

*The Life
of
Father S. O'Donnell A.A.*

(1796–1869)

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5. Reverend Fr. William C. Burn, Archivist (Diocese of Charleston, USA) (1989)
6. Reverend Fr. Paul Connell, St. Finian's, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath. (1990: 94: 95)
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FOREWORD

In the necrology of the Augustinians of the Assumption (A.A.), we read the name of Fr. Edmund O'Donnell on the 31st of January. So far, very little has been written about this first English-speaking A.A. priest. For various reasons, little is known as to the exact place of his birth or the seminary where he studied. Unfortunately, documents giving details of his early years have been mislaid owing to the turmoil caused in France by two persecutions against Religious Orders in 1880 and particularly against us in 1899, and also by the upheaval brought about by the two World Wars.

We had hoped that the Archives in the General House in Rome, and elsewhere, would bring to light these documents and thus help us to have an accurate knowledge of the first professed Assumptionist priest to die since our foundation in 1845-1850. We have to fall back for some information on the 2nd Volume of Fr. Siméon Vailhé's *Life of Fr. d'Alzon* (p. 43), and on research work carried out in Paris and in various Government offices of that city. Research work in Ireland has remained fairly unsuccessful in spite of the courtesy and kindness of the ecclesiastical authorities I contacted.

Apart from the fact that Fr. d'Alzon, once he had got to know Fr. E. O'Donnell better, greatly esteemed this good priest and saintly religious, another incentive to make him known came from a request of Mgr. John K. Ryan, of the Catholic University of America, Washington D.C. This request reached me, Fr. Austin, through Miss Mary Carlin of the Catholic Library Information Bureau, Dublin and Fr. Xavier Martin, O.S.A., concerning Fr. O'Donnell's *Compendium of St Thomas Aquinas*.

I replied saying that I had already started research work on this Father's life and activities, and that indeed he was an Augustinian of the Assumption. I then wrote to Mgr. J. Ryan myself. When he heard that Fr. O'Donnell was an Augustinian of the Assumption he wrote to me on November 23, 1958:

In her letter, Miss Carlin stated that you had been gathering material for a biographical account of Fr. O'Donnell. My own interest in him is in connection with his translation of parts of the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas. I have been preparing a bibliography of English translations of the various works of St. Thomas. This will include, if possible, the years of his birth, death and Ordination and a few relevant facts as to his career. I know that he did some other translating in addition to that of St. Thomas. I need not assure you that I will appreciate whatever help you can give me in this matter.

I was able to send Mgr. Ryan some notes, however incomplete, quoting a part of Fr. O'Donnell's own introduction to his *Compendium of St. Thomas* and in return received the following answer:

January 26, 1959

Many thanks for your letter of January 21 and the information about the career of the Reverend Edmund O'Donnell, A.A. This information is just what I needed. It will be a valuable addition to my bibliography. I will give due credit to you for providing these very interesting facts of Fr. O'Donnell's life and character.

J.K. Ryan

So I have decided, at last, to draw up these notes

I dare not claim any literary merit for them. They are more of a chronological "journal" which will enable us to follow Fr. Edmund O'Donnell's life in community from 1853–1854, till his death in 1869 and to learn a little more about his writings. One can then have a better idea of his scholarship, temperament, original ways and also of his charitable dispositions and piety in the Paris Community where he spent the last fifteen years of his life upon earth. They are still incomplete, for the first part, so nobody will be able to say of this modest attempt what was said of another book and its author:

"Dr. Shellaberger's book on Bayard (1928) is one of these rare histories which gather together all the threads of a subject and leave no loose ends for future historians to pick."

Alas, here there are still some loose ends to pick!

These notes were finished in 1982, but until now remained in a folder as I had hopes of filling in the gaps when circumstances allowed me to. I had undertaken to write the history of our mission in Australia under the first Bishop of Brisbane, the Right Reverend James Quinn, and this called for a considerable amount of time, reading a number of books and spending a month in our Generalate in Rome studying the vast correspondence of our missionaries.

To fill in the gaps, I decided simply to continue where I had left off. Further information was reaching us. Here I am greatly indebted to Miss Helena Walsh, (of our Brockley Parish), for her great help in the research work by letters to Ireland and the USA and for accepting to type the manuscript.

Background

Our necrology states that Fr. Edmund O'Donnell was born in 1791. He was born in Cashel, Co. Tipperary, Ireland. As Fr. O'Donnell died on January 31st, 1869, Brother Jules Boulet notified the authorities of the 8th Arrondissement (ward/ borough) in Paris of Father's death. At that time we had a residence and a small Chapel in that part of the city. The locality had been pointed out to Fr. Picard and the residence and Chapel had been approved by Cardinal Morlot, Archbishop of Paris in 1860, as a result of the closing of the College at Clichy.

The information given by the good Lay-brother, and to be found in the Registers in the Maine or Town Hall, was vague and incomplete. However, I was able to see these Registers and obtain a copy of the Death Certificate whilst I was passing through Paris. (The Death Certificate is now in Rome.)

It seemed then that both the name of Fr. O'Donnell's place of birth and his age (about 75 years old) were incorrectly stated on the certificate. We still did not know where he attended school and where and when he studied for the Priesthood.

An early Friend

While writing the history of our Mission in Australia I was helped by Reverend Fr. James Foley, Professor of Pius XII Provincial Seminary, Banyo, Queensland, Australia. He was known to my relatives and sent me a copy of the "History of the Catholic Church in Brisbane" (1990) written by Fr. Denis Martin (Archivist) together with cuttings from newspapers and reviews. Therefore, I collected a lot of information about the first three Priests and two Brothers who accompanied Bishop James Quinn, the first Bishop of Brisbane in 1860. I noticed that an article that appeared in "The Australian Catholic Record" Vol. 31, related that a well known Irish priest—Fr. John McEnroe, an important ecclesiastic in Sydney having arrived there in 1832 as an extra officially paid Chaplain to the Catholics in NS Wales—had been born in Ardsallagh, near Cashel, Co. Tipperary, Ireland. While in Rome studying the letters of our missionaries to Australia, I came across a letter from Fr. Rene Cusse to Fr. d'Alzon, and discovered that Fr. O'Donnell was a boyhood friend of Fr. John McEnroe (October 14, 1864).

The Tipperary Heritage in Ireland has access to the Baptismal and Marriage Records of the forty six Parishes in the Diocese of Cashel. I was advised to write there by Fr. Christy O'Dwyer, President of St. Patrick's College, Thurles, Co. Tipperary

Fr. John McEnroe was baptized on the 14th of September, 1795, the son of Peter McEnroe and Margaret McAuliffe in the Parish/ Diocese of Cashel.

In a letter from Fr. Paul Connell of St. Finian's, Mullingar (March 23, 1995) he writes:

As you know already, Fr. McEnroe was born in Ardsallagh, Cashel, Co. Tipperary. He was educated at Flynn's Grammar School in Cashel. From there he went to Maynooth and on to St. Finian's in Navan after Ordination. St. Finian's was often referred to as the 'Navan Academy'... so I imagine it is one and the same.

Fr. Christy O'Dwyer, President of St. Patrick's College, Thurles, Tipperary, in a letter in December 1989, made things clear by telling me that Fr. McEnroe was ordained priest in Maynooth on Trinity Sunday 1819. The year after his Ordination he was appointed to fill a chair at old St. Finian's Seminary, Navan, Co. Meath, where he taught for three years and where Fr. Edmund O'Donnell found him as his Professor.

In 1822, at the request of Bishop John England—the first appointed Bishop of the new diocese of Charleston, South Carolina—Fr. John McEnroe left Ireland to help him in the organization of his then vast diocese.

We know that Fr. O'Donnell left Ireland with him for Charleston. They arrived in New York in 1822 in time to witness anti-Catholic demonstrations.

Fr. McEnroe left America for health reasons in 1829 and lived in Clonmel. While living there, he saw a group of Irish prisoners being transported to Australia. He bought prayer books written in English and Gaelic in a nearby shop, and threw them into the van. With his health restored in Ireland, and not having any definite pastoral ministry, he realized the necessity of priests for these unfortunate deported Catholics. Thanks to John Plunkett—a Catholic and Solicitor General in Australia (1832)—Fr. McEnroe was appointed Catholic salaried Chaplain for the Colony after approval by the Archbishop of Dublin, for the Irish soldiers and convicts in Australia. He was now thirty seven years of age, with experience of missionary life in Charleston, USA. He accompanied John Plunkett to Sydney—a long sea journey—where he was to spend the rest of his life in N.S. Wales. He died, known as Archdeacon McEnroe on August 25th, 1868.

His friend, Edmund O'Donnell, if he had returned to Clonmel with him, did not accompany him to Australia. Any letters between the two friends have long since disappeared.

CHAPTER I—EARLY YEARS OF FR. E. O'DONNELL

In the official biography of our Founder, Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon, by Fr. Siméon Vailhé, (Volume 2, page 443) he writes that Fr. O'Donnell had left Ireland as a missionary in order to help his Irish compatriots and other Catholic immigrants in the USA.

I got in touch with Father Aidan Furlong, A.A., our former Provincial who was in America doing a course on Pastoral Theology. As Fr. McEnroe had gone to work in the Diocese of Charleston and taken Fr. O'Donnell with him, I asked Fr. Aidan to make some enquiries. He did so and contacted the Diocesan Archivist, Fr. William Burn who had drawn up a list of the names of the early Priests of the Diocese. Fr. Aidan received a reply on June 5, 1989 and he sent me a letter in which he stated:

We have just one bit of information on Edmund O'Donnell: he was ordained here in Charleston, by Bishop England on April 25, 1824. Absolutely nothing more! Since the diocese comprised the states of North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia, he may have been just anywhere.

However, in a recent letter to Miss Walsh, the current Archivist, Sr. M. Anne Francis Campbell, O.L.M. relates:

I have searched through everything I can think of and regret to say that I can find nothing concerning Father O'Donnell other than that he was ordained by Bishop John England on April 25th 1824 which was compiled by my predecessor. I do not know where he located that date, nor do I know for certain where the ordination took place. My guess would be that it occurred in the Cathedral of St. Finbar in Charleston.”
(February 2, 1995)

Further information was given in a letter from Sr. Campbell (February 7, 1995).

The following information was discovered in a Journal kept by Bishop England for the years 1820–1823. There is an entry dated June 24, 1823 which states:

I ordained Mr. Edward O'Donnell whom I had received as a candidate for Holy Orders from the Diocese of Cashel in Ireland giving him the Tonsure and Order of Porter.

Another entry dated November 25, 1823 states:

I celebrated High Mass in Pontificals and ordained Reverend Patrick O'Sullivan, Priest; the Reverend Edward O'Donnell whom I had within the preceding month given the Orders of Reader, Exorcist, Acolyte and Subdeacon, was ordained Deacon.

We know that Fr. McEnroe was educated at Flynn's Grammar School, Cashel. As they were boyhood friends, Edmund O'Donnell would have also been a pupil there. Edmund O'Donnell must have started his studies for the priesthood at the "old" St. Finian's, Navan, Co. Meath, where his friend Fr. John McEnroe was a Professor from 1820.

Fr. Paul Connell, St. Finian's College, Mullingar wrote to me on January 15, 1990:

The original St. Finian's was opened in Navan, Co. Meath in 1803. The diocesan seat moved to Mullingar in the later half of the last century. When it was necessary to renovate the buildings of the College it was decided to build a new College here in Mullingar, and the new buildings opened in 1908. We have been here ever since.

I wanted to know whether there was any mention of Fr. O'Donnell in the archives or registers of the College, but the reply was negative:

There are no manuscripts left for the old St. Finian's in Navan. The diocesan school moved from Navan to Mullingar, Co. Westmeath in 1908 and few records survived the move.

When I was consulting the Registers in Rome at our General House, I found to my dismay that details concerning Fr. O'Donnell were incomplete, especially an important document giving details of his early life, which had been lost or mislaid.

