

Chapter Twelve.

The new Augustine.

(1862 - 1868)

In June 1862 Hermann Cohen went to Rome to attend the canonisation of the Japanese martyrs arranged for the Feast of Pentecost. There was a large gathering of Bishops from all over the world present for this event.

Hermann preached in the church of St. Louis of France. He said:

"Yes I too have come to Rome to see Jesus Christ, to see him in the face of his vicar on earth...I too have come to hear the words of Christ through the lips of Peter and bend my knee to be blest by Jesus Christ, made visible in the person of his much-loved pontiff". (Pius IX)

Hermann had been to Rome several times since his conversion, sometimes seeing the Pope with a group, at other times being received in private audience.

Present in Rome was the Archbishop of Westminster, who was the first member of the restored Catholic hierarchy to be nominated by the Pope since the reformation. His name was Cardinal Wiseman. Franz Liszt had also come to Rome for this occasion. Hermann's stay was marked by the presence of these two men, though in vastly different ways. The former 'Puzzi' had been reconciled to his master in 1851, the year he was ordained priest. Liszt had been touched by a letter from Hermann at the time and replied:

"When I come to France, I shall try to show the deep appreciation I always have for you by going to visit you in your monastery at Carmel."

However Liszt had never managed to get in the visit. Two years later when Hermann was about to preach in Germany he consulted Liszt about a visit to Weimar where Liszt was residing and he replied:

"You ask me if the people of Weimar would object to you wearing the habit?"

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No, certainly not, dear Father. So come in the habit so as to be convinced of this yourself...As these flats here are very numerous, and I have rooms for my friends, I am hoping you will honour me by staying here. There will be no one to disturb you when you come to stay in Germany."

As it happened Hermann was unable to visit Weimar, so the meeting in Rome was a real reunion. Liszt himself had returned to the church and would also have found a greatly transformed Hermann.

Soon after they met up in Rome he also visited Hermann at the priory in Vittoria and attended Hermann's mass, receiving holy communion from his hands. He stayed for a community meal and the two proceeded to give an impromptu concert on the priory piano which was probably not a Pleyel!

On June 7th. Hermann wrote to his sister:

"I met Liszt here and I see him often and he comes to see me. This morning I took Bishop de la Bouillierie, Louis Veillot and Marie-Bernard to see him. Liszt very kindly played us several pieces as Veillot loves music."

Liszt himself wrote to his daughter:

"Entering religion has enhanced his mind as well as his heart and behaviour. He follows the Carmelite rule faithfully, which is, as you know, one of the strictest among religious orders.... Hermann preached once at St. Louis of France and his sermon made a deep impression...."

Louis Veuillot reports on the solemn stations of the cross in the colosseum in which Hermann and Liszt took part.

"Fr. Hermann was there, barefoot and clothed in his Carmelite mantle, and Liszt his master was beside him, Liszt who was now searching though Hermann was searching no more.."

At the request of Cardinal Wiseman which was opposed by Fr. Eliseus, the General of the order, Pope Pius IX decided to send Hermann to England to restore the Carmelite order there. The needs of the English mission were prominent in his thoughts. The Pope received Hermann in private

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audience and said to him: "I bless you my son, and I am sending you to England, as in the 7th. century one of my predecessors blessed and sent the monk Augustine, the first apostle of that country."

And Liszt tells us: "Cardinal Wiseman invited him to go immediately to England to undertake the foundation of a Carmelite house in that country. The order has glorious ancestors there, - Saint Simon Stock, to whom Our Lady gave the scapular and who lived in the 13th. century".

So Hermann was uprooted again and had to cut his links with friends and leave everything for a new life. When he returned from Rome he passed through Bagneres-de-Bigorre which he had founded and there he preached a sermon on renunciation which must have been very pertinent.

Hermann left Paris on August 5th. 1862. He left in the spirit of the missionary with no financial resources. His friends in Paris supplied him with the price of a ticket, in all he had only 180 francs, and with this he set out to restore the order in England! He arrived the next day, the Feast of the Transfiguration, and he felt cut off and alone. One of the things which he found difficult was having to abandon his habit and dress in a black frock-coat and stiff white collar in which he felt imprisoned!

