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The Late

V. Rev. Fr. W. Ledochowski, S.J.

by M. Thekkakara, S.J. **

When the 13th of last December passed away one of the greatest figures in the history of the Society of Jesus, the Very Rev. Fr. Wlodimir Ledochowski, the General of the Jesuits for the past twenty-eight years. The news of his death, sad though indeed it was, was not altogether unexpected. On November 7th, a cablegram had been received from London stating that Fr. Ledochowski had undergone a serious abdominal operation. Later news was more comforting; it was said that the operation had been successful and that the patient was rallying. But a last cable came announcing that he had been removed from the hospital to his official residence and that he had received the last Sacraments. It was clear that his old, battered frame, which had for so long been taxed to the utmost in the service of God, was too feeble to resist; and so no one was surprised to hear from the Vatican radio the announcement of his death which came a few days later.

Wlodimir Ledochowski was born of a noble Polish family on the 7th of October, 1866, at Loosdorf in Lower Austria. His father was Count Antoine Ledochowski, and his mother Countess Salis de Zizers. Many of the qualities which shone so eminently in the future General were to some extent characteristic of the Ledochowski family. Count Antoine's father had been a prominent political figure in his native Russian Poland, and the alien government, finding him too powerful a foe, had exiled him after one of the frequent outbursts of the national spirit. It was thus that Count Antoine happened to settle down in Lower Austria. Another who made the family name illustrious was Miecislav Cardinal Ledochowski, the uncle of Wlodimir. As Archbishop of Gnesen-Posen he offered a heroic resistance to Bismarck in order to uphold religious instruction to the Polish people. Threats and fines could not intimidate him, and in 1874 he was seized and imprisoned. While in the dungeon of Ostrowo, he was made a Cardinal by the Pope. Two years later the government released him from prison, but banished him from the country. In 1892

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THE LATE V. REV. FR. W. LEDOCHOWSKI, S.J.

he became the Prefect of the Propaganda, an office in which he did much splendid work for the Missions, until his death ten years later. A sister of Fr. Ledochowski was the head of a congregation of nuns which was spread widely in Poland; another sister, still more illustrious, founded a society for work among the African Negroes.

Wlodimir Ledochowski did his early classical studies in an academy for nobles in Vienna known as "Theresianum." On finishing his course here he spent one year studying for the law, and then joined the Grand Seminary of Tarnow in Galicia to become a priest. After two years at Tarnow, he proceeded to Rome to attend lectures at the Gregorian University run by the Jesuits, and had himself enrolled in the German and Hungarian College on October 26th, 1887. Another two years were spent in Rome, during which time he took the Doctor's degree in philosophy. It was then that he decided to enter the Society of Jesus, and so at the end of the academic year 1889, he bade what was supposed to be a lasting farewell to Rome and on September 24th, he joined the novitiate of the Galician Province at Starawies in Poland.

The next few years were spent in the comparative obscurity of a Jesuit in training; but in the case of Wlodimir Ledochowski the period was exceptionally brief. For an average young man who joins the Order at the close of his secular studies, the period of training lasts for about fifteen years; but exceptions are not unheard of, and Fr. Ledochowski was a most singular exception. After his novitiate he proceeded to Cracow for the immediate preparation for the priesthood. There was no need for the classical studies of the "Juniorate", and philosophy and theology could be shortened to four years since he had done a good deal already. In 1894 he was ordained a priest, and the following year he went to Tarnapol in Galicia, where he did "the third year of probation." Thus in 1896, only seven years after his joining the novitiate, his Jesuit training was completed, and he was at the disposal of his superiors for whatever work they saw fit for him.

His first appointment was as a member of the staff of the Polish periodical "Przegląd Powszechny" or "Universal Review" run by the Jesuits of Cracow. Eventually he became the editor of the paper, the first of the series of responsible posts he was to hold in the Society till his death, and later Rector of the College in Cracow where young Jesuits are trained. In 1901 he was made Provincial for the whole of Galicia, a post of the highest responsibility which he held for the next five years.