Now that I knew that Fr. O'Donnell had been ordained in Charleston, USA and had come from the Diocese of Cashel, and was known to Fr. John McEnroe also from Cashel, I began again to do research in Ireland. Here I was helped by Miss Helena Walsh, who wrote to the Waterford Heritage and later to the Tipperary Heritage Unit.

After making several searches in the Baptismal Register of Cashel Parish, it was discovered that Edmund O'Donnell was baptized in the Parish of Cashel on April 7, 1796, the son of John O'Donnell and Joan Caen. (He had a brother named Jeremy, baptized on February 14, 1794.)

However, the mother's name was entered as Judith Keane in the Register.

The Heritage Unit was unable to locate a marriage of John O'Donnell to Joan Caen/Judith Keane, but this is not unusual because the marriage would have taken place in the Bride's parish. There is, however, a spelling difference in the mother's name, but the Heritage Unit confirmed that this was due to the Priest who registered the names.

Joan and Judith are variations of the same name, therefore we feel the mother is the same in both cases. Both children were baptised in the Parish of Cashel and unfortunately we were not given a townland for either in the original Register. (Project Coordinator, October 1995)

In 1822, Fr. John McEnroe responded to an appeal from Bishop John England to go to work in his vast diocese in Charleston, South Carolina, USA. Bishop John England had been born in Cork on September 23, 1786. After having studied for the Priesthood at St. Patrick's Seminary, Carlow, he was ordained priest in Cork on October 11, 1809. His work took him among the poor and along with Daniel O'Connor, he fought for the Catholic Emancipation Act which became a reality in 1829. Appointed Bishop of Charleston, he was consecrated on September 21, 1820 in Cork and arrived in America on the December 30, 1820.

As he was in great need of priests and having had already met Fr. John McEnroe in Maynooth, he appealed to the young Professor at old St. Finian's to help him. Fr. McEnroe accepted the challenge and Edmund O'Donnell (already a seminarian) from old St. Finian's accompanied him. They landed in New York in 1822. After completing his studies at an embryo seminary he was ordained priest by Bishop John England on April 25, 1824.

Further correspondence with the Archivist, Sr. Campbell, was taken up. In a letter, as to the place of ordination, she relates:

St. Finbar's Cathedral is not in existence today. It was a small wooden building which was erected in 1821 and continued in existence during Bishop John England's administration 1820–1842. His successor, Bishop Ignatius Reynolds had it torn down, and built a stone Cathedral—St. Finbar and St. John the Baptist, which was completed in 1854. Unfortunately, it was destroyed by fire in 1861, and due to the Civil War, was not rebuilt until 1907. Since that date the Cathedral has been called St. John the Baptist, the name Finbar was dropped. (February 21, 1995)

We know from the Archivist, Sr. Campbell, that Fr. John McEnroe left the USA for Ireland in 1829 for reasons of health.

Many of the priests and/or seminarians who came to the Diocese during Bishop England's administration left for healthier or wealthier dioceses. The only journal Bishop England compiled was the one written between 1820 and 1823. The fire of 1861 destroyed the Bishop's Residence and library. If records of these early priests existed they may have perished therein. (February 21, 1995)

So Fr. John McEnroe returned to Clonmel in Ireland and stayed there until 1832 when he left for Australia.

Did Fr. Edmund O'Donnell return to Ireland or did he remain in America?

Having thought that Fr. O'Donnell had perhaps gone to work in New York before returning to Europe, I wrote to Reverend Fr. Richard Richards, A.A., (Archivist of the American Province in Worcester, Mass., USA). In a letter dated April 15, 1982 he referred me to Fr. Andrew Dargis, A.A. Whilst the latter was teaching Church History at the Diocesan Seminary in Brighton, Mass., USA, he consulted, at my request, Archbishop Corrigan's "Register of Clergy labouring in the Archdiocese of New York from early Missions until 1889." However, there was no mention of Fr. E. O'Donnell.

Again, Fr. Christy O'Dwyer, St. Patrick's College, Thurles, also made it clear to me that there was no reference to Fr. Edmund O'Donnell in the Diocesan Archives.

Regretfully, there is absolutely no reference to Edmund O'Donnell in our Diocesan Archives. Our College Register is equally disappointing" (December 18, 1989).

Acting on Fr. Christy O'Dwyer's advice, I wrote to the College des Irlandais, (Irish College), Paris. Fr. Liam Swords, the Rector, replied on February 26, 1990, saying that he was unable to find Fr. O'Donnell's name listed among the staff members in the Irish College:

I did, however, find the name Abbé O'Donnell 1869, among the foundations for Masses. As Fr. Edmund died on the 31st of January 1869, it is quite possible it refers to the same man. The Archives here are not catalogued for the 19th of century....

He did enclose a photo-copy of the official document. It was drawn up by Canon Ouin-la-Croix of St. Denis, before a notary on March 2, 1869.

The Canon was the ecclesiastical administrator of Irish foundations in France. Monsieur l'Abbé MacHale was a Professor at the Irish College and the executor of Fr. E. O'Donnell's will. In the document dated September 1, 1869 Fr. O'Donnell is referred to as "*pretre irlandais de pieuse et vénéérée mémoire.*"

Fr. Liam Swords added that M. l'Abbé MacHale, mentioned in the document, was Professor of Scripture and Canon Law since 1849 and a nephew of the famous Archbishop MacHale of Tuam in Ireland.

In October 1991 I wrote to Reverend Fr. Sean Brody, Rector at the Irish College in Rome. He replied:

The Irish College was closed from 1798–1826. Therefore, Fr. O'Donnell could not have studied here prior to or immediately after Ordination. He may have studied at Propaganda, however...

I followed this up with a letter to the Archivist of Propaganda Fide College, as I thought that Fr. Edmund O'Donnell might have gone to this College to perfect his knowledge of Theology. The answer was negative.

So, from Ordination in 1824, until his joining the Augustinians of the Assumption in 1854, there is a gap of thirty years. Some of that time must have been spent working in the Diocese of Charleston, USA. If Fr. Edmund O'Donnell returned to Ireland, we do know that he did not work in the Dioceses of Waterford, Limerick or Cork, which would have been the nearest to his home town. He could have worked elsewhere in America or Ireland before he joined the Augustinians of the Assumption.

Other information may come to light in the future. In the meanwhile,
we shall have to wait.

CHAPTER II—CLICHY COLLEGE

On October 12, 1851, our Fathers had officially opened a little college in the Faubourg St. Honoré, Paris. The Parish Priest of St. Philippe blessed the Chapel and the house, after which Fr. Charles Laurent, the Director, said his Mass and then served that of Fr. Paul Elphege Tissot, wearing on this occasion, for the first time, the religious habit.

Our habit is thus consecrated and attracts a general respect as I have noticed....We go out in our habits (Letter of Fr. C. Laurent to Fr. d'Alzon on the 12th of October 1851).

Two years later in 1853, the school was transferred to Clichy, outside Paris, from the Faubourg St. Honoré—where the Dominican Church and Priory now stand. Money had to be found to buy the more spacious and convenient house and grounds at Clichy and Fr. Laurent was trying to raise some money for the 1st of September. Again in a letter to Fr. d'Alzon, Fr. Laurent wrote on the 24th of August 1853:

I answered the solicitor that I would be ready. My new English Master, Monsieur l'Abbé O'Donnell, a most venerable priest, has offered to lend me 1000 francs from Ireland.

This is the first mention of Fr. O'Donnell's name and he was then a Diocesan priest.

The School Year started on October 16, and on that same day Fr. Laurent was invited to lunch at Auteuil Convent, Mother House of the Nuns of the Assumption, with Cardinal Gousset of Rheims and Cardinal Wiseman of Westminster. Fr. Laurent writes:

Cardinal Gousset, pulling my cowl, introduced me to Cardinal Wiseman saying. 'Look, Eminence, this little habit is not too bad,' and his Eminence of Westminster blessed me and our work. He recognised you from your portrait in the Community Room at Auteuil.

"It is d'Alzon! Ah, my dear d'Alzon, how I would like to see him!"

Then to me, "I do love him. Tell him how pleased I would be to see him."

Fr. d'Alzon had known Cardinal Wiseman in Rome, when d'Alzon was a student, and Wiseman was Rector of the English College in Rome. A few days after his Ordination, on December 29, 1834, Fr. d'Alzon was

invited to say one of his first Masses in the College Chapel in the presence of Cardinal Weld. Later on in *La Revue du Languedoc* (1859–60) while reviewing Wiseman’s book *Recollections on the four last Popes and Rome*, Fr. d’Alzon gave a vivid pen picture of the then Rector of the English College as he appeared in those early years of the last century. Fr. d’Alzon had a good knowledge of English which he practiced with McCarthy—Wiseman’s nephew—and with whom he translated the English poets. Work went on at Clichy and Fr. Laurent ran the school on the same lines as Fr. d’Alzon at Nîmes and tried to bring together the Religious and the other masters who were priests. There were difficulties as we gather from a letter to Fr. d’Alzon:

We are pretty faithful in the observance of our religious rules
(January 28, 1854).

Speaking of the clerical non-Religious Masters, Fr. Laurent adds

With the exception of Monsiuer O’Donnell, they do not show much sympathy. They do not even attend the evening recreation (organized for both groups). Mr. O’Donnell is nearly always there with the lay Masters....

The year went by and Fr. Laurent had heavy debts to pay, and was endeavouring to find the necessary money. He tells Fr. d’Alzon of his worries and plans in a letter of the 19th September 1854:

Monsieur O’Donnell then lent me 1000 francs.

NOVITIATE

Father O’Donnell, during his first year at Clichy, had every opportunity to get to know the Religious and to understand their way of life. It is not surprising that Fr. Laurent had a good influence on him and that Fr. O’Donnell felt the desire of joining the community as a novice.

Eleven years later Fr. Laurent reminded Fr. d’Alzon:

It is I who recruited Fr. O’Donnell (Paris, 12 February 1865).

As we see Fr. O’Donnell about to begin to lead his Religious Life, it might be useful for understanding his character to quote what the Rev. John O’Brien has to say of Chesterton, in his book *Giants of Faith*, and adapt his remarks on the great writer to Fr. O’Donnell. Speaking of Fr. O’Donnell, a man of scholarly mind, as proved by his writings, we can

say of him as was said of G.K. Chesterton, that in Fr. E. O'Donnell "we find a character in its childlike innocence and refreshing simplicity in his dealings with others, particularly with his Brethren and Superiors, as proved by his own letters and those of his Brethren."¹

After the usual preparation, Fr. O'Donnell received the Religious Habit at Clichy in the College Chapel on October 2, 1854 with Fr. Laurent as Celebrant.

The next day Fr. O'Donnell wrote a charming letter in French to our Founder:

Clichy, 3rd of October 1854

Dear and Venerable Father,

At last I am one of your sons. Since yesterday, feast of the Holy Guardian Angels, I am a member of the Community of the Assumption. Yesterday evening, Fr. Laurent clothed me with the Religious Habit and gave us an excellent instruction on the obligations of the Religious life and the holiness it requires. I would have been delighted to have received the monastic habit from you and to have embraced you on this occasion which constitutes one of the happiest days of my life. For many years I had been thinking of it and with the help of God's grace and Our Lady's powerful intercession, preparing myself to adopt this way of life and to consecrate myself more closely to the service of my Creator and my Saviour. I now recommend myself to your good prayers and those of the Nîmes community so that Our Lord may deign to grant me the grace and blessings necessary for my sanctification in this world and life eternal in the next. The prayers of fervent souls are always very efficacious in drawing down upon us God's mercy and in strengthening us against the temptations of the world and the wiles of the Old serpent who seeks by all possible means to deceive us and deprive us of eternal bliss....

[He continues, telling Fr. d'Alzon how he had been the victim of a theft, and how this had upset him.]

I shall follow the wise advice dictated by your fatherly love.

