

Six Years on the West Coast of America 1856-1862
Louis Rossi

Translated, annotated and introduced by
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Ye Galleon Press
Fairfield, Washington
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Transcriber's note: The following Chapters, II (excerpt) and IV through VI, are transcribed from Six Years on the West Coast of America 1856-1862 by Father Louis Rossi because these chapters record Rossi's experiences with the Sisters of Providence in 1856. The Chapter II excerpt refers to Bishop A.M.A. Blanchet's request to the Sisters of Providence General Administration for missionary sisters for his diocese of Nesqually. Chapters IV through VI provide Rossi's perspective of the journey to Vancouver, Washington Territory in 1856.

The transcription is exactly as the text was published.

In the book, these pages have specific reference to the Sisters of Providence: 14, 30-31, 63, 65-66, 70, 77, 82, 83, 87, 154, 156, 174-175, 209, 318, 319, 320, 354. However, pages 14, and 154ff. were not transcribed because they do not relate to the sisters' journey to the West.

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2006*

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Chapter II
Canada

Page 30. ...My good bishop [A.M.A. Blanchet], having stayed in Quebec to say a last goodbye to his old parents, rejoined me subsequently in Montreal. Humble and shy, he entrusted me to preach every time he was invited to preach. It happened very often at the cathedral, where we were the bishop's guests, and during the trip we made into the countryside to solicit offerings.

He nursed the hope of introducing the Sisters of Charity⁶ to his diocese; he had already tried, but unfortunately his expenditure of time and money was unsuccessful.⁷ Since that time lots of objections have been made to him and to his plans. He has had lots of difficulties and has suffered because of prejudices, so much so that one day he said to me: "I don't know how to succeed in this, your Reverence. See whether you can't do something to help." The difficulties came from two areas, from the nuns and from the clergy. I won't take time now to relate everything I did to bring this project to fruition, but I shall say that God blessed my efforts; we got the Sisters. The bishop was very happy about that and kept thanking divine Providence. He was so satisfied with the fruit of my efforts that – on several occasions – he showed his gratitude for what I'd done.

While the nuns were preparing to leave I was indisposed by renewed colic attacks. ...

⁶ The Sisters of Charity of Providence, also called Daughters of Charity, Servants of the Poor, founded at Montreal in 1843 by the widowed Emilie Tavernier Gamelin. (Tr.)

⁷ Rossi gives some details of this first episode in Chapter XXV. (Tr.)

Chapter IV Voyage to San Francisco

I hope that my readers will not hold it against me for having lingered with these matters, and for having dealt with them out of their proper chronological sequence. To come back to where we were, I think I must remind you that it is the 6th of November, [1856] and the fifty-three hours I have had in New York have almost elapsed. I have to leave for the Pacific Coast, and it is the *Illinois* which will bring me to my yet unknown destination. What terrible confusion! And what a sad sight are these rag-covered females with dismal, dirty, dreadful faces that you wouldn't even wish to see in a dream. They run after you, pester you, tug at your coat in order to sell you oranges, pears, apples, cigars, candies that you'd have trouble eating even if you had no other food because these hapless women were handling these fruits, these candied almonds with hands that have touched everything save soap and water. What a sight are these dirty, shabby, half-naked men, cursing and swearing like lost souls, and throwing the passengers' luggage about pell-mell. What a shocking sight to see these gangs of disgraceful lads who come running, one after the other, to grope at your pockets, and who deafen you to sell a newspaper, yelling all at the same time: *New York Herald! New York Times! New York Sentinel! Harper's Magazine! Harper's Weekly Journal! Harper's Illustrated News! Freeman's Journal! The Metropolitan! Everybody's!* It is with great difficulty that I succeed in getting out of the middle of this hubbub, away from the yelling and swearing of those young thieves, and aboard boat by climbing an almost perpendicular gangway, because the steamer is sitting so high.

The scene changes, but even if it is of a different stamp, there is no less confusion.

There are passengers arriving, passengers leaving, and they bump into each other, bustle each other, plead, complain, shout at every pitch and for the most varied and often most comical reasons. Those who are on the wharf shout *hurrah!* waving hats and handkerchiefs in the air; those aboard do the same thing. Some men and some women start crying, others arrive half-drunk, saying and doing quite silly things. There's a din that would give you a migraine. Some speak English, Spanish, or French. Others speak Italian, German, or Russian; still others, Turkish or Chinese. That was the scene aboard the *Illinois* at the time of our departure. For an instant I thought I was in hell, in the Tower of Babel, and in Noah's Ark, all at the same time. It was only when the steamer was gliding over the Atlantic waves that a semblance of order was established on the vessel so recently in total disorder.

While this confusion prevailed on the dock and aboard, a gentleman paid a visit to our cabin and took pleasure in forcing open Monsignor's suitcase, and mine. But just as he was about to find what he was looking for, he was caught by a third cabin-mate, but was clever enough to make his escape. We were in the company of this thief for the entire voyage; since he had a wife and a child with him, we thought it better not to arraign him before the captain.

The *Illinois* was undoubtedly a big ship, but the number of passengers – 975, without counting crew – exceeded its capacity. At most, there was room for 400 people. You might well imagine, therefore, all the inconveniences caused by such an excessive overload. Since there were too many passengers to take their meals all at the same

time, from morning till night there was a succession of people going to and coming from the dining room. You can understand the disputes continually caused by the change-over of tables because some people already there didn't always want to leave voluntarily. At night, all the passages and all the saloons were paved with people. Everyone was trying to get a little rest, but it was almost impossible. The excessive heat, as well as the filth and bad smells of an overloaded ship, made it difficult to breathe, and made us dread the outbreak of some sickness, especially among the steerage passengers.

On board there was a Mormon with a retinue of wives I never managed to count. The poor fellow was to be pitied. It would have been absolutely necessary for him to have the gift of being everywhere at the same time. Since nearly all his wives were sick, you would see him bringing water to this one, ice to that one, tea to another, coffee to still another, endlessly on the go with never a stop! Among his companions there seemed to be one who took up more of his time than any other. One day, he was seen going up on deck with his treasured burden over his shoulders, and laying her down carefully on a mattress prepared for that purpose. Then, with devotion I would have supposed a Mormon almost incapable of, he knelt down beside her and fanned her face to make the heat less unbearable. From time to time he turned towards some of his other wives as if to ask them to take his place so that he might look after others who were sick in their cabins, but they pretended not to see the predicament of their husband who was, at this time, overwhelmed by his numerous companions, and by the variety of their sicknesses or needs. Was it malice? Was it jealousy? I don't know; but in any case, a more comic sight I have never witnessed. Finally, one of our nuns, motivated by charity took his place, and for a long time continued to take care of his favorite Mormon.

You might well ask where all these passengers were going. Some were going to California in search of gold, others to Oregon in search of land. At this time the emigration was really prodigious, and it doesn't seem to have slackened off since. Every month, three or four steamers unload 2000 passengers on the Pacific Northwest Coast, without taking into account those who arrive in sailing ships – coming from Europe or the Atlantic Coast States around Cape Horn, or from Australia and the Sandwich Islands – and those who cross the deserts, generally called *plains*. In this way, one can understand how – in less than twelve years – California and Oregon have been populated, and have founded towns and lots of villages.

A sea voyage offers few attractions; I find the monotony worse than the fatigue. On rivers, you have beautiful vistas to admire, and a variety of pleasures; even in a train or in a carriage the trip is sometimes broken, and you can rest briefly from the fatigue or boredom of a long trip. But at sea, you see only sky and water, water and sky: and if, at times, you see an island on the horizon, a passing boat, a bird venturing out over the sea, a fish appearing close to the surface of the water, the ensuing loneliness then makes you sadder. But as soon as you come near a port, even if only to stay for a day, you feel relieved and entirely relaxed.

