

CHAPTER XXX

PETER DE SMET PERSONAL ASPECTS

§ I. PEACE ENVOY TO THE WESTERN TRIBES

Among the traditions of Jesuit missionary history is the employment of members of the Society as government intermediaries with the Indians. "The Governor General [of New France]," wrote Baron Lahontan in the seventeenth century, "cannot be without the services of the Jesuits in making treaties with the governors of New England and New York as well as with the Iroquois." "Such services," comments a modern writer, "when the very life of the colony was threatened by Indians was bound to be recognized and to win prestige and authority for the clergy as a whole."¹ This rôle of the earlier Jesuit missionary as peacemaker was reenacted in the nineteenth century by Father De Smet. Through his various peace missions to Indian tribes, notably the Sioux, undertaken in some instances at the petition of the federal government, he became in a measure a public figure, whose name was carried far and wide throughout the country. These missions had a significance that one may qualify as national, resulting, as they sometimes did, in the cessation of Indian hostilities over a wide area and in the resumption of peaceful relations between natives and whites. They constitute a phase of Jesuit activity on the old frontier of such interest that one may be allowed to dwell on them with some detail.

The first recorded instance of De Smet's activities as peacemaker occurred in May, 1839, when he arrived among the Yankton Sioux near the mouth of the Vermilion to negotiate a treaty between them and the Potawatomi of Council Bluffs. Two of the latter tribe had been massacred by the Sioux, now become a source of chronic terror to the less bellicose Potawatomi.

The repast concluded, I disclosed to them the principal object of my visit among them, viz a durable peace between the Sioux and the Potawatomes, their neighbors. Having discussed the different points and refuted the false reports that divided the two nations, I persuaded the Sioux to make some presents to the children of such of our Potawatomes as they

¹ Alexander Ridell, *The Rise of Ecclesiastical Control in Quebec* (New York, 1916), p. 105.

had killed, which is called covering the dead, and to come and smoke with them the calumet of peace. The feast and the council were terminated with the most perfect cordiality. The same evening I gave them an instruction on the Apostles' Creed, and I baptized a great number of their little children. This nation, dispersed over a wide extent, reckons 32,000 souls.²

In November of the following year, 1840, De Smet, on arriving at Fort Vermilion from his first Rocky Mountain journey, found that his diplomatic success of the preceding year had been undone.

When I reached Fort Vermilion, a Santee war-party was just back from an excursion against my dear Potawatomes, they brought one scalp with them. The murderers had blackened themselves from head to foot with the exception of their lips, which were rubbed with vermilion. Proud of their victory, they performed their dance in the midst of the camp, carrying the scalp on the end of a long pole. I appeared all at once in their presence and invited them to meet in council. There I reproached them vigorously with their unfaithfulness to the solemn promise they had made me the year before to live in peace with their neighbors the Potawatomes. I made them feel the injustice they were guilty of in attacking a peaceable nation that wished them nothing but good, and who had even prevented their hereditary foes, the Otoes, Pawnees, Sauks, Foxes and Iowas from coming to invade them. Finally I advised them to employ all means to effect a prompt reconciliation and avoid the terrible reprisal which could not fail to come upon them, being well assured that the Potawatomes and their allies would come soon and take vengeance for their perjury, and perhaps wipe out their whole tribe. Abashed at their fault and dreading its consequences, they conjured me to serve once more as their mediator, and to assure the Potawatomes of their sincere resolution to bury the hatchet forever.³

Making his way back to St. Louis in 1846 at the close of his missionary career in Oregon and the Rocky Mountain country, De Smet found opportunity to effect a treaty of friendship between the Flatheads and the most inveterate of their enemies, the Blackfeet. He spent several weeks with various Blackfeet bands, eagerly improving the occasion, and with success, at least for the moment, to bring about a friendly understanding between their tribe and the Flatheads.⁴

Up to this juncture the efforts of De Smet to promote the cause of

² CR, *De Smet*, I 189. De Smet's activities as peace envoy are the subject of a scholarly study, Patrick W. Donnelly, S. J., "Father Pierre-Jean De Smet United States Ambassador to the Indians" in *Historical Records and Studies*, 24 7-142 (1934).

³ *Idem*, I 256.

⁴ *Idem*, I 589-599.

peace among the western Indian tribes had been made on his own initiative and in his private capacity as missionary and disinterested friend of the natives. But in 1851 his services as peace envoy to the Indians were engaged, though in a somewhat informal way, by the federal government. Thenceforth until his death he appeared at intervals as official mediator between the government and disaffected Indian tribes. His experience in this rôle was of a nature always satisfactory and sometimes striking and, from the standpoint of the secular reader of history, constitutes perhaps the most interesting phase of his career.⁵

During the forties a steady stream of Oregon emigrants, augmented later by California gold-seekers, passed over the Great Plains. Their passage was watched with suspicion and finally with dismay by the Indians, who began to realize that their vast domain was destined to pass into the white man's hands. They grew in consequence discontented and sullen so as to alarm the government, which feared that their mood might express itself in ruthless violence. To forestall any outbreak on their part, it was resolved to convene the chiefs of all the plains tribes in council with a view to ascertain their grievances and find a *modus vivendi* between them and the whites. The idea of the council was due in the main to Donald D. Mitchell, superintendent of Indian affairs at St. Louis, who found Washington ready to second his plans. Mitchell was eager to secure the services of Father De Smet for the council. Permission to this effect having been secured from Father Elet, his superior, Father De Smet with his companion, Father Christian Hoecken, left St. Louis June 7, 1851, on the *St. Ange*, Captain La Barge, for Fort Union at the mouth of the Yellowstone. Cholera broke out on the *St. Ange* as she made her way up the Missouri and Hoecken was numbered among the victims. His death made a profound impression upon De

⁵ De Smet's reputation for influence over the Indians had been well established at the beginning of the fifties "Mr. Beale desires me to enable him to make your acquaintance and to obtain your cooperation in doing the best for these tribes, he . . . being so well acquainted with your character as to believe that in cooperation with the civil authorities you could do more for these poor people, more for their welfare and keeping them in peace and friendship with the United States than 'an army with banners' I can add that this is not only his opinion but that of the authorities at Washington and my own When I was there this winter I had a conversation with the Secretary of the Interior (the head of the Indian service) and also with the Commissioner of Indian Affairs on this subject and they concurred in the views of Lieut Beale which I have stated to you In fact, it was I, myself, and in consequence of my knowledge of your meritorious services in the missionary field and of your intimation a year ago that you might go to California that brought this point under the notice of the authorities and I shall be happy to be of any further service in carrying it out Affectionately, Thomas H Benton " Benton to De Smet, April 7, 1852, CR, *De Smet*, 4 1566.

Smet as is related in another part of this history.⁶ Reaching Fort Union, the latter with a party of Indians of various tribes set out thence overland in a southerly direction. The route taken led by Fort Alexander and along the eastern base of the Big Horn Mountains to the Platte River near the site of Casper, Wyoming, where connection was made with the Oregon Trail. This the party followed eastward to Fort Laramie, thirty miles beyond which, at the mouth of Horse Creek, the council was to be held. Ten thousand Indians were in attendance. It was the largest meeting of natives with representatives of the government that had yet taken place. The sessions, marked by great harmony on all sides, lasted from the 12th to the 23rd of September and resulted in treaties with various tribes guaranteeing to the whites free, unmolested passage across the plains, and to the Indians compensation in money for the losses they had sustained at the hands of emigrants and for similar losses they might incur in the future. Father De Smet attended the council from beginning to end, putting forth all his energies to insure its success by working upon the Indians to listen to counsels of wisdom and moderation. The negotiations over, he started back for St Louis in company with Robert Campbell and the commissioners, D. D. Mitchell and Thomas Fitzpatrick, all names of interest in the history of the frontier.⁷ His letters detailing the business of the great pow-wow as also the incidents that marked his journey to and from the meeting-place are among the most valuable that he wrote.

During the eighteen days that the Great Council lasted, the union, harmony and amity that reigned among the Indians were truly admirable. Implacable hatreds, hereditary enmities, cruel and bloody encounters, with the whole past, in fine, were forgotten. They paid mutual visits, smoked the calumet of peace together, exchanged presents, partook of numerous banquets, and all the lodges were open to strangers. A practice occurring but on the most amicable and fraternal occasions was seen—this is, the adopting of children and of brothers on each side. There was a perfect unanimity of views between Colonel Mitchell, superintendent of the Indian Territory [?], and Major Fitzpatrick, and nothing was omitted to foster these germs of peace. The object of the assembly was a distinguished proof of the highest benevolence on the part of the United States Government, as well as of the sincere desire of establishing a lasting peace among tribes hostile to each other, and of obtaining a right of passage through their

⁶ On the eve of De Smet's departure from St Louis for the council Father Elet received word from the General disapproving of the journey. But as all arrangements were made for it and as it did not involve De Smet's returning to Oregon, he was permitted by Elet to carry out his program. For particulars of Father Hoecken's death, cf *supra*, Chap XXVIII, § 6.

⁷ For notices of Campbell and Fitzpatrick, cf *infra*, notes 46, 47.

possessions for the whites, and making the Indians compensations for injuries and losses the latter may have sustained from the whites

At the opening of the council, the superintendent made known to the savages that the object of the assembly was the acceptance by them of the treaty, such as had been prepared beforehand, with the consent of the President of the United States. This treaty was read sentence by sentence, and distinctly explained to the different interpreters, that they might have the exact and legitimate meaning of each article. The preamble explains that it is a treaty between the agents named on one side by the President of the United States, and on the other by the chiefs or braves of the Indian nations that reside south of the Missouri, east of the Rocky Mountains, and north of the boundary line of Texas and Mexico, viz the Sioux or Dakotas, the Cheyennes, the Arapahos, the Crows, the Minnetarees, and Mandans and Aricaras. . . This assembly will form an era among them, and I trust will be ever dear to their memories. It closed on the 23rd of September.

The happy results of this council are, no doubt, owing to the prudent measures of the commissioners of the Government, and more especially to their conciliatory manners in all their intercourse and transactions with the Indians. The council will doubtless produce the good effects they have a right to expect. It will be the commencement of a new era for the Indians—an era of peace. In future, peaceable citizens may cross the desert unmolested and the Indian will have little to dread from the bad white men, for justice will be rendered to him.⁸

Seven years were to pass by before De Smet journeyed again over the Great Plains. In 1857 the Mormons, settled under the leadership of Brigham Young in the Salt Lake Valley, prepared to resist by arms the appointment by the United States government of Alfred Cummings as governor of Utah Territory.⁹ A military expedition under command

⁸ CR, *De Smet*, 2 675-676, 684. Fitzpatrick on leaving the council conducted a group of Indians to Washington. They were received and entertained on the way at St. Mary's Mission, Kansas, and at St. Louis University. The treaty of Fort Laramie is in Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, 2 594. The Indian tribes that were parties to the treaty are listed in the preamble as "the Sioux or Dahcotahs, Cheyennes, Arapahoes, Crows, Assinaboines, Gros-Ventre Mandans and Arrickaras." The treaty was signed September 17, 1851, and subsequently ratified by the senate, the assent of all the tribes except the Crows having been obtained. Robert Campbell was present as a witness, but only Mitchell and Fitzpatrick signed the treaty as commissioners. Curiously enough Father De Smet's name does not appear among those of the fifteen witnesses. The treaty is severely commented on by Larpenteur in Coues, (ed), *Forty Years a Trader on the Upper Missouri*. Cf. also Hafen and Ghent, *Broken Hand, the Life Story of Thomas Fitzpatrick, Chief of the Mountain Men* (Denver, 1931). There are numerous references to De Smet in Larpenteur's narrative.

⁹ It is often stated that De Smet was the first to direct the Mormons to the Great Salt Lake region on the occasion of his meeting them near Council

of Albert Sidney Johnston was sent out to afford protection to the new executive. It failed to suppress the rebellion and a second expedition, under command of General William Harney, was dispatched to Utah in the spring of 1858. At the same time commissioners were sent by the government to deal with the disaffected Mormons and offer amnesty to such of their number as withdrew from the rebellion. This conciliatory policy met with success and General Harney's expedition was turned back at the ford of the South Platte.¹⁰

Accompanying the troops on this occasion in the capacity of chaplain was Father De Smet. Between him and General Harney existed a friendship of many years' standing, the soldier admiring the missionary's obvious influence over the Indian tribes and his successes in adjusting their affairs. Accordingly, on being appointed to the command of the second Utah expedition, the route of which lay through a region infested with many hostile Indian tribes, Harney was prompt to enlist the services of De Smet. Representations having been made by the General at Washington to secure a military chaplaincy for the Jesuit, the latter received from Secretary of War Floyd a communication dated May 15, 1858

The President [Buchanan] is desirous to engage you to attend the army for Utah, to officiate as chaplain. In his opinion your services would be important in many respects to the public interest, particularly in the present condition of our affairs in Utah. Having sought information as to the proper person to be thus employed, his attention has been directed to you and he has instructed me to address you on the subject, in the hope that you may not consider it incompatible with your clerical duties or your personal feelings to yield to his request.¹¹

Bluffs, Iowa, in the fall of 1846 The matter is doubtful and Father De Smet's own testimony leaves it such "They [the Mormons] asked a thousand questions about the regions I had explored and the spot which I have just described to you [Salt Lake region] pleased them greatly from the account I gave them of it Was that what determined them? I would not dare to assert it" CR, *De Smet*, 4 1405 It does not seem likely that De Smet was ever at Great Salt Lake himself. He passed through Utah only in 1840 and 1841, and then by the route of the Oregon Trail, which ran a considerable distance from the lake There is no evidence that on either of these occasions he detoured from the trail in the direction of the lake

¹⁰ CR, *De Smet*, 1 70 General William S Harney, noted Indian fighter, married Mary, daughter of the St Louis philanthropist, John Mullanphy The relations between De Smet and Harney are detailed in the latter's biography, Reavis, *The Life and Military Services of Gen. William Sibley Harney* (St Louis, 1878). The book contains several unfounded statements with regard to De Smet, e g, that he spoke various Indian dialects with ease (p 454).

