



1847: Death of Lavigerie's maternal grandmother, Rose Agnès Fourticot, at the age of 69.

Letter to the Office of the Propagation of the Faith (December 1884)

In Ghardaïa, capital of the Mزاب in the Sahara, the missionaries find themselves in need of building both house and school, since the local house they have been renting up to now and which was completely inadequate has become inhabitable. « Our situation has become almost unbearable, the superior in Ghardaïa wrote to me a few weeks ago; the house we are in threatens to collapse, the cracks are growing, and I dare not take the risk, not only of teaching a class in it but even of simply living there. What would become of me and what would we have to do if an accident happened? We are promised repairs, but I don't believe the promises of our landlord who is a Jew. Besides, the house foundations are weak and more than half of it is built on unstable land. Yet, we would so much love to settle in our own house! I told you how, when we left to make our retreat, our dear children and their parents had accompanied us for a good part of the journey. They were all in tears, since they thought that, despite our assurances, we were not coming back. News of our return soon spread through the town of Ghardaïa and, straight away, all came running to greet us, with many small gifts of dates, biscuits, and raisins of which we had a whole stock for several days. See, Reverend Father, what you can do for us. The most urgent need would be to build a suitable house with a school. To buy a plot of land which is very expensive here and to build a simple house on it we should need at least 25,000 francs. The Arab Bureau is putting out to tender the construction of two educational establishments, one in Ouargla and the other in Ghardaïa, for the modest sum of 60,000 francs each. So far, its attempts at introducing schooling have not been very successful, however. The Mozabites who have to send their children to them pay for substitutes. I know of several who have paid 15, 20, and 60 francs for them to stand in for their children. We continue our work of ransoming young Africans, but, for this work to develop, we are obliged to wait until we are more suitably housed. »

3) Orphanages – each one of the above-mentioned missions has an orphanage in which the number of children depends on the post's resources. The missionaries are often forced, out of charity, to take in orphans abandoned by everyone or the children a widowed / mentally disturbed? mother abandons because she sees in them an obstacle to her re-marrying. Each one of these children, cared for completely in our missions, costs 200 francs per year and there are so many of them that some quite considerable expenses are required which the missionaries can only meet by making more and greater sacrifices. «I must tell you », Father Hamard wrote to me a few days ago, « that our little orphanage has undergone some changes. After the persistent winter rains, the intense heat of summer, and also because of the poor construction of the building, which serves as school and orphanage, we have had to give up living there. Huge cracks threatened to split the house in two, lengthways, and our children ran the risk of being crushed under the rubble. We have therefore had to reduce the number of boarders by half. I must admit that I found this necessity very hard to accept and I would have willingly sacrificed everything to keep those dear children. When shall I be able to take them back and what will become of them in the meantime? »

4) Native catechists – These are recruited from among the children brought up by the missionaries and they render us a real service from the point of view of the mission. This year we have founded a special training centre in Taguemount-Azouz, so as to increase the number of these special assistants. There are currently 27 pupils who are, at the same time, getting ready to sit teachers' certificate exams. They will then be able to run schools more easily under the direction of the Missionaries. Up to now, we had been sending these young people to be trained in our apostolic institute in Malta, where there are still a number of Kabyles, but the paucity of our resources has forced us to change our plan and found a central institute in the very heart of Kabylia. I should add that we find all our Kabyle catechists completely satisfactory, and all our missionaries bear excellent witness to this. They have won great esteem and respect for themselves, and they already exert a real influence in their country. Ils ont su s'attirer l'estime et la considération, et ils jouissent déjà d'une réelle influence dans leur pays.