

Letter of M. Maubant on the death of Mgr. Bruguières, written just before his entry into Korea.

November 9, 1833

Gentlemen and dearest confreres,

In the letter I had the honor of sending you on October 14 of last year, I told you that Bishop de Capse had left Siven on the 7th of the same month. I did not expect to write to you soon, but an unexpected accident obliged me to send an express to Macao to give you the news. 24 days after the departure of Monseigneur de Capse, two of his couriers came back to tell me that he was no more. You cannot imagine the pain and consternation in which this sad news threw me. However I should have feared it, the privations, the fatigues and the sorrows of all kinds that Monseigneur had endured in the burning climate of India and especially while travelling through the vast empire of China, had exhausted his strength. Outside the plains he could hardly walk on foot for a quarter of an hour without being obliged to stop: nevertheless he did not believe himself incapable of continuing his arduous journey even through Tartary. Nor is it unlikely that he could have reached Korea if he had traveled in a different season and if his extreme love for mortification had not made him observe an almost continuous fast. Mortification and prayer were his favorite virtues. Every week he recited the Office of the Dead, every day he added to the recitation of the ordinary rosary the rosary of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin, and several other prayers. Every day he recited a special prayer for the success of our laborious enterprise, for the charitable faithful of France, members of the Association for the Propagation of the Faith, living and departed.

For some time he had been subject to headaches. Two or three days before leaving he was attacked by one a little more strongly than usual, he vomited and little by little the sickness faded. On the day of his departure he seemed quite well. On the evening of that same day, a more violent attack seized him and kept him at the home of some Christians in Ouhaio on the 8th and 9th. Fortunately, he was accompanied by a Chinese priest who had the charity to stay with him and to give him all possible relief during his journey. He had three men at his service and the two servants of the good father Ko whenever he wished. But all the care and attention that was given to him could not protect him from the rigors of the cold from the month of October, that was harsher in some parts of Tartary than in the north of France during the harshest winters. A temperature so contrary to his infirmities reduced him to the most pitiful state. He was frozen with the cold. He could no longer digest any food, not even the milk he took with the least reluctance. His exhausted stomach rejected everything that was offered to it, without alteration.

On the 10th, although weakened (he was getting weaker every day), he found himself a little relaxed and set off again. On the 15th he stopped a second time at Lamamiao, a famous town in western Tartary. He had the happiness to find again a charitable Christian with whom he rested one day. On the 19th he finally reached Pely Keou, another important town in western Tartary, where there are two to three hundred Christians. He was supposed to spend a fortnight there, but alas, the Lord had disposed otherwise.

He was received at the home of the parents of a guide sent to him by His Excellency the Vicar Apostolic of Chansy. They warmed him up and prepared a supper more suitable for his health, and he felt a little better. He spoke with Father Ko, they had supper and recreation as usual. He spent the night without experiencing any new pain, his headache was gone. He thought he was much better, completely cured. There had not been time to prepare an altar, so he could not offer the Holy Sacrifice. He had a missal, a breviary and several other small

books. He occupied himself as usual during the morning. He had dinner and then took his recreation with the good Father Ko. After the recreation he felt much better.

My dear fellow students, oh, the fragility of our miserable nature, he had only one hour of health left! After the recreation he went to rest as is customary in China. When he woke up, he asked to wash his feet. The old man who told me these details was with him; he brought him hot water and had a Christian come to shave him as the bishop had requested. He was shaved, they were finishing preparing his hair in the manner of the Chinese, when all of a sudden he cried out, penetrated by a sharp pain in his head, holding his head tightly between his two hands 'ho ya ho ya! enough! the bed' - while laying himself on it, 'my cap,' a few European words, undoubtedly the names of the good God, of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, and these were the last ones; promptly they called the good Father Ko who was a few steps away. He ran to him, but alas, my dearest Lord had already lost the use of speech, he could only breathe with difficulty, the good Father Ko administered and applied to him the plenary indulgence. Then he recited the prayer for the dying and several other prayers, and at 8 o'clock or 8 hours and a quarter, my dear Lord of Capse gave up his soul to God.

