



In Memoriam

LIVARIUS OLIGER, O.F.M.

1875-1951

THE DEATH OF Livarius Oliger, O.F.M., brings to a close a remarkable career of widespread and fruitful historical research. The Academy of American Franciscan History sorrowfully notes the passing of this illustrious Associate Member, who was an ardent scholar, a devout priest, an inspiring teacher and a true, humble friar of St. Francis.

His biographical details bear out inherent simplicity. Nicholas Oliger was born on February 17, 1875, at Schorbach in Alsace-Lorraine. By 1889 he had finished his elementary schooling and was ready for the intermediate studies preliminary to his entering the Franciscan Order. The anticlericalism of the day in France compelled the Franciscans to send their young aspirants to England. Thus he found himself launched on a scholastic itinerary that was to take him the length of Europe. Two years were spent in England, one at Saltash in Cornwall, and the other at Clevedon in Somerset. In the year 1891 with his companions he went back to Metz, where the local preparatory school of the Alsatian friars had again been opened. Reorganization in the Franciscan province had not accomplished the reopening of their novitiate and thus the candidate received the habit of St. Francis on September 25, 1892, at Harreveld in Holland. He was given the name of Livarius. A year later he made his profession of simple vows and was transferred to the friary at Dorsten in Westphalia, Germany. Here his intensive study of the humanities began, and more than likely the initiative was acquired for his historical research of later years. Undoubtedly, some impetus came from his professor, the renowned Fr. Bede Kleinschmidt, O.F.M., whose critical studies on medieval Franciscan art became fundamental in the field. Philosophical and theological studies were pursued at Metz from 1894 to 1901, culminating in his ordination to the priesthood on September 22, 1901. In this interim period, Livarius

Oliger had the good fortune of coming under the aegis of the scholarly Fr. Englebert Michels, to whom we can attribute the keen theological insight our later historian could bestow on the intricate and delicate problems of his investigations.

The vicissitudes of the Franciscan province in Lorraine account for these rather varied experiences and the young priest was sent to Fulda in Germany, where he remained from 1901 to 1903. Besides his priestly duties he was given charge of the library of the friary. It was an ideal environment for the mental caliber and temperament and the intuitive talent of Fr. Oliger. The Fulda library houses an imposing deposit of books, in every respect worthy and declarative of the great traditions of this monastery which had its origins in the ninth century. The archives held particular attraction for him and became the fountainhead of his first literary endeavors. This marks the close of a phase in the life of Fr. Oliger that can be appropriately designated as formative.

The scene of his scholastic efforts was to shift to Italy in 1903. It began with his appointment to the Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels at Assisi, a place so close to the life and history of St. Francis and his Order. His immediate duties consisted of the spiritual care of the French pilgrims visiting the celebrated shrine of the Portiuncula. Fortunately historical research on Franciscanism was at the time engaging the attention of many prominent scholars who because of this were intermittently in residence at Assisi. This gave occasion for the privilege of association and contact. Much of the historical work now authoritative, if not definitive, regarding the early origins of Franciscanism was then in progress. The friendships and acquaintances made by Fr. Oliger were so integrated into his own scholarship that his geniality and competence soon crystallized into a vast and versatile correspondence. Over the course of the years his friends came to include Paul Sabatier, Gustave Schnürer, Henry Boehmer, Herman Grauert, Henry Denifle, O.P., A. G. Little, A. Fortini, Johannes Jörgensen and many others equally sincere and appreciative of the able and sympathetic critical acumen exchanged. It is to be hoped that some of their correspondence is still among the private papers of Fr. Oliger because there indubitably exists precious detail that can not only serve biographical background but render enlightenment on methodology and pertinent data in paleographic and diplomatical research.

