



Mount Saviour Chronicle

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Dear Friends of Mount Saviour,

A German proverb says: "Wenn einer eine Reise tut, so soll er was erzählen" (When one makes a trip, he ought to tell about it). The journey to Europe was full of experiences I would like to share with you, and I think this can be done without losing sight of the immediate purpose of this Chronicle, which is to bring you the wishes of our monastic family for the feast of the Nativity of our Lord. The mystery of Christ's birth lives on in the Church and in the lives of Christians, as St. Leo the Great explains so well in a sermon on Christmas: "It is true, the infancy of the majesty of the Son of God did not refuse to assume has in the progress of age developed into the maturity of manhood. The actions which Christ took upon Himself for our sake during His humiliation came to an end through the triumph of His Passion and His Resurrection, and yet, today's feast day renews for us the most holy birth of Jesus from the Virgin Mary. Adoring the origin of our Redeemer, we celebrate the beginning of our own life, for the birth of Christ is the origin of the Christian people, and the nativity of the Head is also the nativity of the Body. The children of the Church may be separated from one another by the succession of times, yet the sum total of all the faithful born out of the baptismal font, as they are crucified with Him in His Passion, raised with Him in His Resurrection, enthroned with Him at the right hand of the Father in His Ascension, likewise are born with Him today in this Nativity. Every one of the faithful in any part of the world, when he is reborn in Christ, is cut off from his old past and becomes a new man in a second birth. He is not counted any more among the descendants of his father according to the flesh. He belongs to the new race of the Saviour Who has become a son of man that we may become sons of God." (VI Sermon on Christmas) When "the power of the Most High" over-shadowed the Virgin and the Word of God was made flesh, a new beginning was made in us from above. Through the sacrament of baptism, the purity of this new birth has been made accessible to all who carry the burden of Adam's fall by reason of their natural origin.

The mystery of the Nativity shows its power in the lives of those who are born of God. Out of the many things

which happened on the journey through Europe, I have selected a few episodes in which this becomes especially evident. Our retreat at Maguzzano was a new beginning by listening to the word which Christ had for us. The contact with monastic sanctity in the monastery of Pierrequi-Vire showed that the Divine Word descends from His heavenly throne in the midst of quiet silence. The unforgettable Mass in the humble parish church of Hay-les-Roses in the banlieue of Paris revealed the splendor of a new beginning in the midst of the desert of godlessness.

Because of lack of space, I am unable to tell you more about the youth of Christ in the "Old Continent": how I saw it in the venerable person of our Holy Father in Castel Gandolfo; on the visit to Fatima; in the liturgical revival in St. Severin and St. Sulpice in Paris, in the outstanding work of a true shepherd of souls, Archbishop Montini in Milan; in the new beginnings of monastic life which we witnessed in Leire (Navarre), Poblet, (Catalonia), in Boquen (Brittany); in the oblation of Bill Harrington and his wife in the crypt of S. Anselmo in Rome. But I cannot let this opportunity pass without remembering gratefully those who showed us the charity of Christ through their most generous hospitality: Mr. and Mrs. Ramon Tous, who were waiting for us before daybreak when Albert and I landed in Lisbon and took such loving care of us during our stay in Portugal; Mr. and Mrs. Magin Alfonso of Barcelona, who made it possible for us to visit the Basque country, Navarre, Zaragoza, Poblet and Ripoll under excellent guidance of Florencio Balasa; Msgr. Angelo Grazioli, who greeted us in Verona; Msgr. Belvederi and the Sisters of Montefiolo who did so much for Brother Paul, and last but not least the mother and aunt of our dear Father Peter in LeMans.

