

LOOK OUT BELOW!

By REV. (Lt Col) FRANCIS L. SAMPSON

To bring you up to date—Father Sampson, chaplain of the 101st Airborne Division, U.S. Army paratrooper corps, chuted into Normandy on D-Day and later into Holland, where he was captured by a Nazi patrol and marched to a prisoner of war camp.

Contraband In The Pulpit

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Toward the end of March of 1945 an American colonel by the name of James Alger had become very sick while being marched from the Stalag in Poland where many American officers were imprisoned.

The guards brought him up to Stalag IIA, and he remained with us for nearly three weeks.

He was a very clever man, and it didn't take him long to size up the guards and contact the one to be bribed. Through this guard he was able to have a radio smuggled in piece by piece.

We had tried this before but had never been able to assemble a complete radio. He told us that BBC was broadcasting instructions every week to prisoners of war, and as the war drew to a close, it was essential that we comply with these orders.

The great problem was to find a suitable place to hide the radio. For the "Georgie" which made a thorough inspection of every barracks. They would pull up the floor boards, take the bunks apart, and probe the ground around and under barracks. In short, they did their job thoroughly and well.

Finally an idea dawned upon Colonel Alger that might offer security for the radio. After checking it with me (for I would be implicated), he had a man build a little pulpit for my chapel, and the soldier did a masterful job in fixing a little trap door on the top.

He then covered the whole thing with a piece of the scarlet blanket material, and inserted into a hole a long spike that kept the trap door from opening. The radio dropped out in front of the entire congregation. There was a long three or four seconds of silence, and then the place broke into a roar.

of laughter. It was with considerable embarrassment that I covered the radio and stuffed it back into the pulpit.

I then tried to compose myself and restore order. The constant snickering made it very difficult to concentrate on the sermon, and after about five painful minutes I gave up and went to Communion. I felt pretty sure that they would say nothing. These particular guards had been very decent and quite helpful on many occasions.

Just before our liberation, when most of the guards were taking off towards the west to escape the Russians and to surrender to the Americans, I gave each of these guards a note to Americans who might capture them. The note stated that these Germans had been friendly and helpful to American prisoners of war. I haven't any idea whether the notes helped them or not.

Easter in Stalag IIA will always be remembered vividly and joyfully, I believe, by everyone who was there. The memory and lesson of that day will always remain with me until the day I die.

Good Friday had been observed by Catholics and Protestants alike in the American compound with Stations of the Cross and an hour's meditation taken from the "imitation of Christ"—the chapter on the Royal Road of the Holy Cross—a road of which these emaciated men of all nations had some personal knowledge. The had managed to obtain from the French who worked downtown German priest a set of paraphrases which they were successful in smuggling into the camp.

We prepared, without the Germans' knowledge, to hold an outdoor Solemn High Mass. The guard crew had been reduced to a skeleton force by this time, for nearly every German under sixty had been sent to the front. Each nation was to be represented on the altar, and each nation had a little choir with the principal parts to be sung by all the choirs together.

We hoped and prayed for a good day, and it turned out perfectly. About a half hour before the Mass, word was sent to the various compounds to assemble in the big field beside the kitchen. The Germans were too bewildered to make much of a protest. Besides, the war was so close to being over that they were very anxious to be friendly.

The solemn old French priest was the celebrant of the Mass. I was the deacon, the Dutch priest was the subdeacon, the Polish priest was the master of ceremonies, an Italian seminarian was the assistant master of ceremonies, the Belgian Man of Confidence was the thurifer.

For acolytes we had a Serbian, a Scotchman, an Englishman, and a Russian. (The French priest told me that this Russian was a saint.) Two French priests directed and coordinated the choir.

All of the Catholics and many of the Non-Catholics attended. The number was well up in the thousands, the largest congregation I have ever seen, apart from a national Eucharistic Congress.

The crowd entirely surrounded the altar, and what a sight it was! Many of the Germans were there, too, not as guards, but as worshippers.

This was the Catholic Church. Here were Frenchmen kneeling next to Serbs, next to Poles; Americans worshipping beside Belgians, beside Italians, Scotsmen finding the heart of brotherhood in the Mass with the Dutch, with Germans, and with Russians.

There was no argument here, no friction, no hatred, no intrigue or struggle for balance of power. Here was the Christ being elevated again and drawing all things to Himself. Here was a King whom all could love and obey and in that love and obedience find the happiness and freedom every man longs for.

