

**THE REMINISCENCES
OF A TEXAS
MISSIONARY**

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The reminiscences of a Texas missionary by P. F. Parisot

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REMINISCENCES
— OF A —
Texas Missionary.

— BY —
W. W. Johnson
REV. P. F. PARISOT, O. M. I.

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PART I.
TEXAS AND LOUISIANA.
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CHAPTER I.

1852. ADIEU to Belle France. Aspect of the Diocese of Galveston. My first trip. Peniless. General Chambers. Liberty. Sour Lake. Prayer answered. Two nights in a box. Back to Galveston. Yellow Jack. Second Mission tour. Raw Sweet potato for my supper. Jasper.

In the month of March, 1852, six Oblate Fathers and one Lay Brother, accompanied by four Nuns of the Incarnate Word, two Ursuline Sisters, four Brothers of Mary, and eighteen Seminarians, bade adieu to "La Belle France" and went aboard the sailing vessel "La Belle Assise," at Havre, en route for Texas.

"My native land adieu! adieu!

I cannot always stay with you, stay with you."

The wharf is crowded, thousands are there, in expectation of an unwonted spectacle. The saintly Bishop Odin, in his episcopal robes, blesses the band of missionaries from the pier and then goes back to Paris, in the interest of his diocese. The ship leaves its moorings, the cannon booms, the Ave Maris Stella is sung by thirty-five voices. "Adieu ma belle France." The sacrifice is made joyfully, "Hilarem datorem diligit Deus." Some sing, "Partons pour la Syrie." I saw tears trickling down the checks of a tender-hearted seminarian, as he cast a last glance on the coast of France disappearing on the horizon. "Adieu, mother."

Fifty-two days between the immensity of the firmament and the immensity of the ocean taught us to appreciate the fixity of mother earth. New Orleans at

last. The seminarians go to Barrens, Missouri, to finish their ecclesiastical studies. The rest go to Galveston, a city of 6,000 souls. Here we find the episcopal residence, a rather poor-looking place, a frame house with six or seven rooms. The occupants were the Very Rev. Chambodut, V. G., and Rev. M. Huc.

At that time there were in the whole State of Texas, the following Priests: the Rev. Clark at Houston, the Rev. Miller at Brazoria, the Rev. Anstaett at Victoria, the Rev. Padey at Refugio, the Rev. Dubuis at San Antonio, the Rev. Giraudon at Laredo, the Rev. Borrajo at Eagle Pass. In all nine Priests for the whole diocese of Texas. In the course of a year this number was increased by the Revs. Dixon, Heggarty O'Reilly, Sheehan, O'Driscoll and six Oblate Fathers.

In the month of February, 1853, I was sent by Bishop Odin to visit Eastern Texas. I had just \$2.00 in my pocket and a heavy saddle-bag, containing all articles necessary for the Mass and my wardrobe. I went on board a steamer, crossed over Galveston Bay, paid my fare, \$2.00, and landed at Chambersville peninsular. I entered the town, which contained three houses, the most conspicuous of which was General Chambers' residence. I directed my steps thereto, with my heavy saddle-bag on my shoulders, and met General Chambers on the door steps. "Good morning, General," said I, "I am sent by Bishop Odin to visit Eastern Texas. I have no horse, no money, and do not know the roads. Can you help me out?"

"How can your Bishop send you without money? Go back to Galveston by return boat, I shall pay your fare. You must come back better equipped."

"Much obliged to you, General, I think I will take my saddle-bag on my shoulders and go ahead." The

General, seeing my obstinacy, lent me a big American horse and a colored man to accompany me. We reached a settlement six miles ahead, called Turtle Bayou, where I sojourned three days. Here they lent me a donkey. It took me the whole day to reach the next settlement, fifteen miles distant. Here I prepared for First Communion a sick girl, who died a few days afterwards. I reached Liberty, where twenty-five children made their First Communion, after an eight days' preparation. En route for Beaumont, half way, where the road forks to the left, I saw a board stuck in the mud bearing the following inscription, "Sour Lake." Led by mere curiosity I went to see the lake. On arriving, a gentleman asked me if I were a Catholic Priest, and on my answering affirmatively, he invited me to see a dying lady, who had been praying to Almighty God to send her a priest.

The following day I said mass in her room and administered the last Sacraments, blessing God, who made me quit the high road through curiosity. She died shortly after.

At Beaumont, I could not find a single Catholic; so I went a few miles below, where lived a Mr. Chiasson, with his numerous family and his father, aged 103 years, who was as deaf as a post. I had to hear the old man's confession half a mile from the house behind a bush. After a few days spent in that neighborhood I started for Orange, where I met an Alsatian, who had arrived there a few days previous. He was the only Catholic in the place. He had for a dwelling place a kind of hut, or rather a box six feet cube, where we both slept comfortably, after partaking of a supper, prepared in a small tin plate over a lamp.

