

The Cause of Beatification of Jean-Marie de la Mennais

IN THE PREVIOUS ISSUE of our review, we concluded by saying that Jean-Marie de la Mennais was buried in the Community cemetery at Ploërmel, according to his own wish.

But later on things presented themselves in a different way, and we did not see any inconvenience in transferring the mortal remains in the big Chapel of the Mother-House, as the Brothers wanted. This was done on the 6th August 1900, during the preparatory steps of introducing his Cause of Beatification. The exhuming and inspection of the mortal remains were then requested. And that was made not all at once, as many think, but on two occasions. Let us look into this ...

Such a request had its importance through the centuries. Judging from what people think, two personages in the History of the Church (François Suárez, S.J., and Brother Louis de Granade, a Dominican) had their Cause frozen, for, on opening their coffins, they noticed they had changed their position. They may have been buried alive ...

The First Exhumation and Transfer of the Mortal Remains of Jean-Marie de la Mennais.

As we have already mentioned, the exhumation took place on the 6th August 1900. The writer and at the same time the Director of the Chronicle, Brother Alexis-Marie, does not hesitate to affirm that:

"The day of 6th August will certainly remain one of the most beautiful and the most touching that our Institute has ever celebrated to date."

And he consecrates a whole issue of the Review to this event. After more than a hundred years, should we not give this event again its value? The answer is left to our readers.

The ceremony takes place in three phases:

- The exhuming of the mortal remains of Jean-Marie de la Mennais and his transfer.
- The Mass and the activities that followed.
- The burial in the new tomb.

And that took place in three different places:

- In the Community cemetery where Jean-Marie de la Mennais had been buried on the 31st of



December 1860.

- In the big entrance Hall of the Community, where the casket must have been put for the medical examination of the mortal remains.

- In the Chapel of the Mother-House, where he had to be re-buried.

Preparation of the Ceremony:

The Mother-House transforms itself into a beehive where all the Brothers are as busy as bees working enthusiastically and energetically: sacristans, masons, carpenters, blacksmiths, members of the Scholasticate, the Novitiate, the Postulate, the Brothers and their students, without mentioning all other organisers and co-ordinators... In short, everybody.

In the Chapel, a monumental crown from which radiate long white banners with red borders going up to the Altar is poised. On each pillar hang banners of all colours, decorated with ermine, the symbol of Brittany. In the middle, the national flag with the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

In a well-calculated order, the inscriptions in big characters show the dates of the great events in his life, the most important monuments commissioned by Jean-Marie de la Mennais.

- Exhumation of the mortal remains.

In the cemetery.

The ceremony begins in the morning at 7 a.m.

To make the work easier and to avoid problems, they construct a kind of cornice above the tomb of Jean-Marie.

Present under the cornice are the workers and those who are responsible for the work: The Vicar General of the diocese, replacing the Bishop who had died recently, represents the Church, those who are going to do the work, and in the name of the Congregation, besides the Brothers of the General Council, there are two Brothers, chosen as official witnesses among the numerous persons who, forty years before, had attended the burial of Jean-Marie de la Mennais. These are Brothers Fidantien and Nicandre.

The canonical formalities over, they pull the coffin made of oak timber and covered with a lead coffin from the grave.

Transfer of the mortal remains.

"What a contrast between this lively and joyous ceremony and the sad and gloomy burial of 1860!" said the witnesses of the two events.

The cortege advances through the alley of oaks ... What had never been seen before: more than a thousand Brothers, Scholastics, Novices, Postulants; nearly 200 Priests ... and a big crowd of people from the whole region. While the coffin is on its way, carried shoulder high, the members of the General Council, the Visitors and the Director Principals, the missionary Brothers from Africa and America, the Brother-soldiers, the youths in the houses of formation, the Ploërmelais, the Father's relatives, and the descendants of his sister Marie ... follow. Hymns and Psalms are sung, people pray, listen in silence to the pieces of music played by the "Philharmonique de Saint Armel".

From the belfry built in the time of Father de la Mennais, the bells ring loudly.

We arrive in the enclosure of the Mother-House. The coffin is placed in the big, decorated entrance Hall.

Recognition of the mortal remains. Mass.

We submit ourselves to the prescribed canonical rubrics and regulations. "The Father's body is like a mummified one, still bedecked with priestly ornaments, and altogether recognisable." In short, that is the opinion of those who had known him. He is put into a new lead coffin covered with a casket made out of Norwegian oak, then placed on a stand where all the faithful can view it.

Then, in the big Chapel, full of the inhabitants of Ploërmel, we celebrate Mass with great solemnity. The funeral eulogy – the homily – is delivered by Canon de la Villerabel: a lengthy, wise and moving homily – a little bombastic, perhaps, according to the prevailing tastes.

Then, for three hours, the faithful in big numbers file past the coffin containing the relics. Only the head is visible. Many kiss him on the face. Others touch the body with medals, rosaries and images... which will become relics. All the ranks of the society file past. Many children attend the ceremony...

-Burial in the new tomb.

At 4 p.m., the congregation waits in the Chapel until the coffin is placed in the new tomb, prepared by his successor, Brother Cyprian. The enthusiasm is indescribable: more than a thousand voices sing the Magnificat.

Near the coffin of Jean-Marie de la Mennais, they put a reliquary containing the finger of Father Gabriel Deshayes, his friend and co-founder; the finger which he had used to sign his last wills. The tomb is covered with a granite slab from Belgium.



And the writer of the Chronicle at that time concludes thus: *"From heaven, our Brothers, who have died since the foundation of the Institute and for whose salvation Father de la Mennais had done so much, must have participated in this feasting."*

In the next issue, with shall keep on with the second exhumation, much simpler ... and we shall begin the story of the Cause itself.

*Brother Delfin Lopez, Postulator.
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