He commented in a letter to a bishop:

"Here I am at my post, charged with establishing a new Carmel. I beg your grace to recommend me to Our Lord and his holy mother. This project appears to me to be very difficult and takes from me all the support I felt in France."

Catholicism in England was undergoing a new awakening at this time. Cardinal Newman later recalled about his own youth that in the England of that time, there was not even a catholic community, but only a few individuals of the old religion, passing away, silently and sadly like a memory of what once had once been. When Hermann arrived of course things had changed but it was still very difficult and prejudice and social discrimination were still rife.

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Hermann was given temporary accommodation in the convent of the Assumption sisters in Kensington Square. In his first hours there he must have recalled his visit twenty five years earlier in the company of the singer Mario, when he enjoyed great success with the London public as a concert pianist. How things had changed! But Hermann Cohen the artist was still remembered and many people wished to see him and he was offered invitations to preach. So once more Hermann was launched into a busy apostolate. He was joined by more Carmelites from France, among them Fr. Joseph-Louis who was appointed Novice Master. The sisters gave them the use of a small house which belonged to them. The sitting room could accommodate about forty people and this was used as a chapel. So on October 16th. the feast of St. Teresa of Avila the Carmelite Order was restored in London. The solemn opening took place in the presence of Cardinal Wiseman as well as two future cardinals - Manning and Howard. Fr. Frederick Faber, the famous spiritual writer and founder of the Brompton Oratory also attended. Fr. Hermann sang the High Mass in the little chapel of the house together with his new community. The Archbishop of Westminster welcomed the Carmelites with joy and he had great expectations of this order dedicated to Our Lady, Queen of Carmel, and which in the past had such an honoured place in Our Lady's dowry. In an earlier letter dated August 22nd. Hermann had written: "Mary Immaculate gave the holy scapular to St. Simon Stock in a place quite near to London, (Aylesford) Since that time she has taken possession of England in a very real way." (1)

Hermann placed the new foundation under the protection of St. Simon Stock so making him the patron of the present English region of Teresian Carmelites. Hermann was certainly very busy. As he was the only one in the community who could speak English he had to do everything himself, even buy the daily provisions. Even so his English was not fluent and it took a long time to prepare his sermons. Soon also Hermann discovered a large ex-patriate German community in Brighton and Hermann went to visit them. He addressed them quite a lot and at the end of Lent 1863 many of them became Catholics. Hermann later spoke of Brighton as 'his little diocese'.

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It soon became a priority to obtain a bigger house suited to community life. They discovered a suitable house and garden on the market off Church St. Kensington. It belonged to a Mr. Bird who was not favourably disposed to the Catholic church. Hermann entrusted the matter to St. Joseph and went to see this gentleman and succeeded in renting the house. But Mr. Bird balked at the idea of selling his house to the Carmelites. Again on the feast of St. Teresa they took possession of this 'rented priory'.

Their presence there met with opposition from the residents and passers-by, but gradually things improved and as they became better known they began to be appreciated. On March 8th. 1863 a novice was received in the little chapel. This was a significant step forward and a good augur for the future. Hermann was kept busy in

his new situation. In a letter he mentions that he preached in English but also sometimes in French - and in German to the group in Brighton. He also heard confessions in all three languages. He preached incessantly in the little chapel and many people began to frequent the place and there were several converts to the faith. In addition to this work, Cardinal Wiseman also gave him the task of spiritual director to his clergy and engaged him for their retreats. Moreover the Cardinal, aware of Hermann's eucharistic devotion, put him in charge of Eucharistic work in London. Hermann remarked, 'anything to do with the Blessed Sacrament is dear to me. The Cardinal knows my preference very well.'

Hermann began to involve himself with preparing children for their First Communion. At that time there was very little outward solemnity attached to this ceremony because of circumstances. Hermann instructed the children in their faith. He held a one day retreat for them and the Cardinal himself came to talk to them.