I have the honour, dear and respected Father, to offer you the homage of my respect, of my utter devotedness and complete sincerity.

E. O'Donnell
(Maison de l'Assomption)

¹ O'Brien, John. Giants of the Faith. Image Books, A Division of Doubleday and Co., Inc., Garden City, NY, 1957.

Needless to say the thief was discovered and dismissed from the College staff.

Three months later, Fr. O'Donnell wrote again to the Founder, wishing him a happy New Year and expressing his gratitude to Fr. d'Alzon for receiving him as a novice and promising him fidelity in the practice of his Religious life:

Maison de l'Assomption

Clichy, 31 December 1854

It is by harmony, humility and obedience and mutual help that we deserve God's blessings and bring about peace in the souls of men and thus God's glory...

[He begs Fr. d'Alzon, if he is free, to spend a few days at Clichy and a few times during the year, as his presence is required by the needs of the College and Community.]

Kindly excuse the liberty I am taking in speaking in such a way, for it is not up to me to tell you what you have to do. Please accept, my dear and beloved Fr. d'Alzon, all my best wishes and greetings for the New Year, and the homage of my respect and of my sincere and lasting attachment for life.

E. O'Donnell

Fr. O'Donnell, as we have just seen, did not go to Nîmes for his novitiate. The shortage of personnel at Nîmes as well as at Clichy, compelled the Founder to adapt circumstances to the needs of both houses. Fr. d'Alzon was the first to bewail such a situation and he remedied this unsatisfactory state of affairs as soon as he could organize a regular novitiate set apart from any form of activity. At Nîmes, in the very first years, Fr. d'Alzon's presence and fervent example made up for the lack of a regular claustral set up, and by his instructions, left his stamp on the early group of novices, never very numerous.

What was the situation at Clichy? It was very much the same as at Nîmes. Fr. d'Alzon knew he could rely on Fr. Laurent, a fervent priest completely dedicated to his Religious life, a cultured man and friendly to all. It was, therefore, under his spiritual guidance in these special circumstances, that Fr. O'Donnell made his novitiate. The novices at Nîmes and at Clichy practiced their Religious life, day by day, under the guidance of their zealous Founder, and the group of his very first followers who were imbued with his spirit.

It may be interesting to read how, in 1801, Pius VII restored canonically the Society of Jesus in Italy. Before that date, Pius VI had already, in 1799, allowed Blessed Joseph Pignatelli, S.J. to open a novitiate at Calorno, thus preparing the restoration of the whole Society,

but at that time there were to be no exterior signs of a Jesuit revival. Six postulants started their novitiate.

What Fr. Martindale, S.J. in “The Month” says of these novices, we could say in a slightly adapted way of our early Religious in those hard and difficult days of the foundation. “There was no living tradition. Little by little by suggestion rather than by direct ruling, he (Blessed J. Pignatelli) formed the young men to live the full Jesuit life as of old. ‘We lived the life’ said one of them, ‘not because we were novices, but living the life we found we were novices’”²

How true of our “Anciens” or early senior Religious. Fr. Laurent had modeled his community and team of teachers on the Nîmes pattern. He was anxious that not only the principles of the Religious life should be upheld but also that its exterior forms should be observed. He had written as far back as 1852 these lines to Fr. d’Alzon:

Paris, November 1852

“My dear Father,

We have begun to organize our life in a monastic way. The religious have their own refectory and this will allow them to perform public penances, the boys’ refectory is presided over, for the time being, by l’Abbé Bages. In the evening, at the “obedience,” personal accusations then charitable remarks may be made, after which the Prior gives the blessing. The members of the community, before going out, ask for the blessing. We shall regularly have the individual private interview with the Superior, and the monthly day of recollection. We have the long prayers before and after meals, and we go to the chapel reciting the “Miserere” Psalm. There is reading during the meals. For precedence, we have the Prior, Procurator and Prefect of Studies.... The Martyrology (at Prime) is sung according to the rubrics. We are going to appoint the hebdomadaries etc. Nevertheless I have not yet made bold to impose the use of discipline. But on New Year’s day, I shall make a present of one to each Religious.

It was therefore in the atmosphere of a regular rule of life that Fr. O’Donnell made his year’s novitiate, whilst remaining English Master.

In the letters from Clichy of that period and kept in the Archives of the General House in Rome, there are allusions to Fr. O’Donnell.

Brother Marie Joseph Levy, a Jewish convert, choir novice and teacher, wrote to Fr. d’Alzon:

² August 1954, page 107

Père (no longer Abbé) O'Donnell is a good Englishman (Irishman A.T.) who will never change and who will remain such as you know him. The boys venerate him and hold him in great esteem. (Clichy, 6 October 1854)

Well, whereas this good Choir Brother did change, and leaving us, tried his vocation first as a Carmelite, then joined the Dominicans, dying a missionary priest in Mesopotamia, Fr. O'Donnell remained an edifying Assumptionist till his death in 1869, comforted by the Founder's blessing just before he passed away.

The same Choir Brother was supervisor and very firm with the boys. Unfortunately, another Choir novice, Br. Andre, who left in 1855, was not a fit candidate for the Religious life and gave a lot of trouble to the Superior, Fr. Laurent, by criticizing everybody and everything, even in the presence of the lay Masters and boys, and had allowed the latter to get out of hand. Brother Marie Joseph Levy, who did not stand any nonsense, soon restored order and discipline in the school. He wrote again to Fr. d'Alzon:

Clichy, 29 November 1854

Last Saturday, Fr. Laurent was not well, and I presided over the prayers which are said in common in the study there was a lot of noise. I did not intervene but at the end I made those present begin all over again. Nobody dared move. In the refectory the Masters and Br. André with the pupils complained of the service. I asked for silence and then prayed the Masters to be seated. I then made the boys remain standing for a quarter of an hour, as they had laughed at Fr. O'Donnell's accent while he recited the prayer. I made them understand that I would not tolerate that in the school, mocking everybody and everything.... Order was restored after a warning from Fr. Laurent and I was appointed prefect of discipline.

Brother Marie Joseph was hesitant about his vocation as an Assumptionist and although Fr. d'Alzon encouraged him and advised him to pray about it, he finally left the community and later, as it was said, died a Dominican missionary in Mesopotamia.

In the following February, Fr. Laurent sent Fr. d'Alzon a report on the spiritual state of the community:

... Fr. O'Donnell gives the example of regularity. He would like to do everything in common, from morning to night, but he has not yet acquired the core of our ideas. He has rather the spirit of a religious who is waiting for the quiet rest of eternity... (Clichy, 25 February 1855)

Later on he was to write on June 29, 1856,

... Fr. O'Donnell does a lot of good to the VI Form.

In community life there are always a few difficulties. Fr. Pernet writing to Fr. d'Alzon on January 13, 1856, said:

Fr. O'Donnell seems somewhat displeased and for the time being keeps rather to himself.

Nevertheless, Fr. Tissot, writing from Clichy on March 15, 1856, said:

As far as they are concerned, Fr. Pernet and Fr. O'Donnell do not spare themselves in living their community life to the full, they are a great help to me in the direction of the novices...

RELIGIOUS PROFESSION

Fr. O'Donnell had made his first Religious Profession after the first year of his novitiate at Clichy. In keeping with the Constitutions of that period he was due to make his final vows a year later. For reasons unknown to us his final Profession was advanced by a few months. The ceremony took place at Clichy on August 10, 1856. It is a pity that so far we have no details of the ceremony and its exterior solemnity.

We can understand that it was not easy for Fr. O'Donnell on account of his age and former way of life, to fit in, without difficulty with all the prescriptions of the Religious Life, particularly in a nascent community. We shall see that, at times, he was reprimanded by Fr. d'Alzon and by others, but no one could refuse to acknowledge his simplicity and humility.

Fr. Laurent, who was a classicist, sent the founder a short report, in Latin, on his community and their work. That date is uncertain.

Reverendus Peter O'Donnell faucium deloribus tenetur.... Te salutant tui in Christo filii, inter quos ego maxime indignus. [Rev. Fr. O'Donnell is suffering from a soar throat.... Your sons in Christ, of whom I am the most unworthy of all, greet you.] (Clichy, June 24, 1856 or 1857)

On June 1, 1857, Fr. Laurent wrote a long letter to Fr. d'Alzon in order to express the community's joy at the granting of the Laudatory Decree by Rome.

Fr. O'Donnell was delighted like the others but his delight was expressed in a way peculiar to the English temperament(?) This decree has made our blood less watery or troubled. What comes from Rome is always a stimulant or a sedative;

(2) to agree to our name being AUGUSTINIANS OF THE ASSUMPTION

(3) to suggest the initials A.A. after our name instead of the words in full: too long.

(4) to give Fr. d'Alzon a report on the spiritual, intellectual and material situation of the staff and school.

Well, there are difficulties everywhere. It would be easier to work out our sanctification. All this to show you that during recreation, we do not speak unkindly of our neighbours.

Yours sincerely in Our Lord,

Charles Laurent A. A.

The use of these initials A.A. has been our custom ever since, especially on account of our aggregation to the Augustinian Order.

The College had a good reputation, although the financial situation was a cause of worry. Several boys came from England like Blount, William O'Shea and Jackson. A prospectus was printed in English for families wishing to send their sons to a Catholic school in France.

In the meanwhile, in 1857 Fr. Picard had been sent to Paris to open a modest regular novitiate at Auteuil. Blessed Marie Eugénie was a real Providence to this small community. Fr. Picard was the novice master and chaplain to the Convent of the Nuns of the Assumption. The house was situated at No. 1 Rue Hemes, now called George Sand. The novitiate, it was hoped, would attract vocations from the Paris area. Writing of the new house, Fr. Picard wrote to Fr. d'Alzon: "*Nous y serons assez mal à l'aise, Raison de plus pour que nous soyons bien avec le Bon Dieu.*" ["We shall not be very comfortable here. A further reason for being on good terms with the Good Lord"]

Fr. Henri Brun, a member of the Clichy Community, had been invited to bless the new residence and its Chapel. He did not understand Fr. O'Donnell's ways and gave vent to his feelings in a letter to Fr. d'Alzon, but Fr. Picard had forestalled this move by writing to Fr. d'Alzon on October 16, 1857:

I dare not share Fr. Brun's opinion at the present moment as I did not have a 'sol' (halfpenny) to my name, and Fr. O'Donnell came generously to our rescue in obliging us with 1000 francs. Nobody knows this, except Brother Marie and myself, and we shall remember this in order to pray for our benefactor and brother...

Even peaceful Pernet was cross with him as we read in several letters to Fr. d'Alzon. Fr. O'Donnell had been ill and had to remain in his room. Two things seemed to have annoyed Fr. O'Donnell: one, being rather lonely, and the other, being obliged to interrupt the translation of St Thomas' *Summa*.

He had been well looked after, although the College Fathers were too busy to spend much time with the patient, as Fr. Pernet remarked in a letter of December 25, 1857.

Already in 1858, Fr. Picard was discussing with Fr. d'Alzon the possibility of closing down the College at Clichy on account of the debts and financial difficulties and was discussing the transfer of the Religious who taught there. "Remains Fr. O'Donnell. The Mother General of the Nuns of the Assumption had offered, last year, to accept Fr. O'Donnell as Chaplain of their house in London (Auteuil May 9 1859)." Nothing was to come of this proposal.

At Clichy, apart from the financial difficulties, there was a certain feeling of discouragement amongst the members of the Community, and Fr. O'Donnell did not escape this feeling of depression. We can gather this from a letter of Fr. Pernet to the Founder.

Our Religious life is now more fervent than in the past. There is more regularity. Nevertheless, Fr. O'Donnell is always withdrawn. He seems to worry about three things: his translation of St. Thomas Aquinas; his health, which at this moment makes him hope for a complete cure, and his 15000 francs...

