

## LUCAS FERDINAND LEGIERSE, O.CARM.

1844-1882

By the Rev. Anthony C. Dressel, O. Carm.

*The Sword*, October 1939

A priest almost entirely unknown to the memory of the men of our Province is Father Lucas Ferdinand Legierse, buried alone and far from a Carmelite monastery on the top of a hill at Emerald, Franklin County, Kansas. His isolation is really poetic. A traveler going due west from Garnett or Scipio will see in the distance the spire of a big church and feel himself rather near to it. But the rolling country in those parts offers an optical illusion; and, while one seems quite near to the church, one still has ten miles to go through an immense farming district of corn, oats and wheat. Finally one winds through a wooded road to see nestling in the woods an imposing church, school and residence — St. Patrick's parish which had been founded by a Carmelite, the Rev. Father Schacht, in the year 1859.

The Carmelite Fathers were in charge of the Emerald parish from the time that Father Schacht built a little log cabin church in 1859 until it was given over to the Rev. J. B. O'Connell, a diocesan priest in 1889 a period covering fully thirty years. After the first little church had been built the Carmelites traveled sixteen miles twice a month from Scipio for nine years Father Louis Guenther built a stone structure out of native stone in 1868 and became resident pastor until 1881 when Father Lucas took charge Father Gabriel Browne succeeded Father Lucas and held the pastorate for a year and a half when he in turn was succeeded by Father Joseph Walsh in 1883. Father Walsh did splendid work there for six years when the parish reverted to the diocese in 1889.

Among the graves in the lonely cemetery of St. Patrick's there is that of a priest marked: Rev. Lucas Legierse, O. C. This particular grave had been nearly forgotten. The parish at first had seen very prosperous days but since the World War had rapidly dwindled away. Interest in this grave was first awakened when Father Vincent Metzler, pastor of St. Boniface parish in Scipio, had occasion to visit Emerald — known for many years as the Irish Settlement — and noticed the neglected grave. The old wooden cross had rotted away but part of an arm still bore the word "Gierse." From this the burial place of the Carmelite was identified, and Father Vincent had the grave cared for and erected a suitable tombstone in 1929.

The publishing of the sword aroused the interest of several of the Fathers who collaborated to trace the history of this forgotten Carmelite.

Ferdinand Legierse was born in Borhum, Prussia, on August 1, 1844. His parents were James Legierse and Elizabeth Mensink. As a Theologian he joined the Carmelites in Scipio, received the Habit July 15, 1878, and made his profession on August 7, 1879. That same year on the vigil of the Assumption he was ordained at Leavenworth by the late Most Rev. Louis M. Fink, O. S. B., and read his first Mass in Scipio on the feast itself. Being a member of the Scipio community, he was assigned to the missions connected

with the Emerald parish. In December, 1881, he became the resident pastor of Emerald. His pastorate was a short one as he died September 30, 1882. He was a member of the Order a little over four years, passing to his reward at the age of thirty-eight.

Since his pastorate was so short, we wonder why the people of Emerald demanded that his body should be buried in the little cemetery at Emerald. But they did, taking the case to the Bishop when the Scipio community wished to remove the body from Emerald. The Bishop prevailed on the Order to leave the body at St. Patrick's. For some reason Father Legierse was buried at two o'clock in the afternoon. Father Albert Heimann was Prior at Scipio when Father Lucas entered the Order; but Father Louis Guenther, who succeeded Father Albert, held the funeral services.

Father Lucas was tall and thin and very energetic. He crowded many years in his short span of life. A splendid orator, he frequently stirred both himself and his hearers to tears. Father Legierse won the hearts of the people by his faithfulness to duty — attending the missions at Westphalia and other points attached to Scipio on roads so terrible that they baffle all description. After a heavy rain in those fertile districts, the roads were simply rivers of mud. It was impossible at such times to use a buggy. Horseback riding was then in order and that too was sometimes next to impossible because the poor horse had to mush through with mud that seemed bottomless. Frequently it was a day's work to attend a single sick call. Emerald at that time was at its best. People had just passed the log cabin stage and had erected beautiful homes.

Sick calls were many, and on one of these stormy nights so bad were traveling conditions that Father Lucas lost the Blessed Sacrament after crossing the swollen Pottawatomie. Fortunately, after a brief search where the horse had bolted, he recovered the precious Burden. On one of these sick calls Father Legierse contracted pneumonia, which resulted in his death on September 30, 1882. This, perhaps more than anything else, endeared him to the people. He was of a very sympathetic nature; and, as some recall, he had also a splendid sense of humor. His arrival at a distant home was a real pleasure as well as a source of edification- Monsignor McGlinchey, director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in Boston, who was baptized by Father Legierse, states that the old local people remember Father Lucas as a happy and holy young man who just simply won the hearts of the people by being all to all with everybody. They regarded him as a young saint.

Thus the short life of Father Legierse was spent in the busy pioneer days of Anderson and Franklin Counties in Kansas when the roads were still lanes of mud and travel next to impossible. His was a true missionary life — short it is true — but packed with good works. Judging from the holy memory in which he is still held, we know that Our Lady of Mount Carmel will find his place of isolation on the last day. Now there is not a house in sight any more, and what was once a lively parish with immense, fertile fields, is now only a picture of desolation and poverty, a waste of untended and abandoned farms with a beautiful church in the center to tease and mock the whole surroundings.