

ARNOLD DAMEN, S. J.



BY THE SAME AUTHOR

**THE EARLY FRIENDS OF CHRIST
OUT TO WIN
TALKS TO PARENTS
TALKS TO BOYS**



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A CHAPTER IN THE MAKING OF CHICAGO

BY

REV. JOSEPH P. CONROY, S. J.

Author of "The Early Friends of Christ," etc.



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TO THE MEMORY
OF THE EARLY MEMBERS
OF THE PARISH OF THE HOLY FAMILY
HELPERS OF DAMEN
WHOSE DEEDS LIVE AFTER THEM
IN THE FAITH THEY SPREAD
IN THE COUNTRY THEY SERVED

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ARNOLD DAMEN, S.J.

CHAPTER I

A SERMON AND A STORM

ONE dark April night, just fifty years ago, a group of persons were hurrying through a street of Chicago's south side. In the midst of this group was a little boy of nine years, who was put to it to keep the pace of his elders, whom he was accompanying. And the going was not without its hazards, for it must be remembered that the sidewalks of Chicago in those days were, like delicate lace work, largely composed of interstices. To hurry along its streets at night called for a degree of daring and indicated that some happening of importance was under way.

All nights in Chicago were, of course, dark, the feeble gas lamps at intervals merely marking a spot where one might ultimately arrive if one were careful. But this night, the boy remembers, was black. Underfoot, mud on the sidewalks, mud in the street; overhead, almost scraping the roofs of the houses, wallowed folds of heavy clouds with terrifying growlings coming from their caverns. Every few seconds hideous forked lightnings streaked out as though darting and searching about for somebody to shrivel to a cinder. One of the scenes they lit up, the boy recalls, was the city morgue at Eighteenth Street, a spot wild horses could not have dragged him by any night he was alone. Ghosts were popularly believed to walk there, and pop-eyed boys told hair-raising tales of having seen and been chased by them.

But the white lightning glare revealed other things, too. Other dark groups, who could not be ghosts, were momentarily visible in the flashes, pushing ahead against the swooping gusts of wind, picking their way in single file across the ankle-deep mud at the crossings, all the groups converging toward a dense crowd that was steadily disappearing into the doors of a church at Eighteenth and Butterfield Streets—St. John's Church, then in the suburbs of Chicago.

A mission was in progress there and the great Father 'Diamond' was to preach.

In due time the group to which the little boy belonged got into the church and found place in the few empty seats left at the rear. The crowds came packing in after them until the aisles, the sanctuary, every spot of standing room in the church was taken. The tiny vestibule gave evidence, from the pushing of bodies and the sliding of feet, that the only place left for many who came would be the street. Any fire commissioner today would be terrified at the crowd jammed into every inch of that wooden church. A few jets of gaslight from brackets on the walls did little more than make the darkness visible, producing the impression of some mysterious, subterranean gathering in the catacombs.

After what must have been a sharp struggle to pierce the crowd, the preacher of the evening rose into the pulpit and stood, looking at the congregation. Then, amid a perfect silence, Father Damen made the sign of the cross, 'In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.' And just as he had finished the words, the storm broke. 'Broke' isn't the word. It exploded. The very first crash of thunder that shot out of the sky made the whole building shudder from stem to stern, like a ship hit by a tremendous sea. The gaslights along the wall were all but extinguished and the church went into total dark-

ness. A moment, and a flash of lightning, crackling viciously, swept through the windows and lit the interior brighter than day. Then a second thunder crack, worse than the first and apparently right over the roof, and the congregation began to show signs of fear. They held, however, and the threatened stampede did not start. Because Father Damen opened his sermon and went on with it as though thunder and lightning did not exist. The boy who listened that night will never forget that sermon and that storm. And yet, except the words of the sign of the cross, he does not remember a single word of the sermon. The whole affair resolved itself, in his young mind, into a contest between Father Damen and the thunder; and with the sporting instinct of youth, he was wondering, and perhaps betting, who would win. The storm did not let up. One would imagine that with its first dozen terrific bolts it would have exhausted itself, or that the sword of the blinding lightning would weary. No; the battle went on and on, with Father Damen in the pulpit there battling against them. When the lightning flashed around him in the pulpit, he was like the Bible pictures of Moses on Mount Sinai, receiving the tables of the Law, his white hair, his giant figure, his voice on the mountain top, mediating between God and the people. In after years, when the boy read about the historic storm scene at St. Peter's in Rome when the Cardinals of the Vatican Council were voting one by one for the Infallibility of the Pope and the *Placets* of their Eminences were each answered by a terrific crash of thunder above the dome—he recalled that night in St. John's Church, with Father Damen preaching, when he had heard its duplicate. And, like Moses and like the Cardinals, Father Damen won the contest. His voice poured through that raging of the elements, steady, melodious and triumphant. If any human voice was ever put to the test, surely his was

that night. And it was not merely that he sounded above the thunder. His words came forth articulate and clear. He preached a sermon through all that crack and roar of heavy artillery and that incessant, dazzling, disturbing glitter of dangerous lightning, and he seemed to do it easily. He did not shriek, shout or bellow. He kept his voice on the key all the way, with indefinite resources of power held in reserve for every emergency. When he needed more power, all he had to do was, as the chauffeur has it, to 'step on it' and the power was there.

The astute reader has, no doubt, already penetrated the mystery of the passive small boy in this scene and has identified him with the writer. Well, that was the first time I heard Father Damen preach—likewise the last. As I have admitted that I do not recall a single word of the one sermon I attended, it may be inferred that I never heard him at all. But this I cannot admit. Just as there are songs, so there are sermons without words. Many of us, perhaps, after years of experience, wish there were more of both. Not suggesting the least criticism, however, of Father Damen's words, I am sure I took vital strength from his sermon, sure that I sensed what he meant to tell me. Indeed, of all the sermons I have since listened to, and they have not been few, the sermon of Father Damen in St. John's Church that wild night is the one I remember best and, as far as I can judge, took most away from. The occasion was admittedly spectacular, the sulphurous fires and the all-shaking thunder without, suggesting evil spirits in Miltonic battle, and the clear, musical, unbroken voice of Father Damen ringing through the confusion with unwavering defiance, like the archangel's trumpet challenging the demons to the fight.

But there was something deeper than mere pagantry. The man revealed himself beyond possibility of misconception. Faith was there, the rooted belief

that was part of him. One sensed it easily; determined courage, a disregard of difficulties, a fearlessness of danger; personal affection for the souls of his people; a stanch, direct sincerity that brought him into touch with every person in the church and a tenacity that would not let go until he had brought them all over to his side. The man was there and the subject and the occasion. And it is the man I remember.

If a boy of nine can be so moved by a sermon and can recall it so vividly after fifty years, it can only mean that Father Damen possessed the gift of eloquence and that the affection and the admiration lavished on him by his generation was neither misplaced nor exaggerated.

CHAPTER II

THE HOMELAND OF DAMEN

THERE is a hardy perennial saying, handed down to us very likely from the Garden of Eden, to the effect that appearances are deceitful. Such an evident truism in theory is this, that it pains us to hear it. In practice, however, we ignore it so steadily that it is doubtful that a day passes but every one of us trips and falls heavily over it. I bring it in here, not for the purpose of pointing a moral, but because I am going to talk about Holland and I begin by raising a warning finger.

The man in the street, if you should mention Holland to him, would know all about it. 'Yes,' he would unravel, 'a little place over in Europe about as big as a golf course; full of water hazards; people wear baggy trousers, flamboyant petticoats, wooden shoes, steeple hats. You see them in those pictures of Rip Van Winkle we studied in school. They used to be around New York in the old days, a lot of them. Dutchmen, they called them. A stolid sort; no action; can sit in one spot all day with a stein on the table, and smoking a meerschaum pipe; got a big reputation for cheese.'

This is funny, but the man in the street doesn't think it is. He passes this out as a bit of accurate statistics. It is the sediment of history and no more belongs to history than mud belongs to the water it settles in. The truth is that Holland is the 'fightingest' country in Europe. In fact, considering her area, not much more than a hundred miles square, we think

it safe to claim that more fighting has been done on that tiny space than in any equal territory of the world's history. Up to 1579, while Holland was part of the Netherlands, her story is one of battle after battle. Since then and until the end of the French Revolution in 1815, Holland has fought with Spain, with France, England, Germany, Austria, Sweden and Belgium. For many years her navy was the strongest in the world, and held its own against the combined fleets of France and England. Her merchant ships touched at every coast, and we remember that it was Dutchmen who first sailed up the Hudson River. Among other feats of her busy martial life, she drove Spain out of her boundaries several times, drove out Louis XIV and, twice, Napoleon. She has been called the 'battlefield of Europe.'

All this fighting does not mean that the Dutch are a particularly quarrelsome people. It is the result, partly of her geographical position and partly of her national occupation. Geographically, Holland was the pivotal point for all the whirl of clashing nations in the west of Europe, and the winds of war kept constantly buffeting her from one alliance to another in a continually shifting political scene. Nationally she is a commercial and a seafaring country and she had to have sea room for her markets. In a world where everyone is grabbing for markets, this meant only one thing for Holland—she had to fight.

In her civil and religious life, too, she has been torn by internal discords, most of which can be traced back to the troubles arising from the Reformation. Holland had always been a sturdy Catholic country, and if her priests had been true to her, there is every probability that, with her natural tenacity of character, she would be entirely so today. But as the Zuyder Zee broke through her dikes to get into the land, so did the Calvinists break through her outer defenses,

the clergy, to eat into her religious life. A persecution of the Catholics followed, which for bitter cruelty is comparable only to the persecution of Henry VIII and Elizabeth in England. All this reacted upon her civil life. Politics and theology became inextricably entangled, and, when the Calvinists later split among themselves, further divisions arose that have lasted to the present time.

But even if all these things had not happened to Holland, she would have had another big fight on her hands. All through her history she has had to fight the sea. Hamlet's line about 'taking arms against a sea of troubles' cannot be criticized as a mixed metaphor in Holland. It is literally true of her. For seven hundred years, while pushing back the armies of Europe with one hand, she has had to keep pushing back the sea with the other. Between diking, impoldering, draining, canalling, she has had enough to do simply to keep the ground under her feet. She is forever at the pumps. For Holland is largely below the sea level, and the sea is after her. Already out of an area only one fourth the size of Illinois, the North Sea has taken two huge mouthfuls, the Zuyder Zee and the Wadden, one-seventh of her territory. Disastrous inundations have from time to time swept over the land. One of them, in 1421, destroyed seventy-two towns and more than a hundred thousand lives. She is the most sea-bitten country in the world, living under the sleepless menace of treacherous waters. Her energy is evident in this also, that, after studying the tactics of the sea, she has counter-attacked so as not only to hold her own but actually to gain upon her foe.

Nor shall we fully appreciate the ability, vigor and tenacity of the Dutch without remembering her colonies. On a large map of Europe, Holland is merely a thumbnail's size. But off along the Equator between the Pacific and Indian Oceans, for three hundred years

and more, she has owned, developed and governed a territory fifty-seven times as large as herself, with a population today of nearly fifty million people, as many as the United States had in 1880. This population includes natives of every variety found in the Far East, and she governs them all with only thirty-six thousand soldiers, of whom but six thousand are Europeans. Of all colonies, those of the Dutch are most prosperous, well cared for and contented. This ordered and steady control of a distant colony, with an area one fifth as large as the United States, including Alaska, and scattered across a multitude of islands, is effected largely by the civil service established in the Dutch East Indies, the most remarkable in the world.

All things considered, then, it is the nadir of misinformation to say that there has been 'no action' in Holland. To meet the situations forced upon her, she couldn't be idle even if she wished it. As to the reputed stolidity of the Dutch temperament, it is perhaps a providential balance that the Dutchman has about him a touch of phlegm. Otherwise, between the war devil whooping on his boundaries and the deep sea battering at his coast, he would long since have been driven, not only out of his country, but out of his mind as well. Considering what he has been through, nobody should envy the Dutchman his long pipe and a long smoke out of it. The pipe is dry and the smoke is quiet, and dryness and quiet are things he has learned to appreciate.