That's precisely how I feel now: we are approaching Kingston, in Jamaica. Negro lads are diving around our ship to fish out *bits* (50 American cents) that the passengers throw into the sea in order to enjoy this really amusing spectacle. They come to the surface with the little coin between their teeth and ask us to throw some more in; if you accede to their requests, they dive into the waves, fight with each other to

get them, catch each other by the legs, and do all this while swimming with surprising skill, agility, and speed. You'd think they were fish.

After having gone all through the city, which presents quite an obvious picture of decay and poverty, we went to visit the Jesuits, who received us kindly and enjoyed seeing us. It was noon; it was dinner time, and they held it up a bit only – I could very well see – to be able to prepare some extra food for us. We sat down at a table completely covered with dishes of food: there were lamb chops, veal fillets, ham, sweet potatoes, salad, rice, tomatoes, and other appetizing sweet dishes. These priests treated us magnificently; they vied with each other in offering us one dish or another. I haven't always eaten in such a comfortable way in America and very often, because of my shyness, I haven't eaten at all. So that you may understand what I mean, I'll have to say a few words about eating customs in the New World.

In America, one is fairly casual at meal times. Right from the start you see all that is necessary to satisfy your appetite, you ask for what you want, and it's up to you to choose: if you don't, so much the worse for you. In hotels, where there is a table d'hôte, the table is covered with little dishes of fruit or pickled vegetables, little slices of ham, dried or salted meat, butter, cheese, candied almonds, salad seasoned with milk or else vinegar and sugar, a thousand things, always in very small quantities. After the soup – that is to say, hot water to which a little rice, vermicelli, or chopped vegetables have been added – the waiter is at your side reciting a long litany of foods: boiled mutton, roast beef, roast pork, mutton chops, pork chops, sausages, veal, liver, beef steak, broiled chicken, roast turkey, duck, pigeons, ham, salt beef, salt pork. But these waiters say everything with such speed that it leaves your head spinning and makes choosing impossible. For beverage, you are given coffee or tea with lunch and supper, and water with dinner. However, things are run differently in the big hotels.

After dinner I went with one of the priests to do some shopping, and particularly to buy rum to wash our hands and faces. I have been assured that it is an excellent protection against the fevers of Panama, and we weren't very far from there.

So as not to be burdened with all these goods, I gave a bottle to each of the nuns for them to put in their traveling bags and used by them when the need arose. But, setting themselves up as judges, they thought they could – or even, should – deprive us of them by making presents of them to swindlers, who certainly showed no gratitude.

The next day our ship sailed out on the sea, which was now a little calmer, allowing us to enjoy the singing of Irish, German, and American women on deck, and to listen to the sermons that some clergyman – with white collar and long face – was directing at us, no doubt to convert us, but they weren't producing the desired effect. These preachers were also distributing printed handbills they called *tracts*, and in which Catholics assuredly weren't flattered.

While some were singing, and others preaching, we arrived at Aspinwall, so named after a New York businessman who was the first to conceive the plan of a railroad from there to Panama. We were to stay there for a night, time enough for the cargo and baggage to be unloaded from the ship and reloaded on the train. The passengers hurried to disembark so as to find room in the shanties they called hotels. It was curious to see them – above all those with wives – fighting for the holes called rooms. As for myself, although a bachelor, I had to see to the job of getting lodging for

the five nuns. You might well imagine my embarrassment! Finally, with the help of an Irish subdeacon, I succeeded in finding a place for them alone. Monsignor found a bed in the same hotel, and the servant and I went to another shanty. For this pitiful lodging, and even more pitiful food, we were asked to pay the pittance of twenty-five francs [\$5] a head.

The next morning we went to Panama by rail. The crossing of forty-nine English miles takes two and a half hours: but this very short railroad cost more money than you'd spend to build a town, and its construction cost more lives than it would take to populate a whole country. Chinese, Irishmen, and many workers from other countries perished in thousands; more than once they were on the point of abandoning the enterprise. They thought it almost impracticable because they were short of manpower to finish it. The heat, which is oppressive in this region,¹ and the miasmas, due to the neighboring swamps, marshes, and stagnant waters, stifled the workers during the day. And when they were seeking some rest at night – rest so necessary to restore the strength drained away by the hard work of the day – mosquitoes and other insects pestered them and kept them from sleeping. Then came swelling of the face and arms, after that, fever, and finally death. It took more than five years to complete this undertaking, which is small, if you consider the distance, but really of giant proportions considering the location. It was started in the autumn of 1850. By December, 1854, you could go to the high point of the isthmus: on the 27th of January, 1855, the first locomotive crossed from Aspinwall to Panama, and on the following 17th of February, the railroad linked the Atlantic with the Pacific Ocean.² What now remains to be done is to bisect this isthmus with a canal, and we have no doubt that the power that accomplished a similar task at Suez won't allow itself to be outdone by others. When the waters of these two great oceans are linked by a canal, we'll see the trade of the Pacific Northwest – already so considerable today – growing in proportions that the boldest imagination can hardly imagine, and emigration will be in no less extraordinary proportions.³

Our crossing of the isthmus – although it took place in pouring rain and in heat that would have taken your breath away – was quite pleasant. What we could see was truly delightful. This tropical vegetation is wonderfully and abundantly rich. The spell cast by the range of birds – with such differently colored plumage – defies all description. But you have to be well used to resisting temptation to withstand the desire to eat bananas, coconuts, butter-pears, and other produce of the region. It is very dangerous to satisfy the appetite caused by the sight of them. Fevers, peculiar to this climate, wouldn't be long in laying low the gourmet who succumbs to their enticing charms.

In Panama, as in Aspinwall, everyone – man, woman, and child – becomes a vendor with the arrival of the passengers. They compete with one another in offering you bread, tortillas, biscuits, wine, whiskey, and awful water for which you have to pay twenty-five cents a glass, fifty cents with a little lemon juice in it. On one side you are

¹ Circa 9° lat., 82° long w.

² See *Harper's Magazine*, Nov., 1858.

³ Schott, in his *Rails Across Panama*, gives the official overall length of the Panama Railroad as 47 miles, 3.02 feet. There were 176 crossings over waterways, most of which were less than ten feet wide. The journey from Aspinwall (soon to be renamed Colón) to Panama usually took about four hours on the winding track. Estimates of the human cost of this railroad vary greatly. One estimate gave the total work force as 6000, the number of deaths as 835 (295 Whites, 140 Blacks, 400 Chinese). An 'official' estimate of the number of deaths by the railroad company have the deaths as 6000, and some impartial authorities have calculated the deaths to have been about twice that number. See above, 189f. (Tr.).

offered a parakeet, on the other, a little monkey or a bird; some offer sea-shells or pearls, others, gold handiwork which seems to be very well done. And since everyone is speaking Spanish, the noise made by these temporary merchants who speak with indescribable volubility – is not at all unpleasant to the ear.

Panama is an old city with old churches, old buildings, and a lot of ruined or nearly-ruined convents. The winding streets and the squares – where grass flourishes – are sufficient proof that the city was built without a preconceived plan. An old fortress, a cloistered bishop's palace – with the shape of a convent but the look of a prison – and, indeed, many buildings of the same type don't exactly give the traveler a lofty idea of the country's civilization.

There are, however, a few beautiful churches, some well-stocked shops run by Americans, and some hotels of average appearance. Most of the inhabitants are Catholic, but the liberal political party has gotten the upper hand in the country, and the bishop has been exiled by the intolerant sect that flaunts its insolent despotism under the name of liberty.

