

FATHER FRANCIS PIERZ, MISSIONARY

The Reverend Francis Pierz, or Pirec, the Slovenian missionary to the Chippewa Indians, was born in the village of Godic in Carniola, Austria, on November 21, 1785. He received his early education in the elementary school of his native town and in the high school in Kamnik. After attending school at the last-named place for three years, he entered the gymnasium in Laibach, the capital of Carniola, devoting a large part of his time to the study of languages. It was during the years he spent here that he decided to become a priest, and in 1810, soon after his graduation from the gymnasium, he was admitted to the ecclesiastical seminary of Laibach. These years were exciting ones for the people of Carniola, for the country was invaded and occupied by Napoleon's forces. Though French occupation was of short duration, it aroused in Father Pierz the desire to study French, and he was thus unconsciously induced to acquire a tool for his future missionary work.

On March 13, 1813, Father Pierz was ordained by Bishop Kovacic of Laibach and assigned to parish work at Kranjska Gora. Seven years later he was made pastor of Pec, a village where the poor farmers, ignorant of the best methods of agriculture, were living in extreme poverty. Here he not only tended to the spiritual needs of his flock but also tried to help its members to better their temporal condition. Horticulture and agriculture had long been of interest to him, and now he was to turn his knowledge of these subjects to practical use. He published a work on gardening; kept a well-cultivated garden of vegetables, fruits, and flowers; and encouraged the people by his example to follow better methods in field work.¹

¹ A sketch of Pierz appears in P. Chrysostomus Verwyst, *Life and Labors of Rt. Rev. Frederic Baraga*, 379-393 (Milwaukee, 1900); and an article entitled "The Reverend Francis Pirec, Indian Missionary," by John Seliskar, is published in *Acta et Dicta*, 3: 66-90 (July, 1911).

From Pec he went to Podbrizje, where he worked for five years. In 1830 the Reverend Frederic Baraga, the missionary, visited him at this place and tried to induce him to leave his work in Europe, where there was no dearth of priests, and to return with him to America to labor among the Indians.² Father Pierz, however, did not respond favorably to the invitation of the missionary, for his heart was with his poor people at Podbrizje. He was, moreover, forty-five years of age and felt that it was too late to learn the difficult Indian language. Baraga, however, saw that Father Pierz had the qualities needed by a missionary — the ability to master languages, a knowledge of agriculture, love of open-air life, a strong constitution, patience with the slow and untutored, and a zeal for souls. It was this last characteristic of Father Pierz's on which Baraga worked to win him for the missionary field. The letters that the priest received from Baraga after the latter's return to America pictured so vividly the deplorable condition of the pagan Indian, the great work to be accomplished, and the small number of workers in the field that, after hesitating for five years, Father Pierz finally succumbed to his friend's entreaties to devote himself to the American Indian.

After leaving Carniola on June 16, 1835, Father Pierz went to Vienna and obtained funds for his transportation from the Leopoldine Society.³ From Vienna he traveled to Le Havre,

² Seliskar, in *Acta et Dicta*, 3:69. Baraga was an Illyrian priest who went to Arbre Croche, the present Harbor Springs, Michigan, in 1831. He worked at Grand River, La Pointe, Fond du Lac, and L'Anse. In 1836 his sister, Antonia de Hoeffern, joined him as a teacher at La Pointe. He later became bishop of Sault Ste. Marie.

³ This organization, which was known in Austria as the *Leopoldinen-Stiftung*, was founded in Vienna in 1829 for the purpose of supporting the struggling American missions. In 1831 it began the publication, under the title of *Berichte der Leopoldinen-Stiftung im Kaiserthume Oesterreich*, of annual reports on the condition of the missions in the various American dioceses. These consist mainly of the letters and official reports of the missionary priests and bishops in America to the officers of the society. A nearly complete set of the *Berichte* is owned by the Minnesota Historical Society; another file is in the library of St. John's University at Collegeville.

