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PART THE FIRST

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# CARDINAL LAVIGERIE



## CHAPTER I

### LIFE IN FRANCE

CHARLES-MARTIAL ALLEMAND-LAVIGERIE was born at Bayonne on October 31, 1825. His father occupied a good position in the Customs, and his mother, Laure-Louise Latrilhe, was a daughter of the Director of the Royal Mint at Bayonne. Both parents were held in general esteem on account of their high moral character and strict religious principles.

From his earliest years the future Cardinal gave unmistakable signs of a vocation to the ecclesiastical state, those who were his companions still remembering how he loved to give everything a religious colouring and re-enact in his very games the ceremonies of the Church which he had witnessed. As he was the eldest son, his father had formed views of a different nature in regard to his future career; yet when he saw how decided was the boy's vocation, he had the good sense not to oppose it: Charles was therefore sent at an early age to a school in his native town, and subsequently to the Diocesan Seminary at Larresorre, where he remained until he was fifteen.

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[More information](#)

In regard to this period of his life we cannot do better than quote the words of the illustrious Cardinal himself, written on the occasion of the death of Monseigneur Lacroix, bishop of Bayonne :—

‘The death of this memorable prelate has deeply touched me, and this for two reasons. First, because he was, in my eyes, the chief member of the French Episcopate, being moreover the bishop of my native diocese ; and, secondly, because he played a part in the most decisive actions of my life.

‘I was about thirteen when I received from his hands the sacrament of confirmation. He had at that period been recently consecrated, and, looking back along the vista of years, I can in my mind’s eye still see him entering the cathedral, his brow already whitened by the snows of age. I can see the place where I sat, in the nave just opposite the pulpit ; I can hear his sermon ; nay, more, I believe that I could repeat it almost verbatim, were I to try to do so, for the sentiments with which his words inspired me thrilled to the very centre of my being, and have ever since remained deeply printed on my heart.

‘But my reminiscences do not end here. In the course of the following year, as I felt an ever-growing certainty in regard to my vocation, my father presented me to the Bishop. With equal fidelity can my memory recall every circumstance connected with that first interview. Apparently so unimportant, it was to hold an important place in deciding my destiny. I can see with the utmost distinctness the reception-room of the episcopal palace, its ample proportions, magnified by my childish imagination, its furniture covered with gold-coloured velvet, the very sofa upon which the good bishop was seated. My heart beat loudly as I found myself for

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[More information](#)

*LIFE IN FRANCE*

3

the first time in close proximity to a violet cassock. But the genial kindness of the bishop's manner soon set me at my ease.

“So you have a vocation to the priesthood, my child,” he said, as he drew me to his side and gently stroked my hair.

“Yes, Monseigneur,” I replied, emboldened by the encouraging tone of his voice, my resolution meanwhile getting the better of my self-distrust.

“And what is your reason for wishing to be a priest?” he asked in the next place.

“In order that I may have a country parish!” I exclaimed.

‘My father stared at me, astonished to hear of these rural predilections, the secret of which had never been confided to him. The bishop smiled and said: “You shall first of all go to the Seminary at Larresorre, and then you shall be whatever God pleases.”

‘He saw more clearly than I could do what was to be my lot in life. I went to the Seminary, it is true; but whither have not my wandering footsteps led me since then? The country presbytery has never been anything more than the dream of my childhood, and sometimes, it must be confessed, one of the regrets of my later years, amid the varied turmoil and agitation which has fallen to my share. But God has led me hither and thither at His own good pleasure, according to the prophetic words of Monseigneur Lacroix, and thus it has come to pass that I am writing these lines amid the ruins of Carthage, and not in some quiet corner of my native province.

‘Strange as it may sound, it is none the less true that the bishop, who, when he thus addressed me, more than forty years ago, seemed to me quite an old man,

B 2

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[More information](#)

has grown younger in my eyes, in proportion as I have myself advanced in life, and have found my head prematurely blanched by the scorching rays of an Eastern sun. Indeed the day came at last when I found myself quite as old as he.

