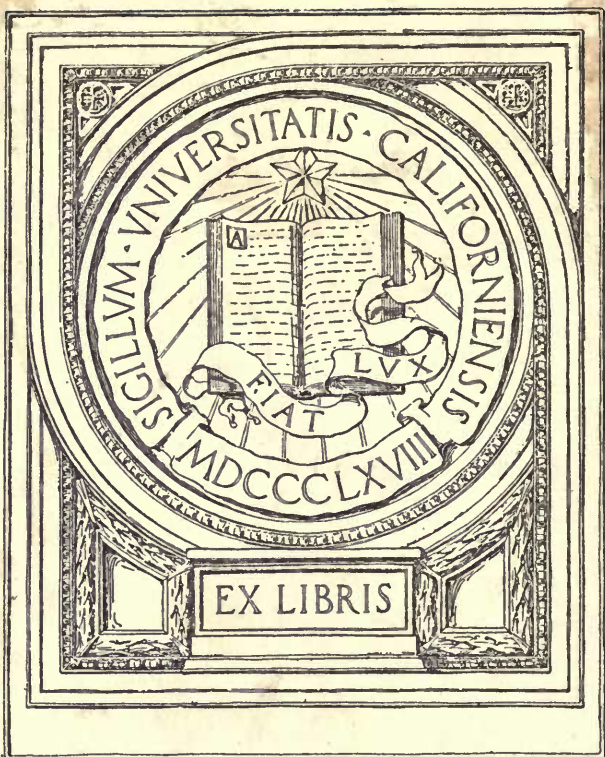


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ANTHONY RAVALLI, S. J.,

FORTY YEARS A MISSIONARY IN THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS.

MEMOIR

—BY—

L. B. PALLADINO, S. J.

SOLD FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE
INDIAN SCHOOLS IN MONTANA.

HELENA:

GEO. E. BOOS & CO., PRINTERS,
1884.

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Forty Years a Missionary in the Rocky Mountains,

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By ^{Lawrence} ~~L. B.~~ ^{Benedict} ~~PALLADINO~~, S. J.
1837-1927.

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OBITUARY.

Died at St. Mary's Mission, Stevensville, Bitter Root Valley, Missoula County, Montana, on the 2d inst., feast of the Holy Angels, Father Anthony Ravalli, S. J., in his seventy-third year of age.

Deceased was an Italian. Born at Ferrara, May 16th, 1812, he entered, November 12, 1827, at the age of fifteen, the Society of Jesus. After his noviceship, he devoted himself, for several years, to the study of belle-lettres, philosophy, chemistry, mathematics, and the natural sciences. He then passed to impart to others the knowledge in which he had perfected himself, and taught for a time in Turin, Piedmont and in other parts of Italy. Later on he completed his course of Divinity and was raised to the Priesthood, and after a third year of noviceship, as customary in the Society of Jesus, took his last vows in Religion, April 21, 1844. With a longing for the Indian Missions from the beginning of his religious life, Father Ravalli whilst preparing for the sacred ministry, sought also to store himself with every useful knowledge that would render him more efficient in the double object of christianizing and civilizing the savage; and to the study of philosophical and theological books he added the study of medicine, under some of the ablest physicians of Rome; and making himself an apprentice also in the artist's studio and mechanic's shop, he could handle with considerable skill the chisel and brush of the artist as well as the tools and implements of almost every trade.

The pioneer of christianity and civilization in what is now the Territory of Montana, Father P. DeSmet, in his second trip to this country had permanently established, in 1841, a Jesuit mission amongst the Flathead Indians, in the Bitter Root Val-

ley, and the following year had returned to Europe to raise means and laborers to help him cultivate the large and promising field, now open in the very heart of the Rocky Mountains.

Father Ravalli was amongst the first who joined Father DeSmet's little band of apostolic heroes. Taking leave of his parents, whom he was never to see again, and bidding forever farewell to his native land in the summer of 1843, he repaired to Flushing, Holland, whence in the month of December, of the the same year, with Father DeSmet in the lead, he and F. F. Vorcruyse, Accotti, Nobili and Bro. Francis Huybrechts, sailed for their distant mission. Rounding Cape Horn they touched at Valparaiso and Callao, crossed the treacherous bar at the mouth of the Columbia, July 31, 1844, and on the next day landed at Fort Vancouver, whence, after a few day's rest, they ascended to St. Paul's prairie, on the Willamette. Welcomed and sheltered by two zealous priests, Blanchet, afterwards Archbishop of Oregon, and Demers, afterwards Bishop of Vancouver, whose little chapel, built on the spot already some time before, had given the name to the place; here they were left by Father DeSmet to pass the winter, whilst he continued on to visit the missions in the mountains. Here at St. Paul's Prairie, Oregon, began Father Ravalli's missionary life, and from this time he was wont to date and number the years he had spent on the Indian missions.

