

A Missionary Enterprise

In 1839 the Dubuque diocese of the Catholic Church reached from the southern boundary of Iowa northward to British America and westward from the Mississippi River to the Missouri River. It included what are now the States of Iowa and Minnesota and large portions of North and South Dakota. About thirty thousand Indians lived within this region — more than in any other diocese save one. Chiefly for the conversion of the native red men this outpost of Christendom had been established in 1837 and the Right Reverend Mathias Loras had come to Iowa as the first bishop of Dubuque.

Zealous for the conversion of the aborigines and desiring to view the northern parts of his far-flung province, the bishop determined early in the summer of 1839 to visit the vicinity of the government fort established twenty years previously where the Minnesota River empties into the Mississippi. "I left Du Buque", he wrote in a letter to relatives in France, "on the 23d of June, on board a large and magnificent steamer" — this one steamer was wont to make an annual trip to that distant military post — "and was accompanied by Rev. Father Pelamourgues and a young man who served as interpreter with the Sioux. After a successful voyage of some days along the superb Mississippi, we reached St.

Peter's. Our arrival was a cause of great joy to the Catholics who had never before seen a priest or bishop in those remote regions; they manifested a great desire to assist at divine worship, and to approach the sacraments of the church. The Catholics of St. Peter's amounted to 185, fifty-six of whom we baptized, administered confirmation to eight, communion to thirty-three adults, and gave the nuptial benediction to four couples."

Before Fort Snelling was commenced, the Minnesota River was known to the French voyageurs as the "St. Pierre", but when the Americans arrived they anglicized the name into "St. Peter's". The whole vicinity, including Fort Snelling itself, the trading post across the river, and the Indian agency were collectively termed St. Peter's by the early inhabitants. In the year 1852, however, Congress ordered that Minnesota, the Indian name of the stream, should be used in all public documents mentioning the river. In 1839 it was known of course only as St. Peter's.

Bishop Loras and the young Abbé Anthon Pelamourgues, who had come from France that very year at the request of the bishop, stopped on the fort side of the river. Who and what manner of people were the one hundred and eighty-five Catholics they found at that distant point? Probably some were traders who had settled around St. Peter's, others may have been farmers on the reservation or Catholic soldiers of the garrison, while a

few *coureurs des bois* from scattered points in the Northwest, even Manitoba, may have been present at that season. The names of a number of them are to be found in the records of the bishop written by his own pen after his return to Dubuque. These are the names of those baptized, of their parents, and of their godparents.

Practically all are French names, two or three like Quin and Graham are Gaelic, and several are names of half-breeds. Stately patronymics of old France stand out in the bishop's peculiar writing on the time-colored pages: Jean Baptiste Latourelle, Olivier Rossico, Louis Brunelle, Amable Morin. And the names of some of the women are redolent of the fleur-de-lis and cathedral incense: Julie Ducharme, Geneviève Cardinal, Josephine Beaulieu, Isabel Madelaine. Interesting is the record of Marguerite Leclair, daughter of Michel Leclair and of a Sioux woman, his wife; of Marguerite Metivier, daughter of M. Metivier and a Sioux woman; of Francoise Marie Boucher, twenty-three years of age, daughter of N. Boucher and "a Chippeway from the Lake Superior"; and of Angelique Martin, daughter of Louis Martin and Ouanino, a Sioux woman.

Twenty-four persons were baptized by Bishop Loras on June 28th; on the following day Father Pelamourgues gave the rites to eleven more; one week later, on July 5th, Bishop Loras baptized eleven, and on July 8th, six. These baptisms oc-

cured at St. Peter's. But the next day at St. Croix, the bishop christened four half-breed children and a Sioux boy, apparently the only full-blooded Indian upon whom he poured the baptismal waters. This makes a total of fifty-seven, although in the letter above quoted, he stated fifty-six — the number which subsequent accounts have always mentioned.

What a picturesque tableau must have struck the eyes of the "Bishop of Du Buque" on these occasions. There in that open cathedral whose pillars were the tall trees of the forest primeval, whose vaulted ceiling was the azure sky peeping through the interlacings of the fragrant branches, stood Mathias Loras, in whose veins flowed the blood of the old French aristocracy. His father, two uncles, one of them Mayor of St. Cyr, and two aunts had gone to the guillotine in Lyons in 1793 during the French Revolution. Round about him he saw trappers from the far Missouri and "bois brulés" from the Red River dressed in deer skins trimmed with fur; traders from Prairie du Chien and soldiers from the army post; women clothed in animal skins and homespun. From a distance in the checkered shadow and sunlight of the forest, peered the Indians — Sioux and Chippewas who had met there for a peace parley. With curiosity they gazed at the "China-sapas", the black gowns — at the middle-aged bishop and the youthful abbé in surplice and stole, the one with crucifix and ritual in his hands, the other with the water and oils of baptism. And

perhaps from afar came the barely distinguishable musical rumble of Minnehaha's waters.