France, whence he sailed for America. In a letter to the Leopoldine Society, dated May 1, 1836, he reports:

I arrived on September 18 at Detroit, the chief city of Michigan Territory, where the Very Reverend Bishop gave me a fatherly welcome; and I soon received, along with a very extensive jurisdiction, the welcome order to journey across Lake Superior to Father Baraga, for the purpose of working . . . with my fellow countryman, that tireless missionary, for the conversion of the heathen in the farthest area of this diocese. On account of the lateness of the season and the approach of winter no ship was able to cross the lake, so I returned to Michigan Territory, to La Croix, a sub-mission of Arbre Croche, for the winter, where I have been happily engaged in pastoral duties for five months.⁴

The next spring Pierz expected to start for his original destination, Fond du Lac, but Bishop Frederic Résé, pleased with the success of the new worker, detained him at the post of La Croix. Nevertheless, his stay at this place was short, for in August of the next year the crops were destroyed by frost and the Indians scattered through the woods, thus breaking up the school established in 1836 and leaving Father Pierz without a congregation. He was then transferred to Sault Ste. Marie, where he found awaiting him four hundred Christian French, Indians, and half-breeds who had fallen into disorderly living and had been without the attention of a pastor for many months.⁵ His work here was hard and at times his discouragement was so great that if the winter had not set in he would have given up the mission. Compelled to remain, he worked to the best of his ability. In the midst of this work of revival of faith he found time in the spring and fall of 1837 to visit some pagans dwelling to the north of Lake Superior at St. Joseph and at Kitchimitigong. His first journey was a failure, as he himself relates, but the second was successful, probably because it was made on the invitation of the chief, who came

⁴ *Berichte*, 10: 43.

⁵ Franz Pierz, *Die Indianer in Nord-Amerika; ihre Lebensweise, Sitten, Gebräuche u.s.w.*, 63 (St. Louis, 1855).

to him in person and begged instruction for himself and his people.⁶

In June, 1838, he started out on a missionary trip to Michipicoten and Okwanikisinong to the north, where he had heard that many pagans lived. In a letter to the Leopoldine Society he described Michipicoten as a small village on a beautiful plateau near the mouth of a large river of the same name and on a bay of Lake Superior. The depot stationed here belonged to an English trading company whose agent treated the Indians well and never ruined them with liquor. This made it easier, according to the missionary, to plant the seed of Christianity. After instructing and baptizing twenty-five natives, he traveled to Okwanikisinong, a large pagan settlement forty-five miles farther north. Here a group of seventeen received Christianity and were baptized on the picturesque shore of the lake. Though he gained these converts, Father Pierz did not think it feasible to erect a church here, because the Indians at this place traveled about so much and because he had no funds. When his provisions gave out he was forced to return to Sault Ste. Marie. Such trips were a drain on his small pocketbook, for his sailor and guide cost him "twelve florins daily besides food of bacon, biscuits, and tea." He was not to remain long at the Sault, for he received a letter from Baraga telling him to visit Grand Portage and to open up a mission there during the summer, with a substation at Fort William.⁷

Upon reaching Grand Portage Pierz found the way somewhat paved for him by a half-breed woman, Mrs. Pierre Cotté, who had prepared many for baptism. A small log chapel had been constructed in anticipation of his coming and he found

⁶ *Berichte*, 12:76; Pierz's baptismal register, June 9, 1837, in the possession of the St. Paul Seminary, St. Paul. The Minnesota Historical Society has a photostatic copy of the register. St. Joseph is an island in Georgian Bay near the shore of Ontario.

⁷ *Berichte*, 12:80-85; Pierz's baptismal register, June 17, 21, 1838. Michipicoten was a trading station near the north shore of Lake Superior.

the natives so kindly disposed to Christianity that he stayed with them until March of the next year. During this period he also established missions at Fort William and Pic. Between the time of his arrival at Grand Portage and the end of the year, fifty-four natives were Christianized. One hundred and five is the number registered for the whole year.⁸ His school at Grand Portage was attended by fifty-eight Indians and seventeen French pupils, who were taught reading, writing, and agriculture. While on a visit to one of these villages in the fall of 1839 Pierz received orders from Bishop Peter Lefevre to leave this rich field and return to Arbre Croche to attend the Ottawa.⁹ This meant for Pierz not only a strenuous and dangerous trip of six hundred miles late in the season, but the sacrifice of the good already accomplished. He excused the bishop for this apparently harsh order by stating that his superior did not realize the hardships of the trip.¹⁰ This move of the bishop's was not made because of any lack of ability on the part of Father Pierz, but rather because the territory in which his missions were located would come under the jurisdiction of the proposed diocese of Milwaukee and Bishop Lefevre was simply withdrawing his men into his own field.

