamdo, north of Yerkalo, put up a show of resistance, but it melted like snow in the sun before the mass and power of the enemy. The Red flood rolled on toward Lhasa, which it reached very quickly. The Dalai Lama had time to escape and took his treasure (a hundred mule-loads) to the Indian border. The red flag, hoisted at once over the highest tower of the Potala, made a curious contrast with the oriflammes and prayer banners floating below it.

A popular belief has it that Tibet's salvation will come from the North, that the Messiah or "*Chiamba*" will annihilate the masses of unbelievers and will install a new and very powerful master in the Potala. It was certainly from the North that Communism came and opened the doors of the "forbidden land." Later, when God's hour strikes—and it undoubtedly will strike one day—Christianity will enter the "land of the spirits," and then Tibet's true salvation will come.

Unfortunately, that hour has not yet struck! It is now several years since the Communists penetrated eastern Tibet and reached Lhasa. Following their usual methods, they have organized and consolidated their forces, and taken over all the key positions. On May 23, 1951, they signed an agreement at Peiping between China and Tibet. The Dalai Lama, who took refuge at Yatung on the Indian border, returned to Lhasa and was named admin-

istrator of the country, surrounded, of course, by a people's committee (Mimang). His rival, the Panchen Lama, who was born in 1938, and enthroned at the lamasery of Tashi Lumpo in Shigatse, is wholly devoted to the conquerors. In 1954-55, both the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama spent six months at Peiping, and when they left for Tibet, they issued a statement proclaiming their willingness to co-operate with the Communist government of China in building a new Tibet.

Undoubtedly, this occupation has not occurred without some outbursts from those who were "liberated." But calm is quickly re-established and the guilty ones go to swell the army of "voluntary" workers who are building roads, working the land, digging irrigation canals, and exploiting the many rich mines, under the supervision of Russian engineers. Two airfields are already in operation: Gyantse and Lharingo. Others will follow shortly. A radio station has been established. Numerous schools have been opened, in which intense indoctrination goes on day and night. Marriage between young Tibetans and Chinese girls, brought into Tibet by the "liberators," is highly recommended. The Red forces numbered 10,000 at first, but will soon reach 100,000 to 200,000, thanks to the enrollment of native "volunteers."

Thus, little by little, Tibet is aligning itself and submitting to Communist imperialism, the ultimate goal of which is to make it another people's republic like Sinkiang and Outer Mongolia.

During these dramatic events, what was happening to the St. Bernard monks and the priests of the Foreign Missions Society of Paris who were working at their side?

For a long time we had no news of them. After Father Tornay's murder, one tragedy followed another as a series of misfortunes overwhelmed our mission.

At the beginning of 1949, the bandits of the region proclaimed they were Communists, acted as such, and seized power. They were soon overthrown by the stronger and more numerous Tibetan bandits who, taking advantage of the chaos in China at

that time, went down the Mekong Valley pillaging, burning and killing. They were the most terrible. But in turn they had to flee before Mao Tse-tung's Communists, the real Reds this time, who had come to "pacify" the country! Our missionaries were caught in the middle!

The population tried to flee first from one, then from the other. Those who escaped the first pillage were caught in the second. Numerous villages were burned, five of them around Weihsi, which saw one of its sections, Pe-Kai, go up in flames. The mission there was saved, thanks to the coolness of Father Lattion who assisted all the wounded without discrimination. Though it escaped the flames, the mission underwent several pillagings. One night around midnight, sixty Tibetans came to the mission and hacked their way through the doors and windows with axes. The place was thoroughly sacked. Everything was taken away, including the pendulum of the clock.

Hua-lo-pa likewise was visited by the bandits, but as it had no resident missionary, the Tibetans did not stay very long.

Things were different at Siao-Weihsi where Father Coquoz "endured a living hell" for three months, to use his own words. The people had long ago fled. The priest alone remained in an effort to save the village from fire. He succeeded. But the bandits stole everything and took over the mission which they made into their headquarters. In the middle of January, he learned of the imminent arrival of reinforcements to the bandits, men from the Kongkar Lama—Father Tornay's murderers. He then decided it was a good idea to leave for Weihsi, where he shared the destitution of Fathers Lattion and Savioz.

Meanwhile, Father Fournier was in the clutches of another group of Tibetans at Kitcha, which he twice saved from fire. The third time, a part of the village was burned and the mission looted just like those at Weihsi and Siao-Weihsi.