If from this snapshot of Holland's history we should attempt to deduce the salient features of her national character, the result could be stated, reasonably, I think, in the following terms: The Dutchman is a determined, tenacious person, or he would have been long ago washed out of his country, or bayoneted out of it; he is practical rather than visionary, expecting tangible results from his investment of time and

labor. This we could forecast from the long training he has had in bailing out his fatherland. He is a courageous lover of justice, freedom and his personal rights, as the frequent wars he has engaged in amply prove. He can be downright and intolerant, as his religious history testifies. Vigilance and patience he must have learned along the dikes; economy, from the necessity of snatching his land in handfuls from the sea. Material realities he can grasp firmly, as a man in the sea will take a death grip on a floating spar. His first look will be for what is useful. 'Safety first' is his slogan. He is cool, calculating, deliberate, because he has always had to be wary about keeping his feet on dry land and his head away from flying cannon balls. Visualizing the Dutchman in a composite portrait, we should picture to ourselves a figure standing, both feet sturdily planted, and looking about him with a long, slow, wondering look, as much as to say, 'Well, *that's* all over. What next?' And beneath the picture we should see written the national motto of Holland—*Luctor et Emergo*.

We must not conclude from all this that, in her pursuit of the useful, Holland has forgotten or neglected the beautiful. The Dutchman has his visions, too. He has, if not an effusive, at any rate a steady and genuine enthusiasm for the arts. He is well educated, he likes music, he is world-famous as a painter, and if he had not had to put in so much time at building dikes, he would doubtless have done noble work in architecture.

Finally, religion is one of the great occupations of the Dutchman's soul. 'It has always been the wonder of travelers in Holland,' says a recent writer, 'that so many religious sects should exist in so small a country.' These disruptions occur, of course, only among Protestant bodies. They prove Holland's downright discontent with her experiment in Calvinism. When

the usually shrewd and foresighted Dutchman traded off his Roman Catholicism for Calvinism, that was surely one time he had an eye shut and a foot off the ground. He got the worst of that bargain. It seems a pity, after barring out the sea and driving off all invaders on his material side, that on his spiritual side he should have opened the sluices to the dreary and corrosive flood of Calvinism—of all religions—and allowed himself to bog down in that hopelessly gloomy morass. He is, however, trying to flounder out of it. Catholicism, which was once his strength and comfort, may save him yet. For it begins to appear that he is trading back, slowly but surely. Holland is now nearly forty per cent Catholic. Let us hope that after Calvinism has split itself into a million splinters, he will gather them all up, throw them over the dikes somewhere and walk back to the Catholic Church.

CHAPTER III

THE PATH TO A VOCATION

IN THIS little country of storm and stress Arnold Damen was born. As we follow and observe him throughout his career, we shall find ourselves in touch with the typical, ideal Hollander. His birthplace was in North Brabant, in the little town of Leur, not far from the Belgian frontier. Arnold was the seventh of nine children born to John Damen and his wife Johannah, whose family name was also Damen. John Damen was a prosperous builder of Leur and he lived there until his death in 1848, preceding his wife by but a few months.

The baptismal register of the church at Leur tells us that young Arnold was baptized on the day he was born, March 15, 1815. One of his sponsors was the Very Reverend Arnold Van Arendonk, after whom very likely he was named. From these two facts we may infer that the Damen family were devout followers of their faith and in close touch with their priests. It was not easy to be a Catholic in Holland in those days. Out of the two million inhabitants then in Holland but four hundred thousand were Catholics, all that were left after two centuries of official persecution. This remnant had come through the fire and they must have been staunch to endure it. They were the foundation of the strong Church of two million Catholics in Holland today. And the Damens were among them.

Arnold Damen was born just at the turning point where we may say the modern Holland began. Five

days before his birth, the prince of Orange was crowned as William I, king of the Netherlands. By the treaty of London in 1814, Belgium and Holland had been united into one kingdom, to be known as the Netherlands. During the first fifteen years of his life, therefore, Damen was technically a Netherlander. For many vital reasons this union of the two countries was impossible, and in 1830 the Belgians revolted and set up an independent state, a movement that resulted well for both kingdoms.

The French Revolution had spent itself by the year of Damen's birth, but the waters of confusion still rose all over Europe. Napoleon's stupid idea that he could Napoleonize the world had torn into the very roots of the nations who were fighting for their lives. For almost a generation, beginning with the Terror, war had been the daily bread of Europe. In 1815, the final crash was preparing in Napoleon's last campaign out of Elba, and three months after, Napoleon was finally defeated at Waterloo. Thus, after centuries of bitter struggles, war within and without, a breathing space of quiet was given to Holland. Damen's early boyhood in Brabant was passed during that period of comparative peace.

The country he lived in is one that breathes of peace. Brabant is not as picturesque as the Dutch lowlands, has no striking characteristics that cause the traveler to pause for something that he has not seen before. It is a familiar scene throughout, but a refreshing one, with its woods, its broken undergrowth, its little villages dropped here and there informally, and every turn offering to the eye some pleasing vista, some undisturbed, drowsy nook, which a painter might eagerly seize upon as his ideal of dreamy contentment—a 'homey' country all through, such as the stifled city-dweller imagines to himself when he would escape from his canyoned streets into a holiday land where he can

take simple, cheerful thoughts out into the clear sun and send them irresponsibly chasing after the birds and butterflies. No healthier spot could be chosen for a young boy to grow up in, body and soul. Damen's sturdy physique and his simple, evenly balanced character owed much to the advantages of these early surroundings.

Sleepily serene as the place seems, romance walks at hand, none the less. Damen's town of Leur is but five miles from the famous city of Breda, that dates back to the eleventh century. From 1534 to the beginning of the nineteenth century Breda might be offered as a sample of the political and the war atmosphere of Holland. The dramatic series of the captures and recaptures of Breda makes an unusual chapter in history. The Spaniards took it in 1581. Nine years after, Maurice of Nassau retook it by a daring strategy, wherein sixty-eight men, hidden under turf in a peat-boat, got into the town and drove the Spaniards out. The spot where the peat-boat lay is pointed out to this day as the Spaniards' Hole. In 1625, after a ten months' siege, the Spaniards recaptured Breda and they felt so good after it that Velasquez celebrated the event in one of his greatest paintings, *Las Lanzas*, known also as the 'Surrender of Breda.' During the French wars the town was taken and retaken twice between 1793 and 1813. Charles II, king of England, lived at Breda during his exile, and William of Orange, another of England's kings, built a fine castle here.

Rambling across this lotus land today, one would not easily suppose that here romance had for centuries gone galloping up and down the lists in a constant succession of tourneys. It seems just as unlikely a combination as that of the Dutchman sitting trancelike by his fire, slowly smoking his long pipe, and the same Dutchman out at sea with his fleet, chasing all the other fleets into harbor. This union of placidity and energy

was what made the Hollander a hard fighter at home and a successful colonist abroad. If we add the supernatural to a character of this kind, we can expect parallel results in its devotion to God's cause, a soul that will master itself thoroughly and, after that, carry the word of God abroad and plant it in other lands.

Through his boyhood, Damen insensibly absorbed both the peace and the romance of Brabant, as his after life fully reveals. His parents saw to it that the grace of God, also, would surround and penetrate him. In spite of the wreckage of all education left in the wake of the Napoleonic wars, the parish school at Leur still managed to function, and here young Arnold spent his earliest school years. During this time he must have shown signs of a vocation to the priesthood. We are told that from his early boyhood he manifested an unusual devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and made many pilgrimages to her famous shrine at Bois-le-Duc. His parents observed the steady development of his character and, after his schooling at Leur, instead of his going to work as most of the boys of that day had to do, they sent him to Belgium, to the classical college at Turnhout. This was a college founded and conducted by M. Pierre Jean de Nef, who turned an ample fortune and distinguished attainments to the training of young men for the priesthood, with the special purpose of sending them to the foreign missions. De Nef directed, supported and taught in the school and his noble work was blest. Hundreds of priests went to the missions from the college of Turnhout. It was always M. de Nef's idea to secure a teaching Order to staff his college, but the disorganized condition of things prevented this until a few years before his death, when he placed the school under the direction of the Jesuits. In Arnold Damen's time the school numbered about one hundred, all day-scholars. After that the Jesuits made it a boarding school and

attached to it an apostolic college, the number of students increasing to more than three hundred. Damen studied well while here, as his standing shows. In 1836, as a sophomore he was sixth in a class of twenty, and the following year as a junior he was seventh among nineteen.

By this time he had arrived at manhood and was considering what special work of the priesthood he would enter and what part of the world he would select as his destined field. His final decision came as a result of a visit paid to the school by the American Indian missionary, the Jesuit Father De Smet, who had been in Europe since 1833. No one better than De Smet could tell of the needs of America and of its great field for the spread of the faith. In a series of talks he told the boys about the country across the sea—immigrants swarming in at its eastern coast, a continual pouring of the population toward the West, and, out beyond the borders of civilization, the Indians roaming the far prairies where no white man's foot had as yet trod. All these needed spiritual help and a special type of man to provide it. Settling a country means perpetual movement from place to place; newcomers seeking their first homes, oldtimers hearing of more beautiful and fertile spots and voyaging in search of them, and the Indians, naturally nomadic, never at rest unless in motion. The spirit of adventure, of discovery was abroad. Daring young pioneers were thrilling to penetrate all over the mysterious West. Hunters, trappers, lovers of the open life, fled before the thickening population out to the lonely woods and plains, where they lived solitary, or in small groups. Farmers from the stony-soiled eastern states heard of the rich lands waiting for them, packed their household goods and their families into wagons and started westward. The great money hunt was on as well. Traders were exploring every nook and corner for

the chance of barter. A fever of movement possessed the people. Opportunity hid just over the next hill, just beyond the next turn of the river, and they chased it as a lad chases butterflies. And beyond it all, in the great land of wolves and mountain lions and buffaloes, wandered the tribes of red men, worshiping false gods, sunk in superstition, but sunk no deeper perhaps than multitudes of white men worshiping the golden calf. Within the cities, too, were the beginnings of that restlessness and speed that have come to characterize the American modern metropolis. There was much stirring about in the towns; business shifted from point to point; manufactories sprung up, and laborers followed wherever the best chances seemed to lie, freely migrating from city to city. The whole country was in a more or less fluid state, dizzy with the whirl of opportunity and feverishly following one mirage after another.

Clearly, anyone who chose this field to labor in as a priest, had plenty of work cut out for him. Whether he went among the red men or the white, he had the same fundamental difficulties; namely, first to find his flock and then to hold it together. And where the nomadic spirit prevailed of going somewhere else to get something else, there was nothing to be expected but a dragging of anchors. The priest who would successfully shepherd this people had to be all things to all men. He must combine the stolid spiritual tenacity of the recluse with the holiday gayety of the adventurer. With everyone about him in constant motion, he must keep in motion, too. And the movement of the multitude was by no means regimental, with the priest merely keeping step as their chaplain. Each individual chose his own direction and his own terminus and made for it with every ounce of speed he possessed, catch him if you can. Not the quiet, confined, settled European town life, where age-old custom

could enable one to walk down the street blindfolded and greet one's old familiars at a certain spot and hour, because they must be there. This new country was a huge playground full of children let loose from the crowded classroom and running about in every sort of tangle after whatever their new-born fancy chose. Plenty of room here for everybody, all paths open, the pent-up restraints of centuries unloosed, millions of rainbows and a pot of gold at the foot of each. Today, it is true, we still play at this game, but we are more polished at it. We jump for the golden apple with more of a nonchalant and natural manner. We are not so naïve as were the forty-niners.