These were the thoughts of the brief sermon which was preached in four languages by the four ministers of the Mass: in French, in English, in Italian, and in Polish.

Certainly no man who attended that Easter Mass will ever forget it. Hundreds upon hundreds of men went to Holy Communion at that Mass, and it took the four priests about half an hour to distribute Communion. I believe that every American Catholic received.

After the Mass the French priest had a little party for the priests and servers. It was then that he paid the finest compliment to American Catholics that I have ever heard. "You Americans," he said, "are the world's greatest lovers of the Eucharist."

Shortly after this we heard the tragic news of President Roosevelt's death. We held a solemn memorial ceremony to which every nationality in the camp sent its highest ranking representative.

We knew the day of liberation was almost at hand. Russian artillery in the east could be heard in the distance, and American artillery in the west.

German civilians were evacuating Neubrandenburg, traveling on anything that had wheels. Confusion and terror among the civilians and the retreating German wounded was the order of the day.

I thought that I had almost become emotionally numb to the sight of suffering and death, but the events of the next several days were to instill in me an even greater disgust and abhorrence for war.

The recently printed book "Look Out Below" is published with permission of the Catholic University of America Press, Washington. All photos illustrating this series in the Courier-Journal are official U.S. Army photos.

NEXT WEEK—Liberation.



Charity Gets Treasure Trunk

Memphis—(RNS)—Hazel E. Wilder looks at the 47-page handwritten short story said to be an original by O. Henry which was discovered in chest donated to a Memphis, Tenn., Catholic charity salvage store. The manuscript may prove to be one of the richest treasures ever found in an old trunk. Proclaimed genuine by a handwriting expert, it was locked up for safekeeping to await bids from prospective purchasers. Entitled "The Ventures," the story was published in the now-extinct "Everybody's Magazine" in 1909, the year before O. Henry died.

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BOOK SHELF

Saint In India

By SISTER MARGARET TERESA Nazareth College

"A Pearl to India: The Life of Roberto de Nobili," by Vincent Cronin. Maps, notes, and index. 297 pp. Dutton \$39.45 at all bookstores.

Vincent Cronin, able son of the novelist A.J., has outdone his own Wise Man from the West (Life of Mateo Ricci) in this biography of the first missionary Jesuit to "go Brahmin" to become all things to the Hindu—for the sake of Christ.

The jacket comment may be taken literally. "One of the most momentous journeys of exploration ever undertaken by the human mind."

The time was 1605. The young man so soon to vow himself for life to the customs of a Brahmin guru (wappings of red ochre cloth for dress, rice diet, mud hut dark as John Flannery's confessional for dwelling, where day and night he would minister to individual souls), was as noble as his name suggests, a son of the powerful of his world—a protégé of Popes and Cardinals.

In Portuguese India he could have followed the usual course, drawing many thousands of outcasts to the Church by his zeal and charm, and living in peace and plenty.

But he saw clearly—saw right through custom, compromise, the western gaze that permitted exploitation—saw the true Hindu mind rich in a millennial University culture, eager to find truth through debate and analysis, but unable to draw near a teacher who ate the unclean, touched the unpouchable.

To reach the soul of interior India, the Brahmin caste of Madurai (and what the Brahmin approved all other castes would accept) he must cease to be a despised Parang (Frank) like his fellow priests.

He must use his nobility of birth, explain himself as of Raj caste, be served only by Brahmins, live with a companion priest in unutterable poverty.

He so lived; he was sick all ways; but his energy, which was his charity, did not fail, nor

did the brilliance of his mind—these made him the Pearl to India, and slowly made him the beloved "Teacher of Reality."

His Christian enemies the Go were powerful even in Rome; the two-year communication distance from Rome worked sometimes for a compromise against him; some of his friends were shocked, some disloyal; some "measured up" to his difficult saintliness.

Cronin's story cannot even pause upon the miraculous progress Cronin's biographer—other—but even so, outward drama marks every day of the story.

Cronin, bless him, interested in the inner drama, gives an encyclopedic report of Hindu thinking on existence, on epistemology, on ethics.