MEETING IN EUROPE

What a joy it was to see our four Romans when Albert Claas and I landed at the Geneva airport after a short flight from Barcelona! It had been the main purpose of the journey to Europe, to be again with the four Brethren who, a year ago, left Mount Saviour to study philosophy and theology in Rome at the College of S. Anselmo on the Aventine Hill. They had successfully jumped the hurdle

of their first exams and spent most of their vacation at Maria Laach, where they were treated like children of the family. On their way from Maria Laach to Geneva, they had stopped at Hauterive, a Cistercian monastery of the Common Observance near Fribourg in Switzerland. Traveling from Rome to Germany, they had visited other Benedictine monasteries in Austria, Bavaria and the Rhineland. Now they returned, as it were, to Mount Saviour. The two or three weeks ahead were to be devoted to quiet thought of the idea and the meaning of their own monastery.

We rejoiced in our meeting again. Brother Benedict, as the "senior" was in charge of things, and also commanded the pursestrings, so I kept close to him. He looked well and rested. He was now a "Bachelor of Philosophy" and carried his dignity with quiet equanimity. As the senior, it was evident he had done much to draw and hold the quartette together. Brother James obviously enjoyed himself in his own little way. The diet at Maria Laach had done nothing to make him shrink, and probably no diet ever would. Remaining a "1000% American" as Brother Benedict put it, he did not miss a thing in Europe, neither in the field of culture nor social contacts. He was satisfied with his lot as a student at S. Anselmo. Brother Paul had had a much harder time of it. The battle of the exams during the last months at S. Anselmo had tired him out and the traveling afterwards had added to his exhaustion. At this moment, he concentrated the balance of his energies on carrying a rather large, mysterious cardboard box, which, on top of all the other pieces of baggage we had with us, posed the question if it were essential. I asked meekly what it contained, and when Brother Paul explained that it held an assortment of straw flowers from Holland, I realized that we simply could not dispense with it. Brother Augustine had finished his first year of Theology because he had already a Master's degree in Philosophy from Notre Dame when he entered Mount Saviour. At S. Anselmo he did not find the going too easy. The teaching is all in Latin, and one must get used to the cramming for the exams at the end. He had come out of this fiery furnace slightly singed, but by no means burned to ashes. The vacation had agreed with him and when we met he had fully recovered. The ups and downs of the journey had not affected his equilibrium nor exhausted his patient willingness to help wherever help was needed.

Our plans had not been defined too specifically beforehand. I knew we wanted to go to a monastery on Lake Garda, but unfortunately I had forgotten the name of the place. I pinned my hopes for the exact details on my friend Edmund Stinnes and his secretary. I knew he lived in Ascona, but how to get there from Geneva again was not quite clear. I remembered that in Switzerland one can reach any phone in any place just by dialing. Edmund Stinnes' phone number was therefore the magic key to the situation, and I had it dialed, got Edmund immediately, and within a few minutes everything was set.

The way to go to Ascona was through the Simplon tunnel. Edmund had recommended going to Brieg that evening, and therefore we bought our tickets for Brieg and got as far as Lausanne where we had to change trains.

Suddenly I remembered that we had to pass through St. Maurice, the famous Abbey of Augustinian Canons, where Father Basil (the present Abbot of Maria Laach) Father Odilo (the present Subprior) and I had been received about thirty years ago on our way home from S. Anselmo to Maria Laach. The wonderful treasure of St. Maurice, with many precious things from Merovingian and Carolingian times, still stood vividly before my mind. So all plans were changed again at the last moment and instead of going to Brieg we stopped at St. Maurice. To our four Romans, this little incident must have shown that "life with Father" had started in earnest.

There was a moment of suspense when, around nine o'clock in the evening, we found ourselves on the street in St. Maurice without a clear idea of where to fill our empty stomachs or where to put down our tired heads. However, this lasted only for a short moment until some ladies came to our rescue and pointed to the "Dents du Midi" a few steps away as the solution of all our problems. We spent a most comfortable evening and night at this hospitable hotel, and when the next morning after Mass a friendly and eager Canon of St. Maurice opened the heavy steel doors to the treasury, there was not the slightest vestige of regret left. I was delighted to hear the "Ah!" of surprise and wonderment on the lips of my spiritual sons, and took peace in the thought that my management of the trip thus far had been better than I had expected. The treasury of St. Maurice was fascinating indeed. Our accommodating Canon himself was infected with the enthusiasm of the young Americans. It nearly ended in our missing the train for Brieg and the Simplon; nearly, not quite.