The losses were staggering for the little mission. The principal posts would have to be supplied again with everything, for whatever escaped the bandits' first inroads was taken later. Two important stocks of medical supplies destined for the mission were

seized by the Communists at Tali. All the mules and horses—precious animals in that mountainous, trackless land—were also stolen. “From now on we have to go on foot, using our last straw sandals,” Father Coquoz wrote. He still had the courage to keep smiling when he saw the Tibetans had left him, as his entire worldly goods, only his famous sleeping bag to bed down under the open sky.

In the summer of 1950, the Communist army hurriedly went through our mission territory from south to north. At the beginning our missionaries did not suffer too much. After they had recovered somewhat from the commotion caused by the battles between the Tibetans and the local militia and by the arrival of the Communists, they again took up their duties, keeping in mind the Chinese proverb: “If things never go as well as you hope, neither do they ever go as badly as you fear.”

So they went back to work, made their annual retreat at Tsechung, and visited one another.

Those were their last hours of freedom!

On December 1, 1950, Fathers Lattion, Coquoz and Fournier were put under house arrest at Weihsi.

At Tsechung, Fathers Goré, Lovey and Savioz were seized at their home one evening and were forced the next morning to set out for Weihsi, where they arrived on March 1, 1951.

Had it not been for the impossibility of taking care of the faithful and the uncertainty of the future, their arrest would not have been too tragic. The “retreatants” divided their time between prayer, language study, editing certain publications in Tibetan, appeals to the local and national authorities and the Swiss Legation at Peiping, and manual labor in order to provide for themselves.

Then they were simply expelled from the country, forced to abandon the faithful and all their mission undertakings. On January 16, 1952, some Red soldiers obliged the priests to follow them and “protected” them until they left China at Lowu, near Kowloon. They reached Hong Kong on March 12.

Strictly speaking, there was no imprisonment in the Salween

Valley. But at various times, Fathers André and Emery and Mr. Chappelet were threatened with expulsion, deprived of employees, and accused. On May 13, 1952, they were driven out; also "protected" by the Communists, they followed the same road as the Weihsi group, which they joined at Hong Kong on July 31. Only Father Vincent Ly, a Chinese priest who is seventy-four years of age, remains in the Tibetan Marches of Yunnan. He was reported still alive in 1955.

United again in Hong Kong, our missionaries, with the approval of Msgr. Adam, moved to Formosa where, henceforth until China and Tibet open up, they will work with the Archbishop of Taipei, having the district and town of Ilan as their field of action.

On October 12, 1952, Msgr. Adam was consecrated Bishop of Sion, Switzerland. Three days later the General Chapter of the St. Bernard monks chose Father Lovey to be his successor as head of the Order. The newly elected provost left Formosa in December and arrived in Switzerland at the beginning of January, 1953. On February 4, Msgr. Lovey and his predecessor, Msgr. Adam, drove to the village of Bourg St. Pierre. There they put on their skis and began the long climb up the Pass to the Hospice. Night had already fallen when its bells rang out the news of their arrival. On the next day, in a solemn ceremony, the keys of the Hospice were given to Msgr. Lovey as a symbol of his taking possession of the provostship of the congregation. At the subsequent banquet, Father Goré gave a brief speech in Tibetan on behalf of the oppressed Christians of the Upper Mekong and Salween Valleys, transmitting their congratulations and request for prayers to the new Superior of the Order.

This veteran French missionary, who had spent forty-five years in the Chinese-Tibetan borderlands, died peacefully in France late in 1954. He was unquestionably the Church's greatest expert on Tibet in modern times.

Meanwhile, on March 5, 1953, the Feast of all Regular Canon Saints—and the day after the death of Father Tornay's aged father

—the Informative Process concerning the “renown and cause of martyrdom” of Canon Maurice Tornay was formally opened in the Bishop’s Mansion at Sion.

This first phase of the ecclesiastical procedures for the canonization of a servant of God begins with the hearing of a number of witnesses. The statements of those witnesses, together with other documents, must establish in a juridically unassailable manner the fact that Canon Tornay was assassinated out of hatred for the Christian religion.

The end of this preliminary Process can be foreseen during the year 1956. All the documents will then be transmitted to Rome, where they will undergo a very careful examination by the Sacred Congregation of Rites.

A POPULAR READING LIST
ON
THE SAINT BERNARD HOSPICE AND MISSION
BY
RAPHAEL BROWN

Literature on the St. Bernard Hospice and Mission is relatively scarce and difficult to find. The following reading list of popular books and articles written in English and French has therefore been added to this book in order to provide students of these famous yet little-known subjects with additional material. The items mentioned below represent a small selection from the comprehensive bibliographical notes which I have compiled on both topics, running to several hundred titles—for the most part periodical references. These notes are at the disposal of researchers or writers. Nearly all the books are listed in the Library of Congress Catalog or its National Union Catalog, while the locations of sets of the magazines in major American libraries are indicated in the *Union List of Serials*.