His father Roberto forgets to regard pagan thought as vile; learns one Indian tongue after another, perfectly, eloquently; learns much of the poetry each by heart; learns Sanskrit; writes long papers in verse as beautiful as the Ramayana, giving the Christian story in terms of the six philosophical systems of India—thought is contained until a Brahmin questioner proves it silly; follows Vedanta with the learned, and Ishak devotion with the simpler, more theistic Davidians; supplies India with a Christian Indian literature—in the 1600's!

De Nobili convinces his flock (and us) by his entire abnegation in an ancient, hitherto impenetrable culture. These Vas, who by right he might not even so, he sets head of through a convert and makes available to Western apostles.

Before the end he needs a papal committee, with it the learned Irishman Peter Lombard as its determining theologian, to extricate him from the accusations of the Por

Polish Schools Win Rights

Winnipeg—(NC)—Poland's 15 private academic high schools and its technical high schools run by Catholic religious congregations have all obtained the right of state schools, it was revealed here.

COURIER-JOURNAL

Friday, May 29, 1969

Ignorance

Said Faith's

Obstacle

Jefferson City—(NC)—Ignorance of the Faith was characterized by Bishop Joseph Marling, D.D.S. of Jefferson City as the "very greatest obstacle of the Church in winning the world to Christ."

At the joint convention of the Diocesan Councils of Catholic Men and Women in Hales High School here, the Bishop also outlined a two-point program as a guide to increasing knowledge of religion.

1) A "Know the Faith" plan to begin in September will emphasize the reading each month of a pamphlet selected from those printed by the Knights of Columbus' Information Bureau in St. Louis.

2) Confraternity of Christian Doctrine study clubs will be launched in the fall with the first object of study being the sacrifice of the Mass.

THE BISHOP further announced to the more than 500 persons attending the convention these programs to be taken up on a diocesan basis. They are:

A method of attending low Mass to carry out the recent instruction of the Holy See on active participation in the Mass.

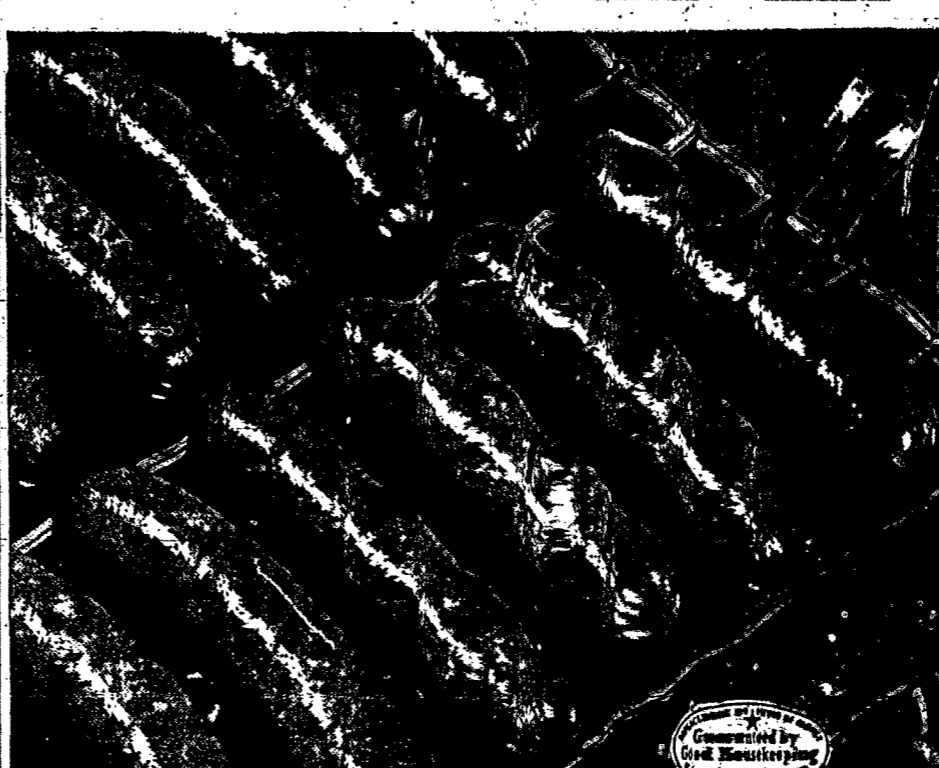
The establishment in each parish of a Holy Name Society to which "we wish all men to belong."

The preparation of a diocesan code for teenage conduct to be entrusted to the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women.

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