Concerning this money lent to Clichy before he joined as a novice; if it was the money provided by the Empress, we may surmise that he may have arranged for the interest to be reserved for the publication of his books. The reason why he insists on repayment, at least the interest of the capital, is that "Religious should not be engrossed in financial affairs." Fr. O'Donnell bores me and gets on my nerves! (Clichy, May 11, 1858)

We can sympathize with poor Fr. Pernet, a harassed bursar who did not have the money, in this case 375 francs—and Clichy with its debts never had any to put aside. Fr. O'Donnell's health was never up to much and already in 1857 he had "to take the waters" again as we know from two letters to Fr. d'Alzon:

Fr. O'Donnell is taking the waters at Pierrefonds. He left us yesterday morning to return on the 11th September (Clichy, August 25, 1858).

According to the financial report of October 1, 1857, Clichy owed Fr. O'Donnell 15,000 francs. On November 10, 1860 it was down to 10,000 francs, and by February 1861, Fr. O'Donnell's name no longer appears on the list of creditors. He had waived his claim in favor of the Congregation. Fr. Picard wrote to Fr. d'Alzon who was in Rome.

A few days after your departure, Fr. O'Donnell came and asked for a receipt for the sum of money he had given to the Community... As this money had been placed in the General Funds it was not up to me to give this receipt. If Fr. O'Donnell gives away such a sum, our gratitude for those 5000 francs should be graven in our hearts rather than expressed in writing (Auteuil, May 23, 1861).

Then again:

Our little Community is still the same as you are aware. Fr. O'Donnell no longer mentions the question of a receipt for his money (Auteuil, June 13, 1866).

The closing down of the College had been under discussion for several years and the members of the Clichy Community made various suggestions in the Autumn of 1858. In the following year, Fr. Picard wrote to Fr. d'Alzon:

Fr. O'Donnell is always the same—he bored me stiff for two hours, telling me that we ought to go to Canada and he invokes the “Lord God” at every minute, hoping that this invocation will have a greater effect on you and on us all than all the reasons he has already given us (Auteuil, September 6, 1859)

But Fr. d'Alzon was not pleased and replied sharply the following year when Fr. O'Donnell had again referred to Canada.

If Fr. O'Donnell speaks to you again about Canada, I ask you to tell him that you are surprised to see him returning to a proposal which he has put to me several times before, and which I have categorically turned down. Tell him that you do not grasp how he understands the virtue of Obedience. After all, as he has money outside the Community, if he wishes to make use of it for a foundation in Canada. I am willing to give him Fr. E. Tissot, but he must not rely on me to make a foundation outside Europe....I would like him, however, to write to me (Lamalou, September 6, 1860).

Fr. Picard had to perform this unpleasant task and Fr. O'Donnell was upset. The Superior of Auteuil wrote to Fr. d'Alzon:

Fr. O'Donnell seems now quite untroubled and comforted (Auteuil, September 1860).

Canada was never mentioned again, although Fr. d'Alzon by then had accepted a Mission in Queensland, Australia under the first new Bishop of Brisbane, Mgr. Quinn. At the request of Pope Pius IX, a foundation was made in the Balkans and Turkey in 1863.

With reference to Clichy College, in spite of its debts, the school continued for another two years. Fr. Laurent, Superior and Headmaster, gives his impression at the beginning of the school year of a great improvement amongst the boys and the zeal and fervor of the Religious.

It is said that everything is beginning marvelously and that it is essential that Fr. Laurent should continue. It is Fr. O'Donnell who says so (Clichy, October 26, 1859).

In September 1860, Fr. Picard was searching for another house which was to become a centre for Assumptionist activities in Paris. He was somewhat apprehensive regarding the attitude of Archbishop's House, after the closure of Clichy. Cardinal Moret understood the reasons and allowed the Fathers to live in a more spacious house at Auteuil itself and then finally in Paris where he pointed out to them the district of Rue François 1, where he wished them to settle. Rue François 1 was still a mostly non-built up area. Land was bought there thanks to the business acumen of Brother Vincent de Paul Bailly, still a novice in Paris

For the time being Fr. Picard rented a larger house at Auteuil on ground belonging to the Assumption Nuns, who generously remained the material mainstay of the Community. In the circumstances, the change of residence proved to be a useful acquisition.

The Founder finally decided to close Clichy in the summer of 1860. The College was not paying its way in spite of its good reputation and it was not central enough as a catchment area for the well-to-do families of the Capital. Some of the Religious were pleased with the decision and some were not, as was to be expected, but the sale of the house and grounds cleared the debts incurred.

As several Religious were now available, Fr. Pernet, in spite of his dread of turbulent youth, returned to Nîmes in October 1860 as a member of the College staff. He remained there for another three years. Fr. d'Alzon knew only too well the powerful spiritual influence this saintly priest had over the College boys. He was to return to Paris in the summer of 1863.

Fr. Henri Brun (via London), Fr. Elphege Tissot and Fr. Victor Cusse with Brother Polycarp Huday and Brother Francisco Gavette (a fiery Spaniard) were getting ready to accompany Bishop James Quinn to Australia. With his brother, he had run the Wardour Street School in Dublin until his Consecration on June 29, 1859, as first Bishop of Brisbane, Australia. He had spent, as a priest in 1865, a few months at Nîmes as Fr. d'Alzon's guest and he also knew the Clichy Religious. No wonder, as a Bishop, he had appealed for missionaries to help him in his vast diocese! (But that is a different story!)

We know that Fr. O'Donnell kept in touch with them by letters to their distant mission in Australia.

Fr. d'Alzon wrote to Blessed Marie Eugénie:

The Community in Paris, will consist of Fr. Picard, Fr. Laurent and Fr. O'Donnell. Brother Benjamin will be there as Cook. It would be a good idea if Fr. O'Donnell was to give sermons in English in the Parish Church of the Assumption in Paris... (Nîmes July 22.1860).

We have no proof that this happened

CHAPTER III—FR. EDMUND O'DONNELL'S WRITINGS

This subject deserves to be treated apart as it was one of the priestly aspects of Fr. O'Donnell's life. We know that he was a cultured man and had a good knowledge of French and Italian.

Père S. Vailhé, in his biography of Fr. d'Alzon, writing of Fr. O'Donnell, has this to say of his books:

These books show a good use of his time and were an evidence of his cultural abilities... (p. 443).

The Divine Comedy

After, or before, settling down in Paris and before he became a Religious, he translated from Italian into English the *Divina Comedia* of Dante Alighieri, published by Thomas Richardson, 9 Chapel Street, Dublin. 1852.

The Genius of Christianity

Two years later, while on the staff at Clichy, he translated, from the French, Chateaubriand's book *Le Génie du Christianisme* (*Genius of Christianity*), Printed and published by E Thurnor et Co., 26 Rue Racine, Pres de L'Odeon, March 1854. Fr. O'Donnell wrote in the Introduction:

“The ‘Genius of Christianity’ was by this time, (beginning of Napoleon's career) published and was a kind of Talisman in the hands of all classes of Society when religion and literature had no influence on the majority of the French nation. In reading its admirable pages on the beauties, divine doctrine and morality of the Catholic religion, it opened their eyes on their past folly and impiety and turned their heart and soul once more towards their merciful God and the glorious faith of their forefathers.... So the ‘Genius of Christianity’ as if inspired by Divine Providence was undoubtedly instrumental in the accomplishment of that memorable and ever happy event [the Restoration of the Church in France].”

E. O'Donnell A.A.

Maison de l'Assomption, Clichy, pres de Paris.

The author then says that the aim of the present translation is to make the work available to “all denominations” in Great Britain and in Ireland. He thanks the readers for their reception of his translation of Dante, and hopes that the present book will have a similar success. He deplors his deficiencies and re-states his hopes for success.

Translation of the Summa

Once he had joined us as an Augustinian of the Assumption he spent his time in prayer, teaching at Clichy, and intellectual activities. His earlier training in the Seminary and his own personal dispositions fitted him for this sort of work.

In the Spring of 1857, he had started to write his *Compendium of St. Thomas’ Theology*. Fr. Laurent wrote to Fr. d’Alzon on June 12, 1857:

“Fr. O’Donnell has undertaken the translation into English of St. Thomas’ Summa Theologica but he will not put the objections which are, in general too “terrible”. It will surely take him three years to finish this work. Therefore he has renounced life in time and eternity.

By October 1858, the manuscript was ready for printing by J.M. O’Toole (13 Hawkin Street, Dublin). The publisher was James Duffy (7 Wellington Quay, Dublin). The book appeared at the beginning of 1859. We shall see what Fr. O’Donnell had in mind when writing this book, by making use of his own words as they appear in the preface. The author was prompted by the vast output of Godless literature:

“The object of the present work is to explain the Eternal Law and marvelous works of God, eradicate vice and error and destroy false principles in religion, philosophy and social life. I humbly beg to present to Christians of all denominations in the British Empire, a work which is a Compendium of St. Thomas’ Theology, one of the most valuable and extensive productions of human genius. His name alone, of universal celebrity and admiration as a saint and the greatest philosopher, metaphysician and theologian in all ages and nations, is a sufficient recommendation and encomium of the sublime doctrine and incomparable merit of the original.... I have undertaken the translation of this immense work which required much time, labour and constant application to bring it to a final conclusion. The original is extremely difficult and complicated from the multiplicity of its matter and intricate arrangement. I have given an abridgment of it, with the principal substance of

the work. The first and chief reason of the abridgment is that I have principally intended it for the use and instruction for the laity... I have adopted a particular form and method in the execution of the work, suitable for the intelligence of the clergy and laity: the one from his former knowledge of theology and metaphysics will perceive in every page more than is contained in the present text, the other, all that is necessary for his private knowledge and state of life. All the original work is comprised in questions, but for the convenience and utility of the reader, I have formed it into chapters according to the nature and importance of the subject, with the numbers I, II, III, etc., corresponding to the contents of the question by way of reference. There is much more matter contained in the present text than is indicated in the table of contents. The most splendid production of more than human genius, is now for the first time, succinctly represented in a new English dress: how it will please our modern taste and fancy, time alone shall tell..."

E. O'Donnell A.A.

Maison de l'Assomption, Clichy, pres de Paris.

In the Archives of the General Curia, Rome, you will still see the financial accounts for the printing and sale of the two volumes of the *Compendium of St. Thomas*. They denote a substantial financial gain as the two volumes met with success (Lettre a "La Dispersion" No. 96, 1924, p. 161).

As Mgr. J. Ryan of Washington Catholic University remarked in a letter of November 23, 1958 that Fr. O'Donnell was one of the pioneer translators of the *Summa* into English, we may be justly proud of him considering the circumstances in which he had to do this translation and the novelty of the work.

Les Etudes

Towards the end of 1859, Fr. O'Donnell was seriously thinking of translating into English *Les Etudes Philosophiques de Nicolas sur le Christianisme* as we read in a letter of Fr. Laurent to Fr. d'Alzon on December 6, 1859. But nothing seems to have come of it.

Sermons on the Gospels

Father O'Donnell started a work entitled *Sermons of the Gospels of all the Sundays and Principal Festivals of the year (Two volumes)*³ while attached to the second Assumptionist residence at Auteuil. We know this from a letter from Fr. Picard to his former novice, then a student in Rome, Brother Vincent de Paul Bailly:

PS. Fr. O'Donnell is composing and decomposing sermons, much to the amusement of his confreres and for the future happiness of his compatriots... (Auteuil, March 30, 1862).

In his Foreword, Fr. O'Donnell gives the reasons for writing these sermons and the plan he had adopted.

I come once again before the public with another interesting production of my humble efforts and capacity in order to promote the honor and glory of God, and to propagate His divine doctrine for the spiritual enlightenment and sanctification of the Faithful. There has never been, perhaps, a time since the origin of Christianity, that requires more zeal, more vigilance, more energy, more fervent perseverance and assiduity on the part of the true minister of Jesus Christ, than the present period of the world, in order to counteract the malignant prejudice, the prevailing spirit of incredulity and the insatiable pride, ambition and avarice of the present generation.... A regular course of Religious instructions suitable to the peculiar circumstances of the present age, is the best and most essential method to preach the word of God, for the edification of the Faithful in every class and station of life.... These practical sermons... are extremely useful to priests in general... and principally to the priests in North America and the British settlements who have still less time to prepare adequate instructions for the conversion and enlightenment of the different classes of people they have to deal with in the laborious exercise of their holy ministry....