For a priest, this environment called for high apostolic qualities. He had to be with this movement, at its center and at every point besides, out to the circumference. He had to hold fast to the faith himself, as the core of his own life, and he had to keep each soul of his flock in touch with that faith. He must, therefore, have the sturdy homelike virtues of patience, kindness, simplicity. He must be affable, unwearied, never bored, straightforward and square. He must have romance in his soul also, the romance of the Gospel, the final gifts that St. Paul enumerates in his eulogy of charity. He must believe all things, hope all things, endure all things. In the midst of toil, discouragements and disappointments, delays and oppositions, he must keep steadily to his work in all its details, with no idea of surrender. All this implies physical gifts of strength, a driving power of body, a vivacity and energy that will sag under no strain, but will come up fresh for each new task that besets it.

This was the talk that Father De Smet gave young Damen at Turnhout, and Damen rose to it. How well De Smet gauged his man, after events reveal. The young student held in the bud the very qualities needed for the work—the combination of physical strength,

quiet determination of natural character, and the innate Dutch spirit of romance, that, turned to commercial ends, would have made him a wealthy trader, a celebrated explorer or colonist. Touched with the fire of the supernatural, it lifted him to be a great missionary for souls.

Damen went to M. de Nef, the superior of the school, and offered himself as a candidate for the Jesuit missions in America. M. de Nef had the unusual privilege of receiving applicants for the Society of Jesus, though himself not a member of the Order. His approval of Damen was ratified by the superiors of the Society, and Damen went to his home in Leur to tell his father and mother of his choice. A young man named Adrian Hendrickx had already applied as a Brother for the Missouri Mission and the two waited for a year in Holland until Father De Smet's work in Europe was finished. Meantime De Smet had gathered others for the missions—Father John Gleizal of France, who entered the Jesuits as a priest, Francis D'Hoop, a Belgian, and Father David Duparque, who was to join the diocese of Louisville, in Kentucky. They received final word to be prepared to sail with Father De Smet from Havre in October, 1837. They journeyed by stage through France by way of Paris to Havre. Arrived there, they found Father De Smet down with an attack of sickness so serious that the doctor forbade him to sail. Five days passed and he was not better. The day of departure arrived, the ship weighed anchor and sailed with the five men minus their leader. Whatever they felt about the situation, and it must have been sufficiently depressing, they were not more worried than Father De Smet. For him, it finally got beyond bearing and he solved the difficulty by cutting the knot. He eluded the doctor, made his way to the harbor, chartered a swift boat, overtook the departing ship and climbed aboard, to

the equal amazement and joy of his companions. The sea voyage restored his health. In twelve days, after an unusually swift and tranquil passage, they landed at New York.

The journey from New York to St. Louis, a thousand miles by airline, was not what we can easily make it today, a pleasure jaunt. A hundred years ago the heavy wagon was the only Pullman possible over roads that simply made themselves, whenever there were any roads at all. We have no record of Damen's journey, but it could not have been much more comfortable than De Smet's from the Chesapeake to the Mississippi, made only fourteen years before. That pioneer group carried their movables in wagons and went themselves on foot to Wheeling on the Ohio, floated on flatboats to Shawneetown in Illinois and walked the remaining distance to St. Louis. We may easily suppose that a considerable part of Damen's travel was done *pedibus apostolorum* over every condition of road and through every variety of weather. None the worse for their hardships, the party arrived safely in St. Louis and went at once to Florissant, Missouri, to begin their formal training as novices, on November 22, 1837.

A curious sequence of cause and effect comes to the surface here in connection with the work of Father Damen, showing how the best-laid plans of mice and men can go astray. It looks like a *non sequitur* to say that the French Revolution was the original founder of the great Holy Family parish in Chicago and the ultimate prime mover of all Father Damen's mission work all over the United States. But it is the fact. The French Directoire, in its campaign against Catholicism, hunted Father Charles Nerinckx out of Europe. He located in Kentucky and became its famous missionary. Later he went back to Europe to get recruits

for the work here. Nerinckx was not a Jesuit himself, but he brought De Smet back to America for the Society in 1823. And De Smet in turn went to Europe and brought back Damen. The Revolution builded better than it knew.

CHAPTER IV

HIS NEW HOME

THE village of Florissant lies some fifteen miles from St. Louis and a few miles from the Missouri River, in the Florissant Valley, a spot that for beauty and fertility answers to its name. It is one of the oldest inhabited places in the Mississippi region, as old places go in a young country. Politically it had swung from French to Spanish to French and finally to United States possession within forty years. But through all its changes, the inhabitants were of French descent. As an inland town, remote from the facilities of transportation that make for commercial success, Florissant was destined never to grow and it remains today almost as quiet a place as when young Damen first saw it nearly a hundred years ago. Bishop Du Bourg had given several hundred acres of this valley land to the Jesuits, and here they established the second novitiate of the Society in the United States.

In his extremely interesting and accurate *Saint Ferdinand de Florissant, The Story of an Ancient Parish*, Father Garraghan has given us a description of the Florissant Valley as it is today, unchanged in all essentials from the days when the Jesuits first saw it.

On either side the horizon is broken by a line of gently sloping hills, the land between being quite level to the eye so as to suggest the bed of a prehistoric lake. So indeed did it appear to Bradbury, the naturalist, who passed along here in 1836. The soil is fertile to a degree, being rich, heavy loam of an 'inky blackness,' as pictured by Timothy Flint, the Congregationalist clergyman, who in

the twenties of the last century wrote up the agricultural possibilities of Missouri for the benefit of Eastern readers. If the visit be on the eve of harvest time a great panoramic stretch of rural charms unfolds itself to the eye. Fields of ripened oats and timothy, more often of brightly golden wheat, wave gently in the soft June air—fields, too, of the amplest dimensions, running back from the roadside to the hillocks on either flank. It matters not that the soil has been tilled for a century and a quarter; it still yields copiously of its stored-up wealth even to the least industrious of farmers. Such is the Florissant Valley, in extent some two by twelve miles, Florissant being French for 'blooming' or 'flourishing,' the apt name which the early Creole inhabitants found from the beginning for this genuine garden-spot of Missouri.

Charming as was this location of the Jesuit novitiate, we still remember that idyllic scenery, while undoubtedly nourishing to the soul, falls considerably short of feeding, clothing and housing the body. Golden harvests of real wheat do not rise up under the poet's wand, but over the plowman's furrow. The first thing the little community at Florissant had to face was the problem of living. The only practicable way of doing this was to get it out of the ground. And that meant they had to work. They were poor and, while they could hire some help, much remained that they themselves must do.

The standard novitiate training is largely an indoor process, mental and physical. Much meditation, spiritual reading, self-study, with enough outdoor exercise to preserve the balance of health. But when fields must be plowed and corn sown and harvests reaped and wood cut for fires, another standard of training must perforce prevail. All this Arnold Damen and his companions had to do, and their after lives reveal that they managed to combine with it the meditative training as well. Wisdom builds her own house, and the wise man when put to it, will read as much from the furrows of

a plow as from the pages of a book; will gather in the grain and meanwhile plan for his future spiritual harvest; will find tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything. These novices carried their spiritual life with them into the fields and woods whenever necessity called them there, just as in later years they sustained it through all the distractions of their missionary years in the priesthood.

So we see them putting in the corn, tying up the vines, planting their orchards, their vegetable garden, hewers of wood and drawers of water, singing hymns of praise to God and, when their work was done, saying their Rosary together on their road homeward.

In spite of all the outdoor claims upon them, it must not be supposed that they had no time for secluded study. Their day then would be the equivalent of two days now in a normal man's schedule. They rose at half past four, retired at a little after nine. With each day perfectly mapped ahead, we can easily surmise how little waste time slipped through their fingers and how much orderly work they could pack away in those seventeen hours. And with each one helping the other as they went along, reducing the wear of friction to a minimum, they successfully solved the puzzling problem of how to run a farm and go to school at the same time.

Many of them had to learn the English language. Damen found this quite difficult at the start, though his facile use of it in after years would not suggest that. It is remarkable, in fact, how thoroughly these pioneers mastered the English idiom, literary as well as colloquial, with an accuracy of pronunciation, too, that eliminated brogue almost completely.

Their housing was primitive. The pile of modern buildings that today occupy the old site of the novitiate, the splendid chapel, commodious study and dining

halls, the gardens and recreation grounds, were in those days merely a few log cabins in a wilderness. A picture of the place in 1847, ten years after Damen's time, shows us two buildings joined L-fashion, suggesting rather a corn-crib than a house. They had shelter, and very little more.

We have been able to discover but one letter written by Damen to his home and this was sent from Florissant during his novitiate. It is probable that he did not write many letters to Holland after he left. Later on in life he regretted that he had not done more. Brother Thomas Kelly, S.J., who celebrated his golden jubilee as a Jesuit a few years ago, was one of Damen's recruits to the Society as the result of a mission in Brooklyn in the 'seventies. When he was leaving for the novitiate, he tells us, Father Damen advised him to write home whenever he could, adding, 'It is one of the things I regret, now that it is too late, that I did not write to my people oftener.'

The letter we have is from the *Godsdienstvriend*, literally the 'Friend of Religion,' a periodical similar to our *Ave Maria*. Evidently the editor, in obtaining the letter from the family of Damen, believed that his readers were interested in what the Dutch missionaries were doing in America. It is headed, 'An Extract from a Letter of Mr. A. Damen, of the Novitiate S.J. in N. America.'

A.M.D.G.

ST. STANISLAUS . . . 1839

Dear Parents, Brothers and Sisters:

In my last letter I had decided not to write to you again until I had received an answer. However, since no missionaries arrived this year from Europe, I consider it my duty to gratify your great desire. Possibly I would not be so slow in my correspondence were it not that I have almost forgotten my mother tongue. It is a real task

for me to write in Dutch. I have constantly to consult the dictionary, or to ask Brother Hendriks and Carissimus D'Hoop for words that will express my ideas. You must not therefore be astonished if I use an English or a French word now and then. At times I can't tell whether the word I am using is good Dutch.

I am not going to say anything about bodily things, for a religious, especially a companion of Jesus Christ, must live as though he had no body. All his thoughts, words and deeds should be directed toward a single end, namely, God.

In my last I mentioned that several 'nations' (tribes or settlements) have frequently begged our Superior to send them some of our Fathers. At length he had the pleasure of gratifying the desire of two of those 'nations.' His Reverence has sent Father Helias and Father Buschots to Jefferson. Their parish or mission extends over 150 miles and consists of a mixture of Germans and Frenchmen, with a sprinkling of Irish and Americans. The bulk are Germans and French. However, the Irish are quite numerous, as appears from the fact that 600 Irish were present at a procession recently held by the Fathers. The Fathers have little trouble in practicing the Evangelical Counsels. They have no lay Brother, no servant. (I do not mean a housekeeper, for you know religious have no female servants.) They have no furniture. When they go to visit their parishes they must carry all the requisites for Mass with them. The Mass is said in a house. The only church is in the village where they reside.

The other mission established by Fr. Superior is among the Indians, 1300 miles distant from here. It is a poor tribe [Pottawatomies] which has for a long time begged for one or two of our Fathers. Fr. Superior has sent them Fr. De Smet (who came last year with us from Europe) and Fr. Verreydt, a Belgian, and a Spanish lay Brother. Thus we have at present four priests and two Brothers among the Indians.

These missions seem to promise well. Let me tell you something about them that may be of interest to you. I get my information from the letters of Father De Smet. In his first letter he describes his journey and, among

other things, he mentions coming across a young Indian who is a former student of our college and is at present Chief of his tribe. He showed himself very affectionate and friendly toward Fr. De Smet and promised to build him a chapel, on condition that he would draw a few French families to the neighborhood.

One day as Fr. De Smet was walking along the river bank a black man accosted him. He told Father that he took him for a Catholic priest and asked him if he was right. Upon Fr. De Smet assuring him that he was a priest, the man proceeded to make a general Confession with great piety and devotion, shedding tears of repentance for having offended God's infinite goodness and majesty; tears, too, of joy because it was so many years since he had seen a priest. Being 88 years old, the man suspected that it would be his last Confession.