Ascona is in the canton Ticino, the Italian speaking part of Switzerland. There was a little "trenino" as the Italians called it, from Domodossola to Locarno, through one of the most picturesque sections of the Italian Alps. We kept running from one side of the "trenino" to the other in a vain attempt to take it all in. No sooner had Brother Augustine shouted: "Look, those rocks!", and we all ran to his side, when looking back, Brother Benedict would draw attention to a castle poised on a hill; everything set in a grand display of autumn colors. One could see everyone had the "Europe fever." It rose to another pitch in Locarno and Ascona on Lago Maggiore as the result of the singular hospitality of Edmund and Marga Stinnes. Edmund's secretary, Miss Nussbaumer, who had a brother in Einsiedeln and was herself a Benedictine Oblate of that monastery, was untiring in her efforts to be of service. Those were unforgettable days, but they were not meant to last forever. We had to be "about our Father's business", and we were eager to get away from the world.

RETREAT AT MAGUZZANO

Miss Nussbaumer found out where the monastery on Lake Garda was and how to get there. Her arrangements were minute and inspired absolute confidence. Everything proceeded according to plan. We arrived at the station of Desenzano on Lake aGrda just a few minutes before Don Leone Zinaghi, the Superior of Maguzzano, the name of the monastery, arrived with a station-wagon to take us to our destination.

Maguzzano had been a Benedictine Abbey until Napoleon suppressed it. When the Trappists were driven out of France in 1905, they came there, and remained until 1932 when they returned to their homeland and settled at Aiguebelle near Lyons. Since that time, the sons of Calabria, a Veronese priest and founder of the "Servi della Provvidenza", had taken over the monastery as a school for poor boys. Don Leone showed us around in the cloister and the spacious hallways, and we found that we had a wing of the monastery nearly all to ourselves, with a conference room and a little chapel where we could sing Mass and the Divine Office without any disturbance. We had also a small refectory completely to ourselves where we were more than well taken care of by the most faithful Adelmo who had given up his vacation to be able to serve us. We could not have chosen such a perfect setting; certainly it had been prepared by Divine Providence for our retreat.

Because the Benedictines are not an Order, in the modern sense, but rather a Confederation of independent abbeys, each monastery has a spirit and a mission of its own. This does not mean that there is no unity among them. Life at S. Anselmo, where they were together with teachers and students from various monasteries all over the world, had shown to our Brethren that a strong family spirit reigns among the great variety of specific ideals and interpretations of the Rule. For most monasteries, their specific attitude is a matter of history and tradition, of their belonging to this or that Congregation. As far as Mount Saviour is concerned, we know that we are not called to open a school for boys, nor to take a regular part in the ordinary ministry of the souls in parishes. Our first concern should be the monastic life itself as a "school of divine service," in which St. Benedict teaches us how we "return through the labor of obedience to the One whom we have left in the sloth of disobedience." (Prologue). But we are still in the formative stage; we have not received the stamp of a European or of an American mother abbey. We must therefore listen again and again to the voice of the Lord. He has carried us through many dangers; He blesses us with vocations; He is with us in our daily needs. We know He has a plan for us. There is always the danger that the great amount of work which we have to do from day to day may bring us to the point of our losing sight of the deeper call we have received from our Lord: To glorify Him in that peace which the world cannot give.