Hermann was ill at the end of summer in 1863, but by spring he was able to travel to Paris to preach a retreat to the Nocturnal Adoration group at the church of St. Thomas Aquinas.

When he returned to London Hermann launched the Nocturnal Adoration Movement there, which was his favoured apostolate. On August 6th.1863, the first anniversary of his arrival in London, the association or confraternity was established and Catholic men spent their first night adoration in the chapel of the Carmelites.Hermann insisted that the Carmelite community themselves lead by example.They would recite the long office of matins and lauds at midnight and then two friars would remain at the foot of the altar until 5.a.m.So this devotion became a stimulus to religious vocations.

The following year Hermann was invited to give a talk at the congress at Malines.It was a kind of general assembly, to which catholics from all over Europe came to discuss religious matters.Hermann's talk was in the style of the day using the polemics of his time.He referred to the situation in England in these words.:

"But in England, for the last three hundred years, the real presence of Jesus in the blessed sacrament has been a special object of outrage and blasphemy."(2)

The speech was published in a Belgian newspaper, 'Independence Belgique', which also made a personal attack on him calling him a "mediocre musician, always playing the same fugue and preaching the same sermon."

This report was also published in "The Times".Apparently Hermann's remarks did not endear him to his host country!However the attack had beneficial results for the Carmelites.The crusty old Mr. Bird had a fair and honest side to his character and when he read the report in "The Times" he summoned Hermann from across the street,'Well', he said,"I see they have some nice things to say about you here.Please sit down...I have sent for

you today to tell you that I am in much more of a hurry to sell this house to you than you are to buy it. This article has changed my attitude so much that I want to get down to business straight away and close the matter with you. You never know, maybe I might change my mind later!"

Needless to say Hermann was delighted; the contract was signed and the Carmelites became the owners of the house and large garden in Duke's Lane. Soon Hermann was writing to one of his friends;

"We must now build a church in the garden. Have a word in St. Joseph's ear. Why not? He has already built several." And St. Joseph did oblige as he had done in France - on July 16th. 1865, Cardinal Manning, successor of Cardinal Wiseman, laid the foundation stone of the new church. It was designed by the architect Edward Welby Pugin. Hermann felt that great progress had been made. "Now we can really say that the order has been established in England as there is a corner of the land which the Carmelites can call home."

The church was completed in only a year, July 16th. 1866. (3) In a letter dated June 29th. Fr. Joseph-Louis, writing to a friend, outlined the programme for the solemn opening. "We will begin with the solemn transfer of the precious relic of N.P. St. Simon Stock." Hermann had personally fetched the relic from Bordeaux for the occasion. The solemn opening duly took place with Cardinal Manning presiding. Bishop Grant of Southwark sang the High Mass and the sermon was preached by Fr. Peter Gallwey, the Irish-born Jesuit.

Hermann told his sister:

"Our celebrations to mark the inauguration were splendid, consoling and well attended. We have a beautiful church and an excellent organ by Cavaille, and many debts! However those are St. Joseph's affair."

Hermann meanwhile was in great demand as a preacher, travelling to Ireland, Scotland, France and Prussia. About his visit to Ireland he wrote:

"I received your letter in the south of Ireland in Waterford, where I found to my great joy, a people fired by a great Catholic spirit, so alive that I

could have believed I was living among the early Christians. Yesterday I had nine thousand listeners. I have never seen such great faith." He also visited Dublin where he preached in St. Teresa's Carmelite Church, Clarendon Street.

Soon the Carmelites received permission to exercise their ministry in public. Hermann was summoned to Newgate prison to give spiritual assistance to eight Catholic sailors, one of whom was Spanish and the others Philippinos. They had been convicted of piracy and murder. Five of these were sentenced to death. One of the community visited them for a time and all but one were reconciled to God. Hermann and two colleagues went to the Old Bailey on the morning of the execution and he found the conversion of these men the most moving experience since his ordination. The Sheriff, seeing that the men were docile, granted Hermann three requests, namely that the men might wear badges of their religion, that the priests accompany them to the place of execution (previously refused) and that they be allowed say goodbye to one another. Hermann was amazed that the crowd showed no anti-catholic feeling. "The Times", in an evening edition thought it worthwhile reporting the fact that three Roman Catholic priests, tonsured and wearing stoles round their necks, mounted the scaffold and attended the condemned men.