Father Pierz obediently set out in the cold stormy season on a trip of fifty-four days, arriving safely at Arbre Croche on December 3, 1839, after suffering many hardships.¹¹ This mission was to be his field of work for the next thirteen years. He was never to restrict his work to Arbre Croche mission, however, for it was not large enough to satisfy his energy. At every opportunity he was off to visit his former missions,

⁸ Pierz's baptismal register, July 29, 1838, to May 19, 1839; Pierz, *Indianer*, 70-73. For an account of the history and importance of Grand Portage see Solon J. Buck, "The Story of the Grand Portage," *ante*, 5: 14-27.

⁹ The Right Reverend Peter Lefevre was consecrated coadjutor of Detroit in 1841 and acted as administrator of the affairs of the diocese of Detroit from that time until 1843.

¹⁰ Pierz, *Indianer*, 76.

¹¹ Pierz, *Indianer*, 77-81.

particularly Grand Portage and Fort William. In the fall of 1842 he was again working at the outlying missions when his bishop sent word that he must leave these places and remain at his main station of Arbre Croche and, obedient to authority, he returned to that mission. From this place he took care of Sault Ste. Marie, Middleton, and La Croix; and in 1844 Cheboygan and Manistee were added to his list of missions.¹²

In a letter of 1843 Father Pierz thus describes his work at Arbre Croche and in the surrounding country:

In summer I spend my time mostly in traveling to distant sub-stations of this mission or in converting the heathen; in winter I teach school. All my spare time is spent in writing in the Indian language, for we have at present only two little books written in this tongue by Bishop Baraga. . . . At present I am trying to complete a larger catechism . . . and seventy sermons in the Indian tongue for Sundays and feast days. . . . I am wont to give some attention to gardening and to agriculture because I have not only to teach the Indians religion but also a practical economy, which will advance their temporal and eternal welfare. In order to civilize them I must myself often show them the use of the sickle, scythe, plow, and flail.¹³

Upon arriving at a village Pierz would first call on the chief. After the salutation and greeting were given the chief would be presented with tobacco and his squaw with needles, thread, or a handkerchief. After thus winning the good will of the "first family" of the village, the missionary would explain to the chief the purpose of his visit and, if the chief was willing, the braves were called for a conference or a smoker, as the priest called it. When this ceremony was over the missionary was asked by the chief to address the assembly and this "was done in a soft tone of voice, with short pauses and in simple terms." The missionary then left the natives to discuss the affair by themselves. If they resolved to listen to him he set a time for instruction to adults in the morning and evening and for the children in the forenoon and afternoon.

¹² *Berichte*, 17: 53; *Metropolitan Catholic Almanac*, 1844, p. 93.

¹³ *Berichte*, 17: 57.

After sufficient instruction had been given the class was baptized and the missionary went off to other fields. But before leaving his new converts, the missionary always appointed a reliable and exemplary man to lead services on Sunday and to conduct school during his absence. This system bore fruit, for by the year 1841 heathenism was wiped out at La Croix.¹⁴

Accepting Christianity was a great hardship to many Indian women and children, for polygamy was not permitted to Christians and many women consequently found themselves without homes. The missionary found it necessary to supply them with homes where they could be trained to help themselves. D. P. Bushnell, subagent at La Pointe, reported in 1839 that Father Pierz had established a school at Grand Portage, which was attended by fifty-eight Indian and seventeen French pupils, and that they were given courses in reading and writing. Middleton, La Croix, Arbre Croche, and Traverse Bay had schools under this missionary's care. In 1836 the La Croix school had an attendance of thirty-two pupils and Arbre Croche in 1845 had as many as two hundred. In general the subjects taught in these schools were plain sewing, knitting, spelling, reading, writing, and arithmetic.¹⁵

This work of civilizing and instructing was ineffective as long as the Indian continued to roam about, living on the hunt alone and changing his abode with the season. These Indian habits disrupted classes, and agriculture could not be followed up by people who continued to live a nomad life. Father Pierz tried to persuade the natives to build homes, hoping that this would keep them closer to him. But unless he could assure them enough food by means other than hunting, he realized that he would find it impossible to induce them to live in one place. He therefore taught the Indians to prepare the soil and to sow and reap crops. In the vicinity of Arbre Croche he

¹⁴ Pierz, *Indianer*, 91-93; *Berichte*, 15: 64.