Bidding the old man adieu, Fr. De Smet traveled on and came upon another tribe whose Chief had also studied at our college, and who was very anxious to have one or two of our Fathers to come and live among them.

Later Fr. De Smet discovered a fourth tribe, known as the Pawnees, who live underground. A Presbyterian minister had offered himself to come and live among them. They replied that they did not want a devil to dwell in their tribe, and that they would take measures to prevent him from settling there. You see, these poor Indians are firmly convinced that all heretical ministers bring the devil with them. They are very eager for one of our Fathers. It would seem that this tribe is the most cruel. A short time ago they burned a girl alive. They number some 20,000.

On March 31st, Frs. De Smet and Verreydt, with a Spanish lay Brother, arrived among the Pottawatomies, which tribe they are to evangelize. Some 1,200 Indians, dressed in their best costumes, their faces painted in the latest fashion, were waiting impatiently for the steamer on which they were to come. They began their mission by teaching them the Christian doctrine. For although a few among the tribe have been baptized by Mr. Richard, a priest who knows the prayers in their tongue and who visits them once every two years, yet they are ignorant

of Christian doctrine. They do not even know how to bless themselves. Fr. De Smet tells us that he has had about twenty-six baptisms, that the children are good and docile, that this tribe has no word in their vocabulary for cursing and swearing except the word 'dog.' 'Dog' is their biggest curse word. He mentions, too, that the Chief of the tribe is very generous, especially toward our Fathers. He offered them four log cabins for their homes and promised to build them a chapel. On Corpus Christi the foundation was laid for the chapel and the Cross was placed on it. Whatever time Fr. De Smet can spare from religious services he spends as carpenter, making doors, windows and pews for the chapel. They have planned to go once a week and preach among another tribe with the help of an interpreter.

To give you an idea of the progress that is being made by our holy religion among the Americans, our Rt. Rev. Bishop told that in the course of last year he has built 20 new churches for Catholics in Missouri alone—that's the State we live in. This year 19 are being built. Also that more than 300 heretics have sworn off their errors and have returned to the bosom of the true Church, this not counting the converts among the Indians. His Lordship told us also that he had in his diocese 10,000 to 12,000 Catholics who were without priests to minister to them.

The amount of good that's being done by missions is incredible. For here in America, as in Europe, there are numberless poor sinners hardened in wickedness, for whose conversion nothing is more effective than a mission or spiritual retreat. However, here one can, so to speak, wink at their disorderly lives, in view of their ignorance and the lack of priests among them. For indeed how can one look for fruits from a soil that is untilled—a soil that has never received the seed of the Gospel or, if received, the seed has been dried up, not sprinkled with the dew of Christian teaching? This is the sad experience of this country. How many there are who see a priest but once a year! How many have been baptized but never instructed! There is reason therefore to pardon their disorderly lives; and what should still more move us to

tenderness and pity for these poor people is the fact that they persist in begging for priests. Would to God that the good to be accomplished here, and the scarcity of priests were realized in the seminaries of Europe! Then many would break the miserable ties that bind them to their parents, their friends and country; many would bid a permanent farewell to all that keeps them chained to their country and hinders them from answering God's call.

I have not many things to tell about our missions among the 'Guikapoes' [Kickapoos], a savage tribe among whom two of our priests, namely Frs. Hoecken and Ysvogels (both from the seminary of Bois-le-Duc) and a Belgian lay Brother are working. This mission seems to be making slow progress, although several baptisms have taken place and a number of children, having been cleansed from original sin by the Sacrament of Baptism, have died in the Lord, and consequently are praying in heaven for the conversion of their parents. The reason of their slow advance is that the Chief of the tribe gets 1,500 francs from the Protestants as a bribe to make him favor their preachers and their mission. Yet, in spite of all this, in spite of their gifts and the threats of the Chief, they make no progress. Not so long ago the Chief began to play a rather strange rôle, but to his shame and his hurt. He had bribed a man, a kind of lawyer or adviser among the Indians, with a sum of money. This fellow was to feign death. Then the Chief would come and raise him from the dead through the power of the Protestant religion *à la Calvin*. The lawyer had practiced his part well. He died and the Chief brought him back to life. Then he started telling the Indians that he had been in heaven, mentioning all the wonderful things he had seen, and so on. But here came the end of his cheating and the beginning of his shame. Fr. Hoecken, having been notified of what was going on among the tribe, sent word to the lawyer to come and see him. He did not dare to ignore Fr. Hoecken's summons and in an assembly of the tribe the Father questioned him concerning what he had heard and observed there. The poor lawyer, expecting to fool the Father as he had the Indians, spoke so rapidly and

so stupidly that he contradicted himself and denied what he had said at the start.

Then the Father in a serious tone of authority said to him: 'It is clear that you are a humbug and a fraud. It is clear that what you have told about heaven are your own inventions. I want you to confess before these people that what you have told us are lies. Unless you do this I am going to call down upon you the punishment of the Great Spirit.'

The lawyer, frightened by these threats and fearing the wrath of the Great Spirit, confessed his deceit. Father Hoecken, however, was not satisfied. 'I must insist,' he said to the lawyer, 'that for three Sundays you will come to Mass and declare before the congregation that your death and resurrection was a lie. Unless you comply with my command I shall ask the Great Spirit to chastise you.' The man promised to do what the Father had commanded and he was very punctual in carrying out his promise.

I mentioned just now that Fr. Hoecken has Fr. Ysvogels for his companion. This arrangement has been changed. Fr. Aelen has received a letter telling him that Fr. Hoecken lives now at a distance of some 16 miles from Fr. Ysvogels. He is working there among a tribe that numbers 800 Catholics. He lives in real poverty. He has no lay Brother with him, has no church nor house. A poor tent made of buffalo skins serves him for both house and church.

I could fill a book if I were to write all particulars. It is such a task to express myself in my mother tongue. However, I must say something about our mission among the Pottawatomies. According to several reports of Fr. De Smet, he has in the space of six months baptized 118. This shows us what progress our holy religion is making there. He writes us also that two chiefs of a tribe some two thousand strong came to visit him accompanied by 40 soldiers. These people all showed great kindness toward the Fathers and asked them to smoke the calumet, or pipe of peace, with them. Father De Smet showed the chiefs the chapel. They seemed to be very interested in the explanation the Father gave them of the Cross, the

altar and a few pictures representing Our Lord's passion. They begged him to come and pay them a visit and made him a present of a tobacco bag made of the skin of a beaver. In his turn the Father presented them with a rosary and a brass crucifix, which they accepted with thanks, kissing it and putting it about their neck. On taking leave of the Fathers, they embraced them with the greatest affection.

To form an idea of an Indian village, imagine a large number of cabins and tents, all made of the bark of trees, of buffalo hides, of roughly woven linen, of twig and rush-woven mats, all dirty-looking and making a terrible sight, some large, some small, all made in different fashions, placed at haphazard without plan. . . .

Would to God that I were able to give you an idea of the great happiness which I here enjoy! But this is impossible. No one but he who experiences it can understand how happy we are. Give unceasing thanks to God, for my happiness is unspeakable.

I remain respectfully,

Your obedient son,

A. DAMEN,

Novice of the Society of Jesus.

Although this letter tells us very little about Florissant, it does tell us much about Damen. It is an unusually mature letter for a novice. Save for the solemn announcement to his parents that he will write nothing to them of 'bodily things,' there is no preachifying in the letter, a favorite novice attitude. He states, too, and rather bluntly, that he is rapidly losing his mother tongue, without seeming to consider that it might be something not altogether pleasant for his parents to hear. They might imagine that after forgetting his mother tongue, he would soon perhaps be forgetting them. But outside of these defects, the whole letter foreshadows the future Damen. The missionary spirit is strong in him. He seems to lean decidedly to life among the Indians. He is fascinated with the thought

of converting entire tribes. He looks ahead in terms of the whole of America and already craves for more workers to evangelize the nation. One can sense his restrained impatience to be out and doing. He sees the need of men for the whites as well as for the Indians, not realizing that his own missions to the whites are to have much to do with the organization of the Church in the United States. He appreciates all the hardships of the life ahead, but shows no signs of timidity or shirking. On the contrary, his tone is one of confident eagerness, virile and unafraid. The offhand manner in which he speaks of forgetting his native tongue shows how thoroughly he was beginning to identify himself with his adopted country, and he is entirely and unaffectedly happy in the vision he sees before him. All these characteristics develop and intensify in him with the years.

After two years Arnold Damen made his first vows, thereby becoming a recognized member of the Jesuits. He remained at Florissant, however, for two years more, employed in a steady routine of study, reviewing his classics, advancing his English, preparing for teaching. His spiritual life interwove with his study all through. Mass every day, frequent Communion, meditation and spiritual reading. These were to be part of his daily duty all his life. Then he was sent to St. Louis to teach.

Here the Jesuits had a growing college for both day and boarding students, the latter coming mostly from the South and from Latin America. This was Damen's first direct contact with the medley of American life.

There is a vague tradition, for which we can discover no documentary evidence, that Damen was not a success in teaching. If this is so, it cannot be for the reason that he did not work at it. It is impossible to imagine him going into anything without energy. It

is difficult, also, to suppose that he was not clear and definite in his method. His sermons, later, are models of clarity; his business organizing in after years shows a natural instinct for definiteness. It was very probably the case that he found trouble in adjusting himself to the temperament of the American boy. I believe that no one can train a type of boy he has not grown up with. Damen grew up with American life from the age of twenty-three, but he never had a chance to be an American boy. There was his handicap. He got along perfectly with men, because he grew up with them and caught their characteristics at first hand. The Dutch boy he knew intimately; but all his experience of the American boy was, so to say, at second hand. He was already outside the magic ring of boyhood when he first met American boyhood, and he could never hope to capture its essential flavor. After dreamy old Brabant and placid Florissant, the sudden plunge into the electric maelstrom of American youth must have given him something of a shock. Brabant and Florissant were scarcely the atmosphere to prepare one for American boy life in the 'forties, with the call of the open surging in its blood and the wild West beckoning only a few miles away.

Yet again, in the light of what we certainly do know about Damen, it is hard to see him, under whatever difficulties of controlling a new type of character, as not managing his classes even though he did not understand them thoroughly. Only a few years later we find him managing every variety of people in the most businesslike American fashion, with absolute success. If it be true, then, as the tradition has it, that Damen did not hit it off with boys, the only answer is, that boys, like Nature, are wonderful.

On the other hand, there seems to be indirect evidence, at least, that Damen did good work as a teacher. During his regency, complaints were sent to the Gen-

eral, Father Roothaan, that the scholastics in St. Louis were too much engaged in work outside their sphere of duty. Their studies and their spiritual life, it was alleged, were seriously interfered with. The occasion for the complaint arose from the effort made by the college to build additional schoolrooms for city boys who wished to attend school, but who could not be accommodated for lack of space. The college had no money, and the boys either had to go to distinctly Protestant schools, or go without. In his letter of reply to the General, Father Verhaegan, the Vice-Provincial, writes as follows on the nineteenth of July, 1843:

This criticism, which your Paternity states in general terms, can be applied to only one man here, and scarcely applied, at that; or if so, only for a short period. There was question of preparing schoolrooms for city students. The college was unable to meet the expense. Meantime, the boys, to the number of more than two hundred, were attending Protestant schools at the risk of losing faith and morals. Kindling with pious zeal, Mr. Damen offered his services to complete the work. He begged alms from our citizens; and when others had no heart for the work, he finished it up without any expense whatever to the college.

Some of the contributors gave not money, but labor. So Damen had to deal at times with carpenters and other workmen to give them directions. But whatever he did was done with the approval of Father Rector.

This young man, who by his industry has rescued some three hundred boys from irreligious schools, or from the streets, to train them up in letters and religion, seems to me to be deserving of the highest praise.

From which it seems logical to conclude that for an unsuccessful teacher, Damen took rather a considerable interest in schoolrooms.

In any event, looking backward over his life, it was

fortunate for the Catholic Church that Damen was not assigned to be a teacher in the schools. Providence had assigned him to a wider field, and with his careful obedience to divine guidance, he was eventually destined to take up a work, only a small part of which would be the founding of a future university.