‘I told him this on the occasion of my last visit to France, several years ago. I chanced to fall in with him as he was walking on the beach one summer evening, accompanied by his faithful Vicar-General, M. Franchistegny, and his devoted servant Ernest, his old-fashioned carriage following slowly at a short distance. If the bishop had confirmed me, it was M. Franchistegny who had prepared me for my first communion, and, finding myself thus unexpectedly thrown into their company, it was only natural that a flood of bygone memories should rush in upon me. I uttered my thoughts aloud, and my two companions seemed equally interested with myself in thus recalling the past. “You must own,” I said in conclusion, “that it is a very uncommon thing for an archbishop, who can boast a snow-white beard and has attained to my mature period of life, to find himself strolling along with the bishop who confirmed him on one side, and the priest who prepared him for his first communion on the other. The strangest part of the story is that I look the oldest of the three.”

‘Here Monseigneur Lacroix interrupted me. “Do you forget that I am over eighty, while you have scarcely passed your fiftieth birthday?”

“What you say is perfectly true,” I answered, with a smile, “but permit me to remind your lordship that there are various methods of computing the length of our existence in this world. One plan is to count the number of years we have lived, and another to reckon up the

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Excerpt

[More information](#)*LIFE IN FRANCE*

5

number of miles we have traversed. It is certain that incessant wanderings wear a man out as quickly as succeeding years can do. Therefore, if you are thirty years older than I am, I have assuredly traversed thousands of miles more than you have, so that after all we are much on a par.”’

In 1840 M. Lavigerie placed his son under the care of M. l'Abbé Dupanloup, afterwards Bishop of Orleans, who was at that time Superior of the Lesser Seminary of St. Nicholas in Paris. It was there that he made his classical studies, having for companions and fellow-students many who subsequently filled high offices in the Church. But here let us once more listen to his Eminence, as he gives, in a letter written nearly half a century later to M. l'Abbé Lagrange, the biographer of Mgr. Dupanloup, his first impressions of the Seminary and its much-respected Superior.

‘During the course of last year,’ he wrote in 1883, ‘I was on a visit to France, and it occurred to me that I should like to see my old Seminary once more. I never realised the wonderful genius of Mgr. Dupanloup as I did when I stood again within the walls of St. Nicholas. The gloomy old house, with its dusky corridors and its courtyard shut in by walls so high as to give it the look of a prison, joined to the shabby sordid air of the neighbourhood, is calculated to have a depressing influence. Yet, when I first beheld it, the dreary abode was inhabited by a bright, joyous, youthful band. Still the contrast struck me forcibly, coming, as I did, straight from the bright cloudless sky and clear mountain air of my southern home, where nature smiles its most bewitching smile. The leaden skies and damp fogs of Paris in October made my heart grow faint within me, until existence itself seemed barely

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possible under such conditions. But ere long there rose above the horizon another sun which warmed and cheered my soul, awaking it from its torpor, and flooding it with light. The beloved and honoured superior of the house transformed all things around us by the power of his intellect and the enthusiasm of his soul, transporting us all, masters and pupils alike, to those sublime mountain-tops which the clouds of earth can never obscure. His bearing, his carriage, his looks, his words, the deep and living faith betrayed by all his utterances, completely overcame us, and awoke a mingled feeling of awe, admiration, and respect, which no other individual has ever succeeded in calling out, at least in my own case. He used his influence as powerful natures alone know how to do, and carried us away with him, as it were, in a whirlwind of fire, desiring to take entire possession of us in order that he might offer us altogether to Jesus Christ according to the words of St. Paul, "For all are yours, and you are Christ's."<sup>1</sup>

In 1843 Charles Lavigerie exchanged the Seminary of St. Nicholas for that of St. Sulpice. He went first of all to the house at Issy where he made his philosophical studies, and then to that in Paris of which M. de Courson was Superior. Here his rare talents attracted the notice of Mgr. Affre, who had just founded a House of Studies where the monastery of the Carmelite Fathers formerly was, and which still retained the name of *Les Carmes*. He now proposed to Lavigerie that he should take up his abode there, in order to prepare himself for taking an academical degree. An offer like this, coming from such a quarter, virtually constituted a command which left a seminarist no

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 23.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)*LIFE IN FRANCE*

7

choice but to obey, and in October 1846, having just completed his first year of theology, the young Lavigerie removed to Les Carmes. Less than a twelvemonth later he took the degree of bachelor and licentiate of Arts, resuming almost immediately afterwards his theological studies, which had been temporarily suspended. He was ordained sub-deacon by Mgr. Affre in December 1846, deacon by Mgr. Sibour in December 1848, and priest by the same prelate on June 2, 1849, in virtue of a dispensation from the Holy See, as he had not attained the canonical age of twenty-four.