The Hospice

A splendid illustrated history of the great epic of the St. Bernard Hospice remains to be written; such a book would certainly have good sales. The closest approach is Paul Achard's excellent *Hommes et Chiens du Grand-Saint-Bernard* (Paris, Les Éditions de France, 1937; 242 pp. illus.), which contains a great deal of valuable information about the monks and their dogs. Canon Jules Gross' *L'Hospice du Grand Saint Bernard* (Neuchâtel, Éditions Victor Attinger, 1933; 151 pp.) has the great advantage of having a St. Bernard father as author. In English, A. R. Sennett's *Across the Great St. Bernard* (London, Bemrose & Sons, 1904; 444 pp. and 100 pp., illus.) deals only in part with the Hospice.

However, a considerable number of interesting articles giving vivid accounts of visits to the Hospice compensate for the dearth of books. Several dozen have appeared in British and American magazines during the last hundred and fifty years. The following include only a few outstanding articles in periodicals which are available in many large libraries: *Lippincott's Magazine* (Philadelphia), September, 1875; *Argosy* (London) 1897, pp. 321-344; *National Magazine* (Boston), April, 1899; *Woman's Home Companion* (New York), February, 1906; and the *Catholic World* (New York), February, 1925 and October, 1930.

The few reliable facts which are known about the life of the founder of the Hospice, St. Bernard, are collected and analyzed in A. Donnet's *Saint Bernard et les Origines de l'Hospice du Mont-Joux* (Saint Maurice, Oeuvre de Saint-Augustin, 1942; 163 pp.). The traditional legend was ably dramatized by Henri Ghéon in his play, *The Marvellous History of St. Bernard* (London and New York, Sheed & Ward, 1933; 94 pp.).

The text of a recent popular account of all the various orders of canons regular of St. Augustine, despite its Latin title *Canonicorum Regularum Sodalitates* (Vorau, Austria, Ed. Canonica, 1954; 208 pp. and 228 illus.), is partly in English. This well illustrated work is distributed in the United States by the B. Herder Book Company.

An almost forgotten episode in the history of the Entremont Valley leading up to the Grand St. Bernard Pass which is nevertheless of interest to the many American friends of the Trappist Order was the brief but heroic existence of a fervent Trappistine convent during the French Revolution near the villages of Sembrancher and Orsières. The story of this unusual foundation is briefly narrated in *La Trappe in England* by a Religious of Holy Cross Abbey (London, Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1937), pp. 64-68.

Another minor incident of major importance to the world was the unsuccessful attempt of Monsieur Louis Martin, father of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, to join the St. Bernard monks in 1845, which is mentioned in *The Story of a Family* by the Rev. Stephane Joseph Piat (New York, P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1947), pp. 22-25.

Many famous British and American writers visited the famous Hospice during the nineteenth century. As some of them were not favorably inclined to the Catholic Church in general and to monasticism in particular, their comments are occasionally lacking in charity and justice. Among these great men of letters were James Fenimore Cooper, Louis Agassiz, John Ruskin, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Charles Dickens and Matthew Arnold. Of course the one literary reference to the Hospice which is most familiar to school children is Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's short poem "Excelsior."

In 1935 Richard Halliburton made the Hospice a stopping place on his "royal road to romance" by attempting to cross the pass on an elephant, as Hannibal is said to have done. Halliburton described this absurd and inhumane adventure in his autobiography, *Seven League Boots* (Garden City, N. Y., Garden City Publishing Co., 1937).

In recent years three delightful illustrated juvenile books dealing with the St. Bernard dogs have appeared: Claire H. Bishop's *Bernard and His Dogs* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1952; 70 pp.); Ruth M. Collins' *Septimus, the St. Bernard* (New York, Dodd, Mead & Co., 1949; 61 pp.); and Dorothy K. L'Hommedieu's *Leo, the Little St. Bernard* (Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott, 1949; 59

pp.). A splendid fictional account of the monks' life, the famous life-saving dog Barry, and the crossing of the pass by Napoleon is found in Ruth Adams Knight's *Halfway to Heaven* (New York, Whittlesey House, 1952; 154 pp.), which is suitable for older children and for adults.

Georgia E. Cromwell's article, "Switzerland's Enchanted Val d'Hérens," in the *National Geographic Magazine* for June, 1955, gives a vivid description, with numerous illustrations in natural color, of peasant life and customs in a mountain valley of the Valais near the Great St. Bernard Pass.