We had to wait for the tide to be high enough to allow a small ship to tie up at the dock. It came in with the tide, and I confess that I experienced a feeling of terror when I saw this runt of a boat on to which nearly a thousand people were going to be crammed. It is easy to imagine the crush which followed close on the heels of the embarkation of so many people into such a small space, and to imagine the discomfort we experienced. With the exception of a few women who managed to sit down on stools and benches, we remained standing, we weren't able to move, and we were sorely tried by the heat and fatigue. A middle-aged woman, who was right next to me, fainted at my feet, so overcome was she by such trials. No one moved. I took her by the arms and – moving backwards with great difficulty – I trailed her to a bench, shoving people out of my way. I gave her some eau de Cologne. To my great joy, she came to in a few minutes. I hadn't had the opportunity to perform a charitable act for a long time.

The sun had already gone down, the moon had taken its place, and in her wan, languid light we saw the vessel which was to take us to San Francisco. Our small boat stopped at its side, we climbed on to it to the sound of American military music, and the very sight of it was enough to suggest that we'd be much better off there than on the *Illinois*. The *Golden Age* – that's her name – is a big, three-storied palace, without counting the below-deck area and the terraces, or esplanades, for promenading. In a way, we were granted a new lease on life. We had just left a shanty to live in a palace. The *Golden Age* was roomy, comfortable, clean, well ventilated, had good service, and was well run. As far as making our stay comfortable and our trip entertaining, she left nothing to be desired. Consequently, a veritable transformation was wrought among the passengers. From the gloomy and, in a sense, stupefied people they'd been a short time ago, they became lively; and it is easy to see that they are anxious to forget their recent experiences, and to recover from the inconveniences suffered on the other ship. There were some among them who thought that they were justified in complaining louder than others about the bad treatment endured on the *Illinois*: they gathered together one evening and held a meeting to make known their grievances. At this meeting – which they called *indignation meeting*⁴ - they resolved to sign a protest which would be printed in the San Francisco and New York newspapers. My bishop, who was

⁴ Rossi used this English expression in his text. (Tr.).

present at these debates, related it all to me for, although I was there, I didn't understand a word of it because whatever is said in the English language is a dead letter for me.

In this regard, I remember all the pains taken by the captain of the *Golden Age*, Commodore Watkins – a venerable man, a man of fine social graces – and by Governor Burnett⁵ - an enthusiastic convert – to engage me in conversation. But it was useless. One day the latter, after having tried to make himself understood to me in different ways, spoke softly, spelling out the words, and concluded by using the short adverb *by and by* which means 'in a short time.' He undoubtedly wanted to say that I'd soon speak English. I must add that the Good Lord granted that wish.

After six days at sea, we anchored at Acapulco to take on coal. Since it was Sunday, Monsignor, the nuns, a few Catholics and myself went to Mass. The bishop and I said mass, the nuns took the Sacrament, and the other Catholic passengers were present at the service. The village priest urged us to visit his residence, where we drank chocolate for lunch.

We continued our journey, still in sight of Mexico, without incident, save for one man who died of dysentery, and a scare – that nearly frightened us to death – held in store for us until the last day of the voyage.

I was stretched out, sleeping on a sofa in the dining room when, suddenly, I heard a terrible noise, like the sound of a bursting boiler. Everyone was frightened, terrified, running this way and that, going up to the deck above, going down to the deck below; it was a difficult scene to describe. In my turn, I went up to look for the nuns. After searching fruitlessly for a while, I came across one of them who looked like the picture of death. The poor nun was in bed, and it was precisely in her room that the accident – which was upsetting everyone – had happened. Terror-stricken, she had jumped out of bed and had fled, not knowing where she was going.

Finally, however, people calmed down a little when they saw that the ship was still steaming along – although spluttering somewhat - and heard the captain assuring us that it was nothing serious.

As a matter of fact, we soon learned that the axle-tree had broken quite close to the port side paddle-wheel. That slowed the progress of the ship and kept us at sea for a few extra hours. The fright soon dissipated and, thank God, we entered San Francisco Bay by the Golden Gate. San Francisco was discovered by Europeans around 1575 at the time of the explorations of the *San Agustin*, commanded by Sebastian Rodriguez Cermeño.⁶ The southern tip of the Gate extends further into the sea than the northern tip and a lighthouse is situated on each one to guide ships coming from all directions. On the southern side a fortress, called Fort Point, has been built, and the American

⁵ Peter H. Burnett was the first Governor of California, inaugurated Dec. 20, 1849, resigned Jan. 9, 1851. (Tr.).

⁶ Duflot de Mofras, *Exploration*, etc., vol. I, p. 100. Paris, 1844. (The full title of this two-volume work is *Exploration du territoire de l'Oregon, des Californies et de la Mer Vermeille, exécutée pendant les années 1840, 1841 et 1842*. It has been translated into English, under the title *Duflot de Mofras' Travels on the Pacific Coast* by Marguerite Eyer Wilbar, foreword by Frederick W. Hodge, Santa Ana, Cal., 1937. San Francisco Bay was discovered by Don Gaspar de Portolá, not Cermeño, as Rossi says, citing Duflot de Mofras. One Sergeant Ortega actually saw it first in 1769. It was settled during Juan Bautista de Anza's second expedition with 193 settlers under Lt. José Moraga in 1776. See Steckmesser, *The Westward Movement*, 205f. (Tr.).

government has already made sure of the land to do the same on the other side. These two well-guarded fortresses will make the Golden Gate impassable for enemy ships, in case of invasion.

As soon as you pass through this Gate you see a well-fortified island, called Alcatraz, which, if the need arose, could also interdict access to the port by any ill-disposed vessel.

I don't know a more extensive bay than this one; it is about forty miles long, and its width varies from two to ten miles. San Francisco is built on the south side of the hills that run down to the water, but it is only at high tide that ships can come close to the land. However, her industrious, enterprising inhabitants have constructed an extension of 2300 to 2500 feet into the sea, and they have made that the most important and most commercial part of the city. While walking along the streets – still almost all made of planks – you can see the sea through the openings, at high tide, as it laps against wooden pilings which hold up, nevertheless, enormous, ramshackle buildings. Even the hillocks have had to give way to the power and the genius of the enterprise: many have been leveled quite a bit to accommodate streets and houses, and the soil and waste taken therefrom is used to fill in the holes in that part of the city reclaimed from the sea. San Francisco is a wonderful city. Twelve years ago there were only a few hundred inhabitants with wooden huts scattered here and there in disorderly fashion. It didn't even look like a well-laid-out village. Now, it has more than 100,000 citizens,⁷ a figure which grows from day to day. It has the look of a city full of life, of business, of industry: civilization is developing there in an admirable way. There's nothing you'd want that can't be found there, be it for your livelihood, religion, or business. As for shops, hotels, and places of entertainment, it is the equal of any other city, even the most civilized ones. It won't be long before San Francisco becomes, if not the largest, at least one of the largest cities in America. As for its bay, it's the most interesting of them all.

When we entered the port towards dusk, the sailors hastened to tie up the steamer at the wharf. We brought news of great interest for the whole region – the election of James Buchanan as President of the United States. The noise, the racket, the hurrahs, the firing of a cannon, all indicated that it was good news for the citizens. But since this confusion was particularly evident in the neighborhood of the wharf, we thought it prudent not to disembark that same evening, so waited until the next day.

⁷ In 1846, when Captain John B. Montgomery took possession of San Francisco (then called Yerba Buena) for the United States, there were about sixty inhabitants, less than when it was originally settled. The Gold Rush of 1849 rapidly increased the population. By 1850, it was 20,000, by 1852, 36,000, and by 1860, 57,000. See Roske, *Everyman's Eden*, 247f. (Tr.).

Chapter V Trip to Vancouver

In San Francisco's history some dark pages lie hidden. The social elements which helped make it a great city weren't all imbued with the principles of honor and justice which ought to be consistent with our civilization. Swarms of adventurers, bands of individuals chased and hounded out of civilized countries, and droves of dishonest speculators made up the majority of the new arrivals. That's not difficult to understand: the lust for gold had attracted many of those people who thought he had only to set foot on the ground to make their fortune.

