

Photograph of Father Chaminade?

Comments by Lloyd Ostendorf
(1921-2000, Dayton area illustrator), 6 April 1957

Apparently no known photograph has come down to us of Father Chaminade, but if one was ever taken it could hardly look more like him in his old age than the one of the unidentified clergyman that recently turned up.

From the Cromer collection of old daguerreotypes made in France from about 1840 to 1855 comes a group of long gone scenes and subjects that reflect another age — when photography was in its infancy. Virtually all unidentified, the old plates are now owned by George Eastman House of Rochester. The ancient images can be dated by the costumes and outdoor scenes depicted.

The picture we have here when published recently by IMAGE (Eastman House Journal of Photography) was simply, “‘Clergyman Reading’ from Cromer Collection, 1850, France”. The writer was struck by the striking similarity of the features of the elderly cleric with those shown in paintings of Fr. Chaminade. Having drawn his likeness at various times, the comparison came about quite naturally.

It could hardly be stated that this picture was taken “unbeknownst” to the sitter, considering the long exposure time required, it can be readily seen that the subject appears to be more absorbed in reading or meditation than to the cameraman who made the “painting with sunlight”.

The aged priest’s resemblance to Fr. Chaminade’s likeness as we know it from paintings is obvious. Particularly similar are the lines of the mouth, the set of the chin, and the strong straight nose. Allowing of age differences when a given likeness was made, the similarity is noteworthy.

Aside from all wishful thinking and supposition, here at least we have a French priest approximately the same age as Fr. Chaminade, a true contemporary clergyman of his day and his country, and photographed about the time that Fr. Chaminade spent his last years on earth. That the venerable champion of Mary must have spent many of his last days in the prayerful attitude shown, goes with out saying. The holy card marker in his prayer book can be seen; a slight movement of the prayer book during the exposure is also evident on the remarkably clear, old photo.

Since a photograph of any clergyman of that day was an extreme rarity, it is likely to suppose that the person shown must have been someone of importance. If so, it is good to look back more than 100 years [now, over 170 years!] ago and see someone who so closely reminds us of the founder of the Society of Mary.



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