The following day being Sunday, I was shown a house where a German lady lived, supposed to be a

Catholic. Here I said Mass. The whole place was out just to see the Priest; but all behaved very well during Mass.

Out of ten settlements I visited, this was the only place, where I did not administer a single baptism. After calling with all my heart the blessing of God upon the man in the box, I left the place and went back to Galveston. The Alsatian, who tendered me his hut for two days and two nights, came to see me in Galveston in 1856. He was dressed as a gentleman, and bore the title of Captain. He had come from Orange on a schooner loaded with lumber. "The schooner," he said, "is mine, the cargo is mine, and the box six feet cube is now a chicken coop in my yard. I have now a two-story house. Come and see me, and we shall chat on the vicissitudes of human affairs."

After this, my first trip, I became convinced, that my knowledge of English was very limited, so I sat down to review my grammar.

Alas! alas! O woful year 1853! The angel of death accompanied with the dread plague of yellow fever, came hovering over Galveston, claiming 300 victims, among whom were five Priests, Rev. Fathers Dixon; Baudrand, O. M. L., Huc, O'Driscoll, Metton, and a sub-deacon, Rev. Bajar, all lately arrived.

The Vicar General and two Oblate Fathers were spared.

The doctors advised the Priests, who were not necessary for the ministry, to leave town and go to the interior of the State. They answered that they would rather die, than leave the post of peril and be looked upon as cowards.

A protestant lady, inquiring who were buried in these freshly opened graves in front of the Cathedral, was told that they contained six Catholic clergymen who

had died of yellow fever. "Why did they not leave the place," said she, "and save their lives as our minister did?" "Their duty compelled them to stay and die, was the answer."

The lady shed tears of compassion on the graves of these martyrs of duty. It was ascertained afterwards that she joined the Catholic Church.

The Catholic population of Texas at this time (1853) was about 20,000. The number of Priests employed on the mission was tripled since 1852. A new impetus was given to missionary work. The Brothers of Mary had opened their college at San Antonio under favorable auspices. The Sisters of the Incarnate Word, lodged in a private residence at Brownsville, impatiently waited for the completion of their convent then in course of erection, and employed their time in teaching a few girls from Brownsville and Matamoros, Mex. Three Oblate Fathers, with a lay Brother, commenced work on the lower Rio Grande, visiting the ranches along the road to Corpus Christi, and those scattered on the banks of the river as far as Roma. Resident Priests were stationed at some of the principal posts. But Eastern Texas was still a foreign mission, and I was the missionary "in partibus infidelium."

After recuperating from a serious attack of yellow fever I was again sent to visit those places in Texas, which had not been visited by any Priest for a number of years. This time I was out for nearly three months.

The first settlement I visited was situated on the right side of Trinity river. When I arrived at the crossing, the ferry-boat was on the opposite side of the river, and there was no one to take me over. For fully one hour I hallooed for the ferryman at the highest pitch of my voice, until I became hoarse. In my distress, I got astride on two logs tied together and cross-

ed the river, paddling with my hands. I brought the ferry-boat over, but being carried some distance below by the current, it took me a long time to return. Now to ferry my horse over. Here was the rub. On arriving on the opposite bank the water was so shallow that I had to jump into it and push the boat until I was saturated with water and perspiration. When I arrived at the house of the ferryman he was amazed at the recital of my manoeuvre, and could not understand how I managed to get over the river and cross with the heavy ferry-boat, alone. Finally, I arrived at the settlement and commenced work. An old man came from his farm, situated a short distance from the settlement, to see me. He had obtained a grant of 640 acres of land from the Mexican Government years before. A proviso of the law was that a man with a family could obtain the grant, provided he was a Catholic. This man had been influenced by human motives to become a Catholic, but was very ignorant of the tenets of the Church. Upon asking me if I could forgive his sins, "Yes Sir," I told him, "if you confess them with sorrow, for the Priests are the ambassadors of Christ, the dispensers of the mysteries of God, to whom Christ said, "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them, &c." But the poor man would not submit and confess, and went out sorrowful. He had not entered the fold of Christ by the right door, or at least, with the right intention. After I had finished my mission at that place, I was advised to return by water. The river had of late overflowed and left plenty of water in the swamps. The people furnished me with a boat and a colored man, but in some places the water was so shallow that we had to wade and push the boat through the mud. Sometimes we were caught between two trees. To make the story short we made nine miles in twelve hours. After