In 1905 Fr. Oliger was sent to the College of St. Anthony in Rome

to matriculate in the faculty of church history. His efforts were eventually crowned with the traditional academic degree of the Franciscan Order, "Lector Generalis Historiae Ecclesisticae." Here he came under the influence of Fr. Ulrich Hüntemann, O.F.M., a meticulous professor and thorough historian, whose monumental volume of the *Bullarium Franciscanum* is well-known. Upon graduation, Fr. Oligier was appointed to the chair of medieval and modern history in his Alma Mater. By way of complement to his academic honors, he attended the school of paleography and diplomatics at the Vatican and that of paleography at the University of Rome under the direction of the renowned Prof. Vincent Federici. In June, 1908, he received the pontifical degree *summa cum laude* and was given the title "Paleographus ac a Tabulariis." This period evidences some modest ventures on his part into the publishing of historical monographs, the literary form that was to be most representative of his work and in which he was to become a master. It also includes the beginning of his formidable part in the founding and planning of the distinguished historical review, *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum*.

Collaboration followed upon these first years of teaching; in 1911 Fr. Oligier became a member of the Historical Section at the International College of St. Bonaventure in Quaracchi, near Florence. Thus he came to be identified with the *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* from its first date of publication and remained with it until 1915.

World War I intervened, forcing Fr. Oligier to leave Italy and retire to Munich in Germany. Except for his period of brief military service, the change was not altogether unprofitable to him because his studies were broadened through the wealth of archivist material in the libraries of the Bavarian capital. The research accomplished was published in *Franziskanische Studien*.

After the war another five years were spent at Quaracchi, until he was called in 1923 to resume his former chair in ecclesiastical history. When the College of St. Anthony was raised in 1933 to a Pontifical Athenaeum, a new section was introduced into the faculty of history; Fr. Oligier became Professor of the History of the Franciscan Order and its Missions. From 1933 to 1937 he was Vice-Rector of the institute. In 1941 he was invited to be Professor in Methodology in the Faculty of "Utriusque Iuris" and of Hagiography at the Pontifical Lateran Athenaeum, where he likewise took the

academic degree of Doctor in Canon Law *summa cum laude*. One of the significant undertakings in the career of Fr. Olinger was the launching and promotion of the scientific review, the *Antonianum*, a philosophical, theological and historical periodical that has enjoyed a high reputation over this quarter-century. In 1931 he relinquished his editorial position in favor of collaboration on the continuation of the great opus of Franciscan history, the *Annales Minorum*.

Fr. Olinger was more a historian for historians, the scholar who makes himself available for the research worker. His work consequently evidences a universality and eclecticism that almost seems to lack any pattern we associate with specialization. The mass of his writing emphasizes this singularity and the versatility which is indicative of the extraordinary scholarship claimed for him. Primarily, he was an artist of the historical monograph, of which there are about one hundred and seventy. Reviews and documentary notes number some two hundred and sixty, while articles contributed to various scientific encyclopedias are in the neighborhood of one hundred and seventy, making a total of some six hundred literary pieces for his lifetime. All of them are sober, conservative, richly annotated and temperately critical; not a few of them are classics of their kind.

Another facet of his scholarship is the remarkable linguistic proficiency he manifests. His historical writings are distributed over the English, French, German and Italian languages, with some texts edited in Spanish and even in Catalonian dialect. The talent of Fr. Olinger in this respect was more than a reading or conversational knowledge of these tongues; his capabilities serve to accentuate the profundity of his scholarship.

INTEREST IN AMERICAN MISSION HISTORY

The bulk of his work concerns Franciscan origins and the complicated historical records of its many reforms. This highly concentrated field, however, led him into biography and documentary exposition of little-known medieval texts, most valuable keys for the interpretation of larger issues. Gradually these studies invited wider aspects of Franciscanism and his writings began to comprehend missionary endeavor. This is apparent even in 1920 with the publication of his first article in an American periodical, *The Catholic Historical Review* (vol. IV, 1920, pp. 59-65), entitled "The Earliest Record on the Franciscan Missions in America." Literature on the Americas began to absorb his attention in various book reviews made in the succeeding years. The horizon extends until, in 1928, we