¹⁵ Pierz, *Indianer*, 71; N. H. Winchell, *The Aborigines of Minnesota*, 640 (St. Paul, 1911); *Metropolitan Catholic Almanac*, 1844, p. 93; *Berichte*, 10: 44; United States Indian Office, *Reports*, 1849, p. 203.

procured two thousand acres of land from the government for agricultural purposes, and in six years he had most of the Indians there living in neat houses and getting their food from the products of the fields and the returns from the fish and maple sugar industries. By the year 1847 his converts had cleared seven inclosures, were selling half of their grain to the white settlers of the vicinity, and had shipped to other parts ten thousand measures of potatoes in one year. Those living at Arbre Croche alone in a single year sold four hundred barrels of fish and eight thousand pounds of sugar.¹⁶

In this work Pierz had to contend not only with the nature of the Indian but also with the opposition of the fur-trader. It was to the advantage of the latter to keep the Indian poor and uncivilized so that he might have no other resource than hunting. Thus he would continue to bring in furs for the market. Father Pierz declared that the traders did much to prejudice the natives against the Christian faith and that they "put all possible obstacles in the way of the missionary, aiming to retard as long as possible the agricultural training of the Indians in favor of their own sordid interests."¹⁷

Another obstacle to be overcome by the missionary was the liquor evil. To suppress this was one of his hardest problems, for he had to deal not only with the Indian and the trader but with the half-breed. The traders used liquor to facilitate their trade in pelts, but the half-breed liquor trafficker was more dangerous, for his concoction was of a fouler and more poisonous sort. Moreover, he would follow the individual Indian even to his trapping grounds, and there, after a good pile of pelts was gathered, would induce the hunter to drink. Thereupon the half-breed would abscond with the pelts. In a

¹⁶ *Berichte*, 22: 97; Indian Office, Reports, 1846, in 29 Congress, 2 session, *House Executive Documents*, no. 4, p. 262 (serial 497); 1847, in 30 Congress, 1 session, *House Executive Documents*, no. 8, p. 820 (serial 515).

¹⁷ *Berichte*, 15: 71.

letter written in February, 1854, to Bishop Cretin of St. Paul, Father Pierz complained that within three days after the government pay day all the provisions, blankets, and money given out by the government were in the hands of these whisky agents. Within a month there was much sickness and suffering from lack of food and from the cold, for the natives had missed the fishing and planting season and the fall hunting. The liquor business must have been profitable to those engaged in it, if the prices quoted by Father Pierz are accurate. He mentions the sale of one bottle of whisky for twenty dollars and two gallons of brew for forty dollars, and tells that at another time for fifty blankets an Indian was given two gallons of so-called liquor made up of tobacco juice, water, and some whisky.¹⁸

Father Pierz often acted as physician for the unfortunate Indians. He was a strong believer in homeopathy and treated many sick among the pagans as well as among the Christians, thus breaking down prejudice and bringing to him many who otherwise would not have come near him. During the small-pox epidemic of 1846, which struck several northwestern bands with destruction, the doctor of the Mackinac region was himself sick and unable to answer Father Pierz's call for help. The missionary sent for vaccine and administered it to nine hundred individuals, giving himself no rest or care, though he was then in his sixtieth year.¹⁹

All this was done without the assistance of an American missionary society and without the help of the United States government. Pierz did appeal to the government for a small pittance of a teacher's salary, but the request was not heeded. The Leopoldine Society of Vienna and the Ludwig Mission

¹⁸ Pierz, *Indianer*, 87; *Annalen der Verbreitung des Glaubens*, 22: 171. A file of this publication, which consists of the reports of missionaries sent out by the *Ludwig-Missionsverein*, a Bavarian organization similar to the *Leopoldinen-Stiftung*, is in the library of St. John's University.

¹⁹ *Berichte*, 21: 71; Indian Office, Reports, 1847, in 30 Congress, 1 session, *House Executive Documents*, no. 1, p. 910 (serial 515).

Society of Bavaria listened to his appeals and responded to the best of their ability, but the amount given to Pierz was small in comparison with the sums expended by the United States government and the Protestants through the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.²⁰

Pierz's missionary trips were the greatest drain on his meager resources, as he tells in a letter written in 1841.