Fr. O'Donnell had only in view the honor and glory of God, the vindication and prosperity of the Church and the enlightenment and salvation of souls. He submits his writings to the "infallible" authority and judgment of holy Mother Church.

In conclusion, I recommend myself to the prayers and kind indulgence of the Reader and expect he will not be displeased with me, nor have any reason to censure or criticize this work that has cost me so much time, labor and expense, for the

³ Printed by J. M. Tooley and Son, and published by Richard and Son.

advancement of the Christian Religion and the conversion of souls.

E. O'Donnell. Assumption – Auteuil Paris

The press in Ireland gave this work a good write-up, particularly the *Nation*, the *Freeman* and the *Telegraph*.

The *Nation*, following a review of the book, concluded:

May the book whose title heads these lines be the centre of many such a circle of old and young gathered round the reader of pious book, for years to come: and may the future men of Ireland as they learn from it, love God for His own sake and their neighbour for the sake of God, learn also as those in Poland learn it, the more deeply to love their country and to be prepared to do and suffer for her the more. They shall thus, we venture to assert, the more gratify the pious and learned author whose love for 'Virtue and Erin' prompted this generous task.

From the *Freeman*

"This want of being applicable to the wants of the Catholic Christian Mission, is attained to a high degree by the Rev. E. O'Donnell's Sermons on the Gospels. They are evidently the fruit of much learning united to deep and pious meditation.... The Rev. O'Donnell has done and done well in lessening the labour necessary on the arranging and compiling of practical and well-ordered matter for a good sermon and has thus entitled himself to the gratitude ever due to one who extends a helping hand to aid in the attainment of a high and holy object."

From the *Telegraph*, after praising the volumes in generous terms:

In this opinion of the merits of these volumes, we are sustained by that of several eminent prelates and divines who have pronounced them to be in every respect, admirably adapted to the purpose for which they have been written....It is but justice to the publisher to add that the work has been admirably put out of hands and in every respect, the paper, the type and exterior being all that could possibly be desired.

Appendix to Chapter III (Fr. E. O'Donnell's Writings)

During his studies in Paris, as a young man, Fr. d'Alzon was fortunate in having Catholic Professors who taught a sane "*Philosophia Perrenis*".

This, of course, was continued in the Major Seminary of Montpellier. But it was in Rome that he was to find professors and churchmen who would give him a love for true Scholastic Philosophy, so derided by the Protestant reformers, by Descartes and by the materialistic and irreligious philosophers well known right up to the present day. It is no wonder that once he had become founder of a religious community, he sent his students to the Minerva where the Dominicans taught the true principles of Thomistic Philosophy and Theology.

In France, as Vicar General of Nîmes, he did his utmost to combat the materialistic liberal and godless doctrines of the middle classes, and exploited working classes in which he saw fully an explosive revolutionary attitude. Many Catholics and good thinking men were bewildered by what they saw, heard or read. Fr. d'Alzon was worried whether the Clergy and the Laity would be ready to react against the insidious doctrines being delivered on such a large scale, in lecture halls, the press and a number of Chairs of the State Universities.

In default of something better, the textbook by Goudin, on Philosophy in Seminaries was not quite up to the mark. The Dominicans, recently restored in France, were few in number, but had started to edit and publish the works of St. Thomas. At Nîmes, Fr. d'Alzon had hopes that sooner or later the crusade to break the powerful monopoly of the secularist State Universities would succeed.

He prepared to organize a sort of Minor University. Under his direction, his College staff edited the *Summa contra Gentiles*. But such efforts could not be sustained without a serious, critical study of all St. Thomas' more important works. Nevertheless, the study of St Thomas could not exclude Fr. d'Alzon's study and knowledge of the great Father of the Church, St. Augustine. My "dear St. Augustine", as he would like to say.

Fr. Siméon Vailhé, in his biography of Fr. d'Alzon wrote: "Until his death, he remained faithful to his love of the Doctor of Hippo, true founder of the Philosophy of Faith and also for the Master of Scholastics, St. Thomas, victorious defender of Faith and reason" (Volume 2 Page 81).

Father O'Donnell was aware of Fr. d'Alzon's desires and what had been done at Nîmes. This can explain his wish to bring out in two volumes a *Compendium of St. Thomas' Theology* but for the benefit of an English-speaking public, clergy and laity alike whose spiritual needs were just the same as on the Continent.

Father O'Donnell, in Volume 1 Page 7 of his Introduction makes this assertion:

“The two great Doctors of the Church, St. Augustine and St. Thomas were, along with other great minds, by Divine Providence, to combat the heresies which were to threaten the fundamental Articles of the Faith. By his invincible eloquence, profound knowledge and sublime doctrine, he confounded, refuted and silenced them all.(Arians, Manickees, Donatists, Pelagians) St. Thomas, the Angelic Doctor, was pre-eminently endowed with all the gifts of grace and virtue for the most magnificent production of human genius, that is, The Summa Theologica ... His profound knowledge, sublime elucidation and splendour of the mysteries and articles of Faith are admirable and instructive.... The most splendid production of more than human genius is now succinctly present in an English text.”

Fr. d’Alzon united both great Doctors whose philosophical systems may have been different but whose pre-occupation was to search for and preach truth with the love of God.

The Catholic Encyclopaedia Volume 1 Col. 94–95 rightly says:

“St. Augustine is unquestionably the Master of all centuries. But we can say that the dominating characteristic of his genius and true secret of his influence are to be found in his heart, a heart that penetrates the most exalted speculations of a profound mind and animates them with the most ardent feeling.... He is represented holding a heart for his emblem, as St. Thomas is represented with a sun, an emblem showing his own genius in explaining so clearly the doctrines of our Catholic Faith.”

It was thanks to Pope Leo XIII that the Angelic Doctor was restored to his rightful place in his teaching of the Philosophy and Theology of the Catholic Church in seminaries and Catholic Institutions of Higher Studies.

Neither Fr. d’Alzon nor Fr. O’Donnell were to witness this great event.

CHAPTER IV—COMMUNITY LIFE IN THE PARIS RESIDENCE

Community life has its ups and downs, its difficulties but also its funny side to things. Going back to Clichy days we know of the stir caused by a theft of an important sum of money, while Fr. O'Donnell was writing his *Compendium of St. Thomas*. On the part of Fr. O'Donnell and the community, there was "consternation" and then "acceptance" of the fact.

The money had been put aside for that purpose and Fr. Siméon Vailhé A.A. Vol. 11, p. 443, tells us that the Empress Eugénie, wife of Napoleon III, had handsomely contributed to the printing of Fr. O'Donnell's books. The printing of *The Compendium* was thus composed, but Fr. O'Donnell finally discovered the thief, much to everybody's relief. But there were other complications. Fr. Laurent had written to Fr. d'Alzon:

For the past fortnight, I had the intention of asking you to allow Fr. O'Donnell to go to Dublin for the printing of his new book. He leaves tomorrow evening. This means two English lessons less for each of his forms. As it is the beginning of the school year, it will not be too inconvenient and I did not oppose the journey (Clichy, October 15, 1858).

As Clichy could not provide the money to defray the expenses of the journey, Fr. O'Donnell managed to find the necessary money. By November he was back at Clichy. Fr. d'Alzon had known about the translation and printing of Fr. O'Donnell's books on St. Thomas, but he had not gone into details, and had not given an express permission. This explains Fr. Brun's severe letter from Clichy, on October 15, 1858, complaining of Fr. O'Donnell's attitude as far as Obedience was concerned in this case, but we also have seen Fr. Picard's more tolerant letter to Fr. d'Alzon on October 16 in which he could not express sufficiently his gratitude to Fr. O'Donnell for the financial help the latter had obtained for him. If anyone was to be blamed, it was Fr. Laurent, who had forgotten to write to Fr. d'Alzon. In any case, he wrote to the Founder, as it would seem, with his tongue in his cheek.

Fr. O'Donnell is back. According to him, we should not miss a unique opportunity, I mean, a foundation in Limerick. The Bishop would give us a house for a small rent. We would only have to build a College....

And he adds with a certain humour, "Such conditions are most

favourable and we would be silly if we did not accept them...” (Clichy, November 1858).

Fr. O’Donnell did not realise we had neither the men nor the money.

The *Compendium* appeared at the beginning of 1859. Fr. O’Donnell had sent the only copy he then had to the Founder, but as the Archbishop of Dublin was coming to Paris, he wanted to offer His Grace a copy of his book as well. Hence a request to Fr. d’Alzon, through Fr. Laurent—April 18, 1859—to send back the copy to him with the promise to send another copy once he had received a number from Dublin.

Fr. d’Alzon did not like the request but returned the book to the author.

Fr. O’Donnell was somewhat dismayed by Fr. d’Alzon’s attitude but eventually returned a copy to Fr. d’Alzon as we can gather from a letter of Fr. Laurent in December 1859.

As Clichy was closed, Fr. Picard wrote to his former co-student in Rome, Fr. Galabert, then at Nîmes:

“Clichy is empty. With the lay Brothers, Benjamin and Polycarp, Fr. O’Donnell is the caretaker of the building and garden produce (Warmin, September 18, 1860).

It must be said that, in spite of having had, in the 17th Century, Saint Vincent de Paul as Parish Priest, the village people stole whatever they could, once the College boys had left. Then to Fr. d’Alzon, after the Parisian Novitiate had closed without attracting many novices, and after the Clichy Religious and those of Auteuil had moved into a bigger house on grounds belonging to the Assumption Nuns, Fr. Picard wrote:

“We have just celebrated at Auteuil, the feast of the Epiphany. Fr. O’Donnell will not yet be here until the complete withdrawal from Clichy. The new residence is not yet ship-shape, but it will be, before the week is out (Auteuil, January 6, 1861).

And again:

“At last we are all together under the same roof. After a lot of discussions, Archbishop’s House has allowed us to take over Mr. Louis’ house where we are more at ease and where we will be able to store the bits and pieces from Clichy.

I assume from today, the responsibility as Superior (of the new Community) in keeping with your letter.... Fr. O’Donnell grumbles about certain things, in order to maintain “respectability of the Community” (his own words). What next? We have our meals together, the Choir Brethren at one table, and the brothers opposite at another. I think we shall all get on

well together... (Auteuil, January 13, 1861).

While residing at Auteuil, the two Lay Brothers helped to build the small house at Rue François I in the district pointed out by Cardinal Morot. Punctually at nine o'clock every morning, wearing their caps and their working clothes, they set out for Rue François I after their morning Little Office, Meditation and Mass and a summary breakfast. They returned for their meals wearing their working clothes. Fr. O'Donnell did not approve of this lack of religious decorum, or "respectability" as he called it.

Speaking of the new house at Auteuil, Fr. Vincent de Paul had already written to Fr. d'Alzon on January 7 1861: "We shall regret the old house. Fr. O'Donnell will have the former billiard room, a wide glass gallery with a terrace on one side."

The new community lived poorly, and were indebted to the generosity of the Auteuil Nuns of the Assumption. Nevertheless, Fr. d'Alzon insisted on the practice of poverty, on the financial returns and on the diverse practices of the Religious life.

In a letter to Fr. Laurent, the Founder had refused him permission to have nice pictures in his room, as the new house had inherited the "bits and pieces" from Clichy. "Religious have enough with one."