Here in fact they were amongst the Chinooks and numerous other tribes of Indians who lived on the banks of the Columbia and the Willamette, and whom the Fathers, on their arrival, found dying of an epidemic distemper in great numbers every day. Here in the woods, soon after, Father DeSmet built a large dwelling that was intended to be, as it were, the Mother House and the center of supplies for all the missions in the Rocky Mountains. The place, however, wisely or not, in after years was abandoned by the Fathers.

In the spring of 1845 Father Ravalli was sent amongst the Kalispels, where he learned the wonderful secret of living without the necessities of life, as good Father Hœcken had been doing all along from about a year before. The Fathers' bill of fare was principally roots and berries, and that year's crop having failed, they had little of either.

Father Ravalli employed himself for several months in

teaching, through an interpreter, the Indians, baptizing their children and such adults as were sufficiently instructed, attending the sick, and assisting Father Hœcken in the construction of a chapel and a poor shelter.

In September he was ordered to Colville to build a chapel and open a mission amongst the Colville Indians, whence, however, scarcely a month after, he was recalled and sent to St. Mary's to replace Father Zerbinati, who had died there during the summer.

St. Mary's was the mission amongst the Flatheads that, as said before, had been established in 1841. It was located a short distance from where Stevensville now is, on the right bank of the St. Mary's, known now as the Bitter Root river, just between the present Mission buildings and old Fort Owen. It is here that the first attempt at agriculture was made in what is now the Territory of Montana, and here was raised, in 1842, by the Jesuit Fathers, from seed brought over from Colville by Father DeSmet, the first wheat and potato crop, to the great surprise and delight of the natives, who now saw for the first time the way and advantage of tilling the soil. BANCROFT LIBRARY

Though from this on there had been wheat at the Mission, there was no bread, except that which could be made by pounding the wheat on a stone or in a mortar. Father Ravalli's ingenuity and mechanical skill soon found the way out of the difficulty, and in a comparatively short time he had all built, rigged up and running by water a miniature mill, the first flouring mill in the country. Bread was here now a tangible reality as well as an associated idea with wheat and wheat raising for the Indians and the Fathers too.

Father Ravalli built here also the first saw mill; four wagon tires welded together furnishing the crank, and a fifth one, with plenty of filing and hammering, the saw.

He remained here at St. Mary's a companion to Father Mengarini, from the fall of 1845 to the fall of 1850.

The Fathers' manner of living, in the main, was like the Indians, their ordinary fare being roots, berries, dry buffalo meat with its tallow, and game, when they could get it. As to fish, the river flowing by, a fine, beautiful stream, whose waters are clear as crystal, and were then alive with mountain trout, supplied them in abundance. They had enough to eat, but iso-

lation and continual dangers on every side rendered their life far from pleasant. Their mail was brought to them once a year, or rather, they had to go for it themselves as far as Fort Vancouver, when once a year, with an escort of Indians and a few pack animals they would go for their mass wine and what little other provisions they were in absolute need of. And these they were not even then sure to get. For three years Father Ravalli received not one single letter, and twice in five years the Indians carrying the goods were attacked by hostile bands, wounded and robbed of all they had.

Nor was it safer at the mission than on the road. Both the Bannacks and the Blackfeet, then two powerful nations, were mortal enemies of the Flatheads, whose country they would raid time and again, band after band running off ponies and murdering some of the Flathead nation almost every other day. It was not safe for the Fathers to venture even a short distance from the stockade they had built for self-protection. The valley was then covered with thick, high underbrush, and there the Blackfoot or Bannock robber would lurk, hide and lay in ambush for days biding his chance to come out, steal and murder and then run off, if he could, with the scalp or ponies of some Flathead. The Fathers from the stockade, late every night, would fire off a couple of shots in the air, as a make-believe to the robbers prowling about, that within there was somebody on watch and always on the alert to give the alarm.

It happened by this time that a Blackfoot thus hiding in the brush was captured by the Flatheads. They took him to their camp and after a short consultation amongst themselves, shot him. There was at the same time in the camp another Blackfoot who had received the hospitality of the Flathead nation. Afraid now himself of his own life, he at once started off on a run to get away, and by this falling into suspicion with the Flatheads, was shot at and wounded, and three days after died, instructed and baptized by Father Ravalli.