The two weeks at Maguzzano were intended to bring us back into the very center of life as monks. To our four Romans, the first year at S. Anselmo had been an exciting adventure. The battle for survival in the exams and the various travels through Europe naturally had absorbed the greater part of their energies. By all this, the bond which united them to Mount Saviour had not suffered, but the time had come to stop and take stock and make a new step into the center. What does Christ expect of Mount Saviour? In trying to answer this question, we followed a classification of types of Benedictine life as it had developed in the early Middle Ages, which a monk of Maria Laach, Father Stephan Hilpisch, has explained in a recent

article. He distinguishes three types of monasteries: the *liturgical* represented by Cluny, with the accent on the solemn performance of the "Opus Dei"; the *cultural* represented in the Reichenau or St. Gall, where the monks concentrated on cultural achievements such as scholarship, the various arts and the participation of their abbey in the political life of the Empire; the *primitive*, those monasteries which, reacting against the lax interpretations of the Rule in the *cultural* abbeys, strove to return to the spirit of primitive monasticism through strict observance of silence, bodily mortification and manual labor.

It was clear to us that Mount Saviour would not be exclusively a *liturgical*, *cultural* or a *primitive* monastery; that would affect the balance of "ora et labora" (prayer and work) which St. Benedict has established in his Rule. The Divine Office should be the center of our monastic life without allowing liturgical observances to crowd out the other monastic activities as was the case at Cluny. We should strive to glorify God in all things with an appreciation for the gifts which He has given us in creation without allowing cultural interests to interfere with our absolute surrender to God. Although content with the least and meanest of things, the purpose of our foundation should not be a return to primitive rigor, because this would inevitably shift the emphasis and concentrate the attention of the monk on the physical hardships of the life.

St. Benedict's idea was to establish a way of life which would "so temper all things that the strong may still have something to long after, and the weak may not draw back in alarm." Such a golden mean allows every member of the community to turn his full attention to the *spiritual* aspect of the "school of divine service," to the task of reordering all his energies in Christ by means of obedience to his spiritual father. This is the first and essential purpose of our life at Mount Saviour, "to seek after peace and pursue it"; then we shall also radiate this peace of Christ into the hearts of those who come to us.

"IN THE MIDST OF SILENCE"

On our way from Rome to Paris, Albert and I experienced the quiet power of monastic life during our visit to the Abbey of Pierre-qui-Vire. Pierre-qui-Vire is, even in these days of planes, trains and buses, difficult to reach. The founder, Père Muard, had really retired into the desert when he made his abode in this remote part of the Burgundy forest. It was a two-hour ride from Dijon to a little village where one of the Fathers was waiting with a miniature car which he drove at breathtaking tempo around curves and through narrow village streets until, with a sigh of relief, we arrived in front of the monastery. There is no distracting view of any kind, only a ravine with a vegetable garden at its bottom and dark forests all around. It was bitter cold, but there was no heat in the cells or in the hallways. What impressed us immediately was the deep silence which reigned everywhere, not a penitential silence so much as a festive silence. At the entrance to the guesthouse, a sign was posted: "Le silence est l'action de Dieu dans l'ame" (Silence is God's working in the soul). I could not help remembering the Introit of the Mass of the Sunday within the Octave of Christ-

mass: "When all things were in deep silence, and the night had run half of its course, Thy Eternal Word, O God, leaped down from heaven from Thy royal throne." Pierre-qui-Vire is an example how the Divine Word makes a new beginning from above where the silence of creatures opens a way for Him. It had been the idea of Père Maud to combine various kinds of active ministry with the seclusion of monastic life. Even though his ideas were not realized exactly as he had intended, Pierre-qui-Vire became a source of intense activity. Several other foundations were made by it in France, and not only in France, but also in missionary countries like Madagascar, Indochina and Morocco. After the war, the monastery developed its printing establishment from which several publications appear periodically in the field of art (*Zodiaque*) and of the spiritual life (*Temoignages*). The abbey is also doing outstanding work for its Oblates, whom it serves with another splendid publication (*Ecoute*).