That is how the institution of the *vigilance committee*¹ – which took form and then died in the bosom of this city during the year of 1856 – can be explained. Whether one considers it principle or its goal, it will always be an indelible blot on its creators' reputations. We know that the Know Nothings seized on this odious measure to further their exclusionary schemes. Fortunately, public opinion – which has so much influence in America – wasn't long in branding their conduct; and one even saw eminent clergymen, such as Dr. Scott, the Presbyterian, etc., publicly denouncing a scheme which, at one swoop, was destroying both the stability of the government and the liberty of the people. What plan could be more at variance with the customs of our time than one that would deliver citizens into the hands of fanatics who would dispose of them without due process and without granting the so-called guilty person the chance to defend himself? In a word or two, that's the vigilance committee. The day after our arrival I witnessed – close to our ship – scenes that could only have been enacted by tyrants and despots such as the Know Nothings. Thanks to a young Irish priest, who came to get us at nine o'clock in the morning, I didn't see the denouement of these despotic acts.

Since the newspapers had already published the memorandum of our voyage and the names of the passengers, the Archbishop of San Francisco² sent this priest to offer hospitality to my bishop and me, and to put the nuns up with the Sisters of Mercy. They went to their destination in one carriage, and Monsignor and I went to ours in another.

We had to wait four days for the return of the steamer, *Columbia*,³ from its voyage to the north. But these four days seemed very long to me. The absence of all company, of all

¹ It has been estimated that the Far West had about 210 vigilante movements during the second half of the 19th century. Prior to Rossi's arrival on the West Coast, San Francisco had had two Vigilance Committees, in 1851 and 1856. The immediate cause for the formation of the latter was the murder of James King, an editor whose journal had been denouncing the Democratic political machine of David Broderick. King was murdered by James Casey, a New York Irish political worker for Broderick. The committee took Casey from 150 of the sheriff's men and had him hanged on May 22, 1856. During that summer another four men were hanged, one committed suicide in jail, thirty were deported, and hundreds left the city in fear. Nearly all the deported were Irish urban Democrats. The committee disbanded on August 18, 1856. Some historians have seen these tribunals as necessary devices for changing turbulence to quiet stability. Others have viewed them as "businessmen's revolutions" where the vigilantes are seen as upper-class citizens venting their spleen for many grievances upon lower-class foreigners. For further, see Hine, *The American West*, 300f. and Roske, 284f. (Tr.).

² Joseph Sadoc Alemany was the first Archbishop of San Francisco. He served from 1853 until his resignation in 1884. Alemany was born in Spain (1814) and, after completion of his studies in Italy, was sent to the U.S. in 1840, and became an American citizen in 1845. Before becoming Archbishop of San Francisco he was Bishop of Monterey. Upon retirement he went back to Spain, where he died in 1888. According to an unpublished journal [link 'journal' to the journal](#), written by the nuns who accompanied Bishop A.M.A. Blanchet and Rossi from Quebec to Washington Territory, the young Irish priest was Father Michael King, secretary to Archbishop Alemany. This journal, written in French, is in the archives of the Sisters of Charity of Providence in Seattle. (Tr.).

³ Rossi is mistaken in the name of the steamer bringing the party from San Francisco to Fort Vancouver. The nuns' journal and *The Institution of Providence in Oregon* (the history of that order), V, 89., gives *Brother Jonathan* [link 'Brother Jonathan' to the errata note in the B&R index](#) as the steamer. (Tr.).

connections is, perhaps, the greatest privation you can inflict on civilized man. Finally the *Columbia* arrived on the third day, and we were informed that it would leave for Oregon at ten o'clock the next morning.

It was the month of December and we were traveling towards the north, which meant that we could do equally well without fans or iced water. At the appointed hour we went aboard the steamer. Although it was very big, it wasn't comparable to the *Golden Age*, nor to any other steam vessel of the Pacific Line; but it was sturdy, especially built for the northern run where the sea and the harbor entrances are particularly bad.

When I was getting close to the ship, a female voice behind me suddenly shouted "Apples, apples!" I turned around and saw a woman – with two baskets of apples – who was inviting me to buy some. Like Old Father Adam, who couldn't forego the pleasure of taking the fruit that Good Mother Eve offered, as soon as I had the apple in my hands, I was ashamed to put it back in the basket and, in spite of the thirty-five cent price I was asked for it, I ate it. Meanwhile, the departure signal was given, the cables were slackened, the steam made the paddle-wheels turn, and once again we, with the vessel, were cast to the mercy of the wind and the waves.

A few hours after our departure Monsignor came to enquire about his servant. "Where is Moses?" he said. I went to look for him, I searched all over the steamer, but no Moses. "Would he have jumped into the ocean in despair?" I said to myself. I remembered that the poor fellow was a bit touched; he wanted to get married at all costs, and no one wanted him. What was most troublesome was that his choice always fell on people ill-disposed towards him, or who didn't suit him at all. Once I had to wear myself out remonstrating with him because he got into his head to take up with an eighteen-year old girl, and he had hardly enough teeth to eat fresh bread. He was at least fifty years old.

But to come back to Moses – not having come across him in any part of the ship, I went to the nuns' cabin and asked them whether they knew where the hapless servant was. They looked at each other, and replied evasively. I subsequently found out that nothing would have been easier for them than to end my searching by telling me what they knew of him. The fact is that Moses stayed in San Francisco. Here's how it happened. Since the nuns had expressed a wish to buy some apples, Moses – who was always attentive to the ladies, even to those whom he knew to be dedicated to the Lord – left the ship and went in search of the requested fruit. But, since his errand took a little too much time, he saw the ship disappearing from his sight when he came back. Not being able to reach it, he was out of commission with his apples, which he brought to the nuns a month later. How true it is that this fruit has always been fatal for us!⁴

The sea was very rough during the whole journey and that prevented the ship from stopping at different ports along the coast to deliver mail. It was only with great difficulty that we were able to go into port at Diligencias, named after Cape Diligencias,⁵ discovered in 1602 by D.

Transcriber's note: Rossi is correct. He and the sisters traveled from San Francisco to Vancouver aboard the Columbia.

⁴ Both McCrosson, in *The Bell and the River*, and the nuns' journal corroborate the incident of Moses missing the boat in San Francisco, with a couple of differences. The two youngest nuns had sent Moses in search of sugared popcorn, a novelty at that time, and not apples. Moses caught the next steamer to Fort Vancouver, arriving just before Christmas, 1856. While waiting in San Francisco he learned how to bake bread, a trade very useful later at Fort Vancouver. (Tr.).

⁵ Port Orford is on the Oregon Coast, about 45 miles SSW of Coos Bay, and seven miles south of Cape Blanco. McArthur, in *Oregon Geographic Names*, 101, notes that Vizcaino named it Cape San Sebastian in 1603, and that de Aguilar named it Cape Blanco at about the same time. The Heceta-Bodega maps of 1775 call it Cape Diligencias. In 1792 Captain Vancouver sighted it and named it Cape Orford, after his "much respected friend," George Orford, the Third Earl of Orford, grandson of Sir Robert Walpole. While the Port retained Vancouver's renaming, the cape is still known as Cape Blanco. It is the most westerly point in Oregon. (Tr.).

Sebastian Vizcaino, and which Vancouver – following his compatriots' manic example of changing all the names given by previous navigators – called Orford, the name used today.⁶

The 7th of December was to be an anxious day for us. We were sailing in the vicinity of the Columbia. Towards dusk we noticed that the sky was covering over with thick, black clouds, and lightning flashes on the horizon gave us the feeling that a terrible storm was soon going to break out. However it didn't break loose until about midnight; it was frightening. The whole crew was afoot; some of them let down the yard arms in order to lighten the superstructure of the steamer, others tied down everything on the deck with ropes as insurance against the vessel's rolling. The noise that all these men were making in running from one side of the ship to the other in order to carry out the captain's orders – and effecting such a multiplicity of maneuvers – was a discouraging prognosis.