¹¹ CR, *De Smet*, 2 718 The copy of Floyd's letter in the war department is dated May 13, 1858

A letter of the missionary sums up briefly the story of his connection with the Utah expedition

The Reverend Father Provincial and all the other consultors, considering the circumstances, expressed themselves in favor of my accepting. I immediately set out for Fort Leavenworth, Kansas Territory, to join the army at that point. On the very day of my arrival I took my place in the Seventh Regiment, composed of 800 men, under the command of the excellent Colonel Morrison, whose staff was composed of a numerous body of superior officers of the line and engineers. General Harney, the commander-in-chief, and one of the most distinguished and most valiant generals of the United States, with great courtesy, installed me himself in my post. The brave colonel, though a Protestant, thanked me very heartily. "General," said he, "I thought myself highly honored when intrusted with the command of the engineers, to have attached to my command a representative of the ancient and venerable church, I hold as an additional favor." General Harney then shook hands with me, with great kindness, bade me welcome to the army, and assured me that I should be left perfectly free in the exercise of my holy ministry among the soldiers. He kept his word most loyally, and in this he was seconded by all the officers. During the whole time that I was among them, I never met with the slightest obstacle in the discharge of my duties. The soldiers had always free access to my tent for confession and instruction. I had frequently the consolation of celebrating the holy sacrifice of the mass early in the morning, and on each occasion a large number of soldiers devoutly approached the holy table . . .

Everything was going on admirably and in good order. The commanding general and staff were already at the crossing of the south branch of the Platte, 480 miles from Fort Leavenworth, when he received the news that the Mormons had submitted or laid down their arms, and at the same time an order to distribute his troops to other points and return to the United States. This also changed my destination, the conclusion of peace put an end to my little diplomatic mission to the Indian tribes of Utah. I consulted with the general, and accompanied him on his return to Leavenworth.¹²

When De Smet returned to St. Louis from the Utah expedition, it was with the intention of resigning at once his commission in the army. Events frustrated his plan:

At the beginning of September, 1858, I sought to resign the post of chaplain which I had occupied in the Utah expedition. The Secretary of War did not see fit to accept my resignation, in consequence of fresh difficulties which had arisen west of the Rocky Mountains. There the Indian tribes had formed a powerful league against the whites, they had surprised Colonel Steptoe and had killed two of his officers and several soldiers, a general uprising was imminent in all that region. Nine tribes had already

¹² CR, *De Smet*, 2 718-719, 728.

entered into the coalition, namely the Palooses, Yakimas, Skoyelpis, Okinagans, Spokans, Coeur d'Alenes, Kalispels, Kootenais and Flatheads. These poor savages, formerly so peaceable, the last four especially, had become very uneasy over the frequent incursions made by the whites upon the lands in the southern and western portions of the Territories of Washington and Oregon. From uneasiness, they had soon passed to displeasure and anger, when they saw these adventurers taking possession of the most advantageous sites and settling as owners upon the most fertile parts of the country, in total contempt of their rights and without the slightest preliminary agreement.¹³

The mountain tribes had become especially stirred up and had resolved to drive back the whites, or at least to make resistance to their progressive encroachments. Bands were quickly formed in various places, these came together, began drilling and in a few days a body of 800 to 1,000 warriors was organized. Their first blow was a victory for them, and in their eyes a complete one, for they had not only driven off the enemy but had besides captured his train and provisions. The precipitate retreat of the Americans even seemed to them a shameful flight. It was, however, a perfectly natural thing, since the brave Colonel Steptoe, having no suspicion of the rising, had with him only one company of 120 men, on their way to maintain order at Colville. Intoxicated with their first success, the Indians thought themselves invincible and able to meet the whole United States army.

On the other side, the government thought the affair of sufficient gravity to make it prudent to put it in the hands of General Harney. This officer had won glory on many occasions in Indian wars in Florida, Texas, Mexico and the plains of the West. He wished to have me with him on this distant expedition, and at his express request, the Secretary of War invited me to go accordingly. After ascertaining that it was agreeable to my superiors, I consented to retain my position of army chaplain in the new army. I hoped to be of some service in that capacity to the men, but above all to the Indian tribes of the mountains, I desired greatly also to be in touch with my missionary brethren in the difficulties which the war would doubtless bring upon them.¹⁴

¹³ Cf also CR, *De Smet*, 2 748, for the causes of the Oregon Indian war of 1858. "So extensive and deep has been the sentiment of distrust and dissatisfaction produced by the influx of immigration to the Indian country coupled with the protracted delay in the ratification of the treaties made in 1855 that the most persistent efforts of the agents and other officers of the government have barely sufficed to preserve amicable relations even with tribes heretofore uniformly friendly." *RCIA*, 1859, p 382.

¹⁴ CR, *De Smet*, 2 730-732. The attack on Col Steptoe's column was made by the Coeur d'Alènes and Palouse. The preposterous charge was made that Father Joset, Coeur d'Alène missionary, incited the Indians against the troops. An authentic account of the affair, detailing Joset's heroic efforts to restrain the Indians and prevent bloodshed, was furnished the San Francisco *Monitor*, March, April, 1860, by Father Congiato, superior of the Rocky Mountain Missions. Cf *supra*, Chap XXIV, n 103.

74 THE JESUITS OF THE MIDDLE UNITED STATES

De Smet sailed from New York for Oregon by way of Panama, September 20, 1858. When he arrived at Vancouver October 28, the actual campaign against the Indians was over. "The task, however, remained of removing the prejudices of the Indians, soothing their inquietude and alarm and correcting or rather refuting, the false rumors that are generally spread about after a war and which otherwise might be the cause of its renewal."

To cope with such a task no one was better fitted than De Smet. It was accordingly decided that he should visit the upper tribes, to whom he was well and favorably known in consequence of his missionary activities among them in the forties. Leaving Vancouver the day after his arrival, he passed the winter at the Sacred Heart Mission among the Coeur d'Alènes, visited the abandoned Flathead Mission of St. Mary's in the Bitter Root Valley, the first station established by him in the Rocky Mountain country, and spent some time at the new St. Ignatius Mission near the Great Flathead Lake. On April 16, in response to instructions received from General Harney, he left St. Ignatius with a party of chiefs of the various mountain tribes, to conduct them to Fort Vancouver where a council was to be arranged between them and government officers. The council, which took place on May 19, had a successful issue. His mission now accomplished, Father De Smet asked and obtained June 1, 1859, permission from his military superior to return to St. Louis. Evidence of the esteem in which he was held in army circles is to be met with in a series of letters addressed to the missionary by Captain Alfred Pleasanton, whose services in the Civil War were to bring him into prominence. The captain, who appears to have been next in command to General Harney in the Oregon expedition, exerted himself to further in every possible way the missionary's diplomatic endeavors among the Indians:

By the campaign of last summer submission had been conquered, but the embittered feelings of the two races excited by war still existed and it remained for you to supply that which was wanting to the sword. It was necessary to exercise the strong faith which the red man possessed in your purity and holiness of character, to enable the general [Harney] to evince successfully towards them the kind intentions of the Government and to restore confidence and repose to their minds. This has been done, the victory is yours and the general will take great pleasure in recording your success at the War Department. . . . We all miss you so much; I have not met an officer of your acquaintance who has not expressed great regret at your departure and we all feel indebted to you for the good understanding between the poor Indians and the whites at this time. No disturbance of any kind has occurred and I feel confident there will not be any.¹⁵

¹⁵ CR, *De Smet*, 4 1577, 1580 "It gives me pleasure to commend to the general-in-chief the able and efficient services the Reverend Father De Smet has

The last and by far the most important of the peace negotiations of De Smet with the Indians were those which he conducted with the Sioux. Disaffection among the various bands of this widespread tribe, occasioned in large measure by the undoubted wrongs which they suffered at the hands of the whites, grew apace during the years immediately preceding the Civil War. The outbreak of the great conflict diverted the attention of the government from the western frontier and thus gave the Indians an opportunity of which they were not slow to take advantage. They at once broke out into open rebellion, ravaging the white settlements and carrying on hostilities with a fury which culminated in the historic Minnesota massacre of 1862. Military detachments were sent against them and with success. But the following year the Sioux of the Missouri were on the warpath.

In December, 1863, De Smet, while in Washington on his return by way of the Isthmus of Panama from a trip to Oregon, was earnestly requested by the secretary of the Interior and the commissioner of Indian affairs to undertake a journey to the Sioux country with a view to use his influence to bring the belligerent Indians to terms:

I have been requested, by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in Washington, "to undertake the journey and to bring about, if possible, a peace among the hostile Sioux, acting in concert with the commander of the troops and the appointed agents" They offer to pay all my expenses, with a handsome remuneration for myself. Not being well as yet, I have not accepted their request. I fear I would lose all caste among the Indians. They have hitherto looked upon me as the bearer to them of the word of the Great Spirit and have universally been kind and attentive wherever I have met them. Should I present myself in their midst as the bearer of the word of the Big Chief of the Big Knives in Washington, no longer their Great Father but now their greatest enemy, it would place me in rather an awkward situation. I have written to the Commissioner that if I can go, I will go on my own hook, without pay or remuneration, visit the friendly Sioux first, and in their company try to penetrate among their fighting brethren and do my utmost to preach peace and good will to

rendered" Harney to the assistant adjutant-general, June 1, 1859 CR, *De Smet*, 4 1576 "So completely had the Indians been pacified through the good offices of Father De Smet and the active and efficient measures of General Harney that the emigration to Oregon during the summer of 1859 continued to pour into the territory" Reavis, *op cit*, p 285. At least two reports of De Smet, both of them unpublished, on his diplomatic mission of 1859 are in the war department archives. On November 12, 1859, Harney transmitted a communication from De Smet narrating particulars of his journey to St Louis and of the dispositions of the Indians "The Report of Father De Smet is very interesting and proposes a plan for Indian reservations" E. D. Townsend, A. A. Gen July 6, 1859 De Smet's resignation as chaplain tendered September 29, 1859, was accepted by W. A. Dunkard, acting-secretary of war, October 6, 1859 Archives of the war department

them, and to make them come to a good understanding with the general in command and the agents of the Government ¹⁶

On April 20 De Smet left St. Louis for the upper Missouri. Making his headquarters at Fort Berthold, he remained there the entire summer, during which time he visited the Sioux and other tribes in the vicinity. Word having been brought to him that the Santee Sioux, the chief participants in the Minnesota Massacre, who were then hugging the British frontier, were eager to see him and hear what terms the government had to offer, he thought it his duty to answer their call. Before doing so, however, he felt it proper to lay his plan before General Sully, who was then coming up the Missouri with a strong force. De Smet, having gone down the river to meet him, acquainted him with his intention of visiting the Santee. The General was of opinion that peace terms should be discussed with the Indians only after they had received punishment for the crimes they had committed. "In consequence of the General's declaration and the circumstances of the case, my errand of peace, though sanctioned by the Government, became bootless and could only serve to place one in a false position, namely, that of being face to face with the Indians without being able to do them the least service. So I took the resolution of returning to St. Louis. I reported to the Government all that had passed during my stay in the plains." ¹⁷

¹⁶ CR, *De Smet*, 1. 85.

¹⁷ *Idem*, 3 833. Numerous testimonies from army officers as to De Smet's influence with the Indians are extant "The Reverend Father De Smet, S J, being about to visit the Indian tribes of the Rocky Mountains on a charitable mission on behalf of the Government, it affords me the greatest pleasure to recommend this most excellent and good man and devoted friend to every officer and agent in the public service, both civil and military There is no one to whom the country is more indebted for valuable and important services with the Indian tribes on this side of the Rocky Mountains as well as in Oregon and Idaho The highest degree of confidence has always been reposed in the purity of character and refined intelligence the good Father De Smet has evinced in his intercourse with the most distinguished persons in this country as well as in Europe" A P Pleasanton, major general, St Louis, April 18, 1864 (A) "The Rev P J De Smet goes on a mission of Peace and Mercy among the fighting Sioux, leaving today Notwithstanding the wide renown of this illustrious Missioner and traveller, I do myself the honor and pleasure of writing you a note to beg—what I know it will afford you pleasure to grant—that you will give him such letters as insure him every assistance he may have need for from your officers and troops who may be stationed on his route either going or returning" Maj -Gen Rosecrans to General Curtis, St Louis, April 19, 1864. (A). Even when engaged in strictly missionary work De Smet was given cordial letters of recommendation by the military authorities "All officers of the army within the Military Division [of the Missouri] are required and all citizens are requested to extend to the bearer of this letter,

In 1867 De Smet was again on the upper Missouri in the capacity of official peace envoy to the hostile tribes. The secretary of the Interior had requested him to visit the latter "to endeavor to bring them back to peace and submission and to prevent as far as possible the destruction of property and the murder of the whites." "I accepted the commission," he wrote, "there being nothing in it contrary to my duties as a missionary, and with the distinct understanding that I shall not accept any remuneration for my services. I prefer to be altogether independent in money matters, as my only object is to be of use to the whites and still more to the poor Indians." "My quality of envoy extraordinary of the Government carries with it the title of Major, strangely mated, it must be owned, with that of Jesuit. Still, it must be said in its behalf that it gives me readier access among the soldiers, a great many of whom are Catholics."¹⁸