The Indian missionary must enter upon his difficult and dangerous journey through forests, without road or path, over streams and lakes, which he crosses in birch-bark canoes. Around many obstructions to navigation the canoe must be carried on the shoulders — a work for which French-Canadians are used. These helpers must be given not only three portions of bacon, bread, and tea daily, but also at least one dollar per person. The interpreter must be paid twice this sum as his daily fee. Therefore the cost of such a missionary journey, with at least four men companions and the indispensable interpreter, comes to more than twenty florins daily and increases to a higher fee if the mission work requires many days or some months.²¹

Despite the cost and hardships of such journeys, Father Pierz traveled over a thousand miles each year. He preferred such rough work, however, to labor in a semicivilized field. His work was not with Christians, but rather with pagans; and as soon as the greater number of the inhabitants of a village were converted, he left them to plant the seed of Christianity in other places. He felt it was possible to get priests to carry on the work he had started, but that missionaries to the pagans were scarce. This spirit of restlessness under the restraint of life in a well-ordered community and the feeling of impatience with the slow progress of the converts began to show itself anew in 1847, and it was increased later in the year when on a visit to Father Otto Skolla, the Franciscan missionary at La Pointe, Pierz met some Chippewa Indians from the Mississippi River.

²⁰ *Berichte*, 15: 66.

²¹ *Berichte*, 15: 69.

In 1851 the diocese of St. Paul was organized, and the Chipewa of Minnesota came under the care of the head of that diocese, Bishop Joseph Cretin. He knew of Father Pierz's success as a missionary and asked him to join the new diocese and work among the Indians. Pierz was only too glad to accept the invitation, and with the consent of his bishop he handed over his missions to his two assistants and started for St. Paul, reaching there on June 18, 1852.²² In view of the shortage of priests in this new diocese, Pierz was also authorized to minister to the white settlers scattered along the Mississippi River for a hundred miles. Thus Indians, half-breeds, traders, and land-seekers were the elements composing his new flock. The missionary arrived at Crow Wing on July 20 in company with a trader named Beaulieu, who had traveled fifty miles to meet him.²³ This trader feared that the missionary's first impression of the Indians at Crow Wing would not be very favorable, for they were having a war dance at the time; but no doubt this news only made the seasoned missionary more anxious to reach his post of duty. That fall and winter he spent at Crow Wing, and he built a church and school on the spot where he saw the war dance at the time of his entrance into the settlement.²⁴ In the spring and summer of 1853 and 1854 he sought out the white settlers along the Mississippi River at Sauk Rapids, Swan River, and Belle Prairie and organized parishes at each place, and in the latter year he visited the German settlements at St. Cloud and St. Joseph. As soon as possible he left the settlers and returned to his

²² Pierz, *Indianer*, 84.

²³ A baptismal register kept by Father Pierz from 1852 on opens with the statement that the Crow Wing mission was established on August 1. The original is in the parish house at Belle Prairie, Minnesota; the Minnesota Historical Society has a photostatic copy.

²⁴ A paper in the Pierz collection at the St. Paul Seminary, dated August 9, 1852, shows that Captain John B. S. Todd, the commandant at Fort Ripley, gave Father Pierz permission to occupy any piece of land not exceeding twenty acres in size for church purposes.

Indians, visiting for the first time in 1853 those at Mille Lacs and Sandy Lake.²⁵

The journey from Crow Wing to Mille Lacs, which was one of the hardest trips he ever made, Pierz describes as follows:

Two-thirds of the distance was made on foot over poor roads through brush and timber and one-third was made by water. We crossed six lakes in a birch-bark canoe weighing two hundred pounds, which my catechist had to carry on his shoulders when crossing portages. My cook carried the kitchen utensils and food weighing about a hundred and fifty pounds. My burden was the whole portative chapel with the articles needed for mass and the books, as well as blankets weighing seventy pounds.

. . . It is impossible to travel on horseback in summer because the road lies through five deep, dirty swamps and over thousands of fallen trees and execrable hunters' trails. For two days we traveled amid indescribable hardships. On such a wretched way I often stumbled over roots and I once had such an unfortunate fall that I was obliged to remain where I fell for some time until I was rested and could rise. . . .

The worst feature of this trip was the fact that in my hasty departure I forgot my mosquito netting and my gloves and for two days I had to keep waving a leafy branch about my head to keep off the never-ceasing swarms of mosquitoes. In this process my hands were tortured. Nevertheless I was so badly stung about the face and on the hands by bold attackers that I suffered as much pain from the bites as if I had a severe case of nettlerash.