His studies went on and he was ordained priest in 1844, in his twenty-ninth year.

CHAPTER V

EARLY YEARS IN THE PRIESTHOOD

FATHER DAMEN had passed through the assigned stages of preparation for his life work and was facing a future that he himself saw only in the faintest outline. He had prayed much. His intense devotion to the Blessed Virgin, ripening since early childhood, was, by this time, matured and settled in his life. He had meditated profoundly and sensibly, planning his life so as to have all its energies radiate from a central core of obedience. This will appear as we see him in later action. He had definitely cut himself off from his home and country and had set himself to learn to love other peoples and other ways. There had been difficulty in all this, fatigue, discomfort—a new language to make over into his native tongue, the toil of the fields, the inconveniences of log cabin life, the hampering conditions of study, the sudden plunge at last into the whirlpool that we call American life, and the dubious feeling that maybe he would not be able to understand it, or keep pace with it. A complex interweaving this, of both physical and mental hardships that could depress and discourage a soul not sturdily set for any hazard.

And now the decks were cleared for action. The wide field of the priesthood opened out a limitless horizon before him. In what direction to travel? Where was the gateway to the great romance that he had heard calling to him since his boyhood in Brabant? He had crossed the sea to convert the wild Indian. Now the tide of white men rolling westward needed help per-

haps as much as any Indian. The work before him seemed endless and the laborers were few. Nobody ever suggested college life to him again. His career was therefore destined to be more directly like that of Him who went about doing good. The first duties assigned to him pointed that way. He was made assistant priest at St. Francis Xavier's Church, in St. Louis.

Direct contact with souls awakens in the priest the spark of a new life, and if he feeds the spark it will grow to a flame that illumines his own soul as well as those of his flock. The merely academic view of life absorbed from books alone is a thin and ghostly thing compared with the depth and perspective gained by touching life at first hand. Books are to life what the tentative plan is to the building, or what reading about war is to fighting it. And it was building and fighting that was all the time lurking in the depths of Father Damen's soul and struggling to come to the surface. He must himself have been conscious of the hidden power in him, for in the period just after his ordination, a period of pause and survey, while he was attending to the simpler duties of the parish priest, we find him studying the situation and planning and praying for his future efficiency among the people. And he decided that it would be through his preaching that he would achieve it.

On the surface it seemed rather a random choice, perhaps a piece of foolish self-deception. The glamour of large audiences, the thrill of swaying popular sentiment have made many less simple men than Father Damen persuade themselves that they were accomplished orators, when a canvass of the question would give the minority but a single vote. It did appear that Father Damen was drifting toward this class. Father Coppens writes of him then: 'He had not developed any notable oratorical powers. In fact, I remember an old lady remarking that when she wanted to get a good

sleep, she could do so without fail by listening to one of his sermons. He felt his deficiency in this respect.' This 'feeling his deficiency' was a good sign.

Nevertheless, he clung tenaciously to the idea, though he did not talk much about it. Neither did he waste any time dreaming about it. He proceeded with the parish routine, only under his hands it was always more than routine. He brought over into the spiritual field the Hollander's ambition of steadily getting more land out of the sea. The aggressive character of his later work began immediately to appear. Nothing hurried about it, or fitful or spectacular; just what we might call a continuous poldering, one bit of work added to another, with sufficient indications that beneath it all was a spirit that kept reaching out for more and yet more. Turning over the baptismal records for those years at St. Francis Xavier's Church we come upon the brief entries of baptism with their short additional remarks, and the signature *A. Damen, S.J.* Here we shall find on one page a note stating that an old man is brought into the Church with all the sacred rites. Further down, the record of a woman baptized hurriedly and secretly on her death bed; and immediately below, her little servant, a slave, baptized at the same time. Again an entire family mentioned in one entry—and so it goes, page after page.

It is easily seen that these records imply much more than is written down. Father Damen had to find these people, keep in touch with them, instruct them, and follow them along as far as possible after baptism. To keep at this work day by day and year after year is peculiarly exhausting. The way in which individual cases can multiply, overlap and entangle is bewildering. And the sudden emergencies that are always occurring with some individual somewhere along the line will put the strongest nervous system to the test. Father Damen did a great amount of this, yet it was but a

single feature of his daily work. Along the pathway of his routine occupations Damen kept constantly watching for the chance of bringing outsiders into the Church. He had a keen eye for any opening that presented itself and he followed up an opportunity with quick and sure judgment. Merely commonplace happenings, even incidents that opened unpleasantly, would be skillfully turned by him into a conversion. In his sermon on *Confession* he narrates one of these himself.

Some years ago [he tells us], when I was pastor of St. Francis Xavier Church in St. Louis, I was called to a sick lady, and when I came to the house I found with the sick lady a Protestant doctor. I asked the doctor to leave me alone with the lady for a few moments and he did so. In the meantime I heard the lady's Confession and administered to her the consolations of our holy religion, the Sacraments of the Church. Having got through I said to the doctor that he might come in. But the doctor was a Yankee, and you all know that the Yankees are a very inquisitive people and always want to know the ins and outs of everything; and so, the doctor said to me:

'What have you been doing, sir?'

'Well, doctor, that is a very impertinent question. But as I know what you are driving at, I will answer you. I heard the Confession of that lady.'

'You do not pretend to forgive sin, do you?' said the doctor.

'Yes, sir, I do.'

'Well, sir,' continued the doctor, 'that is a very extraordinary power.'

'Yes, sir, it is. But you do not believe in that power, doctor?' said I.

'No, sir,' said he. 'No, no, I do not believe in any such nonsense as that.'

'Well, doctor,' said I, 'do you believe that the Apostles had the power of forgiving sins?'

'No, sir, I do not.'

'Then, doctor, what did our divine Saviour mean, when, breathing upon His Apostles, He said, *Receive ye the*

Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them? What did Christ mean, doctor, at that time?

'Well, I declare,' said he, 'that is a tough question.'

'A little tough, doctor. Will you be so kind as to answer it?'

'Well,' said the doctor, 'I am not prepared for that now. I am here on professional business, and am not ready to answer you now, but I will see you again.'

The doctor was a sincere and honest man, and when he arrived at his office he remembered his promise to see me again and, knowing that he should be familiar with his subject in order to talk with me, he procured himself some books on Catholic doctrine and read them through very carefully, until he became convinced that Confession is of divine origin. He became interested in the matter and procured more books, and finally became convinced that the Catholic Church is the only true Church of God.

Three weeks after that there came a rap at my door. 'Walk in,' and the doctor walked in.

'Father,' said he, 'will you be kind enough to hear my Confession?'

'Eh, doctor?! Hear your Confession? Why, you do not believe in that?'

'I do, Father,' says he, 'and I believe in all the other doctrines of the Catholic Church. I am thoroughly convinced that it is the only true Church and I would like to make my Confession.'

'All right, doctor, get on your knees.' He got on his knees and I heard his Confession and received him into the Church.

After three years of assistance in parish work, he was appointed first pastor of St. Francis Xavier's Church in 1847, a position he was to hold for ten years. Here, for the first time, his power began to reveal itself. From his experiences during the three previous years, the practical lesson he had learned was the value of organization.

Nowadays, organization is an old idea among us and **an** overworked idea as well. For many years it has

served as the battle-cry of efficiency in America until people are beginning to realize that organization is turning into a form of centralization that threatens to strangle them. Politics, labor, charities, business, literature, studies, 'movements' of all kinds, have steadily shown a growing tendency to draw the individual into the complicated machinery of organization, to stifle his personality and to stamp him as merely a standardized piece of equipment. It is the abuse of a good idea. In union there is strength, it is true, but when the union is too close, when the clock is wound up too tight, it will not go at all.

Back in the 'forties, however, we were rather at the other extreme, more or less scrambled along all lines. Danger lurked here, too. As a single evidence of this condition, we were then directly headed for the Civil War, only fifteen years away. Organization then was just what we needed everywhere, a sane adjustment of huge national forces that were growing so rapidly that they were getting out of hand. Only a wise man would see this at the time, because we were infatuated with our mere size and power. And only a strong man could control these conflicting currents and turn them into a single stream.

The Catholic Church was one of these forces. She had had her own experience of the disunion that permeated the country, a disunion we may consider unavoidable owing to the rapid, sporadic and varied developments effervescing simultaneously in every quarter. Father Damen was quick to see that as his work grew, the only way to keep it unified and steady was to give it the spine of organization. He did not try to do too much at once. He was not of the type that gathers a crowd, thrills them with an 'inspirational talk,' and then passes on, registering another movement 'established.' He knew that an organization is like a building, stone laid upon stone, under the per-

sonal supervision of the architect. In 1848, he began very simply and quietly by starting the Young Men's Sodality. The first idea he had in mind as the object of this Sodality was a religious union of college alumni in St. Louis, to keep the old students of the University together and to preserve their faith. It began thus, but many others were anxious to share in its benefits, and the original idea spread to include Catholic laymen of St. Louis. Professional men joined in large numbers, lawyers, doctors, engineers. Bankers and business men of influence came in. Its register shows a long list of the best-known Catholics of St. Louis at that time. These men were encouraged and instructed to spread the faith. They responded, not only by the good example of their lives, but by aggressive work in winning back careless Catholics to the steady practice of their religion and in assisting in the conversion of non-Catholics. By 1856 it numbered three hundred of the most prominent men of St. Louis.

This form of sodality work, namely, gathering from a whole city to form one body, would not be practical today, nor is it needed now as then, when parishes were not so thoroughly organized. But it remains as an example of the possibilities of sodality work. During the ten years he directed this St. Louis sodality, Damen gave to it such steady and personal attention that from a small beginning it grew to be a strong religious force in the city for fifty years. From it finally, as from a nucleus and a model, grew all the other sodalities of the city of St. Louis. All Father Damen's work had in it this element of fruitful reproduction. Even though his original planting died out with time, it was not until it had scattered abroad the seeds of future harvests. He had seized thoroughly the idea of the vital importance of having roots to a work that is intended to last and he was willing to spend time planting the roots deep. He was not attracted to occupations that brought only ap-

plause as their result. He did not allow monotony to stale his energy, and he showed none of the restlessness of temperament that tires easily when held to one line and is satisfied to be superficial if only it can often change. Like the successful oil driller, he had the practical instinct to locate spiritual values, and when he chose a prospect he drilled persistently.

This appears in his work with the Young Men's Sodality. Evaluating the group, he saw that within them was another group who could gain more spiritually by adding something to the ordinary sodality routine. To these men he suggested the idea of a special retreat. He invited them to come as guests to the college at a time when they could afford the leisure, and to spend several days there in making the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. It was a turning point in the lives of them all. At the end of the retreat four of them decided to enter the Society of Jesus. And all of them became permanent influences for good in the Catholic life of the city.

This was apparently the first retreat of its kind given in St. Louis and, as far as we are aware, in the West. How widely it has spread since that day, everyone knows who is at all in touch with Catholic life. This type of retreat is now a part of all Catholic school work, regularly scheduled to be made by the students once each year. It has penetrated in one form or another into most Catholic organizations who yearly make the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, following Father Damen's plan as closely as is possible. And the recent opening in many places of the houses for laymen's retreats is but the flowering out of this first retreat in St. Louis University.

The devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary was the favorite of Father Damen. This devotion, originating in Paris, was introduced into St. Francis Church

by Father Gleizal, his predecessor. Damen developed it into one of the most popular devotions in his church. From there it spread through all the Jesuit churches in the West, another instance of the broad fruitfulness of his work. When Damen came to Chicago he chose the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the third Sunday of August, as the day for laying the cornerstone of Holy Family Church. He put all his parish work under her protection.

In addition to these two organizations and his administration of church matters as pastor, Damen always did his full share of the regular pastoral duties, sick calls, preaching, Confessions, the parish school, instruction of converts. In the first year of his pastorate, what was called the Asiatic cholera swept St. Louis with all the deadliness of our more recent 'flu' attacks. Father Damen was everywhere during this plague, expending his great physical strength to exhaustion. He was among those who were recognized by the city as having done remarkable service to the stricken people.