I am not aware of how the other passengers were suffering, or what they were doing in their cabins; as for myself, I can say that I was in a very sorry state. Stretched out on my bunk, I was holding on to the opening between the ceiling and the bulkhead of the cabin with one hand, and with the other I was clutching the piece of wood that holds up the bunk. The ship was so buffeted by the hurricane that I was often close to rolling on the floor. All that didn't do much to calm me down. So I prayed; yes, I prayed, and I invoked the Mystical Rose, the beautiful Star of the Sea who – in this moment of grave danger, as in so many other less frightening circumstances – was my last refuge, and the mediator who could save me. "Oh Holy Virgin," I said to her, "would it be possible for you to let me be shipwrecked at the dawning of this beautiful day when all Christians of the ancient faith are venerating your Immaculate Conception? On such a joyous day for Christianity, would you let me become a victim of this frightening hurricane? Would you allow me to perish in sight of the mission that I have undertaken such a long voyage to reach?"

Such was the prayer that I kept on repeating for six hours, after which I went up to the deck where it was impossible for me to stay one minute because of the raging storm, accompanied by freezing rain. We skirted the bar at the mouth of the river all day, without even attempting to cross over it. The sight of this shore in squally weather is grandiose, solemn, frightening.

Imagine an enormous row of waves breaking for a distance of three leagues from Cape Disappointment⁷ to Point Adams,⁸ and forming a kind of sandy crescent about 1500 meters long at the river's mouth. The sea water, whipped in by the wind towards the river mouth, encountered the river water on this enormous sand bar, producing a frightful impact; the noise is so loud that you can hear it several leagues away, and the mountainous waves – resulting from the meeting of two opposing currents – reach a height of sixty feet.

It was in the middle of these mountains – made more frightening by the hurricane – that our ship was. If the engines had then had the slightest mechanical difficulty, that would have been the end of the ship and of us, all at the same time. The sight of our steamer was – simultaneously – picturesque and dreadful. The waves, coming furiously from opposite directions, seemed to be competing with each other for the satisfaction of burying us in the abyss. In the winking of an eye our vessel was thrown – prow pointing to the sky – on to a watery peak; and just as suddenly, the treacherous water would slip from under it, letting it fall to the bottom of the trough, threatening to swallow it up. One time, we thought we were done for; the keel rubbed against the sand bar, and the ship took a leap which turned several passengers upside down.

⁶ Duflot de Mofras 101.

⁷ So called by the English Captain, Meares, because he neared it on July 17, 1788, in search of the Columbia, and declared that it didn't exist. The Spanish captain, Don Bruno de Heceta, recognized this cape on August 17, 1775, and named it *Assumption*.

⁸ Name given by the English and Americans, while the Spanish called it *Fronadoso* (well-timbered cape).

Expert English, American, and other navigators have asserted that there is no worse sea lane than this in the known world. Neither the English Channel, the Straits of Gibraltar, nor the Mexican Gulf can be compared with it. Its currents, its rip tides, its storms, its sudden wind changes make it exceptionally dangerous and the enormous bar does nothing to lessen the danger, especially in bad weather.

It was about five o'clock on this memorable 8th of December when we were finally able to enter the Columbia, and it took almost an hour before we could drop anchor off Fort George, or Astoria City, where we stopped for the night.

Before the American, Captain Gray, named this river for the ship he was commanding – the *Columbia* – on the 13th of May, 1792, it was ordinarily called the Oregon⁹ (we know neither the etymology nor the origin of this word), and it was named the Rio de San Roque on the 17th of August, 1775, by Don Bruno de Heceta, who actually discovered it from the sea-ward side. I say, from the sea, because we believe that French Canadians discovered and were acquainted with it from the interior.¹⁰

This river rises in the Rocky Mountains, is nearly always navigable, and up as far as Fort Vancouver it can accommodate big ships of more than 400 tons. At Fort Vancouver it is about 1200 meters wide, and from there to the mouth it gets wider and wider. I saw three-masted English and American ships and big steamers tied up at different docks beside the Fort. The whole course of the river is peppered with islands, enormous tree trunks, and sand banks which make navigation quite difficult. The services of a pilot are required to enter or leave the river. There is an untamed and often grandiose beauty. All along the Columbia there are dense forests into which even a squirrel would have trouble making his way; there are very high cliffs, covered with moss, or bare, sometimes sheer, sometimes projecting over the river like an arc; there are sandy flats strewn with fossil bones, with ships' wreckage, with tree trunks, and there are Indian cabins scattered here and there.

The islands you come across are only of average interest. Among them you remark Puget Island, Crane Island, Walker Island, Kallamet Island, and Multnomah Island, which faces the Willamette, one of the Columbia's tributaries.¹¹

A little further along the southern bank you come to Saint Helens, where the Pacific Steam Navigation Company tried to build a town to compete with Portland, on the Willamette; but it failed in its plan.

When we arrived in sight of Fort Vancouver I turned towards my bishop and asked him where the town was. "There," said he to me, pointing towards the northern bank of the river. I

⁹ Jonathan Carver, in his *Travels Through the Interior Parts of North America* (1778), used the name Oregon for what he called the River of the West. Carver may have appropriated the name, if not the spelling, from an English army officer who was commandant at the frontier military post at Mackinac during the time of Carver's journey into the upper valley of the Mississippi. Major Robert Rogers, the officer, used the name Ouragon, or Ourigon, in a proposal to London for exploration west of Great Lakes in 1765. (The French word for hurricane is *ouragon*). The name was not used by Lewis and Clark, whose journals were published between 1814 and 1817, but it was used by William Cullen Bryant in his poem, *Thanatopsis*, in 1817. There are several other theories about the origin of the name – see McArthur, 460f. – but McArthur leans towards the Mississippi valley origin. (Tr.).

¹⁰ Dufлот de Mofras, II, 106.

¹¹ Of the Columbia islands mentioned by Rossi, Puget and Walker appear on current maps. There is, however, no Crane Island. Rossi may be confusing it with a Crane Island in the San Juan Islands. Nor is there a Kallamet Island. The present Tenasillahe Island was referred to by Wilkes as Kathlamet which, in turn, had several spellings. Wilkes' spelling is very close to what Rossi uses. The island called Multnomah by Rossi was named Wappato by Lewis and Clark, Multnomah by Wilkes, and it was later renamed Sauvie, which it remains. See McArthur, 433, 535f., and 591f. (Tr.).

looked towards where he was pointing and, seeing nothing, climbed on some trunks, stuck out my neck, strained my eyes almost out of their sockets, still hoping to find something. But there was nothing within sight. I had imagined that I was going to arrive in a place, not, perhaps, quite like the big cities I'd seen and visited, but at least something that had the look of a town or a big village. But since I didn't see anything resembling that, I came back to my bishop and again asked him where the town was. "There, there," he still kept saying, "don't you see that pole with the flag atop? That's the military fort. Do you see that house, and the other one over there? Take a good look, that's the town," he replied. I confess that the description and the vista caused me to lose control of my initial feelings. A spontaneous and quite involuntary gesture betrayed my disappointment. Burying my head in my hands, I exclaimed, "My God! What have I gotten myself into!"

I was immediately aware of the impropriety of this sign of discouragement; I recovered; but a sudden, fleeting flash went through my mind, making me realize that plenty or hardship lay ahead of me in this far-off country.