The Carmelite Priory preserves a manuscript account written in French but unsigned concerning the establishment of the Carmelite foundation in the archdiocese of Westminster. The writer was a member of the first community and had previously been a secular priest.

This account would be incomplete without mentioning Hermann Cohen's part in bringing the Carmelite sisters to London also. Hermann first suggested this project to Cardinal Wiseman who agreed with the venture but died before it could be put into effect. Cardinal Manning went ahead with the project with some modification (he insisted that the sisters be under his jurisdiction).

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Hermann sought the cooperation of the Carmel of Lyon where he was well known and it was agreed that Mother Teresa (Aragones d'Orcet) with four other sisters would set up a Carmelite community. They set out from Lyon on December 18th. and arrived in London on December 23rd and were given accommodation in a convent near the Carmelite Priory. In February they moved to St. John's Wood and one of the lay brothers at the Priory who was a skilled carpenter, provided them with furniture! Next they moved to a house in Lillie Road, Fulham and Fr. Hermann arranged for them to have the services of Notary who was a convert to the Church. He would not accept any remuneration for his work. The final move made by the sisters on July 22nd took them to their present monastery in Bridge Lane, Golders Green.

It is worth noting also that Hermann Cohen promoted and encouraged the Carmelite Third Order, now known as the Secular Order, while he was in London. He refers to Third Order members in some of his letters. In fact most of the extant letters were addressed to Cornelia Freeman who was a member of the Carmelite Third Order.

When Hermann's term as Prior at Kensington expired, he set off for France in October 1865 to preach an octave for the feast of St. Teresa in the Carmel at Rennes. From there he went to St. Pern to the novitiate of the Little Sisters of the Poor where the foundress, Jeanne Jugan resided. By advent he had gone to Berlin where he was well-known, and there he preached both in German and French.

There was a Jubilee taking place in Berlin, the capital of Prussia at the time, and at the end Hermann distributed Holy Communion to seven thousand people - a remarkable number indeed.

From there he came back to Dijon and then to Lyon.

This was his last visit to this Carmel which he had founded and significantly Hermann raised funds for the poor which was always one of his major concerns.

Between the years 1866 and 1868, Hermann travelled throughout Europe and especially France. His last visit to London was in the year 1867. By Lent 1868 we find him back in Berlin and it was here he received the news that he could now return to the desert house at Tarasteix which pleased him greatly.

(1) In fact a more authentic tradition would place this vision at the old Carmelite priory in Cambridge.

(2) The library of the Carmelite Priory in Kensington possesses an English translation of this speech which was delivered in French at Malines on September 3rd. 1864. It runs to 40 pages and is interesting as the only longer document from Hermann that we possess.

(3) This church was destroyed during the war, February 1944, and a new one designed by Sir Giles Scott was built to replace it.

Brother Alfred Lapham, was a member of the Kensington community who died in 1986 at an advanced age. He wrote an account of Hermann Cohen which began: "It was in 1916 when I was sent to join the Carmelite Community in Kensington, and there I met Brother Louis Joseph; he died after great suffering in 1928 at the great age of 85. He entered the Order at Montilimart, France and was transferred to London in November 1863, during the Priorship of Father Hermann Cohen. Hence Brother Louis was able to tell me much of that great Friar, of whom I intend to write".

Note. A chasuble personally embroidered by the exiled Queen Amelie to whom Hermann acted as confessor was presented by her to the church, together with a book of the gospels. Both are now lost.

A piano presented to Hermann by the famous piano makers Erard is still preserved at the Priory.

Additional Note. The Carmelite Order had a well known Pre-Reformation church in London which was located in Whitefriars St. The crypt of this church has been preserved in the new building development on this site. The 'Daily Mail' Offices in Fleet St. are known as 'Carmelite House.'

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