As soon as the time came for the re-opening of studies, he returned to Les Carmes at the express request of its superior, in order that he might go through the necessary preparation for his doctor's degree.

This he attained in as short a time and with the same marked distinction that had accompanied his previous efforts. Of the two essays he submitted to the examiners, the first was in French, entitled 'An Essay on the Christian School of Edessa,' and dedicated to Mgr. Sibour, the then Archbishop of Paris. The second was in Latin, and entitled 'De Hegesippo,' being dedicated to M. Victor le Clerc, President of the Faculty of Letters. Both essays met with the highest approval, and the youthful candidate received his doctor's degree without a single dissentient voice.

In the course of the following October, M. l'Abbé Lavigerie was appointed professor of Latin literature in the House of Studies mentioned above. The limited income of this establishment did not allow of its offering a sufficient stipend to its professors, and he was, therefore, appointed at the same time to be assistant chaplain to two convents situated in the immediate



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[More information](#)

vicinity. These positions he continued to hold for about three years, during which he graduated in theology. By the express desire of Mgr. Sibour, he competed, in December 1853, for a chaplaincy which had fallen vacant in the Chapter of Ste. Geneviève and came out first among the candidates.

He was, however, destined never to fill the office he had thus won for himself. The impression he made upon the examiners was so great, that in the course of the same week the Archbishop of Paris introduced him to the Minister of Public Instruction with a view to his nomination to the Chair of Ecclesiastical History at the Sorbonne. The appointment was at once conferred upon him, and he entered upon his new duties in the early part of 1854. The professorship lasted over a term of seven years, but after his third year M. Lavigerie was made honorary professor.

It is foreign to the purpose of the present work to enter into a minute and detailed analysis of his lectures. Several of the courses delivered by him have been printed, amongst others a 'Study on Luther,' and some 'Lessons on Jansenism.' These latter are more especially worthy of mention, as having roused into fresh activity the slumbering animosities of the past century, and brought down upon the head of the young professor a shower of attacks on the part of a journal which, though Catholic in name, was Jansenist at heart. Then, as ever, he showed himself to be a staunch champion of the rights of the Holy See, and a firm upholder of Catholic doctrine in all its integrity.

But though his professorial duties left him free to engage in many good works, he felt that his powers were cramped. The tranquil and somewhat monotonous life of a lecturer, while it called into play his literary

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talents and oratorical gifts, did not afford sufficient scope for the exercise of his energy and activity. He was a born missionary, and he needed a different and a wider field of usefulness. He pined for freer air, and used, as he said himself, to feel stifled and oppressed.

Ere long a new horizon opened out before him. A Society had been formed among the leading Catholics of Paris for the purpose of extending the religious and political influence of France in the East by founding Catholic schools there. M. Lavigerie shall himself tell us how he became connected with it:—

‘My confessor,’ he writes, ‘was at that time the well-known Father de Ravignan, whose name, as I inscribe it on these pages, awakens within me a feeling of affectionate respect. From the outset I had been strongly attracted to him by his eminent virtues, his force of character, and in a measure also by the sympathy engendered by the early recollections we had in common; for he was like myself a native of Bayonne, so that we had both spent our childhood under the shadow of the same ancient cathedral, living in different houses in the very same street.

‘Father de Ravignan was a consummate master in the art of guiding souls, and thoroughly understood my difficulties and aspirations, though he never spoke openly about the unsuitability of the life of study and professorial duties in which obedience to my ecclesiastical superiors had induced me to engage. He merely dropped vague hints from time to time in regard to his own settled conviction that a more congenial career was in store for me, doing this doubtless with a view to sustaining my courage until the right time should come.

‘One day he told me that Father Gagarin had called