We disembarked with the help of little boats, and it was with no little trouble that we finally got our feet on dry land. We had to walk about a mile before coming to the bishop's place. The road which led there wasn't made to be walked on in dainty ankle boots; we sank in to the knees, and it wasn't always easy to get out of those unexpected ruts. When we reached a little wooden ramshackle house, I asked Mr. Brouillet – the vicar-general who had accompanied me this far – what that shanty was. "It's the bishop's palace," he replied.

The bishop's palace!!! Three ten-foot-square rooms and a passage twenty feet long by five feet wide made up the ground floor. To the left of this passage was a kind of an alcove through which you went to the school, the church, and the kitchen. It also led to the loft. The latter measured twenty-five feet by twelve, the kitchen, twenty by fifteen. The church, built by Hudson's Bay Company for the use of French Canadians in its employ, was also made of wood, and was in great need of repair.

The ground floor was allocated in the following manner; a room for Monsignor, a second for the vicar-general, and the third for the school-master. The passage was used as drawing-room, dining room, and chapel. Every evening it was prepared for the celebration of divine service, and the next day, all was undone. For the nuns and myself, there remained the loft; by a stroke of good luck it was divided into two rooms by a partition. The nuns had the room at the front, I had the one at the back, near the stairs. I could only go to bed after the nuns had retired to their room, and I had to get up before they went out. Fortunately, this state of affairs didn't last long.

Chapter VI My Work

Transcriber's note: This chapter only has one reference to the Sisters of Providence – construction of their convent; however, it is included in its entirety for the background information it provides about frontier life, the struggles of learning English, the Catholic Church's mission claim, and societal issues, all things that the Sisters of Providence would encounter as their ministries developed.

In America, where laws have not yet regulated construction, houses and shops are soon built. In the big cities they have had to limit wooden construction, but outside of that, this primitive raw material is generally used. This explains the facility with which towns and villages are built, and how you see them appearing all of a sudden, as if by magic. On a piece of land which – yesterday – was covered with brush, marsh, rocks, or trees, you see a village, or even a town, rising up instantaneously. Wood – found in such abundance and so easily wrought – contributes a lot to the speed of construction. This instantaneousness, this vigor in execution is, moreover, one of the particular characteristics of the American people. *Go Ahead* is their favorite expression, and the act follows the word. Besides, the Americans don't need much to put together a town: a shop or two where, as far as goods are concerned, you find everything thrown together in the same place, things you'd hardly find in a hundred shops in our towns; a post-office, often set up in the shop; a night club, a doctor's office with drug dispensary; a hotel, a lawyer's office – that's all they needed to make a town. After that comes the school, the meeting-house which, generally, doubles as a school, and other more or less necessary buildings. But if the town is a county seat, then you find the courthouse which is frequently used as a church for all religious denominations of every color and creed. The meeting-house and courthouse are also often used for political meetings and lectures.

But these towns, often of very obscure origin, are subsequently developed on a large scale and with a rapidity absolutely unknown to us in Europe. They become important cities in less time than we need to conceive and erect a fair-sized monument. The landowners who indulge in this speculation often fail in their plans, but they also often succeed, and make enormous fortunes.

Here's the method they follow to establish a town. When a proprietor has a piece of land he deems suitable for such use, he has it measured and has a plan drawn up by a surveyor; he gives the future city a name, and has it announced in the neighboring newspapers. If he has money, or credit, he has a few cabins built, calling them shops, hotels, cabarets, etc., then sells – or even gives away – sites so that others will come and erect buildings. These sites are uniform, and usually have the same dimensions in different towns so that when you've seen one, you've seen them all. They are almost all drawn up to the same plan, that is to say, with straight, forty foot wide streets – sometimes more, never less – which cross rectangularly. Each division of more or less 240 feet makes a perfect parallelogram, and is divided in eight – and sometimes ten – equal lots. Since the government does nothing to develop towns, and since everything depends on individual initiative and on the local authorities, a multitude of details concerning the common good are neglected. One shouldn't then be surprised to see streets in towns and villages – and even the public highways – made impassable, and travelers very frequently exposed to the gravest dangers on rivers and streams, in carriages and on the railroad. What still appears strange – but true, nevertheless – is that once you become habituated to living with all these discomforts and all these dangers, you get used to this life and you find it difficult to leave. You would say that it is in our nature to be adventurous, above all. I've had occasion to know people used to the comforts of a refined life who became so accustomed to this life that they wouldn't have changed it for any other. With the exception of Russians and Turks – who don't seem to be emigrant peoples – you find people from every country in the world in America, and all of them generally settle down, save the French, who are almost always stricken with

homesickness. One can't attribute that solely to their lack of success, for I have known some who lived comfortably doing all sorts of jobs, once they had taken up residence.

Our buildings sorely needed repairs and improvements. So, after looking it over for a few days, I decided to go to work to make our bishop's palace less uncomfortable. The desire to get on with the work, as well as the need to be thrifty, helped make up my mind. Labor is very dear in this country. A workman costs twenty to twenty-five francs [\$5] a day, and our financial resources had been depleted. At times, I've had workmen for fifteen francs [\$3] a day, but they left a lot to be desired. So I took a hammer, saw, hatchet, and other carpenter's tools and, with a few second-rate workers, I began my missionary's novitiate by laboring, before preaching and baptizing.

In a short time we succeeded in putting the nuns in a separate place, and in giving the whole building the appearance of a religious establishment. There was an agglomeration of buildings spread over an area of about four acres, enclosed by a wooden fence, and with the look of a little village. On this bank of the river there were four such groups, all bearing the name of Fort Vancouver.¹ Dr. John McLoughlin, chief agent of the Hudson's Bay Company, was the first to give this name to his establishment, which he founded in 1824 in memory of the English officer, Vancouver, who explored the region in 1792.² This establishment, also called Fort, is only a few hundred meters from the river bank. Then there is the military Fort, situated a half a league from the edge of the river on a low esplanade, right close to the magnificent forest, and overlooking the boundless sweep stretching far on the other side of the river. Our mission, as I have just described it, comes after these two forts: it sits a good half league from the river, between the two forts and the town. The latter is built on the river's edge, in a hollow.

Before 1859, the land occupied by these establishments – which spread well beyond their present boundaries – was claimed by the Hudson's Bay Company which, in accordance with certain treaties concluded between the United States and the English governments, enjoyed the right of holding stretches of unsettled land – of its choosing – for the purpose of trading with the Indians. But in May of that year – since its charter had expired – the lands it formerly possessed devolved to the United States and became the subject of controversy between different parties who claimed them for varying reasons. So Fort Vancouver is still in

¹ Fort Vancouver was founded by the Hudson's Bay Company during the winter of 1824-1825 as a fur-trading post and supply depot. For the next twenty years it was the most important settlement of the Pacific Coast between San Francisco Bay and the Russian outposts in Alaska, and the headquarters for all Hudson's Bay Company activities west of the Rockies. With the decline of the fur trade in the 1840's, Fort Vancouver began to lose its importance. After the boundary settlement of 1846 the headquarters and depot of the Hudson's Bay Company were transferred to Vancouver Island in British territory.

In May, 1849, the first U.S. soldiers camped near the Fort, and the next month the first U.S. Army buildings were under construction, with the help of Hudson's Bay Company. The Company retained a general trading post at Vancouver until 1860, and then it was evacuated at the request of the U.S. military authorities. See Hussey, *Fort Vancouver*, 1f., *et passim*. (Tr.).