One of the most interested spectators of the entire group, however, was a remarkable half-breed by the name of Scott Campbell. His wife and seven children were among those baptized. "Scott Campbell, the interpreter at Fort Snelling, was the intermediary between the Indians and their lords", writes Marcus Hansen in his history of Old Fort Snelling. "He was a half-breed whom Meriwether Lewis had met on his expedition up the Missouri River. He took the boy with him back to St. Louis; and when Lewis died, Campbell returned to his Sioux relatives and finally drifted to the agency at Fort Snelling. Having a knowledge of four languages, and possessing the confidence of all the tribes within four hundred miles of the post, he was indispensable. From August, 1825, to April, 1826, he was engaged in the fur trade, but was lured back into service by a salary of thirty-four dollars per month and one ration per day. By 1843, however, he had become such a drunkard that he had to be dismissed.

"The veteran missionary, S. W. Pond, in recalling early days wrote that 'Scott Campbell no longer sits smoking his long pipe, and conversing in low tones with the listless loungers around the old Agency House; but who that resided in this country thirty or forty years ago can pass by the old stone houses near Fort Snelling and not think of Major Taliaferro and of his interpreter?' "

In all probability the bishop met Major Lawrence Taliaferro, possibly a number of times during his visit. From 1820 to 1840 that gentleman was the government Indian agent for St. Peter's, one of the best and most widely known agents in the Northwest. He was from an old Virginia family whose ancestors had come from Genoa, Italy. A colored female slave of his, Harriet, had married Dred Scott, when that subsequently famous personage, the hero — or the victim — of the Dred Scott decision, had come to Fort Snelling with his master in the thirties.

Scott Campbell, the major's interpreter, was the son of Colin Campbell, an influential Scotch trader and interpreter. For at least three generations, members of this family served as interpreters in the Northwest. Scott was born at Prairie du Chien in 1790. It was with him that Bishop Loras stayed during his visit to St. Peter's, for he mentioned in one of his letters "the house in which Mr. Scott [the bishop insisted upon calling the interpreter "Scott" instead of "Campbell"] had afforded me and Mr. Pelamourgues the most generous hospitality." And in another letter he stated: "The wife of our host, who had already received some religious instruction, was baptized and confirmed; she subsequently received the sacrament of matrimony and made her first communion."

Campbell's wife was one of the three married women who were baptized. That a warm friendship must have sprung up between the gentle bishop and

the hardy Scotch-Sioux interpreter can be gleaned from a letter written by Father Galtier, a missionary whom Bishop Loras sent to St. Peter's the following April. "I introduced myself to Mr. Campbell, a Scotch gentleman, the Indian interpreter, to whom I was recommended by the Bishop. At his house, I received a kind welcome from his good Christian wife, a charitable Catholic woman. For about a month I remained there as one of the family."

On June 29th Abbé Pelamourgues baptized three of the Campbell children: Baptiste, John, and Marguerite. Baptiste was the first and perhaps the youngest of the children of the Campbell family to be baptized. For him Antoine Papin, Major Taliaferro's old blacksmith of the Indian agency and later one of the first settlers of St. Paul, stood as godfather. One week later, on July 5th, the bishop himself baptized the other four children: Hypolite, Joseph, Henriette, and Mathias. This last lad was referred to later as Scott Campbell, Jr., but here it is clear that he was named after the bishop, whose Christian name was Mathias. Last of all Margaret Menager Campbell, Scott's wife, then thirty-two years of age, was baptized. Historians have alleged that she was a Menominee half-breed, although that seems strange since the wives of nearly all the voyageurs in that vicinity were Chippewas or Sioux. Half-breed she was, but Bishop Loras recorded that she was "in the tribe of the Sioux".

Twenty-three years later, in December, 1862, thirty-eight Sioux Indians were waiting in prison at Mankato to be hanged for their part in the Minnesota massacres that year. Of the thirty-eight who were to be executed, three were half-breeds, and one of them was Baptiste Campbell, the youngest son of the interpreter at old St. Peter's. Guilty of many crimes, including the murder of a man and a woman, he appealed to a Catholic priest for spiritual absolution. "About six o'clock on Christmas morning, I gave Holy Communion to the three metizos" (half-breeds), wrote Father Ravoux in his *Memoirs*. "It was the first and last time they received the Bread of Angels." Apparently Father Ravoux, who had come to Dubuque as a Catholic missionary in 1839 and had been ordained by Bishop Loras, knew nothing of Baptiste Campbell's previous religious contact with the bishop.

Thirty of the condemned Indians were baptized. Baptiste acted as interpreter. As his father had served the Dubuque bishop and abbé twenty-three years before, so Baptiste, with the same linguistic talent that his father had shown, served Father Ravoux on this occasion. An Iowa bishop and abbé had presided over his auspicious Christian initiation on the banks of the Mississippi beneath the walls of Fort Snelling; and a former Iowa missionary gave him absolution on the eve of his execution in the prison yard at Mankato.

But the tragic sequel of that early visit of Bishop

Loras among his converts at St. Peter's is not finished. John Campbell, who "was a man of more than usual physical beauty — had long, curly, black hair, dark expressive eyes, and a finely proportioned figure," was hanged at Mankato also, on May 3, 1865, for the murder of the Jewett family. And Hypolite, another brother, baptized by Bishop Loras himself, had also engaged in the Minnesota massacres but escaped to Manitoba.

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