The route taken by De Smet, quite different from any he had previously followed, reveals the progress in modern means of communication that was being made in the western country. He travelled by rail from St. Louis to Chicago and thence west on the Northwestern Railroad, which had just been completed to the Missouri River. His destination at this stage of the journey was Omaha, but heavy rains having wrought havoc with bridges and tracks, he had to interrupt his railroad journey at Dennison, Iowa, and proceed by wagon to Sioux City, a distance of a hundred miles. There he took passage on the Steamer *Guidon*, which was ascending the Missouri. With him was a band of twenty-six Yankton Sioux, with their chief Pannaniapapi, an exemplary Catholic Indian and his devoted friend. At the Yankton agency, near Fort Randall, where he took leave of his Yankton friends, he boarded the *Bighorn* and continued his journey up the river. At Forts Thompson, Sully, Rice and Berthold and numerous other stopping places on the way up to Fort Buford at the mouth of the Yellowstone, hundreds of Indians were awaiting the arrival of the missionary. He interviewed them all, gathering information as to their condition, taking note of their grievances, and counseling them to follow the ways of humanity and peace. As a result of his investigation he felt convinced that the Indians were ready to live amicably with the whites if only the latter

the Rev. Father De Smet, a Catholic Priest, who has heretofore travelled much among the Rocky Mountains and is now en route for missions under his control, all the assistance and protection they can to enable him to fulfill his benevolent and humane purposes. He has always been noted for his strict fidelity to the interests of our Government, for indefatigable industry and an enthusiastic love for the Indians under his charge." W. T. Sherman, major general, St. Louis, April 9, 1866 (A)

¹⁸ *Idem*, 3. 859, 881.

would deal with them according to the dictates of humanity and justice. "I am firmly convinced, that if the just claims of the Indians are attended to, if their annuities are paid them at the proper time and place, if the agents and other employees of the Government treat them with honesty and justice, if they are supplied with the necessary tools for carpentry and agriculture—the tribes of the Upper Missouri will maintain peace with the whites, and the warlike bands who today infest the plains of the Far West and the valley of the Platte, where there is so much destruction of property and loss of life, will promptly cease their depredations and would not be long in joining the stay-at-home tribes."¹⁹

Descending the Missouri at the close of his mission, Father De Smet met at Leavenworth the new peace commission, consisting of several distinguished army officers, which had been appointed by the government to probe thoroughly the entire question of the relations between Indians and whites. They invited Father De Smet to join their party and accompany them in their visit to the tribes. This he was willing to do, but as his baggage had already gone on to St. Louis, he found it necessary first to return to that city. Here he fell ill and at the direction of his physician gave up his plan of joining the peace commission on their travels. For the results achieved by his expedition of 1867 De Smet received an appreciative note from the secretary of the Interior "You will please accept my thanks for the faithful and efficient manner in which you have discharged the duties entrusted in your care."²⁰

The following year, 1868, was to see the most remarkable of all of De Smet's embassies to the red men in the quality of pacificator. On March 30 of that year he left St. Louis for Chicago, whence he travelled to Omaha and from there to Cheyenne. He was in company with Generals Sheridan, Sherman, Harney, and Terry and the other members of the peace commission. At Cheyenne the commission and Father De Smet parted company, the former going to Fort Laramie, while the latter returned to Omaha, whence he proceeded to Fort Rice. His plan was to penetrate the interior from this point with a view to meet the Sioux bands still in arms and arrange a council between them and the commissioners. It was a perilous undertaking, one which in the opinion of Major General David S. Stanley, no other white man could have attempted with impunity.^{20a}

¹⁹ *Idem*, 3 886

²⁰ *Idem*, 1 92

^{20a} *Idem*, 4 1584 *et seq.* An account of De Smet's peace mission of 1868, based on Charles Galpin's journal (*infra*, n 41) may be read in Stanley Vestal, *Sitting Bull, Champion of the Sioux* (Boston, 1932), Chap XV



Father De Smet with a group of Indian chiefs of the Pacific Northwest, 1859
Daguerreotype in the Linton Album Archives of the Missouri Province, S J, St.
Louis



Father De Smet meets the hostile Sioux, Powder River, 1868 The most notable of his peace conferences with the Indians Sketch in the Linton Album by Matthew Hastings, 1835-1919, painter of Indian and western scenes Archives of the Missouri Province, S J, St Louis

The missionary set out from Fort Rice in company with an escort of eighty friendly Sioux for the camp of Sitting Bull, designated by him "the generalissimo" of the hostile chiefs. The camp was on the Yellowstone about ten miles above the mouth of the Powder River. Here had gathered some five thousand Sioux, the warriors numbering about five hundred. Charles Galpin, a trader of many years experience on the upper Missouri, accompanied De Smet as interpreter. The mission was completely successful, the Sioux chiefs being induced to meet the commissioners at Fort Rice and there conclude with them a treaty of peace and amity. The picture of the venerable missionary, robed in his religious garb and going forward to meet the vengeful Sioux without other arms or protection than a banner having on one side the name of Jesus and on the other the image of the Virgin Mother is one which the brush of the painter might well immortalize.

His achievement was one of the most remarkable in the history of our Indian wars. He was sixty-eight years old and suffering with bodily infirmities which in a few years were to end fatally. He made a journey of 350 miles through a rough and unknown country to a large force of Indians who had sworn death to any white man who might fall within their power. There was no other man who could approach them. Yet by virtue of his great reputation among all the tribes, their absolute faith in his word and their belief that he had their interests at heart, and, we may add his devout trust in the Lord whom he served, he did this remarkable thing and brought about a peace in the most hateful and difficult situation that our government had been called upon to face in all its troubles with its Indians. The Commissioners formally acknowledged that but for Father De Smet their work would have been a failure.²¹

²¹ *Idem*, 4 1584, 1 102. For De Smet's own account of *idem*, 3 899-921. For the speeches made by the chiefs at the council he drew upon Galpin's journal. Cf. *infra*, note 41. Galpin reports the speeches of Sitting Bull and Two Bears as follows:

"The Sitting Bull came boldly forward. After going through the usual ceremonies with great dignity and due respect, [he] said, 'Father, you pray to the Great Spirit for us, I thank you. I have often beseeched the kindness of the Great Spirit, never have I done so more earnestly than this day, and that our words may be heard above and on all the Earth. When I first saw you coming my heart beat wildly, and I had evil thoughts caused by the remembrance of the past. I bade it be quiet—it was so! And when on the prairie I shook hands with you and my cousin and sister, I felt changed and hardly knew what to say—but my heart was glad and quickly scouted deception. I am and always have been a fool and a warrior, my people caused me to be so. They have been troubled and confused by the past, they look upon their troubles as coming from the Whites and became crazy, and pushed me forward. For the last five years I have led them in bad deeds, the fault is theirs, not mine. I will now say in their presence, welcome, father,—the messenger of peace. I hope quiet will again be restored to our country. As I am not full of words I will thank [you] in the hearing of the Chiefs and

§ 2 LETTER-WRITER

In the history of the vanishing frontier during the three decades 1840-1870 Father De Smet has an acknowledged place "Explorers of this attractive field," say his biographers, Chittenden and Richardson, are constantly crossing his trail, "which interlaces the whole Northwest

braves, as a token of peace, hoping you will always wish us well I have now told you all All that can be, has been said My people will return to meet the Chiefs of our great Father, who wants to make peace with us I hope it will be done, and whatever is done by others, I will submit to, and for all time to come be a friend of the Whites' Two Bears came forward, and said, 'Friends, I heard of the coming of this good man months ago and hearing it, was at once ready to welcome him to my country on the East side of the Missouri, where I was born and raised As our country is common to all, I have come with him not only to see some of the old comrades I travelled the warpath with, but to hear you talk, and see how you treat this, in my opinion, our best friend The Whites love and respect him, so do I, and my people. I pray to the Great Spirit that I may always do so I wish you to hear what I have to say, and I mean it all I do not come here to beg you any favors upon the strength of our relationship, but I am here with a few of our chiefs and braves who represent a large portion of the Sioux Nation, some seven hundred lodges, to tell you that our minds are made up to follow his advice and be guided by the men sent by the President to accomplish something definite for our future good I have listened with attention to what you have said in this, the greatest [council] ever held in our country I say the greatest, because headed by this best of men and five of the great chiefs of the Whites It cannot mean other than for our future good and prosperity I tell you now, one and all, my mind is made up, I shall follow this Medicine man's advice, and accept the offering of peace so kindly sent you by our Great Father I was troubled and perplexed with the various reports from you for the last two years, seeing that you all hear and having heard you all talk, and treat this party so kindly, I will thank you one and all for your wise conclusion I shall leave with a heart full of joy, with hopes you may ever continue to be friends with the Whites, and that this cruel war that has so long been hanging around us will soon be over I now thank this Good Man, and raise my hands to the Great Spirit that he may pity and guide us through our future life'" *Mid-America*, 13 160 (1930) The letter of thanks of the Peace Commission to De Smet is in CR, *De Smet*, 3 921

"Fort Rice, D T July 3, 1868

We, the undersigned, the members of the Indian Peace Commission, who have been present at the council just terminated at this post [Fort Rice], desire to express to you our high appreciation of the great value of the services which you have rendered to us and to the country by your devoted and happily successful efforts to induce the hostile bands to meet us and enter into treaty relations to the Government We are satisfied that but for your long and faithful journey into the heart of the hostile country and but for the influence over even the most hostile of the tribes which your years of labor among them have given to you, the results which we have reached here could not have been accomplished We are well aware that our thanks can be but of little worth to you and that you will find your true reward for your labors and for the dangers and privations which you have encountered in the consciousness that you have done much to promote

from St. Louis to the Straits of Juan de Fuca.”²² His letters, now available in a definitive critical edition brought out by these two students of early western history, constitute a considerable body of first-hand and generally accurate information on the geography, topography, fauna, flora, and Indian inhabitants of the West at a period before the oncoming waves of white emigration and settlement had transformed its face.²³ The one-time advancing fringe of western settlement long ago reached the waters of the Pacific and the frontier as a phenomenon of our national history has ceased to be. But in De Smet’s day it was a reality, and as such, lives in his written work. The Indian lore in particular which he managed to pick up and consign to the printed page is of abiding ethnological value. “The history of the native races of North America,” to borrow again the words of his biographers, “can never be fully written without consulting the writings of Father De Smet.”²⁴

The usual designation of De Smet’s published writings as letters is something of a misnomer. The more lengthy letters, at least, are not so much examples of conventional epistolary correspondence as they are carefully drawn up and often elaborate dissertations or sketches covering interesting phases of the life of the old West. Considered as literature and apart from the body of ethnological and other information which they contain, the De Smet letters merit a high degree

peace on earth and good will to men, but we should do injustice to our feelings were we not to render to you our thanks and express our deep sense of obligations under which you have laid us

We are, Dear Sir, with sentiments of the highest respect,

Your Very Obedient Servants,

Wm S Harney,

Bvt Majr Gen & Indian Peace Comr

John B Sanborn, Com

Alfred H Terry,

Bvt Major-General U S A & Comr ”

²² CR, *De Smet*, I viii

²³ *Life, Letters and Travels of Father Pierre-Jean De Smet, S J, 1801-1873 Missionary Labors and Adventures among the Wild Tribes of the North American Indians, embracing Minute Description of their Manners, Customs, Games, Modes of Warfare and Torture, Legends, Traditions, etc All from Personal Observations Made during Many Thousand Miles of Travel with Sketches of the Country from St Louis to Puget Sound and the Altrabasca, Edited from the original unpublished manuscript Journals and Letter Books and from his Printed Works with Historical, Geographical, Ethnological and other Notes Also a Life of Father De Smet Maps and Illustrations* By Hiram Martin Chittenden, Major, Corps of Engineers, USA and Alfred Talbot Richardson (four volumes, New York, Francis P Harper, 1905) This edition of the De Smet letters is cited in the present work as CR, *De Smet*

²⁴ Cf CR, *De Smet*, I 138 On the alleged exaggerations of the De Smet letters as regards the results achieved with the Indians, cf *supra*, Chap XXV, § 7.

of praise. There can be no question that their author possessed literary gifts above the common. It has often been observed of men of action that when they take the pen in hand they reveal at times an unexpected freshness and vigor of expression. This is true of De Smet. His literary manner shows a virility and directness that reflect faithfully his own robust and manly nature. In the art especially of accurate and vivid portrayal of nature, animate or inanimate, his writing leaves little to be desired. His descriptive power is indeed his chief literary asset, and to it his letters chiefly owe whatever they possess of effectiveness and charm. Hardly any feature in the physical background against which the life of the old West and Northwest was set is left unnoticed by this keen observer. The buffalo, the bear, the mountain lion, the antelope, the wolf, the polecat, the prairie dog, the rattlesnake, the prairie fire, the forest fire, the tornado, the aurora borealis and Rocky Mountain scenery of whatever kind—all are portrayed with accurate and often graphic touch. A favorite topic of description with De Smet was the Missouri River.²⁵ He knew the noble stream as few white men ever came to know it, having travelled frequently on it in canoe or steamboat and along its entire course from the great falls to the mouth. His attitude towards it was one of deep personal affection. Its snags and sawyers, the dizzy swirl of its yellow and turbid waters, its varying moods, agreeable and disagreeable, the splendid growths of timber that line its banks for hundreds of miles above the mouth—he has pictured it all with a pen as sympathetic as it is true to fact. No Missouri River pilot, it has been said, could have indicated with more correctness, certainly not with more vividness, the perils that beset early navigation on the great water highway of the West. And what he did for the Missouri, De Smet did in lesser degree for the Columbia. Sources, rapids, the inspiring scenery that lies along its course, and the dangerous bar at its mouth are all touched off with his usual descriptive skill. Rivers, in fine, with the intimate part they played in the drama of frontier life, seem to have made a particular appeal to De Smet's imagination. His letters picture for us, besides the Missouri and Columbia, the Colorado, the Athabasca, the Saskatchewan, the Platte, the Yellowstone, and other streams of minor note.²⁶