Father Murphy, who came from New York to St. Louis in 1851 to assume the office of Vice-Provincial for the western Jesuits, records his admiration of St. Francis Xavier's parish among his first impressions. He writes to the General, Father Beckx :

The two pastors, Fathers Damen and Loretan, are prudent. The piety of the parishioners and of the two Sodalities is remarkable for this country. . . . I have never seen anywhere in America so many Communion of men. What a fine meeting every Sunday morning of the Arch-confraternity of the Immaculate Heart! When I think of New York, these things strike me very forcibly. It is all because our Fathers here are allowed free play and their influence is very great. Their knowledge of English amazes me more and more every day. Not only do they speak and write well, but some of them preach per-

fectly. This is what I had been told in New York and elsewhere.

At about the same time Bishop Van de Velde of Chicago, writing of Catholic conditions in the West, says:

In St. Francis Xavier's Church, St. Louis, there are more Confessions, Communion, and especially more conversions of non-Catholics than in other churches.

Father Verdin, then the President of St. Louis University, describing the work done in the church, says that there are five Masses at the high altar on every Sunday and feast day, the church crowded at all Masses. At least two sermons are preached on these days. On Sundays there are five hundred Communion, and on First Fridays and feast days, two hundred. 'I say,' he concludes, 'and it is the truth, that the church is our joy and our glory.'

A little later, in 1856, near the end of Damen's pastorate there, Father Wippert writes: 'The sermons in our church produce great fruit, as we may infer from the immense crowds of people and the use of the Sacraments, which is extraordinary for this part of the country.'

Father Murphy, all through his term of office, continues to be impressed by Damen. The winter of 1851-52 was a hard one in St. Louis, with great suffering among the poor, many of whom were on the verge of starvation. Damen always watched over the poor and, what is more, he understood them. He felt as one of them and he could do things with them and for them that they would resent at other hands. On this occasion the immediate and pressing need was food. It had to be got to the needy in large quantities and in a hurry. Damen saw that the only practicable solution was to establish a food station. For this he collected funds himself through the city, started the

station and carried it through the emergency, supporting hundreds of families. All who came from any part of the city were taken care of. The only drawback to the enterprise, as we view it today, was the name that it had. It was called the *Soup House*, hardly a legend to tempt a delicate appetite. We like to believe that Damen did not invent the name.

Father Murphy writes of this relief work in a letter to Father Beckx :

The winter has been a very severe one. The kitchen for the poor, known as the *Soup House*, started and supported by Father Damen, has fed a great number of families. One can say that he is at the head of the charities of St. Louis.

Again, in 1853, he reports to Beckx :

The great good being done in our church is a subject of edification to the whole town. At St. Xavier's there is always some devotion to maintain the fervor of the faithful. Confessions are very numerous. Something is there, as a matter of fact, that electrifies the most indifferent. Father Damen, a Hollander, is the soul of it all—a zealous worker, ardent and courageous by nature, with robust health and gifted with uncommon eloquence, he suffices for everything and carries everything along with him. He has, too, the talent of gaining the good will of the clergy and of securing their co-operation. Many Protestants owe their conversion to him.

Like every man of energy, Damen was not without his critics. Toward the end of his pastorate in St. Louis, complaints were made that he catered to the rich. Father De Smet, taking up Damen's defense, answered this in a letter to Father Beckx, dated May 13, 1856.

Reverend Father Provincial, [he writes] has asked the Consultors to say a word to your Paternity about Father Damen, because of certain ideas concerning him, er-

roneous in my opinion, which have been addressed to you. As pastor and missionary in a large American city, I think you would be hard put to it to find his equal in the whole country. For many years he has been working indefatigably, with much edification and great and consoling fruits in the vineyard of the Lord. He has introduced into St. Louis many works of piety with great success. Several charitable institutions owe to him their existence and support. The number of conversions he has made among Protestants and infidels is very large. He has brought back to the practice of their religion a great multitude of Catholics who were weak and unsteady in the Faith. The Sodality of the Blessed Virgin which he has established in St. Louis and over which he presides, is made up of the best men of the city, over three hundred gentlemen of all ranks of society. All the Bishops who assisted at the Provincial Council of St. Louis last October were witnesses of the zeal of the Sodality and the great good which results from it for the whole city. He possesses the esteem, the respect and the admiration of most Catholics of the city. The rich draw on their purses for him much more readily than for anyone else to aid him in his charities and his holy enterprises. The rich also have need of counsel, sometimes much more than the poor, and they address themselves by preference to him. This sometimes gives rise to talk and causes a little umbrage.

Just now Father Damen is contemplating the erection of an industrial school under the care of the Sisters of Mercy, as an offset to schools of their kind among the Protestants, who do much to pervert the children of the Catholic poor. He has been engaged in this venture scarcely two months and already the subscriptions amount to more than sixteen thousand dollars. With four thousand dollars, which he expects to obtain before long, the school will be founded and two hundred children at least will be saved from the hands of the sectaries.

CHAPTER VI

THE GIFT OF PREACHING

WRITING of Damen in 1853, Father Murphy says he is 'gifted with uncommon eloquence.' This could not have been said of him a few years previously. Although from the start Damen had aimed at being an effective preacher, his early efforts, as we have noted, were failures. Instead of being a tonic in the pulpit, he was a soporific. Partly owing, no doubt, to his yet incomplete mastery of English, he fumbled his language. He lacked directness and confidence. His thoughts sprawled about without articulation or sequence. Strange, one might have said, that a man of so practical a mind should continue to be so impractical in this; a pity that he wasted time trying to talk that he could employ in useful work.

No one knew better than Damen that he was not doing well at his preaching. But there was something in him that told him to go ahead. When he saw that evidently he was not improving, in fact at a standstill, he resolved to call for special help from God. He made a vow never in his life to decline any task that superiors might assign him, if God would grant him the gift of preaching. Father Coppens tells us the result: 'Suddenly his success in preaching became extraordinary. He drew immense audiences, filled the largest churches and by his earnestness touched the hardest hearts.' This remarkably sudden transition from futility to power in preaching was regarded on all sides with astonishment.

We may add here that Father Damen was true to

his side of the contract. His vow, a most difficult one when we consider it carefully, was not lightly made, nor lightly fulfilled. As long as he lived, in big and little things, he responded to the smallest wish of his superiors. He was the gainer in both ways. He acquired the visible power of preaching and with it the inner virtue of a perfect obedience.

Damen's desire to be a great preacher was not based upon any craving for literary distinction. The academic sermon, a poor thing at best for the people, was never his ideal. It would even seem that he turned away from the merely literary as a possible hindrance to direct effectiveness. He had studied the best models in Latin and Greek, as well as in Dutch, French and German. But from the easy manner in which he could lay a language aside it is clear that what he sought was not literary effect. In his letter to his parents we find him after only a year forgetting his mother tongue with no symptoms of dismay. Later he apologizes to the Jesuit General for writing in English, since he has grown out of the habit of using Latin or French. Again, he asks in Chicago for somebody to preach in German, as he has lost what he had of that language. And he seems to have thrown them all overboard with the sense that he was lightening the ship. The fact is, that he wished for only one thing in order to be effective in America, the mastery of English, and he used the other languages only for their aid to him in this. And this he attained, through hard efforts and the help of God—a clear, virile, direct English which he used for the exact purpose he desired, to tell divine truth to people in a way they would not forget. Neither was he enamored of the dramatic quality of his sermons. He never stood back, as it were, to contemplate their artistic value. The only appreciations he gives us of his sermons are to be extracted from such stray phrases as 'preached three times today'; 'ten thousand Com-

munions'; 'my voice holds out well'; 'not feeling at all tired.'

The explanation of this is simply that Damen did not rest with preaching as his final aim. It was a most useful tool in his hands, and only as such he valued it. He had another idea back of this. He wished to reach, to appeal to, to convert, large masses of men. He did not think in terms of brilliant masterpieces, city churches, cultured audiences, distinguished personages. His imagination swept out and encircled whole regions at a flight. He visioned vast multitudes gathering for the Church and felt that he was one who must go out and gather them. It is the missionary ideal that held Damen and that explains everything about him, his excellences as well as his limitations. The literary preacher is one thing, the missionary preacher is another, or rather, is two things. And Damen was, above all, the missionary. Like Xavier, like Marquette, his ambition was to carry the faith to ever widening circles of men. Preaching was to him merely the sculptor's chisel to fashion his idea and to make it stand out clearcut to easy view, the instrument he played upon to enable men to catch and hold the melody. As we shall discover, he estimated his audience first and then fashioned his discourse. But his main thought was always a missionary thought. He was not ultimately thinking of how he would give out his discourse, but of how he would gather in his audience.

Our idea of Damen, therefore, would be very incomplete if we were to look on him merely as a preacher. He was much more than this. He was a missionary. He regarded preaching as the door that opened into the mission field, but the gathering in of great harvests of souls was always his dominant idea. When the time arrived to take up this work, Damen had gone through a preparation that made him perfectly apt for it. During these first ten years of his

priesthood, Providence had gradually maneuvered him into position. He had not been sent to preach, but had been put into contact with human life in all its stages from childhood to old age—children in the schools, young men in the sodality, families in the parish, the sacramental and spiritual duties within the church, wide experience derived from the confessional and the pulpit, visits to the sick and dying; conferences with the troubled and the scrupulous, instructions to converts, the administration of a parish with its inner details—all this experience he had absorbed and had ready at hand for instant use. He had studied a cross-section of Catholic life down to its last nerve. He had taught much, but in the process he had learned more.

Outside events, too, shaped his future. He had already begun to give missions here and there, near home, whenever parish arrangements would allow it. His sermons drew crowds everywhere he went, so that he became very well known not only in St. Louis but through Missouri. Among other places, his name had reached Carondelet, where Father O'Regan was head of the Theological Seminary. In 1854, Father O'Regan was appointed Bishop of Chicago. After consulting the needs of his diocese, he decided that one of the things that would help would be to have Father Damen come to Chicago and to conduct a series of missions there, along the lines of his work in St. Louis. Accordingly, in the summer of 1856, Father Damen, with three other Jesuit priests, Fathers Boudreaux, Masselis and Corbett, arrived in Chicago and gave three weeks of missions in the Cathedral of the Holy Name. To judge from the reports, nothing like it had ever been done in Chicago. Father Matthew Dillon, pastor of the Holy Name Church and President of the University of St. Mary's of the Lake, wrote of this mission in the *St. Louis Leader* as follows:

The spiritual retreat which our Right Reverend Bishop has provided for the Catholics of this city has just closed. For the last three weeks the exercises have been conducted by five Jesuit Fathers under the guidance of Father Damen. The fruits of their holy and successful labors are already manifest. Many Protestants have embraced the Catholic religion, and the Catholics, to be counted by thousands—many, very many of whom had neglected their spiritual interests—crowded the churches and confessionals. The zeal, the piety and labors of Father Damen and his associates, and his practical and persuasive eloquence, have won for these eminent servants of God the love and veneration of all our citizens, Protestant and Catholic. From four in the morning until after midnight, these zealous Fathers and the parochial clergymen have been occupied, yet all this was insufficient, such was the holy importunity of the people whom God moved to profit by their ministry.

It is understood that twelve thousand at least have received Communion. None of the churches could accommodate the multitude that crowded from all parts of the city. The cathedral, with its galleries newly put up, being found altogether too small, the mission was transferred to the large enclosure on the North Side, known as the church of the Holy Name, and here, as if nothing had been previously done, a new harvest is found already mature.

Years of spiritual indolence are atoned for and a new life, the life of grace, is begun by hundreds who for long years knew not how great a blessing this was. How consoling to the heart of the Right Reverend Bishop and to the missionaries must be this fruit of their labors, this fresh evidence of the vitality of the Catholic spirit, which it would seem neither time nor circumstances the most unfavorable to its culture can root out of the soul of the sincere believer!