At the close of the second day we came so close to the Indian village that we could see their wigwams. Our attention being taken away from the canoe for a moment, it struck a tree in the water and we had to land at once and spend the night in a swamp.²⁶

Father Pierz had hitherto dreaded the coming of settlers among the Indians, but by this time he saw that they would have the land sooner or later; and, since the transition was inevitable, he wanted God-fearing men to come and have the advantage of free lands. Therefore he added to his many activities that of prospector and "booster" for Minnesota. Though

²⁵ Pierz's baptismal register, 1853-44.

²⁶ Pierz, *Indianer*, 89. See also *Berichte*, 26: 57.

his prospectus entitled "*Eine kurze Beschreibung des Minnesota-Territoriums*," published for the purpose of making Minnesota better known to the Germans in the United States and abroad, may at times seem somewhat exaggerated, probably few of those who were persuaded to come were disappointed after settling in the state. As a result of this sketch and similar articles that Father Pierz published, fifty families took up land at St. Joseph and Jacob's Prairie. It is safe to say that the majority of settlements established in Stearns County during the late fifties are the result of Pierz's advertising of this section among the Germans.²⁷ Having been instrumental in bringing these settlers to the region, it devolved upon him to attend to their religious needs. Thus Father Pierz was the founder of the Catholic parishes of Sauk Rapids, Swan River, and Belle Prairie in 1853; of St. Cloud and St. Joseph in 1854; and of St. Augusta in 1855. It is true that these parishes were visited by the missionary but two or three times a year, much to the disappointment of the settlers. In his articles about the region Pierz stated that churches had already been built at Sauk Rapids, St. Joseph, and St. Cloud — a report that gave readers the impression that these places had pastors.²⁸ Father Pierz was now seventy years of age and his work instead of growing lighter was, because of the influx of settlers, growing too heavy for one man, especially an old man. At his suggestion, Bishop Cretin asked the Benedictine fathers of Pennsylvania to attend to the German settlers of this part of the diocese.²⁹

²⁷ The prospectus is printed in Pierz, *Indianer*, 117-130. The author relates that similar material had been published in the *Wahrheits-Freund*, a Catholic weekly newspaper published in Cincinnati. An incomplete file of this paper is in the library of St. John's University, but the issues that contain Pierz's advertising are missing. Pierz's sister's family was among the first to settle at St. Joseph. A district in Wakefield Township, Stearns County, is known locally as Jacob's Prairie.

²⁸ Pierz, *Indianer*, 128.

²⁹ See August C. Krey, "Monte Cassino, Metten, and Minnesota," *ante*, 8: 223-225.

The arrival of the Benedictines in the summer of 1856 allowed Father Pierz to give all his attention to his Indian missions of Crow Wing, Mille Lacs, Fond du Lac, and Sandy Lake. Indeed they needed his whole attention, for the Chippewa, Sioux, and Winnebago Indians were continually fighting. Their feuds were constantly interfering with the missionary's work of civilization and sorely tried his patience and ability as a peace-maker. In 1858 Father Lawrence Lautischar was sent to assist Father Pierz, and together they established a mission at Red Lake on August 1. After spending two months here, Father Pierz left his assistant to continue the work, giving him strict instructions to attempt no journeys during the winter, but to spend the time in teaching school at the mission house. The veteran missionary retained for himself the dangerous task of long winter trips. But on December 10, while he was at Belle Prairie, a messenger brought the news that Father Lautischar had frozen to death while returning from a sick call to a heathen Indian living across the lake. Ordinarily a man of seventy-three would have given up at this point, but not so the old missionary. He even refused an invitation from Father Augustin Ravoux, administrator of the diocese, to go to St. Paul for a well earned rest.³⁰

Father Pierz felt that he now had double work to perform, and in February, 1859, he visited Leech Lake, his newest mission, making the trip of eighty miles in three days. For two months he worked strenuously at this place, giving instruction to children and adults. He found these Indians true to his high appraisal of Chippewa ability, for in three weeks the members of his class were ready to receive baptism. In fact he felt that he had never succeeded so well anywhere else. His success he attributed first to the fact that the Indians

³⁰ *Annalen der Verbreitung des Glaubens*, 27: 388; Father Augustin Ravoux to the *Association pour la propagation de la foi*, September 3, 1858, in the archives of the association at Paris. The Minnesota Historical Society has a translation of this letter.

there were suffering from famine, which forced many to him who otherwise would never venture near; and second to his knowledge of medicine, which helped him to do much to alleviate suffering. In 1861 he visited Otter Tail Lake, but spent only eight days there. Nevertheless, his records show that baptism was administered to one person.³¹

In a letter to the Leopoldine Society written on April 15, 1863, Pierz states that no new missions were founded in the year 1862 on account of the Indian uprising against the white settlers. Then follows a very sympathetic account of the threatened Chippewa uprising and of the important part played in its suppression by the missionary himself. This account is worth quoting, for it gives a version of the affair not generally known.