²⁵ The index to the Chittenden-Richardson edition of the De Smet letters lists thirty-five references to the Missouri River, covering such topics as snags, sawyers, scenery, steamboat navigation, forts, etc. Of a certain passage (3 846) the editors say "This is one of the most complete descriptions of the Missouri River steamboat extant." Again "This observation upon the habits of the Missouri river is literally correct. The most experienced pilot could not have stated the case more exactly" (3 867) "This excellent summary of the difficulties of Missouri river navigation is evidence of Father De Smet's habit of close observation" (1 161)

²⁶ "De Smet's brilliant and poetical descriptions of the grandeur of the [Colum-

The letters of Father De Smet written at the request of his superiors as a means of securing material aid for his missionary work gave him widespread publicity both at home and abroad. What gives them interest from an historical point of view is especially the circumstance that through their medium thousands of readers in Europe and America acquired their first knowledge of the great unopened country west of the Mississippi. Travellers and explorers from Lewis and Clark on had been gradually unfolding in their published reports the outstanding features of the vast inland empire which (up to the line of the Rockies at least) had been acquired by the United States in the Louisiana Purchase, but in the forties, when the De Smet letters were first given to the world, it was still largely a land of mystery. The letters did much to lift the veil. The prairies of Kansas, the high arid plains of western Nebraska and Wyoming, the interlacing valleys and defiles of the Rocky Mountain region, the great fresh water lakes of Idaho and western Montana and the promising lands of the upper and lower Columbia Valleys were themes of absorbing interest which the reader could find filling the pages of the De Smet letters. There too one was introduced to the Oregon Trail, the historic highway par excellence of our national history, over which through two eventful decades poured the sturdy emigrant stock that was to build up the Pacific Northwest and California. "These intrepid pioneers of civilization," wrote De Smet, "have formed the broadest, longest and most beautiful road in the whole world from the United States to the Pacific Ocean. . . . [It] is as smooth as a barn floor swept by the winds and not a blade of grass can shoot on it on account of the continual passing" ²⁷

In 1853 De Smet was requested by Governor Isaac Stevens to accompany him in his impending government exploration of a route for a transcontinental railroad from the upper Mississippi to the Pacific Coast. "From your work entitled 'Oregon Missions,'" Stevens wrote to the Jesuit, April 11, 1853, "I have derived much pleasure and much information, but I understand that since its publication you have journeyed extensively in the western country, particularly between the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers. The object of my writing at this time, therefore, is to ask of you such additional information as you may be able to give me. The geography of the country, the Indian tribes, their numbers and character, the missionary and trading posts, I am particularly anxious to receive information about" ²⁸ Another instance of the

bia] river and its forests denote a keen appreciation of nature and a facile pen" William Denison Lyman, *The Columbia River*, p. 156

²⁷ CR, *De Smet*, 2, 671.

²⁸ CR, *De Smet*, 4, 1568. "The information we already have of this region," he [Stevens] writes to Donelson, "is based upon the following works, Lewis and

84 THE JESUITS OF THE MIDDLE UNITED STATES

effect produced by the De Smet letters is found in a letter addressed to him by Governor Gilpin of Colorado, who did more than any other individual, so it has been maintained, to point out and bring to public notice the possibilities for settlement and development of the country lying between the Rockies and the Missouri. Sending to the missionary a copy of his work, *The Central Gold Region*, Gilpin wrote

It is necessary for me to require of you to inflict upon yourself the task to read it through I attach a chief gravity to the judgement which you may pronounce upon it, because, as you were my predecessor in the regions of which it treats, so it has been from your oracular delineations that my boyhood took fire and burned with an inexpressible ambition to penetrate to a complete comprehension of this superlative portion of our country May we not congratulate one another that those magnificent countries of the great Mountains, of which *you* were the *first* to speak and write with the enthusiasm of truth, have now in so short a time become the very arena of fashion and prospective empire As you have been so prominently a pioneer in directing the tide of intelligent progress into the wilderness, I implore you to remember that there remains a still more delicate and sacred mission This is the judicious location and growth of cities²⁹

From his earliest years De Smet had cultivated an amateur's interest in nature-study and botany in particular. This interest he developed more and more, as his travels through the Great Plains, the Rocky Mountain region and the Pacific Northwest brought him opportunity to make known to the public the salient natural features of what were then all but unknown parts of the United States In 1838 at Council Bluffs he was taking meteorological observations with instruments furnished him by Joseph N. Nicollet, French scientist and explorer in the service of the United States government, who commended the accuracy of the missionary's carefully tabulated work and used it freely in his own published reports³⁰

Father De Smet often turned to map-making as a means of embodying in permanent form the great mass of geographical and topographical

Clark's Travels, Irving's Astoria and Rocky Mountains, Travels by the Missionary De Smet, Nicollet and Pope, Governor Simpson's Journey around the World and some information not yet published obtained from Dr Evans on his geological survey of these regions' " Hazard Stevens, *The Life of Isaac Stevens* (Boston, 1901), 1 292 Stevens telegraphed to De Smet, April 21, 1853 "Is it an absolute impossibility for you to go with my expedition? It will be a great opportunity to meet your friends among the Indian tribes and you would render great service to them and the country" CR, *De Smet*, 4 1569

²⁹ Gilpin to De Smet, July 20, 1860 (A) Of course other books on the West had appeared prior to De Smet's

³⁰ Cf *supra*, Chap XIII, § 4

detail which he picked up in the course of his travels³¹ While not marked by any degree of technical finish, these maps will always be interesting historically as being among the earliest attempts made in the field of western cartography. In 1851, at the request of Donald D. Mitchell, superintendent of Indian affairs at St. Louis, he drafted a map of the western country for the government.³² His maps of the sources of Clark's Fork of the Columbia are particularly interesting pieces of work. Commodore Wilson of the United States Navy, who had himself published a map of the Oregon region, commends one of these sketches in a letter to the Jesuit as supplying the lacunae which his own map showed in regard to the Flathead country. Probably the most significant of the De Smet maps are those showing the Yellowstone Park region, with many of the important features of that great wonderland, the geysers, for example, clearly indicated. De Smet's French for geyser (nearly all his map-nomenclature is in that language), is *fontaine bouillante*, "boiling fountain." These sketches of the upper reaches of the Yellowstone Valley are all the more noteworthy in that they antedate by some twenty years the Washburn expedition of 1870, which first brought the natural wonders of that region to public notice and started the agitation for making it a national park "It would indeed have been fortunate," say Chittenden and Richardson, "if the park had been set apart on the lines he describes rather than as it was, for it would then have embraced much territory, particularly the Jackson Hole country, which, it is generally conceded, should have been a part of the Park and which is now largely included in recent forest reservations"³³ A newspaper statement of date early in the fifties is

³¹ De Smet's ms maps, bound in a stub file, are in the St Louis University Archives

³² This map is now in the Library of Congress, Washington It bears in a cartouche a dedication to D D Mitchell, superintendent of Indian affairs at St Louis, at whose request it was made "Understanding that you will shortly start for the Upper Missouri country on your missionary labors and intending as you are aware to hold a treaty or treaties with the various prairie Indians at Fort Laramie in September next, you will do me a favor by informing such of the upper tribes as you may see, of the intentions of the Government, which are more particularly set forth in the circulars herewith, which I will thank you to distribute to any persons that would be likely to make known their contents to the Indians Should your other engagements permit I shall be rejoiced to see you at Fort Laramie Any sketches that you can take and the outlines of maps of the Prairie and Mountain country would be of great importance and would be highly appreciated by the Government, as well as any information with regard to the habits, history or other interesting matters appertaining to the Upper Indians" Mitchell to De Smet, St Louis, April 19, 1851, CR, *De Smet*, 4 1565

³³ CR, *De Smet*, 2 662 "In a scrap-book containing a large number of manuscripts maps prepared by Father De Smet during his travels are four maps that embrace the sources of the Yellowstone From these maps are taken the following

interesting in this connection "It must be gratifying to Father De Smet to know that when that country shall have been peopled by an industrious population, his explorations will be spoken of as his predecessors now are in the valley watered by the Father of Rivers and upon the borders of Lake Superior."³⁴

Not all the geographical and other information which Father De Smet embodied in his letters was acquired by him at first hand. He managed also to secure valuable data from trustworthy informants, having in his frequent journeyings come into contact and in cases formed lasting friendships with many of the picturesque figures of the pioneer West. The list of his acquaintances of this type include John McLoughlin, the "Father of Oregon",³⁵ James Bridger, typical fron-

names of features now familiar to every visitor to the Park. Gardiner Mammoth Hot Springs, Yellowstone Lake, Yellowstone Falls, noted as 290 feet high with an outline of the Grand Canon below them, Firehole river, the various hot spring districts, Jackson Lake, the Teton Mountains, Two Ocean Pass, Atlantic and Pacific creeks and 'Colter's Hell'. On one of the maps occurs the following notation: "Great volcanic region about 100 miles in extent now in a state of eruption." *Loc cit* "This description [letter of January 20, 1852] is the first that defines correctly the geographical location of the geyser region." Chittenden, *The Yellowstone National Park, Historical and Descriptive* (Cincinnati, 1915), p. 42. Bryan Mullanphy, mayor of St. Louis, in a letter of January 7, 1847, introducing De Smet to President Polk wrote: "The Rev. Peter De Smet, superior of the Catholic missions in Oregon, the bearer of this letter, has spent some six years travelling in Oregon. He has confined himself to no particular route as other travellers but has crossed and recrossed the mountains in every direction and has in consequence been enabled to prepare a chart of unparalleled accuracy. He is cognizant of safe routes that emigrants to Oregon might take, incomparably shorter than those now followed. Mr. De Smet is a friend of mine of twenty years acquaintance, but his elevated enterprises interest me more in his success than even the very high personal regard I entertain for him. He has deserved well of the United States and has been among the Indians an effectual pacificator." (A)

³⁴ Unidentified clipping. The writer alludes apparently to the explorations of Marquette and other early Jesuit missionaries. Mention may here be made of De Smet's alleged discovery of gold in the Northwest and his reticence on the subject through long years for fear the Indians would suffer by the invasion of their lands by the whites in case the discovery were made public. The point is discussed in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 4: 89, where conjecture is made that the missionary was led into error in the matter, probably mistaking mica for gold. For the credit given him by the public in the early sixties of early and intimate knowledge of the presence of gold in the Northwest, see account (undated) in the *St. Louis Democrat* cited in Rosen, *Pa-ha-sah-pah or the Black Hills of Dakota* (St. Louis, 1895), p. 245.

³⁵ Chittenden and Richardson publish five letters of McLoughlin to De Smet, 4: 1553-1558. McLoughlin began openly to profess Catholicism in 1842. Cf. Edwin V. O'Hara, *Pioneer Catholic History of Oregon* (Portland, Oregon, 1911), pp. 13, 139. An excellent biography of McLoughlin is Frederick V. Holman, *Dr. John McLoughlin, the Father of Oregon* (Cleveland, 1907).

tiersman and founder of Fort Bridger on the Oregon Trail, ³⁶ Major Alexander Culbertson, fur-trader and founder of several upper Missouri trading-posts, ³⁷ E. T. Denig, Assiniboin trader, ³⁸ Robert Meldrum, Crow interpreter, ³⁹ Zephyr Rencontre ⁴⁰ and C. E.

³⁶ Two half-breed children of "Jim" Bridger (1804-1881), a boy and a girl, were looked after by Father De Smet, who put them to school in St. Charles, Missouri (CR, *De Smet*, 4 1483, 1484, 1488) Col. Robert Campbell appears to have been legal guardian to the children "I hope Major Bridger will find his children in good health on his arrival in St. Charles. He has spent upwards of thirty years among the Indians and is one of the truest specimens of a real trapper and Rocky Mountain man. He has been always very kind to us and as he has much influence among the various tribes of the Far West he may still continue to exercise it in our favor" De Smet to Verhaegen, March 11, 1854, in CR, *De Smet*, 4 1489 For accounts of Bridger, cf. Chittenden, *Yellowstone National Park*, p. 335, Hebard and Brinstool, *The Bozeman Trail* (Cleveland, 1922), 2 204-252, Alten, *Jim Bridger*

³⁷ "I shall never forget the unbounded kindness and charity I have received from our good and great friend, the major [Culbertson] He has most literally taken under his care all the little effects I have been able to collect to assist poor Father Hoecken and his brethren in their missionary labors among the Flatheads and Rocky Mountain Indians" De Smet to Denig, June 13, 1856 (CR, *De Smet*, 4 1495) "About a fortnight ago I received a visit from Major Culbertson, he is now settled with his family near Peoria, Illinois, he requested me to visit him and to remain some days with him, to enable him to arrange matters and things I think he intends to marry his wife and to have her instructed and baptized I intend to visit him soon He placed his daughters at a convent in St. Louis" De Smet to Denig, January 13, 1858 (CR, *De Smet*, 4 1500) Culbertson's two girls were entered at the Sacred Heart Convent in St. Charles, Mo.