Divine Providence had chosen him to open the gates of Korea to the missionaries it had destined to propagate the faith there. It had delivered him from the many dangers to which he had obviously been exposed. Four or five times, the last time near Lamamiao, he had been recognized as a European. It had sustained him for long periods of time almost without the help of any food; hunger, thirst, sickness and miseries of all kinds had diminished his strength and exhausted them, but they had not altered his courage. He had formed before the Lord the project of going to bring the help of the holy religion to the Koreans. He did everything he could to realize it. He exhausted all the means suitable to engage the Koreans to receive him and his priests with or after him. He had these means proposed to them by the persons he judged most capable of making an impression on them. Finally the Lord had blessed his efforts. The Koreans are willing to receive him, they are waiting for him, they must go this year to the borders of Tartary at the place they have designated. But alas, he is no more. On the eve of the moment when he was to enter this kingdom which he called the promised land, the Lord called him. He had cultivated all the talents that the Lord had entrusted to him. The Lord calls him in order to grant him the eternal and superabundant rewards that he has promised to those who diligently run in the way of the commandment and the evangelical counsels.

For us, Gentlemen and dearest Confreres, and for me in particular, to whom this news first reached me, what could I do in such a difficult circumstance? It was impossible for me to contact Mr. Chastan to deliberate. I thought of sending him immediately the proposal to enter, to take the place of my late dear Lord de Capse, to enter Korea at the end of next December; but no matter how diligently I sent my letter, it would have reached him by the 17th of November at the earliest; he would not have had enough time to go to Pien Men at the time fixed by the Koreans, and it should be noted that this occasion lasts only three days. Moreover, even if he would have had the time to go to Pien Men at the time fixed by the Koreans; supposing that I had the intention of going there in the absence of any other and that I had to go; I would have had to be assured that Mr. Chastan would not have any business, any illness, anything that would have prevented him from leaving as soon as he had received my letter, because if he had had to delay he would have lost the opportunity. If I had sent him this proposal and expected him to leave, I would have stayed in Siven and after that he would not have been able to go to Pien Men, either because the Koreans had come or because they had not come, the opportunity would have been lost for this year. So after the death of my dearest Lord of Capse, assuming that one of us had to take advantage of the opportunity that presented itself to enter, I found myself in the necessity of leaving. Otherwise I would have had to assume that you would like me better under the present circumstances, or perhaps at

any rate, outside Korea rather than in Korea. This was, I confess, the subject of one of my disturbing meditations, for I know, if not everything, at least my incapacity to fulfill these difficult functions, especially those presented by the partial administration of a new mission, to tremble when I think of them and especially when I think of the account that I will have to give to God.

But finally, gentlemen and my dearest confreres, I have always believed that I could not without blame miss an opportunity that would present itself to make me walk where I believe and therefore cannot help but believe that the Lord is calling me. If Jesus Christ, who I believe is now sending us through your ministry, had wanted to employ men of science and recognized talents to publish the Holy Gospel, the great apostle would have been able to do so. If Jesus Christ, who I believe is now sending us through your ministry, had wished to employ men of science and recognized talents to publish the Gospel, he would not have failed to add Gamaliel and Nathanael to the great apostle, whom St. Augustine says were refused admission to the apostolate because they were doctors of the law. Since before leaving France and many times since, this double consideration, are you worthy; are you capable of fulfilling such high and difficult functions?

Gentlemen and dearest confreres, it seems to me that I have heard and obeyed the voice of the good God, although I always recognize my unworthiness and my incapacity. As in the past, it seems to me that the order is given and confirmed by the circumstances that urge and require the execution of the order, to walk where obedience calls, abandoning ourselves to the help and assistance of the Divine Mercy that sends us. It is with these sentiments, Gentlemen and dearest Confreres, that I am leaving Siven on Monday by the route taken by the late My dearest Lord of Capse, to be present at Pien Men at the time marked by the Koreans and to enter Korea in the place of the late My dearest Lord.

I have taken means that are more or less safe and without any danger to send to Macao the news of my entry two months after it has taken place. I will send a Chinese and French letter in which I say in substance that the affair is happily over. I have obtained the object of his desires and he hopes or has been promised that at the 3rd or 9th or 11th moon Mr. Tchín will be able to come and join him, I greet you... this will mean that I have entered. If I have not been able to enter, I will indicate this by a Chinese letter, of which I am sending a copy, in the following terms: I have not been able to obtain the object of my desires; I do not know how our affair will turn out. I will remain here, if it is in Leaotung, where I was if it is in Siven, with Mr. Tchín, if it is in Chan tong, while waiting for the answer we have requested.

I beg you to see to it that a successor to my dearest Lord de Capse is sent to us as soon as possible.