THE LATE V. REV. FR. W. LEDOCHOWSKI, S.J.

In 1906, he went to Rome in his official capacity to take part in the General Congregation of the Order which met to elect a successor to the General, Fr. Martin who had just died. His singular powers of administration were even then widely known outside his own Province, so that though so short a time a Jesuit and just forty years of age he was one of those who obtained a large number of suffrages for the Generalship. The person actually chosen was Fr. Wernz, the eminent professor of Canon Law at the Gregorian; but Fr. Ledochowski found himself attached to the General's Curia in the important post of "Assistant for Germany", that is, the special consultor of the General in matters concerning the government of six Provinces in and around Germany. Little is recorded of his work during the next nine years. The office of an Assistant is by its very nature one of intense devotedness, but of least publicity. But these were years when he had the opportunity of acquiring an intimate knowledge of the affairs of the Order. Besides in 1909, he had to make an official visitation of the six Provinces, by which he obtained a personal knowledge of a good part of the Society. All who met him during his tour kept a vivid recollection of his fine courtesy, frank cordiality, and supernatural outlook. There was something distinctive about the young Father Assistant—a tenacity of purpose and courage in execution far above the ordinary, and a high appreciation of spiritual values.

After the death of Fr. Wernz, the General Congregation met again in Rome in 1915; it was not the least surprising to any one that when the elections took place on the 11th February, Fr. Ledochowski was found to have the required majority of suffrages. He was indeed one of the youngest ever chosen for the Generalship; but the qualities required by the Constitutions for the General are not age or influence, but "the habit of intimate union and familiarity with God in prayer as well as in all other actions", exemplary virtue, devotedness to the Society and love and sympathy towards all. The electors knew that the person whom they had chosen possessed all these qualities in an eminent degree.

Soon after the election, the General had to transfer his Curia to Switzerland, owing to the increasing hostilities of Italy against Germany—Austria. At the end of the war he returned to Rome and took up residence in the German College as before. The work that faced him was immense. Most of the Provinces, especially those of France and Germany, had suffered greatly from the war. The best men, the flower of youth, had been killed on the front; many houses had been demolished, and

THE LATE V. REV. FR. W. LEDOCHOWSKI, S.J.

others given over to the military were far from habitable: all sources of income were gone and most of the works had to be started anew. Many houses were on the verge of extreme penury. In many cases the General himself had to come to the rescue, to organize relief from places which had not been so badly hit, and to set things going. Hardly had normal life been established, when began the immense work for a special General Congregation of the Order. A marvellous little volume called the "Epitome" which forms today a text-book for every Jesuit was published as a result of this Congregation. Meanwhile, the work and personnel of the Curia were increasing and accommodation in the German College being all too insufficient, new buildings for the Curia were erected in what later came to a part of the Vatican State. The new buildings were occupied by the Curia in 1927. Another great work of about the same time was providing the Gregorian University with its present stately buildings and the vastly improved staff taken from the different Provinces of the Society. A few years later came the 28th General Congregation, the preparation and conduct of which meant almost as much work as for the previous one.

These major enterprises were in addition to the routine work of the General's Curia, which involves a vast amount of correspondence. To the General come reports from communities all over the world where Jesuits live. It is the General's work to compare, to sift, to draw conclusions, to direct policies, to canalize efforts, and to issue orders regarding appointments of superiors. How efficiently this work had been carried on may be seen from the numberless letters Fr. Ledochowski has written during the past twenty-eight years, letters which show a surprisingly accurate knowledge of men and local conditions in the most remote corners of the world, a mastery of the parts as well as of the whole, a breadth of vision, and, permeating all, a high supernatural idealism, confidence in God, zeal ever to procure through a vast diversity of means the one aim, God's greater glory.