³⁸ "I was happy to learn that during my absence you still consented to be married by Reverend Father Daemen [Damen] and that your children have been baptized" De Smet to Denig, August 23, 1855 (CR, *De Smet*, 4 1494) Denig's children were entered by him in a sisters' academy in St. Louis Cf. also CR, *De Smet*, 4 1499 "Charles Primeau was here for some time with his wife and children He followed your example and was lawfully married to his wife I baptized her with all her children I likewise baptized the three children of Bous and two of Alfred Beeman All have been provided for and placed in various religious establishments"

³⁹ "Mr. Meldrum, the Crow interpreter and considered as a chief in the nation, having resided over thirty years in their midst and having become fully identified with them, writes as follows 'The Crows speak of you [De Smet] frequently and are anxious to be baptized and to become Christians I consider them candid and we frequently converse on the subject'" De Smet to Miége, September 19, 1852 (CR, *De Smet*, 4 1310) "July 11, 1866, Yellowstone steamer about Little Cheyenne River baptized Mary about 25 years of age of the Upper Blackfoot tribe Same day she was married by me [De Smet] to Robert Meldrum, Indian trader Witnesses and sponsors of Mrs. Meldrum were Mr. Roelotte and Mr. Culbertson" *Baptismal Register*, St. Mary's, Kansas

⁴⁰ "Zephyr [Rencontre], the great Sioux interpreter, in the name of the different bands of Sioux Indians, numbering thousands, begs most earnestly and

Galpin,⁴¹ Sioux interpreters, F. F. Gerard, Sioux trader, ⁴² John Gray, hunter, ⁴³ Captain La Barge, Missouri River pilot for thirty years, ⁴⁴

urges the arrival of missionaries among that powerful nation 'Remember,' says he, 'the holy waters of baptism have flowed on the foreheads of our children'" De Smet to Miége, September 19, 1852 (CR, *De Smet*, 4 1310)

⁴¹ Charles E. Galpin was interpreter to De Smet on his visit to the hostile Sioux camps in 1868. Galpin's ms journal of this expedition, brought by Father De Smet to Brussels, Belgium, where it remained until 1925, is now in the St. Louis University Archives. De Smet used this source in preparing his own account for publication. The journal is in *Mid-America*, 13 147 *et seq* (1930). Galpin was married to a Sioux woman. "The Reverend Father had with him as interpreter, Mr Galpin, who is married to an Indian woman of the Hunkpapa tribe. This lady is a good Catholic and an excellent person, a striking example of what the influence of religion and civilization can accomplish for the welfare of the Indians" (CR, *De Smet*, 4 1585) "I see your daughter occasionally at the convent. She is in the enjoyment of good health and very much beloved and esteemed by the kind and motherly ladies of the academy" De Smet to Galpin, March 17, 1868 (CR, *De Smet*, 3 1899) "He [the "Log"] tells me to write to you that the death of Major Galpin has left him as an orphan, that the only hopes of the Indians were in Major Galpin and you, and one being dead their hopes are now solely in you" Guelberth to De Smet, March 13, 1870 (CR, *De Smet*, 4 1590)

⁴² "I have been known to Mr Gerard and have been intimately acquainted with him for upward of twenty years. In my long intercourse and visits to the Indian tribes on the Missouri river I have often had occasion of meeting Mr Gerard, particularly among the Aricaras, the Grosventres and Mandans at Fort Berthold. I have always considered Mr Gerard as a true friend to the Indians, assisting them in their need and advising them to keep peace and quiet towards the whites. I hesitate not in adding that it is particularly due to Mr Gerard and to his well-timed advice and persuasion that the three united bands of Indians at Fort Berthold did not go over to the hostile bands of Sioux etc." De Smet to Governor Burbank, October 4, 1869 (CR, *De Smet*, 4 1538)

⁴³ John Gray was with De Smet's party on his journey of 1841 to the mountains. "We had a hunter named John Gray, reputed one of the best marksmen of the mountains, he had frequently given proofs of extraordinary courage and dexterity, especially when on one occasion he dared to attack five bears at once" (CR, *De Smet*, 4 1398) The earliest certified marriage within the limits of what is now Kansas City was performed by Father Van Quickenborne, July 18, 1836, between Benjamin Lagautherie and Charlotte Gray, "daughter of John and Marianne, both Iroquois" Garraghan, *Catholic Beginnings in Kansas City, Missouri*, p. 93

⁴⁴ H. M. Chittenden, *History of Early Steamboat Navigation on the Missouri River, Life and Adventures of Joseph La Barge* (New York, 1903), has an account of De Smet's associations with Captain Joseph La Barge. The latter's son, Joseph, also in his day a Missouri River pilot, lived as late as 1930, retaining vivid memories of De Smet, with whom, as a child, he travelled on his father's boat up the Missouri in 1848. Capt. La Barge was perhaps De Smet's most intimate personal friend among the laity in his declining years and it was at the launching of the Captain's new boat, which he had named the *De Smet*, that the missionary made his last public appearance, May 13, 1873.

Lieut. John Mullan, U. S. A., road-builder,⁴⁵ and Robert Campbell,⁴⁶ Thomas Fitzpatrick⁴⁷ and Andrew Drips,⁴⁸ figures in the fur trade. Many of these persons furnished De Smet particulars of value regarding the Indian tribes or the topography of the country. Bridger, for instance, appears to have been his informant in regard to the Yellowstone Park region, which, it would appear, De Smet never personally visited.

Most of Father De Smet's published letters were written by him in French. The English versions are due to other hands, the *New Indian Sketches*, to cite one instance, being translated into the vernacular by Robert A. Bakewell of St. Louis. Even to the end De Smet never had a firm grip on written English, often lapsing into improprieties of syntax and diction. But this was true apparently only when he laid himself out to compose in English with a view to publication, on which occasions he became self-conscious with numerous lapses from correct idiom as a result.⁴⁹ On the other hand, his offhand familiar

⁴⁵ "I thank you most gratefully for the great interest you have always taken in the welfare of our missions in the mountains and particularly for all you have lately effected for them on your late visit to Washington" De Smet to Mullan, March 31, 1858 (CR, *De Smet*, 4 1500) Mullan Road, the first wagon highway over the mountains from Fort Benton to Walla Walla, was laid out by him

⁴⁶ Colonel Robert Campbell (1804-1879) and Major Fitzpatrick were adopted by Michael Insula, the Flathead chief, as his brothers on the occasion of a visit paid by them to the tribe. Father De Smet travelled back from the Fort Laramie council of 1851 in company with Campbell and Fitzpatrick and later, in St. Louis, had dealings with the former in connection with the education of the Bridger children (cf *supra*, note 36). Campbell, a native of Ireland, was actively engaged for years in the fur trade, first in the mountains and later in St. Louis where he died. Cf H. M. Chittenden, *Fur Trade of the Far West* (New York, 1902), and *A History of Early Steamboat Navigation on the Missouri* (New York, 1903).

⁴⁷ Thomas Fitzpatrick piloted Marcus Whitman and his wife in 1836 and Father De Smet in 1841 across the plains. "The Captain is identified with the whole of that region having spent the greater part of his life in it. He knows the localities well and is acquainted with all the tribes who reside in it. Captain Fitzpatrick is too well known to need any recommendation. I had the pleasure and happiness of travelling in his company, during the whole summer of 1842 [1841], being my second expedition to the mountains and every day I learned to appreciate him more and more." De Smet to McKay, May 10, 1849 (CR, *De Smet*, 4 1465). A sketch of Fitzpatrick is in the *Dictionary of American Biography*. Cf also Hafen and Ghent, *Broken Hand, the Life Story of Thomas Fitzpatrick, Chief of the Mountain Men* (Denver, 1931).

⁴⁸ Andrew Drips, Pennsylvanian (1789-1860), member of the American Fur Company, was in charge of the expedition with which De Smet made his first journey to the Mountains, 1840. His papers are in the collection of the Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.

⁴⁹ This is illustrated in a ms. history of the beginnings of the Missouri Province compiled by De Smet not long before his death. *Supra*, Chap III, n. 1

correspondence is not only generally free from solecisms, but shows a freshness and vigor of expression which makes it readable to a degree. Many of his letters written to government officials or other persons in public life are models of the somewhat stiff, but dignified and at times impressive epistolary style practiced by correspondents a few generations ago.

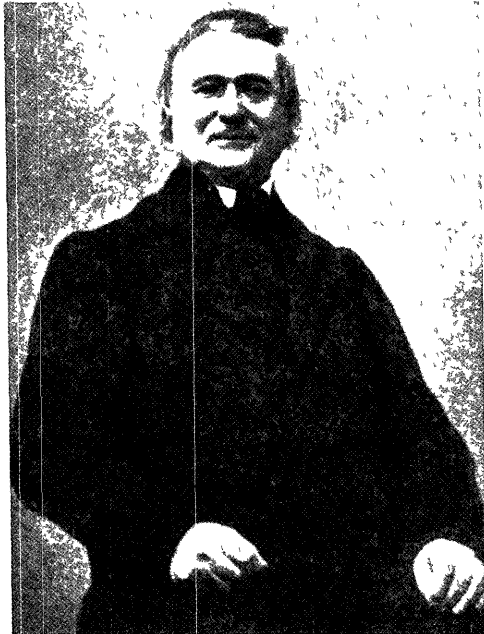
§ 3. THE MAN

In the history of the middlewestern Jesuits almost the most significant factor for a quarter of a century and more was the work of Father De Smet in collecting material means and recruiting the personnel.⁵⁰ No other single individual among them was as active in maintaining the economic basis necessary for the activities they carried on. Hence any account of those activities will revolve to an appreciable degree around the personality of Father De Smet. From 1848, approximately at the close of his Rocky Mountain career, to his death in 1873, a period of twenty-five years, he was procurator or treasurer successively of the Jesuit vice-province and province of Missouri and in this capacity had ample opportunity to exercise whatever business and administrative ability he possessed. Strangely enough, this man of seemingly restive temperament and nomadic habits showed himself an unusually competent keeper of accounts and in many ways an adept in finance. As superior of the Rocky Mountain Missions he had at one time to meet the charge of wastefulness in the handling of funds. But no such imputation was at any time laid at his door during his quarter-of-a-century career as procurator in St. Louis.

The episode which centers around the charge of maladministration of mission funds brought against Father De Smet and his reaction to it has significance, marking as it did in many ways a turning point in his career. It was difficult for Father Roothaan not to credit the reports on this score that had reached him from distant Oregon; he apparently accepted them at their face value and did not hesitate to call De Smet to task. "Oh, how many imprudences have been committed especially in that land of buildings (*cette terre de batisses*) at Wallamet I cannot dissemble with you, my dear Father, you do not seem yourself to have had the sentiment of religious poverty, which should have made you attentive not to go beyond necessity in your expenses"⁵¹ In view of the light in which Father De Smet had thus been placed by the reports which reached him the Father General was greatly surprised when he learned that Father Elet had made De Smet procurator of the vice-province and he wrote promptly to both Elet and De Smet

⁵⁰ Cf *supra*, Chaps XI, § 4, XVIII, § 8

⁵¹ Roothaan à De Smet, February 17, 1849 (AA)



Peter John De Smet, S J (1801-1873)

Memorandum of the Contributions & Expeditions made in Belgium & Holland
in favor of our Mo Province from 1832 till 1872 Apr 11th

			Flor =	Francs
1832	6	Arrival of six young Missionaries Chr Hoeken, Jan Der, Brox, Speckendri es, De Bluy, Busshofs - with \$ 5954 =	15 592, 50	33,000 00
		The material consisted of 9 boxes, valued at		4 000 00
1833	4	Arrival of four Missionaries Wallers, Druyts, Schuurmakers & Buerinck, with a letter of Exchange of \$ 4370 =	14 015, 70	29 662 86
		cash on hand	966 16	2 045, 00
		a material in goods		12,000 00
1834	5	Arrival of five Missionaries Verheyden, Van den Vycken, Dehn, Lehmann & Huot with a letter of Exchange of \$ 6500 =	17 160, 00	36,317 48
		cash on hand	743 00	1 572 48
		a material in goods		20 613, 00
1835	7	Arrival of seven Missionaries De laeure, Gysvogels, Krynem, Van Meelo, Arnoold, Steurs, Clapfens with \$ 2500 =	6 500	13 756 61
		cash on hand	1, 181	2 500, 00
		with a material valued at		2224 00
		NB In the material mentioned, personal effects are not included, neither all other necessary travelling expenses		
1837	5	Arrival of five Missionaries Ghezel, Daman, D Huup, Hendricks, D		
		cash on hand, material shipped, valued at		60,000 00
1843	12	Arrival of twelve Missionaries Vancruy, Deoculle, Sawall, Hobl, Mengarim, Jony Tranel, (D) Sjering, Claude de Notie, Dame de Namier - crossed the Atlantic Ocean, from Antwerp to Fort Van Coevorden, Oregon, in a chartered vessel (D) Dapt, in a barge with cash & material of		125,000, 00
1848	5	Arrival of five Missionaries Ch Ellet, Heyken, Schuurmakers, Nidercorn, Verheyden (Fr Johh Het D S) cash & material,		30,000 00
1853	8	Arrival of eight Missionaries Van Zoeland, Cuyfens, Guffens, Schuenders, M Antheure, Brandt, Leysenbaegal (D) cash &c		25 000 00
1857	7	Arrival of seven Missionaries Buyschaert, de Jyon, Bunker, dan el, Kuyfens, Van Gorp, Paltou (D S) cash & material, etc		20,000 00
1861	3	Arrival of three Missionaries Lambert, Vandermonke, Jussat, (D S) cash on hand & a material valued at		40,384 00
1864	11	Arrival of eleven Missionaries Grelans, Van Krossel, Van Oylt, De Jony, Oerle, Odenhof, Lays, Van Loo, Omeas, Willeh, Murphy, Jussat, (D S) cash &c		86 692 00
1869	2	Arrival of two Missionaries, Sinter (D S) cash & material valued at		76 000 00
				680,767 41

Financial statement compiled by Father De Smet in his last year of life. It summarizes the Society of Jesus in the American Middle West. Archives of the Missouri

$\frac{1}{2}$ after 11.