The killing of these two Indians, particularly of the latter, who was a favorite with his tribe, was soon to be avenged by the Blackfoot nation, who, mixing up in the affair also the Fathers, resolved to come in force and kill as many Flatheads as they could and also the Black Robes that were amongst them. It was in September, and the Flatheads had started off on their

annual buffalo hunt, leaving behind only one old man, two boys who were staying with the Fathers, some old women and a few children, all helpless and defenceless. These, every evening would move in with their lodges and pass the night within the stockade for protection. Father Mengarini had gone to the Cœur d'Alene Mission to consult with the General Superior, and at St. Mary's there was only Father Ravalli left with Bro. Claessens, who is still living and is now stationed at St. Peter's Mission.

Early in the morning, September 12th, a Blackfoot yell from outside the stockade rent the air around as well as the ears of those who were within, and Father Ravalli, the Brother and the rest now expected every moment to be attacked, killed and scalped every one. But the Blackfeet not knowing how many there might be inside, did not dare to come to an attack. One of the two boys mentioned above and who was helping the Fathers in the kitchen, ventured out of the enclosure and fell dead as soon as he was spied. He was the only one killed, and soon after the Blackfeet left without doing further damage than driving off all the horses that were on the place.

To-day, we here mention it in passing, and as a contrast, Blackfeet and Flatheads send their children together to the Father's school at St. Ignatius Mission.

Amongst all these dangers the Fathers kept on cheerfully in their good work of improving spiritually and temporally the condition of the Indian children, whose good will, docility and affection were to the Fathers a sufficient compensation, and all they expected here below, for all their toils and hardships. But even in this the Fathers were sorely tried.

A band of woolfers and trappers, whose only religion was whiskey and women, when winter was about to set in, would flock to the mission from the woods, and under the pretext that they had come to attend to their religious duties, expected and claimed to be supported at the hands of the Fathers. On not receiving all they wanted or craved for, they went to work to poison the minds of the Indians and set them up and turn them against the Fathers. They knew the language, being married to Indian women and went around speaking against the Missionaries, inventing vile, nasty stories and circulating them amongst the Indians. The mischief was soon done and the

Flatheads, who had been thus far, so willing, so docile and so affectionate towards the Fathers, became careless, indifferent, insolent and pretentious to a degree, that from this on, all the exertions of the missionaries in behalf of these Indians availed little or nothing.

Consequently with this and what was said above, all the particulars of which are from notes in Father Ravalli's own hand in our possession, in the fall of 1850 St. Mary's was temporarily abandoned and Father Ravalli was then transferred to the Cœur d'Alene Mission, of which shortly after he became Superior. Here he planned and built the large and bold chapel that, like a spell of fairyland in the midst of dense, interminable forests, has filled many a gold seeker with surprise and unwonted emotion.

In 1857 he was sent to take charge of the Colville Mission. Whilst here, news was brought him one day that an Indian woman had quarreled with her husband and driven to despair by jealousy, had just hanged herself by the neck with a lariat to a tree. Father Ravalli hastened to the spot, cut asunder the lariat and quickly released the woman's neck. But, to all appearance, life seemed utterly extinct, and pulsation at the wrists as well as all beating of the heart had ceased. The neck, however, had not been broken and her body was still warm. Father Ravalli stretched, what every one thought she was, the dead woman on the ground, and commenced now to breathe into her mouth, now to move her arms, so as to impart to the lungs artificially, the movement of natural respiration, and thus quicken into action the spark of life, that was still there, perhaps, and was only dormant and latent. He thus kept working for about three-quarters of an hour, and was about giving up all hopes of success, when all at once a slight change of color was noticed on the lips and face of the woman. Encouraged by this sign, he kept on and soon clearer indications of returning life appeared. Shortly, the woman commenced to breathe, first very faintly and at long intervals, then more freely and more regularly. A little while after she opened her eyes, and about three hours later, from a seeming corpse, she was up and about and lived afterwards to an old age. This strange occurrence won to Father Ravalli, with all the Indians, the name of the greatest medicine man that ever lived.

In the fall of 1860, the Mission was temporarily

closed, and Father Ravalli was then assigned to Santa Clara, California, where for a time he filled the important office of Master of Novices.