Although some years must yet pass before he could give himself to the missions as he wished, yet, it was his first step on the path he had so long looked forward to. Its immediate result was to detach him from

St. Louis and to send him to Chicago to start what was to be the famous Holy Family parish.

This was a most timely mission for the diocese. A good deal of the friction and discontent that inevitably attend the beginnings of every big work was then running through the Chicago Catholics. This was made acute by the variety of nationalities that were settling in the city. Distrust, jealousies, suspicions, the little birds that gather to a cloud darkening the sun, were all part of the fever that hindered the growth of the infant church of Chicago. It was a real danger to the faith and at the time of the mission it had disturbed the attachment between Bishop and flock.

Father Damen caught the trouble on the opening day of the mission. As he and Father Boudreaux were accompanying the Bishop from the residence to the cathedral for the opening Mass of the mission, he observed that as the party passed through the crowds gathered about the church, not a hat was raised nor any token of reverence given to their Bishop beyond a stare of curiosity. During the Mass that followed, Father Damen opened the mission, and in the course of that first sermon spoke upon the reverence due their Bishop. He pleaded for a return of the congregation to their former simple obedience and affection. The result was happy and immediate. On the way back to the residence after Mass, the Bishop found the people kneeling down to receive his blessing as he passed.

Ten years after this incident, the entire Catholic population of Chicago turned out with banners and with music to welcome Bishop Foley to Chicago. Not many perhaps took time to think at that moment what ten years had done to improve the Catholic spirit of the city, now flooding with enthusiasm. But Father John Waldron, the pastor of St. John's, who had lived through those years, and was as close to its inner his-

tory as any priest of Chicago, was standing in a group of friends watching this procession passing by, and he summed up his reflections upon the change of Catholic spirit with the remark, 'Well, all this is due to Father Damen.'

CHAPTER VII

IN YOUNG CHICAGO

CHICAGO, in 1856, was like a young eagle struggling to fly. It had one wing extended and a talon lifted, but the other talon was stuck deep in the mud. When Damen came there, he must have felt it was a home-coming to the lowlands of Holland. There was water everywhere; Lake Michigan washed Chicago's shore line; the Chicago River wound through its interior; rain and snow came down and stayed where they fell, until evaporation took them off. The city was but a few feet above water level and flat as the palm of one's hand. Satisfactory drainage was impossible. In rainy weather the citizens staggered through the mud, a hundred thousand of them. City traffic, except in dry weather, was badly clogged, or altogether stopped. On either side of the streets, huge ditches were dug to carry away the water, but with no fall in the level it simply stayed there.

Ida Tarbell, in her life of Abraham Lincoln, gives us a description of Chicago's appearance in 1860, just a few years after Damen's first mission there.

It was on May 16 that the Republican Convention of 1860 formally opened at Chicago. The audacity of inviting a National Convention to meet there in the condition in which Chicago chanced to be at that time was purely Chicagoan. No other city would have risked it. In ten years Chicago had nearly quadrupled its population, and it was believed that the feat would be repeated in the coming decade. In the first flush of youthful energy and ambition the town had undertaken the colossal task of raising

itself bodily out of the grassy marsh, where it had been originally placed, to a level of twelve feet above Lake Michigan and of putting underneath a good solid foundation. When the invitation to the Convention was extended, half of the buildings in Chicago were on stilts; some of the streets had been raised to the new grade, others still lay in the mud; half of the sidewalks were poised high on piles, and half still were down on a level with the lake. A city with a conventional sense of decorum would not have cared to be seen in this demoralized condition, but Chicago perhaps conceived that it would but prove her courage and confidence to show the country what she was doing; and so she had the Convention come.

Fifteen years after this the city was still filling in. It grew so fast that the leveling could not keep up with it. Streets in many places bore the sarcastically humorous legend *No bottom*, hoisted on a long pole and stuck into the middle of a mud hole. Whenever a fire occurred in these districts in rainy weather, it was invariably a complete success, great lumber yards or grain elevators burning spectacularly in the middle distance, while the firemen stood aloof as spectators several blocks away, beside their engines sunk to the wheel tops in the middle of every street that led to the fire.

This problem of motion was the first great difficulty to be overcome in a city that was growing like a young giant. Already in 1856 the people were solving it. And Father Damen on his arrival found them in the present loop district engaged in the familiar Dutch Lowland occupation of *poldering*, that is, filling in the city to rescue it from the water. Between 1855 and 1860 the entire level of the business portion was raised some twelve feet. It was to be many years, however, before the *poldering* would reach Father Damen's parish on the west side.

This city of Chicago, sticky as flypaper underfoot and scattered over with hastily built wooden houses

that were not much more than shelters, nevertheless, 'had something.' It had location, and the eye alive to commercial opportunity was quick to observe it. Set at the foot of the Great Lakes, it had possible communication all the way through to the Atlantic. Its river gave it, not only one of the finest harbors in the world, but also a possible way into the Mississippi to the south, while as a railroad center it was a pivotal point to the four corners of the country. These advantages had been seen by travelers, and long before any of the large cities of the Middle West were founded the place was taken note of. 'As early as 1688,' Father Garraghan tells us in his *History of the Catholic Church of Chicago*, 'the name of the city had been written into the geography of the day, Franquelin's famous map of that year showing *Fort Chicagou* on the site of the future metropolis; and this, thirteen years before Cadillac founded Detroit, seventy-six before Laclède set up his trading post in St. Louis, and a hundred before Denham and Patterson platted the village that was to develop into Cincinnati.'

Marquette and Joliet saw the same thing. On the cross set as a memorial to Marquette's visit to Chicago in 1674, when he landed at what is now the foot of Damen Avenue and the Chicago River, is an inscription where we read: 'Joliet recommended it for its natural advantages as a place of first settlement and suggested a lake to the gulf waterway by cutting a canal through the portage west of here where begins the Chicago Drainage Ship Canal. This remarkable prophecy made two hundred and thirty-four years ago is now fulfilled.'

Father St. Cyr, the first pastor of Chicago, wrote in 1833 to Bishop Rosati in St. Louis: 'The situation of Chicago is the finest I have ever seen. . . . Everything proclaims that Chicago will one day become a great town and one of commercial importance.' And

twenty-five years after, Father Damen, in a letter to the General of the Jesuits in Rome, says: 'This town will become one of the largest in the United States.'

If explorers and missionaries could thus see at a glance the commercial possibilities of this spot, it is easy to imagine how traders, merchants, land prospectors, anyone directly interested in the business of making money, would grasp at its obvious advantages. And that is what happened. As soon as the tide of immigration reached the Middle West, a large percentage of it poured toward Chicago. The more alert, daring, energetic, reached it first and started the city off with a rush of vitality that struck the keynote of its progress and characterizes it to the present day. In 1840, there were five thousand inhabitants in Chicago. By 1870, it had more than three hundred thousand people. In thirty years, it had multiplied its population six hundred times. There is no record in history of a growth so rapid.

That is one of the reasons why the city was sunk in the mud. It spread so fast that it hadn't the leisure for looking pretty, or even for keeping neat. So many things had to be done, and done right away, that it couldn't get time to wash its face. Streets sprang up over night, and houses, people, business crowded along them helter skelter. They just named the streets and let it go at that. With a city almost down to the water level, it can readily be understood that these streets were a morass in wet weather, and in dry seasons foot-deep with Death Valley dust. They couldn't help it. Like soldiers driving for an objective, they simply must go ahead anyhow. So they plunged horses and wagons into the drifts of dust, or churned through the swamps of mud, survive or perish. Cattle and hogs, destined for the stockyards, wallowed and squealed and moed along the streets, pursued by relentless horsemen, hallooing and whip-cracking; distracted cows ran danger-

ously over the sidewalks, unconsciously prefiguring the modern automobile; frightened mothers rushed out of doors to drag their children away from the mad stampeding. And nobody could do a thing about it, or see a present way out of it. Business had to go on. One had to move fast to live in Chicago. Its practical motto was the equivalent of, 'Devil take the hindmost.'

Naturally, the town attracted two classes of persons especially; those who were fascinated by the romance of speed and those who had the vision and the tenacity to see and to cling to opportunity. All others were submerged or eliminated. Thus the Chicago boom came to be an affair of not merely a few promoters and organizers who ballyhooed the population into an artificial activity that would wither when the turmoil and the shouting died. It was rather the natural and spontaneous spirit of the whole city, made up of the personal contributions of each person in it. This kept the boom going steadily and saved Chicago from the deflation that has been the death of a thousand towns in the United States. They knew the city had greatness within its reach and they were determined to develop it and share in it.

Merely to follow along in Chicago, it will be easily surmised, was something of a feat in those days. But to lead here called for an extra infusion of energy, clear-headedness and driving power. The city was in an effervescence; it was bursting with business. The inflow of settlers was so steady and rapid that houses could not be built fast enough. Patches of dwellings, like separate little towns, began to appear to the west, south, and north, their sites chosen apparently at random. The city limits spread enormously and in so detached a fashion that anything like civic plans for the orderly laying out of the town were impossible. There was a go-as-you-please atmosphere over everything that made

any kind of direction difficult. The temperament of the people had that 'I will' quality in it which later gave the city its slogan. But at that time it was not a civic 'I will,' but each individual took the slogan as his own particular property. This tendency left its mark on the social and the religious trend of the town as well as on its business. And the man who would gather together and guide any group of people with these ideals and growing habits had no idle moments on his hands.

This whole situation need not be considered at all strange. It is the inevitable penalty of too much speed. It is easier to assemble the parts of a machine than to fit them together; easier to gather a crowd than to direct it. And Chicago was not a crowd, it was a multitude, coming on like a swiftly rising tide. Anyone with an elementary knowledge of human nature could predict that clash and friction would be a part of its early history.

This showed among the Catholics of Chicago, in spite of the well-known power of Catholic organization. To begin with, many of the Catholics who came to the city did not know their religion well. Twenty years before this time, Father St. Cyr, writing to Bishop Rosati, said, 'While the number of Catholics is large, almost all of them are entirely without knowledge of their religion.' They went to Mass regularly, and generally they respected their priests, but beyond that they were unacquainted with the detailed needs of the Church as an organization. The result was that when things were done which were perfectly in accord with normal Church rules, but strange to them at the time, they showed a tendency in spots to fall back on their 'I will' privilege, and to go their own way in the matter. This tendency was still in evidence at the time of Damen's first mission in Chicago, in 1856, as the incident we have related proves.

Besides this, there were not nearly enough priests to cope with the increasing work. Those on the ground had to do the best they could, omitting a great part of the individual attention which the Church aims to give her children. The consequence was that a considerable number of souls merely drifted with the tide, in great danger of losing their faith altogether.

Finally the difficulty of nationalities was felt like a cinder in the eye. A melting pot, one would judge, isn't such a pleasant place to toss about in, and the problem of making over many newcomers from various shores into Americans and welding them into harmoniously spiritual co-operation as Catholics, could not be described as easy of solution. The man who would meet this situation, understand and conquer it, must have a strong faith and determination, a keen business sense, fine tact, a real affection for the people he wished to win, physical strength for hard and constant work, patience to see things through and a personality with a power of strong appeal—a combination of the practical and the visionary, a dreamer of dreams as well as a doer of deeds, a prophet, in a sense, as well as a missionary.

After Damen's mission in Chicago, Bishop O'Regan judged that this was the man to meet these requisites and he took steps at once to have Damen join the forces already at work in his diocese. While the Jesuit Fathers were still giving their first mission in the city, he had urged them to consider a permanent residence in Chicago and offered them a location anywhere they might choose. Father Damen wrote the Bishop's wish to his Provincial and received in return the answer to go ahead, do what he could, and his judgment in the matter would be sanctioned. Before he returned to St. Louis, he took a survey of Chicago real estate. There was plenty of it to look at, almost nothing else, in fact, in the districts he leaned toward as the site of a pros-

pective parish. He was not well acquainted with local real estate conditions, but his natural business sense and his practical judgment rose to the surface and in the short time that he had for inquiry he formed a sound estimate of where he was likely to do the most good. Shortly after his return to St. Louis, Father Damen received the following letter from the Bishop:

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, Sept. 15, 1856.