My dear father de Smet,

I went into the room the moment you left me. He immediately said to me, "are you pleased with what I have done?" I said "Yes"; and then urged him to yield to the opiates he had taken, and go to sleep. He said: "Excitement and ^{happened} have done ^{more} for me than sleep can do." and immediately turning his eyes to Heaven as he lay on his back, the head raised on the pillow, He said in a clear, calm, modulated voice & radiant look, "Thank God I am happy!" Then turning his eyes to me, with the same voice and look, he repeated the words to me, and said: "I intended to do it long ago, but did not know whether you would like it" I told him he made me

happy and truly it is the first feel of relief I have had in these five terrible days and nights. So, dear Father all is in your hands now. You are giving peace to me in giving it to him

affectionately,

Thomas H. Benton

Randolph Benton, son of Thomas Hart Benton, American statesman, was received into the Catholic Church on his deathbed by Father De Smet in St. Louis, 1852. A note addressed to the Jesuit on the occasion by the elder Benton. Archives of the Missouri Province, S. J., St. Louis.

deprecating the appointment⁵² De Smet, deeply distressed over the matter, wrote to Father Roothaan in explanation of his conduct in the handling of money.

I have received your letter of February 17 last and I thank you for it in all humility At the beginning of last year Reverend Father Elet had the kindness to communicate to me a passage from one of your letters in which he was asked to tell me "that your Paternity gave me all his confidence." I have kept the memory of it and especially have I tried to make myself worthy of it. Your letter of the 17th announces to me that I no longer deserve this confidence, "that I appear not to have had any idea of religious poverty—that the management of money could not possibly be put into my hands—that I have never known how to give an account of my expenses" I have communicated without delay the apprehensions of your Paternity to Very Reverend Father Provincial begging him with tears in my eyes to take away from me the procuratorship of which I am judged so unworthy and incapable and the burden of which weighs so heavily upon me today Permit me, Very Reverend Father, to give your Paternity a brief explanation concerning the period during which the handling of money has been entrusted to me, an explanation which your honored letter of February 17 seems to render necessary In 1830, 31 and 32 I was Procurator of the College of St Louis I always knew how to keep my books in order and how to render my accounts to the satisfaction of Superiors, for at no time that I know of have I ever been suspected or accused of faulty administration, of prodigality or of wastefulness On the contrary some accused me (to Superiors) of keeping the purse-strings too tight In 1840-41-43-44, I made collections with the approval of my Superiors I succeeded in obtaining nearly all the money necessary for these various expeditions I gave account to my Superiors of the alms thus gathered and of the expenses incurred by me In 1844 I collected in Holland and Belgium I turned over faithfully to the Procurator of the Province all funds collected together with the money which your Paternity granted me from the allocation of Lyons for that year I made my purchases in Belgium and gave my receipts to the Procurator I chartered a vessel and paid the passage of 12 persons furnishing besides an equivalent in money of about 80,000 livres [\$16,000] I sent a sum of about 22,000 francs [\$4,400] for the journey of Father Joset and his three companions This journey of three Fathers and a Brother, who arrived in the Mountains in utter destitution, cost fifteen thousand francs [\$3,000], exactly the sum which I paid for a dozen persons from Antwerp to Fort Van Couver, who besides carried with them a large sum of money Arrived at the Wallamette after my voyage and before my departure for the Missions in the Mountains, I left a sum of about twenty-five thousand francs [\$5,000] in the hands of Father Accolti to be remitted to Father De Vos for payment of the debts contracted by the latter during my absence

⁵² Roothaan à Elet, April 28, 1849 (AA)

As to practicing economy in my own personal needs, I will say without fear of contradiction that apart from a very modest wage paid to a guide, I made the journey three times from the Rocky Mountains to St. Louis without spending a single dollar. In my visit to the Indians last year [1848] I travelled more than three thousand miles and was absent four months and my expenses did not come to fifty dollars. I made a hurried collection in Belgium and Holland in the beginning of 1848, an account of which I gave to Reverend Fathers Elet and Van de Velde. The five thousand francs received from [Rev.] Mr. De La Croix, which came from the Association of the [Propagation of the] Faith, have been given (and much besides) to the relief of the Fathers and Scholastics of the Swiss Province, an account of the same being given to Father Van de Velde at that time Procurator of the Province. I have now in my cash-box, and an account of the same has been rendered to Reverend Fathers Elet and Van de Velde, a sum of more than four thousand dollars for the mission which your Paternity has allowed me to open east of the Rocky Mountains whether among the Blackfeet or the Sioux and for which Reverend Fathers Miede and Baltes are destined. I regret to have to enter into all these details in order to remove what I consider a false impression given in my regard. If I have done wrong in doing so, I beg pardon of your Paternity.⁵³

Meantime the Father General had not by any means lost his confidence in De Smet as a useful member of the Society. He wrote to him again, this time, it would seem, through one of the father-assistants and probably before the letter of De Smet's just reproduced had come into his hands. "Very Reverend Father says of Father De Smet that one may be an apostolic man without being a good procurator and that he has not withdrawn his confidence in him except as regards the office of procurator. The best proof of his fitness for the procuratorship is the way he fills the post. Let us see, then! Let him show exactness in using his resources, punctuality in keeping books, accuracy in drawing up his accounts and submitting them in the form prescribed by the Institute."⁵⁴

To be called to account for inefficiency and imprudence in the discharge of his official duties was a trying experience to the sensitive temperament of Father De Smet, but his reaction to it was remarkable. He apparently took Father Roothaan's strictures as a challenge, he would for the future so comport himself in his office of procurator as to avoid giving even the slightest grounds for a renewal of any such unfavorable criticism as had been directed against him. The event proved the earnestness of his resolve. Already in 1849 Elet was assuring the General that the extravagance alleged against De Smet was without

⁵³ De Smet à Roothaan, April 3, 1849 (A)

⁵⁴ Roothaan [?] à De Smet, May 8, 1849 (AA)

foundation and that he was showing himself the most efficient custodian of temporalities the vice-province had ever known. In 1852, when there was question of De Smet's residing permanently in Belgium, the vice-provincial wrote of him to Father Roothaan "I am satisfied with him in every respect and in money matters I don't see what the vice-province would do without him."⁵⁵ In 1862 he was succeeded in the office of socius by Father Keller, but Father Beckx insisted that he was to be retained as procurator and consultor in view of what he had already done and might be expected to do in the future to advance the temporal interests of the province. In 1864, on the eve of De Smet's departure for a collecting trip in Europe, Father Keller is apprehensive that "his prolonged absence may result in some harm to our temporal concerns."⁵⁶ Finally, in 1868 Father Coosemans was petitioning the General for permission to have De Smet undertake "another one of those journeys which have always yielded such large results in men and money"⁵⁷ "After all when there is question of recruiting for the novitiate, it is Father De Smet who has always succeeded best in obtaining good subjects and numbers of them as well as money for the province and missions."⁵⁸

The procurator's office, as De Smet conducted it, was marked by regularity and system. His ledgers and financial papers, still preserved, were kept with unflinching accuracy and neatness. His practice was to keep facsimiles of all letters personal as well as business, using for this purpose the tissue-paper letter-books in vogue before the advent of the typewriter and carbon copies. Some dozen of these letter-books are preserved, embodying an extensive correspondence with persons both in and outside the order.⁵⁹ De Smet as treasurer was in frequent communication with the superiors of the various midwestern houses. But his business letters were not merely such, they were often conceived in a more or less familiar vein and almost invariably carried items of current Jesuit domestic news, for De Smet had the knack, less common now than in his more leisurely age, of writing an interesting letter. Sometimes six or eight correspondents were addressed in a single day on business matters, each one receiving incidentally more or less the same budget of informing items concerning Jesuit persons and affairs.

This view of De Smet as a patient and painstaking bookkeeper,

⁵⁵ Murphy à Roothaan, February 15, 1852 (AA)

⁵⁶ Keller ad Beckx, October 12, 1864 (AA)

⁵⁷ Coosemans à Beckx, September 4, 1868 (AA).

⁵⁸ Coosemans à Beckx, October, 1868

⁵⁹ Chittenden and Richardson had the De Smet letter-books at their disposal when preparing the edition of his letters that bears their name.

skillful financial manager, and faithful business correspondent is not a familiar one and in truth is hardly consonant with the current idea of the famous friend of the Indians. To most people, as far as he is known to them at all, De Smet is the typical Indian missionary engaged in life-long residential work among the red men, speaking their languages and serving them to the exclusion of every other activity. Yet such was not the real De Smet. So far was his life from being one of prolonged immediate contact with the Indians that, on the contrary, his years from 1848 to 1873, the most fruitful of his career, were spent, apart from visits to the Indian country and to Europe, in desk-work in St. Louis in the discharge of the routine duties of socius or assistant vice-provincial and of procurator. And yet the Jesuit Indian missions of America found in De Smet their outstanding friend and support. As a promoter, a propagandist, a publicity man for the cause of these missions, he had no equal. This above all else is the service which he rendered them, and this is the reason why the name De Smet spells missionary zeal and enterprise on behalf of the American aborigines. He made their cause known to the Catholics of Europe and America by his letters, he collected large sums of money on their behalf, he sought with repeated success to promote relations of peace between various Indian tribes and between the tribes and the government, finally he recruited numbers of young men for missionary service in America. This is the true relation he bore to the Catholic Indian missions of the United States. The ordinary conception of an Indian missionary as one in residence among the natives, dealing with them in their own language and pursuing ministerial work on their behalf, scarcely fits him at all. Not only was he never engaged for any considerable period of time in residential missionary work on behalf of the Indians, but he was to a great extent temperamentally unfitted to be so. Nature had equipped him to be a pathfinder, one who could blaze the trail but not sit down easily to the uneventful, humdrum labor which befalls the resident missionary. "He is a wonderful man," said Congiato, "for opening up the way." "He is good for making excursions, for overcoming initial difficulties," so Father Roothaan judged, adding the comment, "but this is not enough for evangelical work."⁶⁰ Sopranis, the Visitor, reported to the General in 1860 "He [De Smet] is perfectly ready to go to the Rocky Mountains though he avows that he is fitted rather for making excursions by which he opens up the way for the missionaries and prepares the field than for staying permanently in some or other station"⁶¹ Indeed De Smet assured Congiato in 1859

⁶⁰ Roothaan ad Joset, September, 1846 (AA)

⁶¹ Sopranis ad Beckx, October 13, 1860 (AA)

that to remain right along with the Indians would be uncongenial to him but it is to be noted that he was at this time nearly sixty years of age.⁶²

There is extant somebody's recollection of Peter De Smet sitting as a child on the banks of the Scheldt in his native Termonde and watching the boats, as they arrived, with wistful fancies of the great world beyond from which they come. Even at this early date the elder De Smet felt that his son's career would be a roving one. "May God protect him," he would often say, "he will be a soldier or a great traveller. He will never be able to lead a quiet life." So it turned out in a certain sense to be. It is a commonplace of Catholic theology that grace builds upon nature. There was nothing unhealthy in Peter De Smet's instinct for visiting new lands. It was an instinct that could lend itself to the more facile pursuit of spiritual and religious aims and so it was with him. A scholarly biographer of St. Francis Xavier has pointed out that the Basques are born travellers and adventurers and that this racial trait seemingly asserted itself in the incomparable missionary who with a holy wanderlust passed from one kingdom to another of the mysterious East. "Nothing then prevents one from seeing in the tireless travels of the apostle what has been called the restlessness of the Basque. . . . A Basque, he had his compatriots' spirit of initiative, one might say a taste for adventure, which has often laid him open to the charge of inconstancy. . . . Their eyes, one would say, are always seeking out far-away lands."⁶³ That nomadic tendencies were also strong in Father De Smet is evident from his own career and from the testimony of those who knew him. "His great temptation," Father Van de Velde wrote of him, "is to travel. His adventurous character would impel him to roam the four quarters of the globe. It is the most striking trait of his character."⁶⁴ "He loves to travel and to visit new places," said one who had been a novice with him, "he will never stay long in the same place."⁶⁵ Father Roothaan disapproved of what he considered his excessive travelling and his seemingly restless and migratory ways. "We cannot charge ourselves with all the countries to which his taste for travelling would carry him."⁶⁶ But this view of De Smet's repeated journeys, it may be noted, was not, on the whole, the one taken by Roothaan's successor, Father Beckx, and by the American superiors,

⁶² Congiato à Beckx, December 8, 1859 (AA)

⁶³ Alexandre Brou, S J, *Saint François Xavier* (Paris, 1912), p 356

⁶⁴ Van de Velde à Roothaan, March 3, 1844 (AA)

⁶⁵ Van Assche ad Roothaan, July 24, 1844 (AA)

⁶⁶ Roothaan à Elet, August 6, 1845 (AA) "His journeys have been the journeyings of sappers (*sappeurs*)" Roothaan à Miège, April 14, 1851

Father Van de Velde excepted.⁶⁷ Most of Father De Smet's long journeys whether in America or Europe were undertaken at the instance of his immediate superiors or of the government. Moreover, they were often accompanied with great physical discomfort, not to say hardship, and could in no wise be described as pleasure trips. It was a case where temperament smoothed the way for the discharge of unpleasant duties which superiors would not so readily have imposed on individuals of a different type. Father Van de Velde, vice-provincial, had written to De Smet that a certain letter penned by the latter had been "the death-blow," to all his [De Smet's] plans. In a long reply to Van de Velde sent in December, 1844, De Smet explains his whole position in regard to travelling.