But the land of fruit and flowers had no charms for Father Ravalli, and returning in 1863 to what was now Montana Territory, he was first stationed at St. Ignatius Mission, whence in August, 1864, he passed to St. Peter's Mission amongst the Blackfeet Indians. Here he was when the memorable stampede to the Sun River country imaginary gold diggings occurred. It was during a bitter, intensely cold winter and many brave but unfortunate fellow had ears, nose, hands or feet frozen. Father Ravalli threw the Mission's buildings open to all, and with his kind attention and medical skill rendered services that were never forgotten. In the spring of 1866 Father Ravalli moved across the range to the West Side and was stationed for a time at Hell Gate near Missoula, amongst the Whites. This was, what may be called the gold diggings period of Montana, and Father Ravalli had now begun to do for the white man, what he had done all along and never ceased to do for the Indian. He went around from one place to another, attending the sick and ministering to the spiritual wants of both the sick and the healthy. This double work of mercy, now begun at Hell Gate, and continued in all along in after years, till he was able to move about, won to Father Ravalli the esteem and love of every miner, viz.: of all the whites in the country, for all then in Montana were, or had been, miners.

It was whilst on his way home from one of these errands of mercy that he fell sick himself at Mr. T. Foley's ranch, a few miles from Missoula, where he was cared for by Mr. and Mrs. Foley with all the devoted tenderness of a father and a mother. He suffered intensely for over two months and at one time it was believed he would succumb. He rallied, however, but his robust constitution had been so severely strained, that it never afterwards fully recovered from the shock.

In the fall of 1866 St. Mary's Mission was re-opened and one year after Father Ravalli, leaving Hell Gate, had his home again where he had lived in 1845, at dear old St. Mary's, as he would always call it. Here, we may say, he had opened his missionary life and hither he had now come to close it.

His last illness was a long and trying one, and he lay four

years a helpless and patient victim to intense, unmitigated suffering. But the Angels had now come, at last, to take Father Ravalli to his rest on their feast day, and he peacefully passed away on the 2d inst. in his seventy-third year of age, fifty-seven years a Jesuit and forty years a missionary in the Rocky Mountains.

We feel incompetent to eulogize to one whose own life eulogizes him thus beyond all eulogy.

His funeral was attended by all the Flatheads in the camp and a large number of sorrowing friends, who had come from all along the Bitter Root Valley, Missoula, Hell Gate and Frenchtown. The U. S. flag of Stevensville was kept at half-mast for several days, and when he was buried public places were closed and business suspended the principal part of the day. Several elaborately and beautifully made crosses of green flowers and a handsome crown, the work of genteel and pious hands, lay on the coffin beside the sacerdotal insignia; and never, in our mind, were flowers, crosses, and crown more appropriate offerings or more expressive emblems than at the death of one, whose eternally verdant crown of bliss, as it is hoped, had now been won through more than half a century of life of thorns, crosses and hardships that no pen can ever tell.

The funeral service was performed by Father J. Menetrey, S. J., now himself the oldest missionary in Montana. He was assisted by Father F. J. D'Aste, S. J., L. B. Palladino, S. J., and Father L. G. Tremblay of Frenchtown, who eulogizing to the deceased, made the very pertinent remark that a life, like Father Ravalli's must prove an inexplicable puzzle to the materialist and unbeliever of the day. For, if there was no God and no hereafter, then Father Ravalli, by such life as his, had only proved himself one of the greatest fools that ever lived.

Father Ravalli's predominant passion of all his life had been to do good to the soul and to the body of all, irrespective of age, race, creed or condition, with only a preference for such as were poorest or suffered most. He was never more happy than when as a priest he had brought a sinner to make his peace with God; or, as a physician, eased, at the cost of his own ease and comfort, the ills and pains of some poor sufferer.

In his ways, manners and life he was as simple as a child. Intensely affectionate, he was no less demonstrative than sincere and constant in his affection. To a pious lady of distinction,

who had asked him whether, during the many years he had lived in the Rocky Mountains, he had not felt some desire to see once more his native country and father and mother. "Yes," he replied, "and I could have had that pleasure." But then," continued he, "the sacrifice would not have been complete," and lowering his head over his breast broke out into tears and sobs like a child.

Naturally of a happy disposition, his conversation was always bright, cheerful and pleasant, and many a witty saying of his, many an amusing joke and pleasant story have become stock-in-trade throughout the country.

Father Ravalli was tall and portly, and his well built frame and bold, regular features all seemed to combine to render his appearance pleasing as well as peculiarly impressive. In the opinion of all who knew him, Father Ravalli might have had some years yet of useful, active life, but the hardships of his missionary labors first undermined, then weakened and finally broke completely down his robust and strong constitution.

What was mortal of Father Ravalli lies at rest amongst the Flathead Indians, in the cemetery of Saint Mary's Mission.

R. I. P.

MISSOULA, October 10, 1884.