In the meanwhile, a comical situation had arisen with reference to Fr. O'Donnell, as Fr. Picard narrates to Fr. d'Alzon:

P.S. I did not know of your decision concerning the pictures, when Fr. O'Donnell came to ask me for permission to keep those he had had in his cell: his pictures are so ugly that I was glad to get them out of the community room and parlour, allowing him to keep them "ad usum." If you think I must withdraw the permission, I am ready to do so. (Auteuil, January 16, 1861)

Fr. d'Alzon must have laughed and Fr. O'Donnell must have kept them. Nevertheless on February 3, 1861 Fr. d'Alzon in a letter to Fr. Picard writes:

Do you know if Fr. Laurent accepted a letter in which I had refused him permission to have beautiful pictures in his room? I think that Religious have 'enough with one.'

Community life had its little difficulties and amusing side. Fr. Picard wrote

Goodbye my dear Father. All is well here. In order to vary the pleasures of our conversations, we repeat twice a day the same

thing with Fr. O'Donnell after which we retire for the night!!
(Auteuil, February 24, 1861)

Fr. O'Donnell, sixty-two years of age, must have been somewhat stout, judging by this letter from Fr. Picard to Fr. Vincent de Paul:

“Fr. O'Donnell laughed most heartily when he heard of your horror of lumbago. His portly stomach shook the table so much that he placed our dinner in jeopardy.” (Auteuil, March 1, 1861)

Fr. Picard had appointed Fr. O'Donnell as acting chaplain at the neighbouring Convent of the Assumption Nuns and one of his duties was to preach there in French. Fr. Picard added the following to his letter to Fr. Vincent de Paul:

... Fr. O'Donnell has started to preach in French and following the sermon on the Transfiguration there was the one for Ash Wednesday. “Remember man, that thou art dusty.” Those present listen to him well, and everybody behaves becomingly as Fr. Laurent did on the first day.”

Fr. Picard wrote to Fr. d'Alzon:

Fr. O'Donnell is preparing his sermon for tomorrow. He has got some pluck! He is very surprised that they do not understand him (Irish accent) and pretends that well-educated people have always understood him!

Again to Fr. Vincent de Paul he writes:

We live together with Fr. O'Donnell who has finished his series of Lenten sermons this morning. The pupils managed to mortify themselves (not to laugh). Fr. O'Donnell is amazed at their good behaviour and patience.” (Auteuil, March 17, 1862)

In a 1907 issue of “Le Correspondant des Alumnats,” a bulletin for the Alumniates or Juniorates, a particularly comical incident is recalled:

It is customary in Religious Houses to have a few verses read from Holy Scripture at the beginning of the principal meals. On one occasion it was the incident of King David and the Sunnamite. Fr. O'Donnell became indignant as he exclaimed: “Oh! Oh! Oh!” Of course his indignation would have highly amused the French Fathers. Also, being Irish he did not always grasp the meaning of witty French remarks. When he did, he

used to say the following day, while laughing ... “Lord God” and he would explain them to everyone’s delight. (February 1907, p. 29.)

His Chaplaincy’s duties did not last very long. If at the Convent things were not always to his liking, he did not hesitate to express his feelings. This annoyed the Nuns who asked for his withdrawal as he was not in these circumstances “*persona grata*.”

We know this from a letter dated March 27, 1863 from Fr. Picard to Fr. d’Alzon, who was then in Turkey. The Founder, at a request from Pius IX had decided to start a mission in Constantinople, now Stamboul, and in Bulgaria then part of the Ottoman Empire. In December 1862 he had sent Fr. Victorin Galabert to survey the situation and examine the possibilities of a mission. Fr. d’Alzon went out himself, in Spring 1863, to discuss the form and method to be used by the Assumptionists and then to go to Rome to report to the Pope and Cardinals. While in Constantinople, he replied to Fr. Picard’s letter

You did well to withdraw Fr. O’Donnell from the Convent Chaplaincy (Constantinople, April 8, 1863).

This decision did not seem to bother Fr. O’Donnell—he was too busy writing his book *Sermons on the Gospels of all the Sundays and Principal Festivals of the Year in Two Volumes*. Fr. Laurent, a classicist and a good preacher, wrote the following amusing letter to Fr. d’Alzon from Rue François 1:

... On the other hand, Fr. O’Donnell pursues me with his plans for the printing of his new book, but thank heavens I am no longer threatened with writing the Preface. He wrote it himself but read it to me. He made me read and explain one of the printed pages or “Specimen” in order to make me judge the beauty of the type used.

For this he called me from his window on the second floor when I was passing by in the street. I thought it was to hear his confession. Not in the slightest: instead of a penitent I found an author and it was I who became the penitent. I confess this with perfect contrition and with a firm purpose of amendment, to avoid all occasions in the future. I shall not walk in the street, or at least I shall walk on without looking up at the window while I keep close to the wall” (Paris, February 1, 1863).

Later on Fr. Picard wrote to Fr. Vincent de Paul in Rome:

...PS. Fr. O’Donnell is writing and re-writing sermons for the

future use by English speaking priests and for the happiness of his compatriots. (Auteuil, March 30, 1860)

To Fr. Hippolyte Saugrain at Nîmes:

Fr. O'Donnell is in Ireland, as you know. We had to give him three hundred francs for his journey. I don't see of what use his books of sermons will be (Paris, May 5, 1863).

Well, if Fr. Picard had been able to have read later on, the reviews of the books in the Irish Press, he would have changed his mind and seen their necessity. Fr. Picard, who had always shown great kindness to Fr. O'Donnell, wrote to Br. Vincent de Paul, student in Rome:

... Ask St. Peter to obtain a true apostolic spirit for the poor Fathers in Paris, who need new members and have just welcomed back Fr. O'Donnell, author of a new book in two volumes called "Sermons of Rev. Fr. O'Donnell," and printed within a month and in magnificent lettering in Dublin, capital of Ireland. Father is full of the joys of paternity. You must congratulate him, though you only know the news by hearsay (Paris, June 1863).

To Fr. d'Alzon, Fr. Picard wrote on August 7 1863:

... Fr. O'Donnell offered his two volumes (of sermons) to the Archbishop of Paris, who received him most graciously.

The new residence in Rue François 1 which had been finished in December 1861 was too damp to live in, but the little chapel inaugurated nevertheless, was overheated to dry the walls. The people of the district were delighted to have a chapel nearby and the Parish Priest, whose Church was a good distance away, was most sympathetic. The chapel was blessed on February 23, Sexagesima Sunday, at 7.30am and this was followed by Mass, but the whole ceremony was carried out without great solemnity. Fr. d'Alzon for various reasons wishing to avoid making his presence known in the capital, did not go to Paris. He nevertheless transferred Fr. Victorin Galabert from Nîmes to Paris, and Fr. Picard was very pleased to have his Roman co-student with him as an addition to the community. Fr. Laurent postponed a series of sermons in Boulogne because "he is our only good preacher and singer"—so Fr. Picard wrote to Fr. Galabert, prior to the latter's departure from Nîmes for his new residence in Paris.

The chapel from the beginning became very popular with its regular Masses and devotions. The people called it "The little chapel." The

Fathers had to come from Auteuil for the various religious ceremonies, as the new residence was still too damp to live in. It was heated to dry the walls, and as Fr. Picard was to say “It changes colour every day with all the hues of the rainbow.”

At last, the Community moved from Auteuil to Rue François 1. Fr. Picard was able to write to Fr. d’Alzon:

I am writing to you for the first time from Paris where, at last, we have settled in our new house, and I can give you our exact address: 8 Rue François 1. Pray for your children and send them the Papal Blessing.

The house was small and the Religious referred to it as “la bicoque” or “old shack.” There was room for four priests and two brothers and just the necessary furniture, as Fr. Picard informed Fr. d’Alzon on March 10, 1862. Poverty was supreme but the Religious were cheerful, in keeping with the Rule of St. Augustine, “Melius est minus egere quam plus habere” (Regula Chapter IV) “Indeed it is better to want a little than to have too much.” People began to realise their poverty, and slowly began to help them. Fr. Picard gave amusing details about their life at Rue François 1 to Fr. Vincent de Paul in Rome, and of the exiguity of their new home. Here is the gist of the letter:

Our removal took place during last week much to Fr. Laurent’s delight in arranging this and putting everything in order.

[He goes on to say how they made use of every available bit of room to place the furniture, etc.]

A little statue of Our Lady creates a certain religious atmosphere over all the junk and bits and pieces from Clichy. Happily, this does not prevent cheerfulness on the part of the Community, in spite of our poverty Fr. Laurent is the most pleasant of men. His preaching during our May devotions seems to make him all the more cheerful. Fr. Brun is happy. Fr. Galabert is the same as you have always known him. He is learning English. As for your humble servant, Fr. Picard, he is a poor Superior—he has to think of the means of providing the next meal!

But Fr. Galbert was not to stay in Paris very long. He was sent to Turkey.

A great family spirit animated all our early Religious. In spite of their own poverty, we see those in Paris under Fr. Picard’s guidance, collecting Peter’s Pence to help Pius IX in the political situation of the Papal States at that time.

Fr. Picard was also tireless in finding material help and benefactors for our Mission in Australia and later on for Fr. Galabert, who had founded a Mission in the Balkans and Turkey proper. The missionaries needed all the help they could receive from Europe in order to carry on their apostolic work.

Our Mission in Australia had started at the request of Bishop Quinn from Dublin who knew Fr. d'Alzon at Nîmes, and the small Clichy Community. Fr. O'Donnell kept up a correspondence with them. The letters from Australia, apart from a few, have not been published.

In 1863, Fr. Tissot who was in charge of the Mission at Maryborough, wrote to Fr. Picard:

What have I done to Fr. O'Donnell that he no longer gives me news of himself (Maryborough, February 7, 1863).

But another letter of November 6, 1863 asks Fr. Picard to thank Fr. O'Donnell for his very kind letter. That same year, 1863, Renan the apostate, had just published his *Life of Christ*. Fr. O'Donnell, a good theologian, no doubt must have read it.

Fr. Picard's reaction appears in a letter to Fr. d'Alzon:

What a ridiculous and stupid infamy this "Life of Jesus," written by an "ex-rabbat" (ex-seminarist) (Paris, July 12, 1863).

CHAPTER V—THE LAST YEARS OF FR. O'DONNELL

As we reach 1864, we notice, thanks to the letters that still exist, that Fr. O'Donnell's health began to fail. Fr. Picard wrote to Fr. d'Alzon from Paris on May 6, 1864: "Fr. O'Donnell is not well. He has been in bed for the last four days."

The news would recur often in the years leading to 1869. He was now sixty five. He carried on with his work and in the summer of 1864 managed to travel to Ireland for the last time in the hope of finding a few postulants. He was unsuccessful, as we know from a letter of Fr. Picard on September 11, 1864:

Fr. O'Donnell is back from Ireland. He was hoping to return with some novices, but he only brought back hopes.

In a letter dated November 12, 1864 from Fr. Picard to Fr. d'Alzon, Father speaks of an Irish postulant, a Mr. Buckley, aged 24-25 years, who was sent to the regularly established Novitiate at Le Vigan, in the Manor House where Fr. d'Alzon had been born. He did not complete his Novitiate as Fr. d'Alzon wrote the following year:

The Irish postulant will return to Paris. He is in poor health and has not the necessary intellectual requirements. (Nîmes, August 7 1864)

There is no indication that Fr. O'Donnell had recruited him. There is an amusing letter from Fr. Picard to Fr. d'Alzon (Paris, November 1864):

Fr. Laurent moves the walls of St. Roch's Church with his powerful eloquence, whereas Fr. O'Donnell shakes the partition of his room in reading aloud his newspaper, his breviary and so on.

Fr. O'Donnell's health was failing. Although he said he was feeling like a young man, he was saddened to hear of his brother's illness, which Fr. Picard reported to Fr. d'Alzon on December 30, 1864.

Fr. Picard had written to Fr. Hippolyte who was novice master at Le Vigan on May 9, 1864 and had explained the nature of Fr. O'Donnell's illness—which was bladder trouble. "At the age of twenty, we would not have to worry, but at the age of sixty five or seventy this can be serious."