The only plan I have had in view since my Superior thought proper to send me to the R[ocky] M[ountains] has been to augment and to increase the glory of God among the abandoned tribes, allow me to mention, Rev Father, that any person who could remain in this desert with other plans in his head than the A M D G must be and cannot be other than a fool or a madman and this because he must endure the privations, the hardships and dangers which we have daily to encounter and in which the kind Providence of God has a hundred times most visibly saved his poor, unworthy servants F[ather] Joset acquainted me [with the fact] that there exist of late great prejudices in St Louis against me, and that I was represented to him as one who loves to travel and who had very little else in his head As to my travelling much, have my Brethren forgotten that Superiors have placed me in this situation, that I have been sent to wandering Indians? F[ather] Joset adds our brethren in St Louis are under the impression that little is taught to the savages . let them know, dear Father, that the work is progressing, that thousands have been redeemed in the sacred waters of baptism, that thousands who were plunged into the darkest superstitions now know what salvation is and how to attain it,—that in several different nations where four years ago the devil reigned now resound the praises, the prayers of the true God . were my brethren acquainted with the dangers and privations of the deserts and the mountains, I am confident the good Fathers would not think them very desirable trips . . I invite them to come and make a trial of it provided they have a good stock of zeal and fervor for the conversion of the Indians (*conditio sine qua non*). As to all my different journeys, as I

⁶⁷ Beckx ad Ponza, April 16, 1859 Father De Smet's accurately kept record of his travels shows more than 180,000 miles covered by all sorts of transportation. His reputation as a traveller became widespread "He [Reverend Isaac McCoy] probably did more travelling than any other man engaged in Indian missionary work with the possible exception of Father De Smet of the Roman Catholic Church" Joseph B Thoburn, *A Standard History of Oklahoma* (Chicago, 1916), 1 199

have understood that these are considered *my plans*, I will give your Reverence a synopsis of them and I appeal in this to R[everend] F[ather] Verhaegen, your Reverence's predecessor He 1st as my Superior sent me to the Mountains on an exploring expedition, which I have happily performed and of which the result has been faithfully transmitted to my Superiors 2nd R[everend] F[ather] Verhaegen, with the agreement of all the consultors, one excepted, sent me to N[ew] Orleans on a begging expedition and the Lord blessed it 3rd R[everend] F[ather] Verhaegen sent me again with 5 companions to the Mountains where in the space of one year about 2000 Indians were baptized, of which your Reverence's humble servant baptized upwards of 1200 4th At the end of the year all was want about us—the gentlemen of the Hudson Bay Company had granted us one supply and not till this supply was paid for, agreeably to the established regulations of the above said Company, could we obtain another supply At the earnest request of all my companions I ventured a fourth time to recross the pathless desert with two men only to obtain means and to pay off our 1st debts My Superiors approved of my return, encouraged me to visit the different cities of the Union from N[ew] Orl[eans] to Boston to obtain the wanted means. These again were ample and sufficient 5th R[everend] F[ather] Verhaegen thought proper to send F. F [Fathers] De Vos and Hoecken together with several brethren to reenforce the infant mission and he sent me across the Western and Eastern states again to embark to [at] New York for Belgium and Rome on business for the Vice-Province and in behalf of the Rocky Mountain Mission In Belgium I performed the affairs of St Louis University I was sent for From Belgium I hurried to Rome and performed the journey in 7 days I communicated to his Paternity all the commissions I was charged with by Reverend Father Verhaegen, whose office as Provincial, I heard, was to cease his Paternity kept the papers containing the different items I was to execute and among them to beg for the University By word of mouth and by writing Reverend Father General requested me to exert myself in behalf of the Indian Missions Had I been allowed to beg for the St Louis University, with all the good will possible, the time I was allowed to remain in Belgium was much too short The sum I received from his Paternity and from other benefactors for the Rocky Mountain Missions was sufficient, but not over, for we were twelve in number and the voyage was long and costly. 6th Rev Father Franckeville and his consultors thought proper that we should leave Antwerp directly for the mouth of the Columbia. Those who know what I have suffered at sea will certainly not suppose that I have undertaken this long, dangerous passage from some natural inclination or liking I trembled at the very idea of it and nothing but the interest of the Mission, apart from obedience, could have induced me to make it I enter in all these details on account of the observations made against me from which the Mission itself might suffer and in order to acquaint your Reverence as my actual Superior with all what I have undertaken by obedience and agreeably to the intentions of my other

Superiors The wish, the desire, the order of my Superiors, I hope, with the grace of God, will be always my only plan, my only rule ⁶⁸

While the character of Father De Smet was one of transparent integrity, he showed withal certain idiosyncrasies which did not escape notice. Father Elet, who understood him perfectly, touches him off with the words, "thoroughly good but a little original." When question arose in 1856 of removing him from the office of socius, Father Druyts, the vice-provincial, was reluctant to take the step for fear of the effect it would have upon him. "It does not require much to make him imagine that he has lost the confidence of Superiors, that he is made little of by them and looked upon as an entirely useless member and I don't know what he might do in such depression of spirits." ⁶⁹ Father Druyts went on to say that he was not an easy subject to handle and that inferiors and superiors even must deal with him with circumspection. Father Coosemans made reference to De Smet's sensitiveness on an occasion when a letter of his to the Father General had gone without an answer. "This good Father is of a very sensitive nature. Your Paternity might find time to write him a few lines. This would give him great consolation." It was further said by Coosemans that De Smet, showing here a trait common in the sensitive, was often a prey to unfounded suspicions, imagining prejudices or unkindnesses towards him where none such existed. Thus Father Roothaan urged him to lay aside as entirely unfounded the suspicion he entertained in his Rocky Mountain days that his fellow-workers on the missions were in agreement to discredit him. ⁷⁰

A feeling that he had lost the confidence of the Father General reduced Father De Smet at one time to a state of acute dejection, from which a consoling letter from the former helped to rescue him. "For the rest, I pray your Reverence to throw off all distress of mind. I know perfectly well your excellent good-will and pious zeal. Still, I had a feeling that you were altogether too much engrossed in external work and did not sufficiently restore your strength of soul by communication with God." ⁷¹ His chief support during these trying days was the vice-provincial, Father Murphy. "Take it kindly, Very Reverend Father," so Murphy wrote to the General shortly after the latter had written encouragingly to De Smet, "if I send you a letter which good Father De Smet has written to me of his own accord, so to say I confess that his tears have touched me. Your bit of a letter came like a

⁶⁸ De Smet to Van de Velde, December, 1844 (AA)

⁶⁹ Druyts ad Beckx, November 4, 1856 (AA)

⁷⁰ Roothaan ad De Smet, February 18, 1846 (AA)

⁷¹ Roothaan ad De Smet, January 20, 1852 (AA)

bolt from the blue. Thank God, prayer has restored him in truly extraordinary fashion. He is like a little novice in my hands, he is gradually bending down to exact regularity [ms.']. I would make bold to ask you to send him a little word of consolation. He is faithful, so it seems to me, in his exercises of piety and ready to obey in all things. It appears it has been reported to your Paternity that his book has done harm here in America. I confess this amazes me. I should have said just the opposite according to what I have read and heard . . . Grace works marvellously in his soul. He will come out of this trial more interior and more detached from self. *Bonum mihi quia humiliasti me.*"⁷² Some three and a half years later, August 15, 1855, Father De Smet pronounced his final vows as a Jesuit, which were the solemn vows of the professed members. His studies did not entitle him to this grade in the Society, which was assigned to him by Father Beckx in view of the distinguished services he had rendered on its behalf.⁷³ "After a very earnest retreat made in the novitiate the excellent Father De Smet," wrote Father Murphy on the occasion, "made his profession on the fifteenth of the month. In everything regarding the spiritual life he is a man of marvelous docility and simplicity *lac sine dolo concupiscens.*"⁷⁴

In the attempt to bring before the reader Father De Smet as he really was recourse may be had again to the testimony of Father Murphy, who always showed insight and sympathy in balancing the man's remarkable gifts and good qualities against his peculiarities of temperament

To speak in general, one does not approve of Father De Smet's trip to the Indians. Yet in view of the man's disposition and the really remarkable eagerness of traders and travellers about to depart for the same destination to have him along as a companion, my judgment has been that he ought not to be kept back, especially after he learned from your Paternity's letter to him that I might grant such permission. Father Visitor [Sopranis] indeed does not like it much, considering only the reason which Father De Smet principally alleges, namely, the baptizing of babies. Still, he does not interfere with Father De Smet's leaving in May. Our people are very hard in their judgment on this good Father, among outsiders he enjoys the greatest reputation and popularity. To the latter he is said to show him-

⁷² Murphy à Roothaan, March 3, 1852 (AA)

⁷³ Father De Smet was due for his last vows as a spiritual coadjutor in 1833 together with Fathers Verreydt, Van Assche and Smedts. However, as he appeared to be somewhat unsettled in his vocation as a Jesuit, Father Roothaan directed that his vows be postponed. When he withdrew from the Society of Jesus in 1835 he had not as yet taken his final vows.

⁷⁴ Murphy ad Beckx, April 21, 1855 (AA)

self very benevolent and gracious, but to his brethren not so To explain, as Procurator of the Province he is most exacting in money affairs, and perhaps querulous and out of sorts if any delay or dispute turns up, as happens, and, furthermore, he easily imagines that he is going to incur some loss or risk Add to all this, in passing judgment on our men and their affairs, he is led by imagination and feeling rather than by sober reason In a word, he is extremely impressionable. Finally, as a result of the nomadic life he has led ever since youth, he does not easily accommodate himself to the details of common life For the rest, these and other failings he candidly acknowledges without the least trace of self-complacency But they are counterbalanced by really remarkable gifts and by great services rendered to this Vice-Province In my opinion the Vice-Province owes to him almost all it has What an excellent number of young men he has brought to us! Moreover he collects the money with which more or less they are supported and in discharging the duties of his office administers it with the utmost prudence Again, by his reputation and influence with bishops and prominent people he aids us greatly while by his writings and journeys he has spread abroad the name of the Society Would that our own people would bear all these things more frequently in mind ⁷⁵

What Father Murphy says regarding De Smet's influence and prestige in secular and especially governmental circles and the services he was thereby enabled to render to his fellow-Jesuits is worthy of note. All the superiors under whom he lived wrote appreciatively to headquarters regarding his unique position in this respect. As early as 1849, at which time he had not yet begun the series of official peace negotiations with the Indians which won for him widespread public notice, Elet wrote of him to the General "He has single-handed done more for the reputation of the Society in the United States than all the rest in the two provinces. He is all powerful with the bishops."⁷⁶ Father Van de Velde notes how "his affable and insinuating manners win for him the affection of all he meets with in the great expeditions he has undertaken"⁷⁷ Father Murphy conversing with one who had been in De Smet's company on his Missouri River trip of 1862 learned that the missionary was looked up to by all as "an idol and an oracle." Father Sopranis, present in St. Louis when De Smet returned from Washington with the ten thousand dollars of overdue Indian money he had secured "from Lincoln," commented "It is wonderful what industry he shows in transacting business of this kind, all to the very great advantage of the vice-province"⁷⁸

There were many reasons to explain De Smet's hold on the affec-

⁷⁵ Murphy ad Beckx, April 15, 1861 (AA)

⁷⁶ Elet à Roothaan, March 16, 1849 (AA)

⁷⁷ Van de Velde à Roothaan, March 3, 1844 (AA)

⁷⁸ Sopranis ad Beckx, February, 1862 (AA)

tions and esteem of others. His disinterested services on behalf of the Indian won for him widespread and well-merited regard. He had an agreeable and charming personality, could interest others in conversation and above all showed breadth of sympathy and an habitual readiness to lend a helping hand to others. Reference may be made to his dealings, already mentioned, with John Bidwell and the Protestant clergyman, John Williams, on his Oregon trip of 1841. He interested himself in the half-breed children of James Bridger, Alexander Culbertson and Charles Galpin and placed them in convent-schools of the Sacred Heart at St Charles or St Louis. Kit Carson pictures him thus in his autobiography "I can say of him that if ever there was a man who wished to do good he is one. He never feared danger when duty required his presence among the savages and if good works on this earth are rewarded hereafter I am confident that his share of glory and happiness in the next world will be great"⁷⁹ Thurlow Weed recorded a meeting with De Smet on an ocean trip "We have been delighted during the passage with his recital of Indian habits, customs, wars, worship etc. . . . My travelling companions have made a donation to the good Father for the benefit of his Indians."⁸⁰ Weed gave De Smet an introductory note to President Lincoln in which he wrote "No white man knows the Indians like Father De Smet nor has any man their confidence in the same degree"⁸¹

It is as a friend of the Indian, as an ardent promoter by whatever means lay at his command of the Indian's material and religious welfare that Father De Smet is best remembered today. His whole life, it may be said, was devoted with remarkable singleness of purpose to this noble cause. His views on the Indian problem, which he grasped with

⁷⁹ M M Quaife (ed), *Kit Carson's Autobiography* (Chicago, 1935), p 53. There are numerous contemporary testimonies as to the striking impression produced by Father De Smet on those he met "His face was a benediction," said of him a Montana pioneer, Col W F Sanders of Helena, Montana, who knew him well" CR, *De Smet*, 1 4. For De Smet's relations with the family of General Sherman, cf Anna McAllister, *Ellen Ewing, Wife of General Sherman* (New York, 1936), *passim*. A testimony from Edward Bates, attorney-general in Lincoln's cabinet, is interesting "A few days ago *Father De Smet*, the famous Jesuit Missionary, paid me a visit—We are old friends—and yesterday, he sent me two books (his more recent publications) 1st "Modern [Western] Missions and Missionaries" and "Indian Sketches" *Father De Smet* is, I think, full of courage, zeal and self-devotion upon the whole, a very superior man I have known him for many years and have always, found him consistent and persistent in what he believed to be right" Howard K Beale (ed), *The Diary of Edward Bates, 1859-1866* (Washington, 1933), p 555

⁸⁰ Harriet A Weed (ed), *Autobiography of Thurlow Weed* (Boston, 1884), p 547

⁸¹ CR, *De Smet*, 4 1582

an insight and sympathy not always found among his contemporaries, were enlightened and always temperate. One may find them expressed in scores of passages in his writings.⁸² What he pleaded for was fair play towards the Indian on the part of the whites and the government. For the Indian, however, to maintain his free and wandering life and engage in the hunt as his principal means of livelihood became impossible as the waves of white immigration and settlement gradually filled up the open spaces of the West. Because the Indian was thus doomed, if not to extinction, at least to a straitened and artificial manner of life within the narrow barriers of a reservation, the hope conceived by Father De Smet of the wholesale conversion and civilizing of Indian tribes continuing to live in their traditional habitats could not be realized. In this sense only has his work been without permanent result. But in the larger sense of promoting interest in the well-being of the American red men and supplying means to enable them to attain to such economic and social comfort as is possible for them under the changed conditions in which they are compelled to live, De Smet's crusade on behalf of the Indians is bearing fruit to our own day. Some of the mission-posts which he set up are still maintained to the obvious advantage of the Indians while his memory is still a force to inspire men and women to carry on the work which he planned and, with the

⁸² The best discussion of De Smet's views on the Indian question is in CR, *De Smet*, 1 115-126. Cf. also *idem*, 3 1186-1211. At the end of the Oregon Indian troubles of 1858-1859 he submitted a report embodying a plan for the concentration of the Indians in reservations. In transmitting the report General Harney wrote: "The system adopted in California of placing large numbers of Indians upon a single reservation and causing them to adopt summarily the habits of life of the whites failed in consequence of the abrupt transition brought to bear upon these simple and suspicious people [?] The plan proposed by Father De Smet is not open to this objection, it places the Indians in a country abounding with game and fish with sufficient arable land to encourage them in its gradual cultivation, and by the aid of the missionaries at present with them, that confidence and influence will be established over their minds by degrees as will induce them to submit to the restraints of civilization when the inevitable decree of time causes it to pass over them."