² Dr. McLoughlin was born in Lower Canada in 1784, was raised as a Protestant, became a medical doctor, and was in charge of the Hudson's Bay Company at Vancouver from its establishment. Because of his work in this region he was known as "The Father of Oregon." Many of the Company employees were French-Canadian Catholics and, as early as 1834, McLoughlin petitioned the Catholic Church in Quebec to send out priests. The first to arrive were Fathers F.N. Blanchet and M. Demers in 1838. McLoughlin, who converted to Catholicism, provided quarters for them at the Fort, and was very instrumental in the establishment of Catholicism in the region. See O'Hara, *Catholics in the Development of the Northwest*, 1f. and McCorkle, "Saga of a Century," 11. (Tr.).

litigation between the bishop, the Short Family, and the American government. It appears that the bishop will win out in the long run.³

The possession of this property, which covers an area of 640 acres – as well as other missions of the same size – would make the bishop very wealthy, and put him in the position of being able to do a lot of good in the region.

So as to clarify the right on which the bishop bases his claim, I hasten to say that the American government – in order to encourage people to emigrate to Oregon, and to induce the missionaries to civilize the Indians – made different property grants as follows:

Every mission – of whatever denomination – established among the Indians had the right to 640 acres of land around the mission, once it was proven that it was the first occupant.

Every family, made up of man and wife, could acquire the same right upon fulfilling certain conditions.

Every individual acquired the right to 320 acres under the same conditions.⁴

After a few years the government abolished all future land grants, but granted everyone the freedom to avail himself of the Pre-emption Law, that is to say, that every individual could secure 160 acres of unoccupied land, cultivate it, improve it, and become its owner by becoming an American citizen and subsequently paying the government 6.25 francs [\$1.25] an acre. In five years you can become a citizen and you pay only a few francs for the title. You can have possession of a piece of land after living on it for four years.⁵

³ This litigation turned out to be most complicated, and it was not settled until the beginning of the 20th century. In May, 1853, Bishop A.M.A. Blanchet filed a claim for 640 acres of land surrounding the church. This claim was based on the Oregon Organic Act of 1848, which provided that title to the land, not exceeding 640 acres, accepted as mission stations among the Indians of Oregon Territory on the date of the passage of the act, was to be confirmed to the "several religious sects to which said mission stations belong." Peter Skene Ogden, on behalf of the Hudson's Bay Company, protested against this claim on the grounds that the buildings and the grounds occupied by the Catholics were the property of the Company, and that, in actuality, no mission to the Indians existed. (See Hussey, 210f.). The role of the Short family really began with a man called Williamson who, before 1849, asserted that he had a prior claim to the Hudson's Bay Company. Williamson went to the California Gold Rush in 1849, leaving several people to look after his claim. The last of these, a clergyman, was shot by Amos M. Short, who wanted the claim for himself. His claim and the bishop's claim overlapped. In 1850 Short became one of the three probate judges for Clark County, and in 1853 he perished when the ship on which he was traveling from San Francisco foundered at the mouth of the Columbia. It was discovered that he had not filed a claim, and in October of 1853 his widow, Esther, filed for herself and their heirs – ten children from twenty-two to two years old. (See Burnham, "Government Grants and Patents in Vancouver, Washington," and Anderson, "The Vancouver Reservation Case; A Legal Romance.") Rossi's optimism about the outcome of the case may be due to the fact that the Hudson's Bay Company's "possessory rights" would expire in 1859, when the Company's license of exclusive British trade was due to terminate. Also, the commander of the military fort at Vancouver between 1852 and 1855 was Lt. Col. Benjamin L.E. Bonneville, French by birth, Catholic, and a good friend of Father Brouillet, the vicar-general at Fort Vancouver. It was even rumored that Bonneville suggested to the priests that they file a mission claim under the 1848 act. After 1859 Bishop Blanchet began to press vigorously for confirmation of his claim. In 1883 a decision of the Commissioner of the General Land Office awarded the Catholic Church the ground on which the church stood – a half an acre. The battle continued to the Supreme Court, which decided against the church in 1894. In 1905, the Catholic Church finally relinquished all its claims to land within the Vancouver Barracks Military Reservation (see Hussey, 211f.). At this time the bishop of the diocese sought redress by a congressional enactment. This act passed on March 3, 1905, granting the diocese \$25,000 (see McCorkle, 79).

⁴ Here, Rossi is describing the Oregon Organic Act of 1848 (when Oregon became a Territory), the act under which Bishop Blanchet filed his claim. (Tr.)

⁵ Rossi's explanations are somewhat telescoped here. The first part of the paragraph alludes to the Pre-emption Act, passed in 1841. It was a general law which said a squatter could buy the land he was living on at a minimum price as soon as the Government Land Office put it on the market. The last two sentences of this paragraph, however, refer to the Homestead Act of 1862 whereby the settler didn't have to pay the \$1.25/acre charge and, if he cultivated it for five years, he received title of full ownership on payment of a \$10 registry fee. See Muzzy, II, 25f. (Tr.)

It is on the first land grant that the bishop is basing his claim, and he already has the backing of the government surveyor-general, who has great power in these matters.

My many tasks left me little leisure time. As well as my carpentry work, I took on myself the job of interior decorator. The nakedness of the church's interior did nothing to inspire devotion in plain people, on whom the outward showiness of the Catholic religion exercises a great influence. When thinking about the beautiful ornamentation of our Italian churches – above all during the Easter celebrations – I wanted to impart a hint of that to our little mission by decorating our poor church as best I could for the anniversary of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. To this end, I hung colored cotton cloth around almost all of it and spent nearly 500 francs [\$100] on this acquisition. Since yellow was the dominant color, an Irish nun said to me one day: "One can see that you are not Irish," alluding to the orange color – color of the Orangemen's standard – and to the fact that the Orangemen are sworn enemies of the Irish Catholics. Finally, in places not covered by cloth, I put branches of greenery so that – thanks to this work – the church looked much neater than before. On Easter Sunday it was completely filled, and we were gratified to see many people taking the Sacrament.

This congregation – like many others in the region – was made up of French Canadians, of their Indian wives, of Irish citizens and soldiers, and of some other Catholics from different countries. A few non-Catholics also attended the church.

As long as the French Canadians formed the majority of the congregation, we had to preach in French, but this state of things is about to change, and from now on it will be necessary to speak English almost exclusively. The majority of the people speak English, and the few French Canadians still around generally understand that language.

In the midst of my manual tasks, I didn't overlook the study of English, and I was very conscious of my pressing need for it. I placed myself under the tutelage of the schoolmaster, who was a stern taskmaster. He treated me very harshly, without any consideration for my age, without any deference to my disposition, and without paying attention to the difficulties of the language. He would often get angry when I was reading and mispronouncing words. One evening, I happened to be pronouncing the word *world*, and I said *wor, word, worl*, obviously making very great efforts to pronounce acceptably, but without any success. Paying no attention to the trouble I was taking, my master became very angry, struck the table with his hand, and articulated *world-rld-rld-rld* so vehemently that I was almost frightened. When I gave him my little English compositions or translations to read, and if my English wasn't correct, or my compositions or translations left something to be desired – which was inevitable in the ordinary run of things – his fury would reassert itself. "Stop," he would shout, "start again!" or else there would be remarks of another stamp: "Read it again! I don't understand a thing! What do you mean? Say it in Latin so that at least you'll be understood!" After a lot of Latin explanations about my bad English, he'd finish by saying 'go on.' He didn't deal gently with me; several times he made me go to school to hear the children spelling from their spelling books, and he even made me begin studying the ABC's. One Day he summoned me to his school – undoubtedly to submit me to the mortifying necessity of publicly receiving lessons from his toddlers – and ordered me to spell the word *Ba-ker*. Deep down, however, I must admit that the harshness, the brutality – if you will – of this man did me a lot of good: he goaded me into pronouncing distinctly and precisely, and into writing fairly correctly.