After our poor Chippewa Indians had been miserably deceived for many years by selfish fur-traders, ruined to a great extent by the godless liquor merchants, robbed of a portion of their goods by faithless government officials, and left in the utmost need, and, it is said, also aroused to hostility by secret instigators from the rebels in the South, over four hundred Indians from the Protestant missions of Gull Lake and Leech Lake seized arms and formed a robber's band under the leadership of Chief Hole-in-the-Day. They stole about a hundred head of cattle and some food and clothing from the neighboring whites. To my knowledge, however, they shed no blood, but caused a great deal of fear near and far. The militia and many white settlers were called to arm themselves and to annihilate the savage rebels or drive them from the state of Minnesota.

Our kind-hearted president immediately sent a government commissioner, Mr. MacDole, from Washington to offer the rebels forgiveness and peace.³² Instead of going to Crow Wing to discuss peace terms, the Indians plundered a house near Crow Wing the next night and planned to rob and burn the village of Crow

³¹ *Annalen der Verbreitung des Glaubens*, 27: 498; Pierz's baptismal register, September 1, 1861.

³² Pierz is referring to William P. Dole, United States commissioner of Indian Affairs. An account of the "Chippewa Disturbance of 1862" is given by Dr. William W. Folwell in his *History of Minnesota*, 2: 374-382 (St. Paul, 1924).

Wing on the following night. When, through a friendly Indian, news of this evil plot was brought to me, I started out alone with a bag of tobacco. . . . Halfway on my journey I met two black-painted riders galloping furiously toward me to warn me that all white travelers found on this route were to be shot down. I pulled a handkerchief out of my pocket, waved it, and stepped a few paces to the side of the road. They merely glanced at me and rode off without speaking. I soon met . . . about thirty men, who surrounded me and asked: "Father, where are you going?" "I wish to speak with the chief men," was my answer. "That is impossible, for no white man may see them," and they showed me a line on the road, over which no white man might pass on pain of death. I laughed at that and stuck out my foot, saying, "I do not fear your death." A second later I was caught up by four Indians and set down ten paces beyond the line. Laughing they said, "Now father, you have not disobeyed the chief's order, for you were carried over the line. You shall live." A few steps farther these savages showed me another sign, two lines across the path, and explained that I should certainly lose my life if I passed them, because here the dwellings of the chief men began. I said to them that if such was the case, their chief men should come to me. Thereupon I sent someone to tell the chiefs of my arrival and to invite them to come to see me. They came immediately. I greeted them and held out some tobacco to them as a token of friendship. This pleased them exceedingly. Then I asked them why they had come and what they expected to do. No one answered; they looked gloomily at one another and hung their heads in shame. "If you will not answer," I said, "I will speak to you. Now listen to me. You know that the priests are sent as God's messengers to preach and to teach the Truth to all peoples, in order to avert evil from them and to incline them toward good."

All five chiefs with all their warriors surrounded me, attentively listening to my words. I held forth to them in their language for half an hour in this manner, showing them how foolish and unwise was their stand against the mighty white nation, how great a crime murder and depredation are in the eyes of God, and how they are always followed by severe punishment in this world and the next. Finally, by means of my fatherly compassion, I made them understand the dreadful consequences of their ineffectual attitude and I told them that many regiments of well drilled soldiers and crowds of enraged citizens were already marching against them, who would surround them and wipe out

all the Indians as well as their wives and children. Finally I gave them my well-intentioned advice, to use to the best advantage the three days of grace still remaining and to go to Crow Wing, meet all charges, and arrange for peace.

These poor people touched and enlightened by my speech cried from all sides "E, E, Nose, Yes, Yes, Father." The head chief, Hole-in-the-Day, gave me his hand and said, "Father, today we will go to Crow Wing and make peace." The other four chiefs concurred.