The Mission

Published materials on the St. Bernard Mission and its area are very limited in number. The basic works on the Catholic Mission to Tibet in modern times are the *Histoire de la Mission du Thibet* by the Paris Foreign Missions Society historian, Father Adrien Launay (Lille, Desclée, de Brouwer & Cie., 1903; 2 vol. and suppl.), and Father Francis Goré's *Trente Ans aux Portes du Thibet Interdit, 1908-1938* (Hong Kong, Maison de Nazareth, 1939; 399 pp., illus.). Father Goré's book includes valuable first-hand observations on Tibetan customs, as well as detailed records of political and religious events on the Yunnan-Sikang border.

Maryknoll Father Mark Tennien's *Chungking Listening Post* (New York, Creative Age Press, 1945), has some interesting material (pp. 159-166) on the work of the French missionaries on the Upper Salween.

Just before Father Tornay's death, a distinguished and popular French writer, M. Pierre Croidys, prepared an excellent chronicle of the work of the St. Bernard monks in the Far East: *Du Grand-Saint-Bernard au Thibet* (Paris, Spes, 1949; 192 pp.). And in 1946 a Paris Foreign Missions priest stationed in Indo-China, Father Christian Simmonet, spent an enjoyable summer vacation in the Upper Mekong region visiting his French and Swiss colleagues; his witty account of this unusual vacation was entitled *Thibet, Voyage au Bout de la Chrétienté* (Paris, Éditions Monde Nouveau, 1949; 189 pp., illus.).

Articles on the Mission and on Father Tornay, written by the compiler of this reading list, appeared in the *Catholic Digest* for April, 1949, and the *Shield* for April, 1952.

Dr. Joseph Francis Rock, the well-known Austrian-American explorer and botanist, who lived for many years at Likiang, north of Tali, described his journey to the Upper Mekong and Salween area in a well illustrated article, "Through the Great River Trenches of Asia," which appeared in the *National Geographic Magazine* for August, 1926.

Mme. Alexandra David-Neel, a French Buddhist writer who resided for some years in Tatsienlu (Kangting), has recorded her memories and observations of life in China's "wild west" in her book, *A l'Ouest Barbare de la Vaste Chine* (Paris, Plon, 1947; 301 pp., illus.). Unfortunately, her attitude toward Christian missionaries is thoroughly antagonistic and unfair.

The Reverend Marion H. Duncan, an American Protestant missionary who worked for many years in Batang, is the author of two interesting books which record his travels in that area and between Batang, Atuntze, and the Salween: *The Mountain of Silver Snow* (Cincinnati, Powell & White, 1929; 240 pp., illus.) and *The Yangtze and the Yak; Adventurous Trails in and out of Tibet* (Alexandria, Va., published by the author, 1952; 353 pp., illus., with valuable maps).

Recent works on Tibet are numerous. Two, however, are of outstanding importance due to their authors' prolonged residence in Lhasa during the 1940's: Heinrich Harrer's *Seven Years in Tibet* (New York, E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1954, 314 pp., illus.); and Tsung-Lien Shen and Shen-Chi Liu's *Tibet and the Tibetans* (Stanford, Cal., Stanford University Press, 1952; 199 pp., illus.). The latter is by far the most useful work available on modern Tibet. Mr. Tsung-Lien Shen was Chinese Resident Commissioner in Lhasa from 1942 to 1947. A summary of Harrer's book, with over thirty illustrations in natural colors, appeared in the *National Geographic Magazine* for July, 1955. Incidentally, Mr. Harrer, who was in Lhasa during the years when Father Tornay was

driven from Yerkalo and assassinated, has stated that he did not hear about the missionary's death.

The primary source for information about the St. Bernard Mission is of course the illustrated quarterly magazine (in French), *Grand-Saint-Bernard-Thibet*, which Father Melly has edited since 1946, and which has published extensive excerpts from the missionaries' letters and reports, as well as articles on the Hospice and on the progress of Father Tornay's Cause of Beatification. The address of the magazine is: 12 Beauregard, Fribourg, Switzerland.

In May, 1956, when *Martyr in Tibet* was about to be printed, Father Melly announced the publication in Switzerland of a definitive history of the famous St. Bernard Hospice: *La Maison du Grand-Saint-Bernard des origines aux temps actuels*, by Canon L. Quaglia, former archivist and present Prior of the Hospice. This illustrated 696-page book is available from the Hospice du Grand-Saint-Bernard, Valais, Switzerland (price: 20 Swiss francs).