TO REVEREND FATHER DAMEN, S.J.,
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI.

Dear Father Damen:

I have just now written to Father Provincial and I want you to assist me with him that he may grant a request of establishing a House in Chicago. You know its necessity and the prospects before it and hence I have referred to you as one who can give to the Provincial and others all the requisite information on this subject. May I beg of you to do so? You could not co-operate in a holier work. You would be a most efficient instrument to hold up religion in this city and diocese. Land can be had quite near to the locality you wish for, but in a still better place, at a fair price and in large quantities. In one place, as much as six acres can be had. By buying all this, you would, in one year, have two entirely free. The increased value caused by your establishment would effect this. This is a positive fact.

I would also request of you not to correspond *on this matter* with any one whatever in Chicago, except myself, not even with those who, in other respects, would be found most trustworthy. Already Catholics whom you regard much are actually speculating on the subject and if they knew you or I had a preference for a particular place, they would soon have it bought up. You will write soon.

I am sorry that I did not merit your thanks better while you were in Chicago. I can never sufficiently express my esteem for you and your worthy Fathers.

I would have written sooner to you and to Father Provincial, but I wished to know more about the land.

With kindest regards for Father De Smet and the earnest wish of seeing you soon permanently at work in Chicago, where you are most ardently expected, I am, reverend dear Father Damen,

Very truly yours,

ANTHONY,
*Bishop of Chicago and
Administrator of Quincy.*

This letter reveals the cordial good feeling that existed between Bishop O'Regan and Father Damen, and the impression the Jesuit mission had made upon not only the Bishop but upon the Catholics of the city. After the sample of his work they had witnessed, they went after him, in characteristic fashion, to 'sign him up' with Chicago for life. And they succeeded.

In St. Louis, Father Damen was considering seriously the financial side of the Chicago proposition. He had no money himself, and any he could procure had to come either from a loan or a donation. He seemed to think that Bishop O'Regan might help him, but the following from the Bishop disillusioned him of that idea :

As to resources which it would appear you suppose me to have, I have none such, as I think you must know. You are always aware how much we are in debt, and how much must be expected before we can derive any revenue from our churches. We have to erect a hospital, two asylums, a House of Refuge and a House of Mercy; we must build school houses, priests' houses, buy lots for churches and build churches. I must also at once provide a cemetery, which will cost at least \$32,000, without any prospect of revenue in my lifetime. All these wants are known to you, and my inability to supply them, or even a small portion of them. How then, very dear Father, can you talk of my leaving property to my successor? If your Society comes here, I will leave them wealth, a spiritual wealth, practiced by you, and I hope by myself.

There was no prospect of direct financial support from Chicago. But Father Damen read the future of the city too well to allow this to be an obstacle. Through his Superior, he borrowed enough money to acquire a site, and early in 1857 returned to Chicago to locate one.

There was some difference of opinion between Bishop O'Regan and Father Damen regarding the choice of the new site, though the Bishop allowed him freedom in the matter. Father Damen steadily looked away from what are called 'desirable localities' toward any spot where he could reach more souls, and especially the poor. Years before, he had written: 'How many more souls might I not have gained for God had I devoted my time amongst the poor instead of the rich. Have I not had experience enough to prove that my spiritual functions to improve the rich are well-nigh lost, whereas my endeavors for the poor are almost always productive of much fruit?'

Back of all the prospecting and building that Damen was launching into, always remained fast the guiding idea of the missionary, 'Wherefore he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor, he hath sent me to heal the contrite of heart.'

The location that Damen finally decided upon was chosen largely for religious reasons. It was a place where he had Catholics to work for. This appears in the following letter to Father Druyts, his Superior in St. Louis:

The answer from Philadelphia has come about the Bull's Head property. They will sell at \$600 a lot, which would make a total of \$24,600 for the 44 lots. The acre which is in litigation cannot be settled yet. With this acre included, there would be 52 lots, and this would make a total of \$31,400. Of this, \$2,500 would be paid by two Protestant gentlemen toward the improvement. I went out this afternoon and made inquiries about the number

of Catholic families in the neighborhood and I could not find a dozen around the place. I therefore concluded that the place should be rejected as one that would not pay for the sacrifices we have to make. Should your reverence think differently, telegraph—'Buy the Bull's Head.' Bishop still continues recommending this place and says that we will regret it; but I cannot believe that, informed as I am at present about the few Catholics in that vicinity. Moreover, here we would have to put up \$10,000 improvements the first year; that is part of the bargain.¹

Now I have accepted the Southwest Side, three acres at \$5,500 an acre, that is thirty-two lots. Here we will have a large Catholic population at once, sufficient to fill a large church. We can put up a frame church, which will answer the purpose till all the land is paid off. Then it will answer for a school, and the rest of the land, which we can sell, will help us to build the college and the new church. In my opinion it is decidedly the only place we can take here.

This letter is a good specimen of Damen's correspondence. In fact, nearly all his letters that we have concern business matters, and even these reveal the pressure of emergency in every case. They are written on paper of every size, shape and color. There are yellow letters, blue letters, gray letters. Whatever blank sheet lay nearest at hand was satisfactory. With no overture at all he plunges into the theme, states it clearly and briefly and is done. We surmise that Damen looked on letter-writing as a necessary evil. But in spite of their condensation, they reveal his character. There is an honesty about them, a directness that sometimes verges on bluntness, a sincerity that doesn't know how to beat about the bush, with every now and then a note of heartiness and thankfulness and genuine piety that

¹ The Bull's Head was a tavern at the southeast corner of Madison Street and Ogden Avenue, where the Washingtonian Home stood in later years. It was built in 1848 by Matthew Lafin and owed its name to the neighboring cattleyards, the first to be opened in Chicago.

show him as anything but the hard business man. We can see a good deal of Damen's character in this short letter. The two mistakes he makes in computing expenses, is something exceptional with him. He made very few of these in business matters.

In other ways the letter is entirely Damenesque. He could plan rapidly and yet safely. It is remarkable how he forecasts so quickly just what he is going to do. This brief, but complete outline of future building—the land, the temporary church, a school, a college, a second, permanent church—all this looked like a dream to others at the time. Yet in a dozen years, he had it all finished. He had judged perfectly the pace Chicago was striking, and he planned on a scale to keep up with it. His estimating power was unusually keen. Another quality of Damen appears here that characterized him throughout, namely, his power of sturdy decision when decision was left to him, as well as his care to suspend action when he did not have the final word. Thus, Bishop O'Regan had given him freedom of choice of his location and after consideration he had decided against a suggestion of the Bishop. In the matter of spending money for the place, however, he was not declared free by his Provincial, who would ultimately be responsible for the debt. So Damen holds himself ready to drop or change his plan at a word from headquarters.

No difficulties were raised, however. The Bishop consented to his location, the Provincial to his investment and Damen was free to begin. The place he chose for the parish buildings lay a block west of the intersection of what was then known as Twelfth Street and Hoosier Avenue, now Roosevelt Road and Blue Island Avenue. And the parish territory was the fifty square miles spreading around that center; in other words, nearly the whole west and southwest side of Chicago.

A curious fact is that neither Bishop O'Regan nor

Father Damen were aware that they were incorporating into the parish the site of Father Marquette's little church of almost two centuries before. On the twelfth of December, 1674, Marquette had built his cabin at what is now the junction of Damen Avenue and the Drainage Canal. There for several months he celebrated Mass daily and administered the sacraments to some stray Indians and to his French companions. Marquette was thus, informally, the first pastor of the district that, two hundred years later, Damen fell heir to as the first officially appointed pastor of the Holy Family Church.

CHAPTER VIII

A PARISH ON THE PRAIRIE

A VAST expanse of prairie, stretching west and south as far as the eye could reach; in summer rippled with wild grasses, in winter piled with drifts of snow, in spring and autumn sodden with rains slowly seeping into the earth; scattered irregularly here and there, singly or huddled in small groups, gaunt wooden houses standing forlorn; thin outlines of roads forming between strategic points, winding every way through deep dust or heavy mud; a flat, uninteresting, and to the chance observer, a totally unprofitable terrain where one might temporarily lodge under pressure, but which none would consider as a permanent dwelling place—this was Father Damen's choice of ground for the new parish, and here he was already planning to build what would be at its completion the third largest church in America.

It did seem an impossible proposition. A wise conservative would call it, at best, a mere gamble on the future. Where were the people? Only one square mile of the fifty had any Catholics and they were but a handful. Where was the money? He had a few borrowed thousands for the land, it is true, but where were the buildings to come from and where the necessary revenue for all the overhead expense? Even in prosperous times these questions would pose the hardest investor, but in this very year of 1857, the great panic that swept across the country was in full gallop. Money went burrowing underground; business stopped dead; the unemployed were wandering all over the country

looking for any kind of work; restlessness came over everybody, with a tendency to scatter rather than to settle; discontent was spreading fast. The common phrase of the day was 'very hard times.' Men who held any money at all gripped it still tighter, and men who hadn't, reached hungrily out to get it. The idea of anybody giving money away for any purpose whatever seemed preposterous. And there was Damen, already in debt, standing away off in the middle of a prairie, holding out his hands and expecting people to come and put money into them. It looked foolish.

But Damen wasn't a bit foolish. He had resources which neither Bishop O'Regan nor his superiors in St. Louis suspected. All his life heretofore he had acted under orders. Even as pastor of St. Francis Xavier's Church in St. Louis he had followed along traditional lines. Now he was thrown upon his own initiative, facing an objective that was, apparently, hopeless of attainment. He had to give a local habitation and a name to a parish, almost out of airy nothing. A few straggling houses on a prairie, a scattered handful of people having all they could do to earn but a living, debt hanging over his head and a panic eating the country—these were the materials to be somehow metamorphosed into a great church, a high school and college, a group of Catholic grade schools, a population thickly crowding the west side of Chicago. He rose to the occasion and followed through without ever taking a backward step. We have observed of the traditional Hollander, that when hard pressed he will suddenly drop his cloak of stolidity and wave the sword of romance. And no one of his countrymen was ever more typical of this trait of the Hollander than Damen. From this time on, the *Luctor et Emergo* slogan of the Dutch could be used to describe Damen individually. Here was the turning point of his life. Whatever of diffidence, hesitation, timidity he had about him fell away from him,

and a romantic aggressiveness possessed their place. Romance did not overbalance him, however. His unusual, practical business instinct enabled him always to keep his feet. He moved continuously and swiftly but never lost his sense of direction. Imagination never led him on any blind hurrying after will-o'-the-wisps. Whatever mistakes he made in his work were merely technical ones. There were no wrecks on his main lines.

Romance, therefore, with Damen, had nothing in it of sentimentality, no plaintive pondering upon the mystery of the past. He wasted no time in brooding over days that were no more, nor lost himself in vague dreams of cloud-capped palaces in the future. He was a priest alone on a prairie, and his romance was the prosaic labor of bringing scattered sheep together into a fold. In this business he made no movement at haphazard, or by guesswork. The site he chose was the outcome of his own shrewd observation. He had rejected the spot suggested by the Bishop only after thorough study of the Catholic situation in Chicago. For his new location he had gone out and mingled among the few people settled about, and his judgment was that here was the type he was looking for as the solid foundation stones for his parish. Most of them were Irish, and all of them, whatever their other defects and handicaps, had strong religious faith. They were thinking, too, of providing for their children the education that they had been denied themselves. Damen possessed the gift of estimating character in the group as well as in the individual. He saw at once that this combination of faith and the love of learning was bound to evolve into a fruitful and tenacious Catholicity and immediately he picked this as his starting point. Old residents of Chicago wondered at his decision, feared he was making a mistake, foreboded pessimistically, but Damen stood by his first intuition. The event proved him to be correct.