The results achieved have been in proportion to the work at the centre. When Fr. Ledochowski became General there were nearly 17,000 Jesuits distributed in 27 Provinces forming 5 Assistancies; today there are 8 Assistancies, 50 Provinces and over 27,000 Jesuits. Looking at the General's correspondence it is easy to see how far his own zeal and initiative have been responsible for this rapid increase. Numbers by themselves will not speak much, unless we cast a glance, however cursory, over some of the works undertaken. A special feature of this Generalate was the great stress laid on using the press as a means

THE LATE V. REV. FR. W. LEDOCHOWSKI, S.J.

of apostolate for the cause of God; a house of writers was started in the Curia; and new journals were begun in various places. At the Vatican Exhibition of 1936, it was shown that Jesuit Fathers publish nearly 1,100 periodicals; the number in 1915 was just over 200. These 1,100 include 27 journals of general culture like "The Month", "The New Review", and "America", 70 on social questions, like the "Christian Democrat" and "The Commonweal." Another great work of the period was the conducting of seminaries where priests are trained. Fr. Ledochowski has been the cause of Jesuits undertaking many new seminaries, often sacrificing for them eminent men. An aspect of Jesuit activity which posterity might regard as specially characteristic of this Fr. General is the work of the Missions in non-Christian lands. Through his own frequent letters to Provincials and to the Society, through Mission conferences and exhibitions in Rome and elsewhere, through lectures and periodicals, through every means available, not excepting radio broadcasts and movie films, the General tried to elicit enthusiasm for the Missions. He asked that every Province of the Society should have its own Mission. He frequently sent visitors and sometimes called the Mission Superiors to his own Curia for special conferences in order to make the existing Missions more active and fruitful. As Pius XI has been called the Pope of the Missions, Fr. Ledochowski has been called the Jesuit General of the Missions. It is not surprising then that during this generalate the number of Missions in charge of the Order increased from 29 to 46 and the personnel from about 2,000 to nearly double that number. The statistics of these 46 Missions, the 400,000 of the young educated, the 150 orphanages, the 70 hospitals and so on, make an impressive record. India too owes much to this General of the Missions, for during the past twenty-eight years vast improvements have been effected in the various fields of Jesuit activity in India.

The great part of this Generalate coincided with that period of comparative peace between the two great wars, a period of dictators and mass movements, of hectic progress, social upheavals, new political experiments, and many trials at a reconstruction of Europe and of the world. Great forces were unleashed in the political, economic and social spheres, which had their repercussions on the intellectual and spiritual life of man. The Society of Jesus during this period was blessed with a great General who used to the full the good that was in the world, taught his men to meet new evils with new remedies, and tried to serve most efficiently the cause of God. Those who know say that this generalate will be looked upon as one of the greatest in the Society of Jesus, next only to those of St. Ignatius and Fr. Claudius Aquaviva.

To the Creator

by Tot

The sun in crimson glory scarce doth sink,
Scarce do purple western clouds turn pink,
From bush and briar scarce do glow-worms wink,
Than my thoughts fly to Thee.

When in starry gleams the blue Heaven smiles,
And in stately splendour the Night Queen sails,
When in liquid notes the moon Philomel hails,
Then it is I think of Thee.

The babbling brook playing amidst the pebbles
The gentle zephyr breathing discontent in mumbles
The flowery dale easing the heart of troubles
Bring my mind near to Thee.

Shrill punctual cocks the morning's air rend
The swells of the conch thrills to the heart send
When 'neath dark avenues to river I wend
And my heart calls to Thee.

1. Fables of the Panchtantra

Retold by a Naturalist

2. The Crab and the Herons

by S. M. S.

IN the shore of a beautiful lake stood a Peepul tree—the *ficus religiosa*. A grey heron—the *Ardea Cinerea rectirostris*—had built his nest on the tree; and as often as his mate hatched out her young ones, a ratsnake, the *Zamenis mucosus*, dwelling in a hole at the foot of the tree, ate them up.

Having thus lost several broods of young ones the bereaved parents stood one morning knee-deep in water and held counsel together as to