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A PRIEST'S LIFE RICH IN SERVICE

Chaldean Lazarist and his Literary Achievements

Forty Volumes in Syrian Tongue Fruit of Life-Work

A life of which the general public has heard little, if anything, a life rich in service in the cause of science and religion, was closed when Father Paul Bedechan, priest of the congregation of the Missions, breathed his last in the hospital of the Sisters of Charity in Cologne recently. Science, literature and religion lost a worthy champion by the death of this Lazarist Father of Persia, who left to the world no less than forty published volumes in the Syrian language, 35 of which were written in the ancient Chaldean tongue, while five were composed by the deceased in the neo-Aramaic dialect of Urmiah. Most of the older books are editions from manuscripts which Father Bedechan obtained in whatever library they could be found.

Father Bedechan himself has sketched the first forty years of his life in the following modest statement: "I was born on November 27, 1838, of a Catholic Chaldean family in Khosrow, in Persia, in the province of Salmas. The Catholic Mission was erected in Urmiah and in my birthplace and in the year 1841. At the age of 12 I was admitted into the Boys' Seminary of the Missionaries. I felt a vocation to the life of a Lazarist, and, therefore, entered the Novitiate of that Congregation at Paris on October 27, 1856, where I pursued my theological studies until my ordination on May 25, 1861. Appointed Apostolic missionary of the Congregation of the Propaganda, I returned to Persia, where I was active for 19 years as a Missionary."

Utter Lack of Catholic Printed Books

In his home country the young missionary discovered that the poor Catholics lacked all facilities necessary for real progress in intellectual and religious life. American Methodists, who had settled among the Christians of Urmiah and the surrounding country (some 300 villages), in 1834, issued ancient Chaldean and neo-Aramaic publications from their own printery. For lack of other books, writes Father Bedechan, "our Mission was obliged to use these Methodist publications."

The zealous Persian Missionary felt still more keenly the fact that the Chaldean clergy had no printed Breviaries. In some of the more important cities there were one or two manuscript copies in the churches, but it was impossible for the priests in the country to obtain a Breviary. Besides, the few existing copies were by no means unobjectionable, having been used at one time by the Nestorians, and only the most necessary eliminations having since been made. Just how inadequate such a Breviary was may be inferred from the fact that the latest revision of the Chaldean breviary had been ordered by a Nestorian Patriarch in the seventh century. While the priests were in this sort of a predicament the faithful were utterly without printed prayer books and devotional books.

In the year 1880 Father Bedechan returned to Europe in order to labor there for his people and his church. He resided in Paris for five years, was Director of Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul of the Belgian Province, in the Mother House at Ans, near Liege, for fifteen years, after which time he moved to Cologne-Nippes, to the hospital of the Vincentian Sisters, devoting his entire life to the publication of Syrian manuscripts from the ancient days of the Church and the compilation of devotional books in the language of the people.

Fruitful Labors of Priest-Student

In 1885 Father Bedechan published a translation, in the Urmiah dialect, of the Imitation of Christ; a year later in the same dialect, a book of prayer and spiritual reading; the 3000 copies of this edition were soon disposed of, and a new, enlarged edition of 6000 copies was published in 1893; this printing being again exhausted, a third edition has become necessary.

In the year 1886 the first part of the Divine Office was published, and in 1887 the complete breviary (three volumes of altogether 304 pages) was brought out. Rome was so well pleased with this work that the Church authorities immediately purchased one-half of the entire edition, in order thereby to take part of the financial burden from Father Bedechan's shoulders. This publication represented an expenditure of approximately \$8000, half of which sum was borne by Father Bedechan himself.

Among the books published in New-Aramaic for popular use were a Catechism, a school reader, a Bible History, and a book of devotions for the month

of May—the "May of Roses," as the Chaldeans name it. A Life of the Saints appeared in 1912, regarding which Father Bedechan wrote, while the book was in preparation: "In order to meet a real need and to comply with numerous requests I am at present engaged in a most fatiguing and expensive undertaking. I have selected and compiled 1285 lives of Persian martyrs, of Oriental and Occidental saints, ranging from the earliest centuries down to the present." The selection and compilation, however, was only part of the work; it was necessary also to translate the lives into New-Aramaic. In addition to these popular writings the indefatigable priest also published manuscripts of the classic period of Chaldean literature, which he had procured from the Vatican library, from libraries in London, Paris, Berlin, Strasbourg and other places.

Bore Financial Burden of all Books
During the last nine years of his life Father Bedechan devoted himself to a translation into New-Aramaic of the New Testament; although completed some months ago, the manuscript was not placed in the hands of the printer because the translator could not meet the extremely high cost of producing it. It is a singular and striking fact that Father Bedechan defrayed the expenses connected with the publication of all his books, which by the way, were printed in Leipzig. The noble student and toiler received no earthly reward for his stupendous labors; the sole distinction awarded him was the appointment by Rome as Counselor of the Congregation of the Propaganda.

A Type of Priest-Scientist

Father Bedechan was the type of the Catholic priest and scientist; unselfish he made great sacrifices in the interest of religion and science; learned and kind, he was ever ready to assist all who came to him asking charity, religious guidance, or information in matters pertaining to his particular field of study. Men like Father Bedechan are not alone pious sons of the Church, but indefatigable promoters of science, literature and secular culture. The world owes much to the Church for the service rendered by men of this type.
C. B. of the C. V.

CITIZENSHIP COLUMN

Rights and Duties of American Citizenship Explained

LESSON 2

1. Q. What great Americans helped America to secure her independence? A. Samuel Adams, Patrick Henry, John Hancock, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Charles Carroll of Carrollton, John Adams, and George Washington.

2. Q. What noted foreigners helped America in its fight for independence? A. Lafayette from France, Kosciuszko and Pulaski from Poland, Baron Steuben from Prussia, DeKalb from Bavaria, and Barry, Moylan, Montgomery and others from Ireland.

3. Q. In what year did England acknowledge America to be free and independent? A. In 1783.

4. Q. What great event took place after the gaining of independence? A. The Constitution of the United States was adopted in 1789.

5. Q. What is the Constitution of the United States? A. The Constitution of the United States is that written document which directs and keeps in check those officials who exercise the powers of administering the national government. It is the fundamental law under which the country is governed.

6. Q. On what principle does the Constitution rest? A. On the principle that there are certain rights that belong to every man, and which no authority on earth has a right to take away.

7. Q. What body under the Constitution was given the duty of preserving and interpreting these laws? A. The Supreme Court of the United States.

8. Q. What effect did the Constitution have upon the thirteen States? A. The Constitution bound together the thirteen States into a single nation which is now the United States of America.

9. Q. What effect did the independence of America have upon other countries? A. The success of America brought out Rome was so well pleased with this work that the Church authorities immediately purchased one-half of the entire edition, in order thereby to take part of the financial burden from Father Bedechan's shoulders. This publication represented an expenditure of approximately \$8000, half of which sum was borne by Father Bedechan himself.

10. Q. What form of government was established by the Constitution? A. A representative democracy—that is, a republic, in which the people rule.
NOTE—In the American view, the thirteen States had ceased to be colonies after July 4, 1776, while Great Britain acknowledged their independence in 1783. The Constitution made in 1787 became binding in June 1788.

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