

A SKETCH OF BISHOP VEY'S LIFE.

J. L. Vey was born at Yssengeaux (Hte Loire), France, on January the 6th 1840. He resided in Paris from 1862-1865 to follow there the course of studies in Divinity, the science of which he acquired to a high degree.

He arrived in Siam in September 1865, where he devoted his first years to studying the Siamese language, and succeeded so well in that course that, after Bishop Pallegoix, he may be said to have been the best scholar among foreigners who have lived in Siam. The Catholic mission of Siam owes to him several good doctrinal works in Siamese, not to mention the revised Edition of Pallegoix's dictionary to which he devoted nearly two years to render it more complete and handy. He was no less quick in getting familiar with the practical knowledge of the country where he had to live, its usages, laws and regulations, the character and manners of its people.

Bishop Dupont, his predecessor, was not long in noticing the high qualifications of this young apostle, and wouldn't part with him; he entrusted to him the care of the Clerical College and of the press of the Mission which, with the residence of the Bishop, were at that time the only institutions set up in the Assumption quarters. But all this was not enough to absorb the zeal of the young priest, and by his good ways and manners, by his persuasive talks and chats with the neighbouring people of those quarters, he soon gathered many good souls round there, which formed the flock of the parish that has developed now in the Assumption Church.

It was in the years 1870-1871 during the absence of Bishop Dupont, who had been summoned to Rome to attend there the Council of the Vatican, that Father Vey's merits and talents became more evident. The Reverend Fathers scattered in the far districts were not then without encountering difficulties and troubles in their

Apostolic task, and how greatly surprised and satisfied they were when, on submitting them to him, he soon pointed out to them how to cope with such difficulties. When old Bishop Dupont came back from Europe, he couldn't long survive the fatigues of this, for him, too long journey, and as he succumbed to them a short time after, his successor was pointed out in the person of the Reverend Father Vey. Indeed in June 1875, he was elected and appointed by Rome Bishop of Geraza and Vicar Apostolic of Siam and, on the 5th of December of the same year, Bishop Colombert came from Saigon to consecrate Father Vey Bishop. The few old residents of Siam who witnessed the event, like to remember it, for it was carried out on a great scale. It was held in the Church of St. Francis Xavier at Samsen, which had been magnificently adorned for the occasion. Groups of Christians from all the districts had assembled there, His Majesty King Chulalongkorn was represented, and most of the highest notabilities. His Grace the Regent, H. E. Prime Minister Chao Phaya Sisurivong, H. E. Chao Phaya Phannuvong, the Diplomatic Body and officers of various departments were there and welcomed and hailed the two Bishops as they were carried back to the Presbytery after the ceremony, the band of the 2nd King then opening the march.

Father Vey, when consecrated Bishop, took to heart his high duties; his first care was to visit all the stations and make himself aware of their various wants. He managed to the best to multiply the labourers in the vineyard of Our Lord and for that purpose ensured a regular teaching staff to the Clerical College which had been transferred to the province of Ratburi for loneliness' sake, endowing it with the funds he could dispose of; his motto being that it was not so much the number as the qualifications of the converts that were to bring his mandate to success. The origin and destiny of man were the leading parts of his speeches and sermons; he would persuade every one to give all his attention to it. By the increase of missionaries and teachers, the stations were multiplied and more knowledge of the gospel was spread. After one of his visits to the districts, his health broke down and though he was provided with a strong constitution it was penetrated by jungle fever which he never got rid of. To preserve his life twice he was ordered to go home by his doctors, in 1886 and in 1896.

At home he took advantage of his sojourn there to promote the well-being of the Mission. In the audiences granted to him by the Pope Leo XIII., he made his Holiness acquainted with the result of this Mission's work, and in 1897 he was allowed to divide the work of the Mission, too hard for him, and to create another Vicariate, which obtained its formal settlement in the Consecration of Bishop Cuaz as first Vicar Apostolic of Laos on September the 3rd, 1899. Bishop Vey would take to himself the honour and consolation of performing that holy function which was held in the Rosary Church. He was then assisted by the Bishops of Saigon and Cambodia, the Right Reverends Mossard and Grosgeorge, who had graciously accepted to do honour to it by their presence.

When Bishop Vey first arrived in Siam in 1865, the Catholic Mission had then only a Bishop and eleven priests, the Christian population numbered about 10,000 converts; he left the Vicariate of Siam with a Christian population of 23,000 souls having 40 European and 13 native priests to administer them, not including in this the Vicariate of the Laos, which works of itself with 34 European and 4 native priests for a Christian population of 11,544 souls. Sympathising with the derelicts and sufferers of this world, Bishop Vey cared to have all the principal stations of the mission fitted with orphanages for children and shelter places for the poor, and the 15th of September 1897 was one of his good days, when attended by many Fathers of the Mission and surrounded by ladies and gentlemen, the elite of Bangkok Society, he formally opened and inaugurated the General Hospital St. Louis, which has worked since to the great benefit and satisfaction of Bangkok.

Bishop Vey did not remain indifferent to the material progress of the country and would have the Catholic Mission work its part there too. Well aware of the tantamount help supplied in this regard by a sound and moral education, he purposely founded educational institutions and the Assumption College for boys and Convent schools for girls were erected; not to mention the 49 schools already working in the Christian districts where boys and girls are given a first Elementary and moral tuition, which so highly distinguish them from children of

their age who grow up without any training at all. As regards illiterate people, Bishop Vey took great interest also in their well being and never missed an occasion of recommending them a regular and steady occupation, as remunerative to them and beneficial to the country, the prosperity of which as a rule depends on the efforts and virtues of individuals.

The great feature of Bishop Vey was keenness to see all the parts of a question and power of mind to argue for them to the last, with a great readiness to conciliation as soon as invoked. These high qualifications made him a sure adviser, and greatly helped him to keep up the interests of the mission without forfeiting its working on, and this accounts for the great loss the mission suffered by his death.

His special virtues were magnanimity of heart, broad-mindedness, piety, with a deep contempt of himself grounded on that spirit of faith which enlightened and enlivened his whole life.

He is gone for ever, may he rest in peace and soon receive the reward which his hard works and great suffering before the end must have obtained for him. During his last three years indeed he was often confined to his room unable to move or to work much ; but, as he used to say, he prayed much, and hoped this step would make up for the work he was not doing. But it was in the first days of February, 1909, that his poor state of health became alarming, all the organs getting depressed and refusing to work. On the 15th, after having uttered his profession of faith according to the rites prescribed for the Bishops, he received the last Sacraments, piously following and acknowledging himself all the prayers and holy invocations addressed to Heaven on his behalf. Then he lifted up his hands to bless all the Revd. Fathers and nursing Sisters assembled, there, trying to utter a few sentences to exhort them, and return thanks to them for their kind assistance, but, too much oppressed, the last words could not be heard.

He should have departed this life the day after, so much depressed he looked then, but the kind Sisters of the hospital who by their long, constant and most delicate cares, had already so much

contributed to prolong his life, were able to find the way of extending it for some days more, much supported in this indeed by the wise and appropriate directions of Dr. Pin, who did all that was possible, for a doctor, to relieve his Lordship. This short relief was most auspicious as it afforded the consoling opportunity to the Revd. J. M. Vey of the Straits Settlements, nephew of Bishop Vey, to arrive in time from Singapore to meet him alive and receive his last words and blessings for all the members of that noble and gentle French family, the name of which shall never be forgotten in Siam.

Bishop Vey piously and peacefully gave his last breath on the 21st February, 1909.