However, I wasn't making a lot of progress. Convinced of the harm that speaking French at the bishop's palace was doing to me, I finally implored the bishop to send me to a place where only English was spoken. I pointed out that if he really wanted me to be useful to the mission, I'd have to speak the language correctly, and that what I was proposing was the only way in which I could learn. "I've been studying for five months," I said to him, "and I succeed neither in speaking nor in understanding it because we always speak French; I preach in

French, I hear confessions in French, everything is in French here; that's what's holding up my studies." This good prelate, having seen the accuracy of my observations, sent me to Portland – a town of four to five thousand souls on the Willamette, and in the jurisdiction of the Oregon archbishop – the next day, and told me to stay there for a while with the Irish missionary who was in charge of the church.⁶

After a fortnight I was still sputtering along in English, and since I was staying on my own to officiate in the parish, I composed a little address which I read to the missionary before his departure. The next Sunday I delivered it to my congregation. After Mass, several people came to compliment me and asked me to do the same thing for vespers. But I had to excuse myself for the very simple reason that I'd shot my bolt, and hadn't enough time to prepare another. So they scaled down their request and asked me to read something from a book, which I did.

Encouraged by my initial success, I did it again the following Sunday, only this time I increased the dose. My first address lasted only five minutes. The second lasted six, and even then I read it. Finally, on the third Sunday, I preached a normal sermon to the congregation; it lasted between twenty-five and thirty minutes. Since that time I've preached regularly every Sunday without too much trouble, save for one or two occasions. To my great sorrow, some friends told me that if I wanted to preach distinctly, I should give up snuff because it made my voice nasal... a good quality, perhaps in a Frenchman but, they told me, intolerable to English ears.

The advice was good, I took it, and felt all the better for it.

In the midst of my first successes, a very important piece of business obliged me to journey to the Cowlitz mission with Monsignor. It was a question of examining and pronouncing on the validity of a marriage between a young Canadian and a half-breed woman.

The frivolity with which they get married in the New World is equaled only by that – much greater – with which they get divorced. They meet at a dance, a social evening, or on a walk, they take a liking to each other, they go to a judge or some kind of clergyman, and they get married. If they happen to be on a ship, they go to the captain and the marriage is performed. The law recognizes all marriages thus contracted. Even the church had to forego publishing the *Tametsi* decree because priests were very scarce there, and the faithful would have been greatly inconvenienced if the church had acted differently.⁷

Now that we are beginning to have more priests, things bid fair to change. But we are all agreed that such a delicate subject must be handled very prudently.

As for divorce, that's another story; the church has the same stand here as everywhere else. It does not acknowledge divorce. But the law acknowledges it everywhere, except in Virginia and some of the other states in the East, whose constitutions I'm not familiar enough with to comment on. To get a divorce in all the rest of the United States, it is enough for the

⁶ The Irish priest in charge of the only Catholic Church in Portland at that time was Father Patrick Mackin. For this information I am indebted to Rev. John R. Laidlaw, archivist of the Archdiocese of Portland. (Tr.).

⁷ *Tametsi* – Latin for 'although' – is the first word of the opening sentence of a decree concerning the juridical form of marriage enacted by the 24th session of the Council of Trent on Nov. 11, 1563. Briefly, it states that the presence of a priest is required for the validity of marriage. The decree was never published in wide areas of the church. Entire nations were left unaffected by it. In other nations the decree was published in some places, while not in others. As a result, there were often serious doubts concerning the validity or invalidity of many marriages. (Tr.).

parties to say that they are unhappy with each other. No matter what motive underlies their decision, they will get the so-called divorce.⁸

Certain divorce cases – whose reasons are really ridiculous – have come to my attention.

One day a woman was granted a divorce because her husband wasn't a gentleman; yet she, herself, was only a servant. Another made a similar request because her husband wouldn't serve her tea in the evening.

If you wanted to relate all the divorce cases submitted and granted in America, I think you could put together quite a voluminous history. There's not a Legislature in the different States, not a law court in the innumerable counties, which hasn't twenty, thirty, or forty pending – and sometimes more. But the new American settlements on the Pacific Coast are particularly rife with matters of this type, yet people don't enquire into, nor do they worry about their bad effects on society.

In this respect, America has only followed the lead of other – even Catholic – countries, and it wouldn't be fair to wish to put all the blame on the laws. The laws, say the jurists, should be made only for man's good, and not for his downfall. So it follows that when they can't forestall or prevent all society's disorders, they should at least try to lessen their effects. For if American law had absolutely forbidden divorce, it would have been dodged with as much ease as one dodges all the other fine legislation in this country – without, however, effecting any good in society. So the law governing divorces endeavors to lessen their adverse consequences and to diminish their number.

This theory, although put forward to sanction a law opposed by the church, shows, nevertheless, that the American statute book included it in its legislation only because of the necessity of events. If you add to that the fact that this government professes no religion, you won't find it strange that it made such a sanction. On the contrary, one might be surprised that it didn't make some even more opposed to those of the church, such as have been passed in other countries where Catholicism is almost exclusively professed. So for this reason one ought to admire the rest of the American legislation, which is based on justice and equity everywhere.

Perhaps there is no other country with such noble and good laws as America. The fault doesn't lie in the laws, but in the men who ought to obey them, and in those who ought to make them obey. I share the opinion of those who say that as long as America doesn't come under the influence of any particular religious faith, she will be not only free, but she will free others. If, by misfortune, she were influenced by a religious sect, all civil and religious liberty would disappear immediately, and persecutions and proscriptions would ensue endlessly, without let-up. Let us remember the laws passed in the New England States which – being dominated by the Puritanical character – only weighed down the Catholics by branding them with incompetency and by depriving them of all participation in public affairs.

On this point I must acknowledge that our holy religion is not more free anywhere than in America. This historical truth is enough in itself to refute those who say that the Catholic religion must depend on the State for its existence. And at the same time, it proves conclusively that this same religion spreads best where there is more real political liberty. Like the light of the sun, the Catholic truth penetrates everywhere: it needs only space to spread out: it pays no attention to the boundaries of kingdoms and empires, for it has been said that it will prevail from sea to sea, and that it will reach to the ends of the earth.

⁸ Rossi's comments on divorce are not quite accurate. One had to petition the Territorial Legislature to pass a special "relief" bill. Passage was not automatic, not like the present "no fault" divorce laws. Rossi is, however, correct about the numbers. Much of the legislative time during the sessions would be taken up with these "private bills" for the relief of "John and/or Mary Doe." (Tr.).

Wasn't it Christ himself who said that his kingdom, the church, is like a mustard seed which, when planted in the earth, will grow into a huge tree? And what does this seed need in order to develop and grow, if not the absence of all restraint?

That's the divine image of Catholicism, an image brought about from day to day with unequalled constancy over a period of nineteen centuries of fulfilled events. So it is falsely claimed that it needs anything other than a policy of liberty for its propagation. Its enemies are wrong when they attribute its development to anything other than the influence of its divinity; its friends are wrong when they become discouraged, at times, and seem to hesitate when they are face to face with their adversaries. Both sides wouldn't be wasting their time in a serious study of its origin and its progress.

As far as I am concerned, the state of Catholicism in America convinces me – until I see persuasive evidence to the contrary – that it needs only freedom in order to spread its influence and assure its victory. It is true that neither priests nor monks wear garb that sets them apart from the rest of the people; the only distinguishing exterior detail is the clerical collar – and even then, only some of them wear it. It is also true that religious processions never take place in public. This absence of public display in the practice of our religion is due solely to the prudence of the clergy, who take care to expose neither the dignity of the holy ministry nor the symbols of our belief to the insults of dissident fanatics without good cause. But these laws don't intermingle. If sometimes a law which seems to infringe on the rights of religion is passed, remonstrations are made, and the law is modified, sometimes even revoked. What more could one want? As a man, and as a Christian, I hope with all my heart that the American Constitution will never fall under the influence of the narrow-minded ideas of any bigoted political party whatsoever.