"From what I have observed of the Indian affairs of this department the missionaries among them possess a power of the greatest consequence in their proper government and one which cannot be acquired by any other influence. They control the Indian by training his superstitions and fears to reverence the religion they possess, by associating the benefits they confer with the guardianship and protection of the Great Spirit of the whites. The history of the Indian race on this continent has shown that the missionary succeeded when the soldier and civilian have failed, it would be well for us to profit by the lessons its experience teaches, in an instance which offers so many advantages to the white as well as to the red man and adopt the wise and humane suggestion of Father De Smet." Harney to assistant adjutant-general, June 3, 1859. CR, *De Smet*, 4 1579.

measure of success that circumstances allowed, carried into effect. It will be remembered to his credit that his pleas for the aborigines while genuine and often vehement were never one-sided or fanatical in tone. "Far be it from us," he wrote in 1858, "to accuse the noble Republic of injustice and inhumanity in her late treaties. It seems to us on the contrary that no nation has ever furnished more means of civilization. If any one must be blamed on this point, it is rather private persons, new colonists who act and place themselves in direct opposition with the good intentions of the Government in behalf of the Savages" ⁸³

No characterization of Father De Smet would be complete that did not undertake to appraise him as a religious and a priest. It may be said of his personal piety that it was genuine and solid, without being in any particular way impressive. He had the Catholic instinct for the Church's approved devotions. Like Marquette he had a lively and unflinching devotion to the Blessed Virgin. He named his first Indian mission in her honor and from a remote corner of the Far West wrote to his superior in St. Louis to keep a lamp burning before her image for the success of the expedition in which he was engaged. In 1876 Father Coosemans in answer to a petition for biographical material on De Smet penned his impressions of him as a Jesuit. In view of the former Missouri provincial's intimate contacts with De Smet for a period of years and of his delicate conscientiousness in recording his opinions about persons and things, the statement is one of interest and value.

Father De Smet was a good religious but presented nothing remarkable in the practice of virtue and observance of religious discipline, in this respect he was considered as belonging to the class "*de Com[mun]i Con. [fessorum]*" Owing to his continual missionary excursions to the mountains and elsewhere almost ever since his return to America in 1837 and his frequent voyages to Europe in behalf of his missions and the Missouri Province and his exceptional position during the intervals he spent in Missouri, Father De Smet was or rather appeared to be somewhat of an *ex-lex*. I say, *appeared*, because in reality he was a lover and observer of the rule and the solid virtues. Meanwhile I will give you for what they are worth a few *items* respecting Father De Smet's life which came under my own notice and which are brought back to my mind by my poor memory.

1 *Regarding the practice of poverty* Owing to his exceptional position a certain latitude was necessary for him in the use of money. He was very care-

⁸³ CR, *De Smet*, 3 1198. De Smet of course could write passionately when picturing the wrongs suffered by the Indians at the hands of the whites. "This is one case among a thousand. Is it surprising that the victims of such cruelties and oppressions having no recourse to any laws for justice, rise furious, dig up the tomahawk and make their appeal to their quiver and scalping-knife as their last and only resort for the remedy that is denied them elsewhere" (CR, *De Smet*, 3 1201)

ful, however, to be duly authorized and to have periodically renewed the general permissions which he held from the Provincial

2 *Obedience* He loved, cherished and practised it so as to astonish strangers, who admired this childlike reverence towards his superiors in an old gray-headed man He would never set out for an excursion, however short, without the full permission of his superior For his long excursions and great undertakings he was not satisfied with this He liked to be assured that this was his wish Then he set out with confidence and felt sure of the protection of heaven He willingly braved the dangers with which the journeys were beset When he was at home he was in reality a faithful observer of religious discipline, though it may not always have appeared so As I speak of my personal knowledge, my testimony embraces only a period of nine years, when I had him for Consultor and Procurator of the Province

Not infrequently some one or other gentleman would call him away during the evening recreation after supper Yet he always managed to be present at the Litanies, and more than once it happened that not being able to expedite the affair he would leave the gentleman, begging to be excused for a little while and then return to him after the Litanies were over His devotion to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament was evinced in a special manner by his practice of saying mass daily no matter how unwell he might be or in whatever difficult circumstances presented themselves he would never absent himself It was either severe sickness or an open impossibility that would prevent him from celebrating the holy Sacrifice His love and devotion to the Blessed Virgin was apparent in his fidelity to say the beads daily in his old age like a little novice His special devotions were the *Souls in Purgatory* and to *St Anthony of Padua* Whenever he returned from a long journey either across the ocean or across the Plains of the West we were sure he would beg the Fathers to say some masses for the Souls in Purgatory, because whenever he was in some difficult strait or exposed to some danger, he would always call on the holy Souls in Purgatory to help him in his travels and was very generous in promising them masses, more in fact, than he could say himself, relying on the charity of his brethren who always readily helped him in cancelling his indebtedness As regards St Anthony, he had very much confidence in him To him he had recourse whenever he had lost anything and almost always his confidence was rewarded by his recovering it in more or less a strange manner Sometimes after a futile search he would refer the matter to St Anthony Numerous are the instances, and truly remarkable which he related to me ⁸⁴

On the occasion of Father Thomas O'Neil's accession to the provincialship in 1871 Father De Smet was dropped from the board of provincial consultors But he continued to administer the finances of the province as procurator. Meantime, his health became gradually undermined by renal disease though he continued to the very end to

⁸⁴ Coosemans to Deynoodt (?), 1876 Archives of the North Belgian Province, S J

attend bravely to the duties of his office. He undertook to bring together scattered manuscript sources for a history of the pioneer western Jesuits and began to compile such a work on his own account, leaving behind him an English narrative on the subject running into some eighty pages. The last sentence of the last letter written by him, May 12, 1873, reads "In my sickly moments I collect materials which may be of great service for the future history of the Missouri Province." On May 14 he attended the blessing of the new steamboat *De Smet*, named in his honor by its owner and captain, his intimate friend, Joseph La Barge. He returned to the University where he gradually declined, dying May 23, 1873. Bishop Ryan, the Auxiliary of St. Louis, visiting him a few days before the end, had found him full of Christian hope and courage in the face of death. The *Missouri Republican* for May 24 carried an appreciative editorial

In the death of Father De Smet the world has lost one of its most indefatigable and enterprising missionaries of Christian civilization. Early in life he became strongly impressed with the wrongs perpetrated on the Indians of our country and with the possibility of their being brought into intimate relations with Christianity if not with civilization. To the practical accomplishment of this idea he devoted his talents, his time and all the energies of a more than vigorous organization. Without stopping to count the obstacles in his way he pushed forward in the course he had worked out for himself, without flagging or abatement of zeal and if he did not succeed in doing all he believed possible, he set an example to the world of what a man with a strong conviction may do in overcoming apparently insurmountable obstacles. His heroic and self-sacrificing exploits as a Christian missionary will long remain in the memory of mankind.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ "Father De Smet, the great Belgian missionary, was as great a man in America as Livingstone in Africa." Agnes C. Laut, *The Blazed Trail of the Old Frontier* (New York, 1926), p. 94. "I have known many people who were intimately acquainted with this remarkable man and they all speak of him as possessing generous and genial qualities. Some regret that he gave himself up to the missionary career, claiming that in other walks of life he would have become a giant among men." C. G. Coutant, *History of Wyoming* (Laramie, 1899), p. 238. Harriet A. Weed (ed.), *Autobiography of Thurlow Weed* (Boston, 1884), pp. 547, 548. A remarkable tribute to De Smet is embodied in the passport issued to him June 27, 1871, by Governor Gratz Brown of Missouri.

"To Officers and Citizens of the United States residing abroad

Reverend Father De Smet, being about to go abroad and not having time to secure the proper official papers has requested me to facilitate his trip by testifying to his character and standing in Missouri.

I therefore take pleasure in certifying to the fact that he is one of our most distinguished citizens who has spent a lifetime of good works among us, that he has been one of the most zealous of the missionaries of the religion of Christ among the Indians, that no one has ever done more to introduce civilization and

The news of De Smet's death was immediately cabled to the Belgian government by its consul in St. Louis, Mr. Hurck, who wrote on the same day to a friend in Belgium "I need not tell you how pained I am by the loss of a man who held so just a title to universal veneration" When the steamer *De Smet*, to which he had given his blessing only a few days before his death, arrived at Sioux City on its first trip up the Missouri, Captain La Barge was handed a telegram announcing the missionary's death The boat's flag was immediately displayed at half-mast Then, as the craft continued its way upstream, Captain La Barge spread among the trading-posts and Indian camps the news that the great friend of the red man had passed away The Indians were distressed, some of them in token of grief smearing their faces with mud "At Fort Peck the head chief turned his back and while his stalwart frame shook with emotion, tears coursed down his tawny cheeks. No other man ever had such a hold on the affections of the Indians as Father De Smet and they look upon his departure from earth as a terrible calamity" ⁸⁶

true religion among them, that his life has been one of work, self abnegation and devotion to the interest of the unlettered and uncultivated classes and that he is perhaps more esteemed than any white man in the whole community I desire thus publicly to commend him to the good will and the confidence of all with whom he may come in contact

This letter is given from the Executive Department in Missouri and is intended to accredit him generally and respectfully to all who may represent our Country abroad" (Archives of the North Belgian Province, S J)

Numerous tributes to De Smet were written by Jesuit associates of his in America to Father Deynoodt in Belgium when the latter was gathering materials for a De Smet biography Two extracts follow "I shall only say having spent some time in his company and more than once on journeys rather painful by reason of bad roads, bad weather and numerous other difficulties, that what particularly struck me was to see him retain his even temper and usual cheerfulness in the face of all difficulties, theoretically an easy thing but in practice something quite different" Gazzoli à Deynoodt, Coeur d'Alène Mission, August 2, 1879 Archives of the North Belgian Province, S J "I spoke to a gentleman who would make a long journey to enjoy the pleasure of seeing him—another told me he would give everything to hear him preach and as he delighted to preach on the Indians he became eloquent when he mentioned the wrongs done to those unfortunate beings Let us apply to him the words of Scripture '*Erat vir simplex, rectus, timens Deum et recedens a malo*' [he was a simple man, upright, fearing God and holding aloof from evil]" Busschots to Deynoodt, Good Friday, 1875 Archives of the North Belgian Province, S J

⁸⁶ An English clergyman who visited De Smet shortly before his death wrote these lines "As I write my acknowledgements my memory carries me back (nigh nine years) to his one room in the Catholic University of St. Louis, Missouri In memory's clear painting, I still see that dear old man who for me will ever inhabit that cell as at our first interview Everything connected with it is so vividly before me The sun light still seems to stream through the window over his face as it did

Father De Smet's remains were interred in the historic cemetery mound at the Jesuit novitiate, Florissant, where they rest with those of the other members of the pioneer band of 1823 who laid the foundations of the Society of Jesus in the Middle United States. All the warmth of missionary zeal and enterprise on behalf of the American red men, much, too, of the romance and adventure of the old frontier are associated permanently with his name. In the words of the non-Catholic biographers who have appraised with insight his contribution to the story of the West, Father De Smet remains today "an august figure in our national history."⁸⁷

then, goldening the white locks straying from under his biretta I have not forgotten the sorrow that crept over me when one day going to the college to make inquiries about his illness before seeing him, the Brother Concierge told me, 'He is dead' I remember standing by his open coffin in the church of the University and thoughts of those dim prairie wayfarings rushed over me His dead hands even then were clasping the chalice and paten as though he were still pleading that awful sacrifice while that death smile upon his face seemed sadder than tears The greatest monument to him is the one he unknowingly built for himself in taking out to civilize that Western life nigh one hundred and ten [?] Missionaries to the Province of Missouri" W E Youngman, *Gleanings from Western Prairies* (Cambridge, England, 1882), pp 13, 14

⁸⁷ CR, *De Smet*, I 108