Fr. Vincent de Paul was in Paris for a short while in the early summer of 1865. He was thinking of going to Australia where reinforcements were needed. Fr. Picard wrote to Fr. d'Alzon:

... Fr. Vincent de Paul tells me of his future expeditions to Australia. He is re-learning English with a novice's fervour. Sr. M. Bernard, Assumption Nun, completes Fr. O'Donnell's work. Together they will turn out a true "Englishman"—stiff deportment, stiff upper lip, ardent good will, a cool and serious attitude—nothing is lacking in the future missionary, auxiliary to Father Brun, friendly rival of Fr. Tissot—he is burning to go. (Paris, May 15.1865)

He never went to Australia after all. Fr. Picard wrote to tell him in Nîmes that he would be more useful in Paris than in Australia. His words came true when Fr. Vincent de Paul was transferred to Paris in April 1869. Later on he was to exercise the providential mission of founding with Fr. Picard "La Bonne Presse" — "Printing and Publishing Office" in Paris.

In June 1865, Fr. O'Donnell was ill again and in August Dr. Gouraud sent him to Vichy as he had been ill for some months. We know this from a letter to Fr. d'Alzon dated August 4, 1865. Fr. Picard had also informed Fr. d'Alzon as early as April of Fr. O'Donnell's state of health.

... I am rather anxious about Fr. O'Donnell. His health is failing. He was unwell during the ceremony of a reception of a convert into the Church. Dr. Gouraud (an old friend of Fr. d'Alzon), is rather anxious and fears that the end is near. Nevertheless, Father continues to go out and walk a little every day, but he is getting weaker. Strong palpitations tire him considerably. Please ask the community to pray for him. (Paris, April 1865)

So our good patient went to Vichy.

Fr. Laurent wrote to Fr. d'Alzon after Fr. O'Donnell's return. "What can I tell you except that the waters of Vichy have not restored Fr. O'Donnell's 'Voix scripturaire' (dreary parsonic voice) and that the above mentioned Father is disappointed that you have not answered him."

Fr. O'Donnell wrote the following letter to his Superior, Fr. Picard, then at Nîmes on business.

My dear and Reverend Father,
I am delighted to learn, by your kind letter, that you arrived at your destination in good health and that you found everything to your satisfaction at Nîmes and at Le Vigan. Fr. d'Alzon could not have done better (and I congratulate him) than to establish

the novitiate at Le Vigan under the care of Fr. Hippolyte, whose zeal, activity and experience contribute towards the maintenance of order, discipline in that house, and give rise to the hope of a great prosperity in the future extension of our community.

[He expresses the idea that with the help of three or four Fathers, a foundation in Ireland might have been possible.]

The waters and the baths had been beneficial, but after a fortnight I became so unwell that I had to give up taking the waters and baths for three or four days and now I must stay on a little longer to finish the treatment. You are too kind, dear Father, to invite me to spend a few days at Nîmes and at Le Vigan and I would willingly avail myself of the invitation – more so as I would very much like to speak to our dear Fr. d’Alzon, whom I have not seen for a long time. However, I am no longer keen on long journeys, and besides I have not got the essential money. Everything is so expensive here, and I am glad to return to Paris with the little I have.

[He goes on to speak of the costs of the treatment and the time it takes up without leaving him the time to write to friends The season ends about September 21st.]

Try to have a good rest during your stay in the South. You need a rest badly as you have had a hard and tiring year. I do not understand how you manage to keep going. Please offer our dear and good Fr. d’Alzon my respectful greetings and please remember me to all our Fathers and Brothers of Nîmes and Le Vigan.

Please dear Father, accept the sincere expression of my very affectionate and devoted sentiments.

E. O’Donnell

Fr. Pernet wrote to Picard:

Fr. O’Donnell came back the day before yesterday. He hopes to feel the benefit of the Vichy waters while in Paris. (Paris, September 1865)

Fr. Galabert was sent to Constantinople in December 1862 following the General Chapter.

The Paris Community welcomed Fr. Etienne Pernet in September 1863.

Malachy Carroll, the author in his “Life of Fr. Pernet” describes the foundation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption and their work

amongst the poorer working classes. (“The Swallows in the Garret”, The Mercier Press Ltd., Cork)

As Fr. d’Alzon was at Nîmes, so Fr. Picard was to be a tower of strength in advising and encouraging the Little Sisters. He was shy by nature, but a fervent religious. He had seen poverty in his own family, but especially in his visits to the poor in Nîmes and later on in Paris and the “workman’s ills.”

Carroll says in his book: “Fr. Pernet sought for a solution, and recorded the first fitful glimmering of what would be a brilliant answer. Clearly a woman was required, and that woman a nun.”

She was to be Mother Marie de Jesus, co-Foundress and first Superior of the Little Sisters of the Assumption. This foundation in Paris was a revelation to Fr. d’Alzon. On the recommendation of Blessed Maria Eugénie de Jesus, he had welcomed without delay this shy seminarist as teacher at Nîmes. He was also a devotee of the pre-Revolution Augustinian Church of Notre Dame des Victoires, where d’Alzon himself had made the private vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in June or July 1845.

In 1865, Fr. d’Alzon with Fr. Hippolyte Saugrain was busy at Le Vigan with the foundation of the Oblate Sisters of the Assumption whose mission it was to help the Fathers in their various apostolic activities.

Fr. d’Alzon wrote to Paris on January 31, 1866

Would you believe it? Fr. Pernet has founded a charitable Association of a few women dedicated to being nurses in the homes without receiving a penny for their help. They are the “Little Sisters of the Poor” but in their own homes.

At this point we return to Fr. O’Donnell. it was only after he had rejoined the Paris Community that Fr. Pernet fully appreciated the saintly life and simple piety of Fr. O’Donnell. But now the true spirit of brotherly charity extolled in the Gospels and in the Rule of St. Augustine prevailed in all its beauty and a true fraternal affection united these two souls so different in origin, upbringing and temperament. Fr. O’Donnell admired the work of the Little Sisters of the Assumption and did his best to find alms in the early days of their foundation. At Fr. Austin’s request, the Mother House at Grenelle gave him the following extracts from Mother Marie de Jesus’ private journal.

March, 1866. On the last day of the month, Fr. O’Donnell asked to see me and gave me 50 francs. Good St. Joseph did not remain deaf to our prayers.

In August 1866, 50 francs

In January 1867, 100 francs

In October 1867, 100 francs

During the remaining years of his life, Fr. O'Donnell continued to lead a quiet life, praying and studying but any exterior activity had become a burden, as his health was failing. On May 4, 1865 Fr. Pernet wrote a funny letter to Fr. d'Alzon, describing the Grand Exhibition in Paris and inviting him to pay a visit to the Paris Community. "This Exhibition is a sign of the times, and becomes a distraction for Fr. O'Donnell."

An amusing event happened in 1866 which Fr. Picard recalls in a letter to Fr. Hippolyte at Le Vigan (Paris, November 7, 1866):

Fr. O'Donnell has been in trouble with the police. He is most indignant for having been arrested yesterday in the street and marched off to the Hotel des Invalides Police Station as a criminal. Happily the authorities soon found out their subordinates' mistake and apologised to the citizen of 'proud Albion' (rather the Emerald Isle).

No doubt the police were after a man masquerading as a priest! The letter of 1867, 1868 show all along that Fr. O'Donnell was a very sick man. Fr. Picard wrote to Fr. d'Alzon (Paris, April 20, 1867):

Fr. O'Donnell's health is failing.

To Fr. Vincent de Paul then in Rome he wrote:

Unfortunately, poor Fr. O'Donnell is failing as the days go by. He gets about, he says his Mass but he is clearly exhausted by the least thing (Paris, May 1, 1867).

The year 1868 was to be Fr. O'Donnell's last year on earth. He was interested in the missionary work of our Religious in Australia and Turkey—a reminder of his early years as a young priest in America. He wrote to them: he had not forgotten them. He was touched by the sentiments of fraternal charity expressed by various Religious aware of the state of his health. Fr. Picard wrote to Fr. Galabert, Superior of our Eastern Mission in January 1868.

You are a very kind Father; you keep us informed of your activities, this gives us great pleasure as we are keenly interested in your Mission. Fr. O'Donnell is delighted with the little letter you sent to him. He is going to answer you but he wants me to give you his kindest regards. He has recovered

from his heart trouble (Paris, January 1868).

Fr. Galabert, a doctor before entering the Novitiate, knew the outcome, especially after receiving the following:

The Fathers are well except for Fr. O'Donnell. He has serious bladder trouble. The heart is better, but another organ is affected: old age is there (Paris, May 28, 1868).

The same remark was received again on December 28, 1868 in a letter to Fr. d'Alzon:

Fr. O'Donnell is once again extremely exhausted. He has aged considerably but he is very edifying. We shall probably send him to Vichy.

(This was not possible). Again to Fr. Hippolyte (Paris, June 29, 1868):

Our other Brethren are quite dedicated to our work. Fr. O'Donnell is preparing himself for his death.

The Religious in Australia had not forgotten him. Our Archives have the letters from our Missionaries out there. I shall quote from just two letters from Fr. Elphage Tissot.

To Fr. O'Donnell. Maryborough, Australia, May 11, 1868 (in French)

Here are a few details. You can see that in spite of old age (67) I am still alert. After God, I attribute this to the magnificent climate of Australia, particularly of Queensland. When I was hesitant, you advised me most appropriately to accept Mgr. Quinn's invitation. Now I must be more closely submissive to God's Will, to avoid being painfully restless without any true spiritual benefit. (In English) Greetings to all in Paris.

Yours very affectionately in Our Lord, Fr. E. Tissot

One of the moral sufferings of our missionaries out there was the awkward attitude of Bishop Quinn towards the Assumptionists. He refused to keep to the contract signed by himself and Fr. d'Alzon, which was to allow them to live in community.

Already, as early as January 1864, Fr. d'Alzon had written to Fr. Pernet in Paris expressing his concern.

If only I could find out why Bishop Quinn never wanted to answer my letter, I would indeed be pleased. Ask Fr. O'Donnell,

as you wish him a happy New Year on my behalf.

But poor Fr. O'Donnell did not know either. The Bishop, a zealous man, was the sole authority with whom to be reckoned. However, he valued our Father's work and held them in high esteem. Later on in the year Fr. Tissot wrote again to Fr. O'Donnell.

"I do not tell you anything about Fr. Brun, except that I know, indirectly, that he is always 'in a great hurry', opening schools, building chapels, wherever he can"- Fr. E. Tissot (Maryborough, September 2, 1868 Australia)

Fr. Pernet wrote to Fr. Picard:

Father O'Donnell has been greatly affected by the heat wave we have had here since your departure. Yesterday and the day before we could not breathe in Paris. Today the sky is cloudy, the North wind is blowing and it is cooler. I hope our good Fr. O'Donnell will suffer less. (Paris, July 24, 1868)

To Fr. O'Donnell he wrote, speaking of the General Chapter held at Nîmes (Nîmes, September 16, 1868):

Our General Chapter ends tomorrow morning with Solemn High Mass. This Chapter is the most important that we have had until now. Our Institute will gain thereby a new vigour in its development. You will judge for yourself when you see the decisions taken during the Chapter.... Fr. d'Alzon seems very happy
Please be sure, my dear Father, of my sincere affection in Our Lord
E. Pernet

Fr. Picard wrote to Fr. Vincent de Paul from Paris on November 3, 1868:

Fr. O'Donnell is always in pain.

On December 29, 1868 he wrote again from Paris:

Our dear Fr. O'Donnell has slightly improved. He is looking forward, hopefully, to next Spring!

Fr. Vincent de Paul wrote from Rome to Fr. Picard on December 4, 1868:

Adieu! Adieu! A thousand kind greetings to all and thousands of years of good health. Fr. O'Donnell.

Again he wrote from Rome on December 27, 1868:

Goodbye, dear father. Buone feste a tutti quanti. I do not forget Fr. O'Donnell.