In a few days the difficulties were settled, and the Indians promised to let the work of civilization proceed in their camps and asked Pierz to come and live among them. Thus his interference in the uprising proved successful. Pierz declared with pride that not one of the Indians of his six missions was connected with this revolt; all the revolters were heathens or members of other missions.⁸³

The season of 1863 was such a strenuous one that Father Pierz traveled to St. Paul to beg assistance from Bishop Grace. But the bishop did not think it possible to promise an assistant, for his struggling diocese could not supply enough priests for the white settlements. Because he was disappointed here and received no answers to his repeated written requests to the Leopoldine and Ludwig mission societies, Pierz decided to go to Europe and make a personal appeal to the priests and seminarians there. In January, 1864, he arrived unexpectedly at Laibach to canvass for candidates. Apparently he used the same zeal and energy there as in his work in Minnesota, for sixteen young men returned with him to Minnesota.⁸⁴ Before being sent to the mission fields they studied in seminaries in the United States until they were ordained, and therefore Father Pierz had to continue working alone from April to November, 1864. But in the latter month Fathers

⁸³ *Berichte*, 33: 29-34.

⁸⁴ These men were Buh, Plut, Trobec, Katzer, Zuzek, Tomazin, Berg-hold, Tomazevic, Spath, Stern, Eriah, Pauletic, and four others who did not finish their studies for the priesthood. Seliskar, in *Acta et Dicta*, 3: 85.

Joseph Buh and John Zuzek were sent to assist him, and the next spring Father Ignatius Tomazin arrived to relieve Father Pierz at Crow Wing, and Father James Trobec went to help Father Buh, who had been appointed pastor at Belle Prairie.³⁵

Father Pierz's work as pathfinder was now closed; he had blazed the trail alone for many years and in 1865 he celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood. But that did not mean that this indefatigable missionary was going to retire. His life of feverish exertion would not allow that. In a letter dated July 30, 1866, the year after his golden jubilee, he wrote:

As I returned to Crow Wing yesterday, tired from a long mission journey, I learned through my worthy Bishop Thomas Grace that 500 florins in gold had come for me from the Leopoldine Society. . . . This gift from Heaven came at a most opportune time, for my money had given out as a result of my very arduous missionary trips and care for my beloved Indians and hungry woodsmen. I am pleased to impart the happy news that since last spring Father Ignaz Tomasin, my zealous helper, and I have been able to open three new missions among the heathen Chippewa . . . at Leech Lake and Cass Lake. . . . As soon as we procure provisions and other necessities for a mission we will return to these places and continue the work begun there. . . . I am counting again, with all confidence in God's great providence, on the help of the Leopoldine Society and on the willingness of my European mission friends to make sacrifices. However I will gladly set my eighty-year-old bones in motion again to seek the lost sheep in this inhospitable Indian wilderness.³⁶

In the early part of 1867 Pierz made a journey of a hundred miles in ten days to the Sandy Lake Indians. He traveled with horse and sled and spent four nights in the open. But despite his ambition and the fact that the free, roving life was dear to him, he found that exertion began to tell on him, and he was forced to lessen his physical activities. He was thus obliged to spend his winters at Crow Wing entirely; only dur-

³⁵ *Berichte*, 36: 54, 61; Seliskar, in *Acta et Dicta*, 3: 86; *Sadlier's Catholic Almanac*, 1865, p. 187, 190, 217, 252, 256.

³⁶ *Berichte*, 36: 63.

ing the summer months did he travel. An attack of pneumonia impaired his health still further. In fact he never fully recovered from the attack. This weakening of his physical powers, which was hastened by a number of accidents, caused him at the age of eighty-six to give up all his missions and to retire to Rich Prairie in 1871.³⁷

By the middle of 1873 Pierz was fully incapacitated for work. He lost his eyesight and his memory weakened day by day. That summer he bade farewell to his Indians after thirty-eight years spent among them and returned to Europe to spend his last days in his native country.³⁸ On January 22, 1880, he died at the ripe age of ninety-five.

So lived and died this pioneer missionary of Minnesota. There may have been men who spent all their lives laboring on the missions, but there were none who accomplished more in the same space of time, none who gave of themselves more than Father Pierz. He worked constantly and with never a thought of personal gain or glory, and he doubtless passed from this world in that peace of soul that bespeaks a consciousness of work well done.

SISTER GRACE McDONALD

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ST. JOSEPH, MINNESOTA

³⁷ Rich Prairie is now known as Pierz. Father Pierz put a notice of his retirement in *Der Wanderer* (St. Paul) for July 1, 1871.

³⁸ *St. Cloud Journal*, June 26, 1873.



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