A NEW BEGINNING

On several occasions, I had heard the name "Hay-les-Roses" mentioned as the name of a parish where a group of Benedictine monks originating from Pierre-qui-Vire had made an attempt to create genuine Christian parish life in the desert of the banlieue of Paris. Everybody who visits Paris has caught at least a glimpse of the banlieue, originally the glacis of Paris when it was still a fortress, which had been filled rapidly with houses, factories and railroad yards in the course of the late nineteenth century. Millions of uprooted people from all over France have gathered together here so fast that no organization could possibly keep pace with the rapid growth of these settlements, and the Church least of all. The number and size of the churches is woefully inadequate. There is nothing in the appearance of these endless quarters that would remind us of Christian civilization. The masses live in complete ignorance of Christianity. It was on the Sunday of Christ the King when Albert and I descended into the Métro for the Porte d'Italie. From there, it was still a long ride by bus through the bewildering maze of the banlieue until we finally were told that we had arrived at Hay-les-Roses. A big throng had gathered in some open space between workshops and apartment houses for it was market day. To our surprise, the people seemed to know where the parish church was and were eager to describe it to us. Nevertheless, we wondered how many we would find in the church. When we finally got there, we found again to our surprise that it was hard to open the door for the church was packed with people. We squeezed our way in, and more surprises were waiting for us. The congregation were going to receive Holy Communion. Two by two they moved up to the altar in an endless procession, mostly young people and children, singing while they were approaching the altar: "Le Seigneur est mon Berger" (the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want . . .). In the wilderness of the banlieue, this was an overwhelming discovery.

There is no sight in Europe more discouraging than the vast chaotic suburbs around the old capitals, Rome, Madrid, London and, above all, Paris. Nowhere does one feel more the weight of old hatreds, the burden of old

social wrongs, the futility of human efforts to lead humanity by its own power into a new future of blessedness and peace. But here at Hay-les-Roses, suddenly something completely different came into view: a new beginning from above, a new people, a new race, "born not of the will of man nor of the will of the flesh but of God." The power of the "new birth" of our Lord from Mary's virginal womb lives on in the baptismal font of the Church where it gives a new beginning to the sons of man. Here we could see them going up to the altar-table in deep devotion, love and joy to receive the "God of their youth." Even after the Mass had been ended many of them stayed on in the church, singing and praying, reluctant to leave this haven of peace.

In the sacristy we met Père Jean de Féligonde, the monk of Pierre-qui-Vire who was the pastor, together with his right hand, Dom Hadelin, a monk of St. André near Bruges in Belgium. Both invited us to come to the "rectory" for dinner. We could not refuse. When we got there, we realized that we probably had caused them considerable inconvenience. The "rectory", turned out to be an old chateau of the lesser kind, from the times of Louis XIV, and it looked as if nothing constructive had been done there since the days of the Roi Soleil. The evidence of greatest poverty was everywhere. The "parlor" just had some old feeble chairs. The "chapel" had only some benches without backs as choirstalls. But when we began to apologize for our unannounced coming, the little Frère Marc put an end to all apologies with the cheerful remark: "The more people there are in the house of God, the better it is." And we really felt that we were in the house of God. Père Jean de Féligonde had impressed us deeply by the way he celebrated the Holy Sacrifice for his people. Now as our host he welcomed us with such simplicity and warmth that we felt right at home. We asked him about his parish and we learned that no less than 12,000 people belonged to it. Of these, about 200 came to church when he had moved in ten years ago. Now he estimated that about 2,000 were again practising their faith. He was convinced that only a community, not individual priests, would be able to tackle the job of bringing the thousands back to the Church they had left under the pressure of their paganized surroundings. We were glad to hear that he had been able to start a novitiate in a neighboring village, and that during November the first of his spiritual sons would be ordained priest right in the parish church of Hay-les-Roses. We left deeply grateful to God for this experience, and it seemed to us as if the name "Hay-les-Roses" (Hedge of Roses) had taken on a deeper significance. Roses had indeed sprung up in the desert, and a reborn generation "came to Sion with singing, eternal joy upon their heads" (Isaias 35, 10).

May the birthday of Christ be to us all the birthday of peace; may it make of us a new race of children of God, filled with the spirit of song and eternal joy.

Devotedly yours in Christ,

H. Hermann Witzem, O.S.B.