Fr. Hallouin, Superior of the Orphanage he had opened at Arras wrote to Fr. Picard (Arras December 28.1868):

We ask you kindly to offer our greetings and best wishes to all the members of the Community for they are our Brethren, and particularly to Rev. Fr. Pernet and Rev. Fr. O'Donnell.

CHAPTER VI—SAINTLY DEATH OF FR. O'DONNELL

On September 14, 1868 Fr. d'Alzon wrote to Fr. Pernet.

My dear Fr.iend, a thousand greetings to Fathers O'Donnell, Picard, Laurent, Augustin Gallors, and more particularly to your good self.

The Founder himself wrote to the patient from Nîmes on January 1, 1869:

My dear Fr. O'Donnell,
Many thanks indeed for your greetings. I have often thought of you, these days. I was told you were in pain. Nevertheless, one would not say so, seeing your beautiful handwriting. Myself, I am rather tired after a series of sermons I have just given, but I hope to feel better before my journey to Paris about February 1. With my best wishes, dear Father, be sure of my deep affection in Our Lord.
E. d'Alzon

To Fr. Picard:

A thousand pleasant things to Fr. O'Donnell, to whom I already wrote about twelve days ago (Nîmes, January 10, 1869).

To Fr. Emmanuel Bailly:

... PS. Fr. O'Donnell is in great pain. Ask for prayers (Bordeaux January 16, 1869).

Again to Fr. Emmanuel Bailly:

Fr. O'Donnell was pretty low. He has somewhat recovered (Le Mans, January 23, 1869).

That same day Fr. Emmanuel Bailly, in reply no doubt to Fr. d'Alzon's first letter wrote:

For several days we have been praying for Fr. O'Donnell (dying) (Nîmes. January 23 1869).

Fr. Picard wrote to the Founder from Paris on January 21.1869

For five or six days Fr. O'Donnell has been dangerously ill.

Their letters seemed to have crossed because Fr. d'Alzon wrote from Le Mans on January 23, 1869:

My kindest regards to Fr. O'Donnell... How is he ?

Fr. d'Alzon wrote to Sr. Therese de la Conception, Assumption Nun:

By the time you receive this letter, perhaps good Fr. O'Donnell whom you know, will already have died (LeMans, January 28, 1869).

Fr. Picard wrote to Fr. d'Alzon who was still at Le Mans:

We are impatiently awaiting your arrival. You will find Fr. O'Donnell a little better. His state is still serious, but we have time before us. Dr. Gouraud thinks he may still be able to save him (Paris, January 24, 1869).

Fr. d'Alzon wrote to Mother Emmanuel Correnson, Superior General of the Oblate Sisters of the Assumption founded by Fr. d'Alzon in 1865, while she was at Nîmes:

My dear daughter,

In a few hours time I shall have left Le Mans. This letter will be posted as I leave, and when it reaches you, I shall probably have found that Fr. O'Donnell has already gone to Heaven. The day before yesterday he was anointed but there seems to be no hope. Pray and ask prayers for him: besides, he is most edifying (Le Mans, January 1869).

Fr. Picard wrote to Fr. d'Alzon at Le Mans. There were also two lay brothers ill, Brother Boulet and Brother Arsene:

A telegram has already informed you of our anxiety. We were terribly worried, poor Fr. O'Donnell could have passed away during the crisis – a high temperature, the death rattle, weak pulse, the oppression which foretells that death is imminent. During the night he was more peaceful, and this morning we can relax a little, but we are expecting another crisis this evening or tomorrow night. I do not know if you will find our patient still alive on Saturday morning. I am afraid he will not

survive another crisis, which very probably will happen tomorrow, between four and seven.

This good Father edifies us all. He is patient, quiet, simple, allows himself to be cared for like a child, grateful for the least help, and is waiting for death with the greatest calm. Yesterday evening (January 27) he received the Last Sacraments, renewed his vows, and after the ceremony, he said to me:

‘I am so happy. Illness places you in a spiritual aridity but the Sacrament of the Sick has renewed my fervour. Our Lord is so good, he leads us to heaven by the Way of the Cross. We do not understand his designs, but they are full of mercy, and one has always to make amends.... I am happy.’

Then he prayed to the Saints, the Patriarchs, the Prophets, the Angels. When Father receives the Blessed Sacrament, he has the simplicity of a child making its First Holy Communion. We do not leave him for a minute. Fr. Pernet has been wonderfully devoted. All the Brethren have been likewise anxious to help, and their affectionate devotedness has been one of Fr. O’Donnell’s consolations. Pray for us, for you know how we are anxious to see you without delay. (Paris, January 28, 1869)

The next day Fr. Picard wrote to Fr. Galabert, Superior of our Mission at Adrianople, Turkey:

Sickness has been our lot and leaves me neither time nor rest. If only we could have some hope of saving its victims. Poor Fr. O’Donnell, suffering for a long time from bladder trouble, collapsed completely after New Year’s Day and since then, has been in great pain. Dr. Gouraud started to overcome the crisis when the kidneys began to be affected in a most alarming manner... then the lungs (Paris, January 29, 1869).

Fr. Edmund O’Donnell died at 8:30am on January 31, 1869. Fr. d’Alzon had just arrived that very morning from Le Mans.

Before saying his Mass he was able to visit the dying priest and religious, conscious to the very end. The Founder was able to give him his blessing.

On arriving at Rue François 1, he wrote to Mother Emmanuel Marie of the Oblates of the Assumption:

I have arrived in Paris. I found Fr. O’Donnell dying. It is a question of a few hours (Paris, January 31, 1869, Sunday).

Later in the morning he added in his letter:

As I was finishing my Mass, good Fr. O'Donnell passed away. You understand easily that we are upset. May God welcome a Religious who has been a model of edification. He had a beautiful death.

To Sister Imelda, an Assumption Nun:

We are emotionally upset by Fr. O'Donnell's death. He has just passed away. Say the 'De Profundis' every day for a week for this good Father (Paris, January 31, 1869).

To Fr. Emmanuel Bailly, Assumptionist, Headmaster of Nîmes College:

Good Fr. O'Donnell has just given up his soul to God. He died like a saint, praying fervently to the last moment. He was conscious to the very end and was most edifying. I was finishing my Mass when he passed away. I have nothing else to say. We are all affected by this sad event.
E. d'Alzon (Paris, January 31, 1869)

To the same Mother General of the Oblates of the Assumption at Nîmes:

I hope that Fr. O'Donnell, whom we bury tomorrow, will obtain vocations for us. This is what I beg of him to do (Paris February 1, 1869).

Fr. Hippolyte Saugrain, Novice Master, not knowing the sad news, had written on February 1 that they were praying for Fr. O'Donnell:

The novices have prayed and will continue to do so, for the repose of Fr. O'Donnell's soul. In Chapel this morning I sang Mass for him and all the Brothers received Holy Communion for him. The details you give of his edifying death make us wish to become better, but it is not so easy as all that (Le Vigan, February 2, 1869).

Fr. Picard wrote to Fr. Galabert:

Fr. Laurent is not free from the fear of death, but it does not free those whom Fr. O'Donnell left behind in Paris. Fr. O'Donnell has passed away. He died yesterday at 8:30am after having edified us all. He was constant in his meekness, simplicity, patience, gratitude and faith. Pray for our dear Father and

recommend him to our Brethren and Sisters of the Mission. You know how fond he was of all of you. Fr. d'Alzon has been with us since the day before yesterday (Paris, February 1, 1869).

Fr. d'Alzon himself wrote to Fr. Vincent de Paul in Rome :

As I am suffering from an acute attack of neuralgia, I have to stay at home and leave Fr. Picard and our Brethren to accompany Fr. O'Donnell to his last resting place. I have just sung Mass for him. This good Father died in the most admirable dispositions (Paris, February 2, 1869).

He also wrote to Fr. Emmanuel Bailly at Nîmes:

Yesterday, we buried this good and saintly Fr. O'Donnell. Ah, how I wish that God would send us many good vocations to take his place. Pray for this intention, so important (Paris, February 3, 1869).

Again, to the Co-foundress of the Oblate Sisters of the Assumption he wrote:

Yesterday we buried Fr. O'Donnell.

Fr. d'Alzon wrote again to Fr. Galabert:

I have some sad news for you. On Sunday January 31, we lost Fr. O'Donnell. Yesterday, Feast of the Purification, we buried him. He died in a most edifying manner. He was in terrible pain, but he did not utter a cry, and was able to pray till the last moment. It was bladder trouble that carried him off. Have prayers said for him, though I think he is in heaven (Paris, February 3, 1869).

Fr. Vincent de Paul wrote to Fr. Picard from Rome:

...So it is all over. This good Father O'Donnell has begun his life in heaven joining those of our Brethren already there. So now, let us never break this link. Mother M. Eugénie de Jesus said that in the Assumption family, Father, death should be without its usual apprehension. Fr. O'Donnell has therefore begun this tradition with us. When I was leaving Paris, this poor good Father had asked me to say a certain number of Masses for his intentions and I was fulfilling my promise at the time of his death. We did not know one another very well, but during my

last stay in Paris he showed me a sincere affection, and I got to know him as a good priest—in spite of his original ways—which sometimes amused us! Before, I knew him as a good priest, but I am sure that today, dear Father, he must bless you and above all pray for you. Your letter arrived on Our Lady's day (Candlemas)—the day of the Nunc dimmitis, February 2. I had already heard the sad news from Mr. de Quinones who was informed by his brother. He said that Fr. d'Alzon closed Fr. O'Donnell's eyes (Rome, February 3, 1869).

Two days later, Fr. Vincent de Paul, wrote to Fr. d'Alzon (Rome, February 5, 1869):

Very Reverend Father,

I thank God that, by your presence, you were able to comfort the Paris Community, to say the 'Proficiscere' for the first deceased priest of the Congregation and to close his eyes. I like to see, in these circumstances, the hand of God in our work and in our family of the Assumption. Fr. O'Donnell—in one of his last requests—had asked me to present a complete set of his writings, specially bound, to the Holy Father, Pius IX. Before presenting them and writing a letter of homage, I intended writing to you. What must I do now?

Fr. Galabert, in Adrianople, Turkey had written to Fr. Picard on hearing of Fr. O'Donnell's illness, saying the Religious and the Oblate Sisters of the Assumption were praying with their pupils. Fr. Galabert wrote again to Fr. Picard:

My dear Father Picard,

Last Monday I received your letter of February 1 and on the following morning we had a Requiem for the repose of the soul of Fr. O'Donnell.

Our Oblate Sisters received Holy Communion for the same intention. I officiated and the Reverend Polish Resurrectionist Fathers came with their pupils to help with the singing. I like to believe that our prayers will have helped Father to receive his reward in Heaven without delay. His holy and edifying death has been the crowning of a life spent simply and without fuss in the service of Our Lord whom he loved so tenderly (February 18, 1869).

In Australia, the missionaries heard the sad news in May.

Fr. Edmund O'Donnell was buried in the vault of the Nuns of the Assumption, Cimetiere d'Auteuil, 57 Rue Claude Lorrain, Paris 16e. The

tombstone carries the inscription; “*Exspectant donec veniat immutatio eorum* (Job.14/14). I await until my relief comes”

It is worth noticing that Fr. Marie Bournisien’s diary has this entry concerning Fr. Vincent de Paul, Assumptionist:

A year before his death, Fr. Vincent de Paul went to pray at the Assumptionist graves at Passy and then at the vault of the Nuns of the Assumption at Auteuil, to pray for Fr. Edmund O’Donnell.

The visit took place on November 1st, 1911—All Saints’ Day.

So we have come to the end of these notes on the life and apostolate of a saintly and scholarly Religious. He was the first priest of our Assumptionist family to die after our foundation in 1845.

Let us, as we conclude, recall Fr. d’Alzon’s words on February 3 1869:

Ah, how I wish that God would send us many vocations to take his place. Pray for that intention, so important.

Today, let this intention be paramount in our thoughts and prayers.