

DESTRUCTION OF BATHURST ISLAND MISSION

Seven long years' devoted work swept aside in one day! The first blossoms put forth by a promising mission tree cultivated by seven years of hardship blasted, and the tree ruthlessly torn up, within the space of a few hours! The cup of happiness gradually filled by seven years of unrelenting sacrifice suddenly dashed from the lips of the gladsome, expectant laborers!

Towards the end of March a terrific hurricane, accompanied by a frightful tidal wave, swept over the mission station on Bathurst Island. The tempest rushed rapidly from the sea upon the island. While the nuns were in their little convent, the storm, which had been quickly growing in vehemence for some hours, lifted the roof from the building. Father Gsell, the Administrator of the Mission, was at the time busily engaged in striving to save the few articles and provisions he had in the presbytery, which was situated nearer the sea, and was fast being submerged. On learning that the Sisters were in distress, he rushed up to the convent, but, even with the willing assistance of the blacks, failed to save the convent from destruction. As the sheets of iron flew from the convent living room and the waters poured in on all sides, the Sisters fled for refuge to the kitchen; but soon the roof of this building also disappeared. Cold and drenched, the Sisters passed a miserable night, while the waters rose and the tempest howled furiously on all sides. Father Gsell exerted his utmost efforts throughout the night both in assisting the nuns and in trying to save at least a few provisions and goods from the presbytery. Had it not been for the assistance of the natives, he would have been carried out to sea.

While the storm was raging at Bathurst Island, mercilessly sweeping everything away and flattening the buildings to the ground, Father Henschke, one of our young Australian missionaries, accompanied by a lay Brother, was making a perilous voyage to Port Darwin. Brother Alphonsus succeeded in anchoring the lugger near the shore. During the night another lugger was dashed into the St. Francis, and at once sank under the Darwin jetty. At dawn the Brother described the wrecks of several other vessels, but a kindly Providence had saved his own from destruction. The anchor chain, however, soon snapped, and the lugger was borne forward irresistibly, through a clump of mangroves, and stranded on the rocks. But, thank God, at high tide the skipper succeeded in getting the boat out to sea.

When the St. Francis, which was, of course, badly injured, had been sufficiently repaired, Father Henschke, under the guidance of his missionary skipper, struck out for Bathurst Island, where they arrived safely. As their dinghy had been smashed, the natives of the island rowed a canoe to meet the St. Francis. On the way to the shore the canoe somersaulted, and Father Henschke swam vigorously ashore, and, after drying himself as best he could, offered the Holy Sacrifice in a spirit of deep gratitude for God's goodness in not allowing one life on the mission to be lost.

"On looking round," writes Father Henschke, "I could see a great change had taken place during my absence. Most of the buildings, including the presbytery, the convent, and the church, were flat on the ground. Many trees were blown over, and those that remained standing had very few leaves or branches on them. Some of the fences were blown over, and the cattle, goats, and pigs had finished all we had in the garden. We had a couple of hundred logs ready for the sawmill, and all these were carried out to sea. The engine and mill were covered with sea-water. All our provisions, books, clothing, medicines, etc., were either buried or carried out to sea."

After giving the various details of the destruction wrought, Father Henschke adds:—"This means that we must begin to rebuild our mission. Seven years of material work was destroyed in a few hours. We are reduced to real poverty. The Sisters are living in a small bark house until we are able to build a new con-

vent. Father Gsell and myself are occupying a small storeroom that escaped the hurricane. The school, although leaning very much to one side and with a few holes in the roof and walls, is our temporary chapel. But we are unable as yet to preserve the Blessed Sacrament. I made an altar and a few seats in our former chapel, but these were all smashed under the falling building. Every book I possessed has been destroyed, even my breviaries and theological books. Like all other missions, we must expect our trials. In other parts of the world we read of places destroyed by fire, floods, or storm, and after such misfortunes everything seems to flourish. Success seems to follow failure. The Church in the early centuries was openly persecuted, and this only strengthened the foundations. And when the enemies of Our Lord thought they triumphed in crucifying Him, their misdoing saved the world.

"So we must simply keep up courage. Exteriorly our work so far has come to nought: our labor has been in vain. But our Divine Saviour only considers the working of grace. If by our labors, our disappointments, our privations, we have aided the souls of these poor natives, we must be contented. We will make a fresh start. After having erected a few buildings in which we will be able to live, we trust to be able to continue the work of evangelisation."

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

S.M.M. (Palmerston North).—The *Tablet* Company is not a medical association. Like yourself, we would be often pleased to know where to find remedies for chilblains, neuralgia, and warts raised on the proverbial good temper of the Editor by idiotic queries from his correspondents.

"BARNEY."—The Tetrarch was of a brilliancy, but only for one season. Therefore it is hard to compare him with consistent performers. Eclipse belonged to one Colonel Kelly. When a horse wins by such a margin that the other runners are not placed, one can conceive the meaning of Colonel Kelly's challenge, "Eclipse first and the rest nowhere." Manifesto and Jerry M. were two champions across big country. We shall not be "at home" if you write to us on such topics for at least six months to come. But don't be lonely.

"LUTETIA."—Most modern French novels are of a light kind—to put it mildly. René Bazin is always safe and interesting. Henri Bordeaux, less interesting, is usually sane and healthy. You will find the short story at its best in O. Henry's works without going to Maupassant, who is brilliant, but too often more than coarse. Louys is the same—only more so.

"READER."—Yes. We say it here and now again. The parent who neglects the opportunity of sending his children to a Catholic school is a stumbling-block as far as the child's soul is concerned. The game of trying to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds where salvation is at stake is an overrated amusement. "Because ye are neither hot nor cold I will begin to vomit ye out of my mouth" is the last word on the subject, even if it was said 2000 years ago.

"SUBSCRIBER."—More than one Catholic has lost his hair because we hold that Ireland is as important as Belgium. It is too much to expect that all our readers are reasonable. But we are Irish, thank you, and we will die in our boots. Cheer up, anyhow, and don't worry.

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