find an article, "Conspectus brevis fontium Missionum Fratrum Minorum in Extremo Oriente, Saeculi XIII-XIV," in the *Acta Ordinis Minorum* (vol. XLVII, 1928, 224-231); this indicated an interest in Franciscans in the Far East. The following year, in *The Catholic Historical Review* (vol. VI, 1930, pp. 249-285), an article appeared, entitled "Franciscan Pioneers amongst the Tartars." Two letters of Fathers Ubaldo Pandolfi and Bernardino Gutiérrez, O.F.M., addressed to the historiographer Fr. Marcelino da Civezza, he deemed worthy of attention (cf. *Antonianum*, vol. XIV, 1939, pp. 219-228). The article testifies to the circumspection desirable in an historian even though his fields of activity are focused on other matters. From this point on, however, Fr. Oliger began to be seriously and methodically occupied with Franciscan history in the Americas. His students will certainly recall the fervor of his lectures and conferences upon this subject. They culminated in such studies as "Francisco Ximenez, O.P., Missionario e Storico del Guatemala 1666-1729/30" in the *Archivum Fratrum Predicatorum* (vol. XI, 1941, 209-238); a richly annotated edition of Sahagun's *Breve Compendio de los Ritos Idolatricos de Nueva España* (Rome, 1942); "De Vita et Scriptis Didaci Valades, O.F.M., Missionarii in Mexico et Generalis Procuratoris Ordinis (post 1579)," in the *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* (vol. XXXVI, 1943, pp. 32-53); "De Alphonso de Benavides Novi Mexici Missionario," *Antonianum* (vol. XXI, 1946, pp. 105-126). Reviews of pertinent historical bibliography kept apace.

This recognition of the importance of the field of American Franciscan history was for Fr. Oliger the fruit of his comparative studies and consequently his opinion is all the more valued. Few knew and understood Franciscanism as universally as Fr. Oliger. It is striking that his research should lead him to bestow the same emphasis on the missionary endeavors of the Franciscans in the Americas as on the early part of their history. His enthusiasm over the foundation of the Academy of American Franciscan History was genuine. Upon the publication of *THE AMERICAS* he expressed the opinion that the Franciscan Order had at last acknowledged its glorious traditions in a way commensurate with their dignity, scope and achievement in the western hemisphere. Because Fr. Livarius Oliger was totally a scholar of strictly European culture, his satisfaction with *THE AMERICAS* conveyed to the editors and their associates an honesty and sincerity which is both memorable and inspiring.

A remaining accomplishment of Fr. Oliger deserves mention, that of

a superlative encyclopedist. His contributions are numerous; they are included in such representative and indispensable reference works as *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York; *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques*, Paris; *Kirchliches Handlexikon*, Munich; *Enciclopedia Italiana*, Rome; *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, Freiburg i. Br.; and the *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, Paris.

The last work of Fr. Oligier, the *Expositio Quattuor Magistrorum super Regulam Fratrum Minorum (1241-1242)*, was published in Rome only a few months ago. A splendid study in textual criticism and editing, its methodological excellence may well be a model for any historian. In the appendix to this volume, Fr. Oligier made one of his most important scientific contributions; more than anything else it testifies to his exquisite spirituality, his diligent and patient inquiry, his idealism. It has hardly more than twenty pages, yet its quality bespeaks the forty years of research he says that he put into the task. The work is a critical edition of the text of the Franciscan Rule of 1223. It contains a magnificent apparatus demonstrating parallel texts, concordances with previous monastic rules, influences emanating from pontifical documents, patristic sources and traditional statutory ecclesiastical law. The marvelous originality of the Franciscan Rule is thereby discernible, but not without the evidence of its incorporation and conformity with preceding ecclesiastical tradition. The dominating inference, however, is the intimate penetration of its author into the spirit and motivation of the heart and mind of his beloved spiritual father, St. Francis.

There is a tenderness in the affectionate classicism bestowed on the memory of Fr. Oligier by his colleagues in the memorial card commemorating his death in Rome on January 29, 1951. The most concentrated expression is the truest—*Professori eximio desideratissimo*.

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