

CHAPTER X

“AND THERE FOLLOWED HAIL AND FIRE, MINGLED WITH BLOOD.”

FROM the “Declaration of War” between the cats (1859) to the Declaration of Peace between the States the hopes and disasters of the Seminary were akin to the hopes and disasters of the Southern Confederacy. We do not mean that the Niagara region furnished any of the battlegrounds, as it had furnished for the two wars that began with the close of the 17th century and with the opening of the 19th. In the Revolutionary as well as the Civil War, not even the smoke of battle wafted as far as the Falls. In the former, the merest wift of battle smoke came when General Sullivan in the winter of '79 and '80 shot off his raiding muskets, and frightened the Indians to skelter to the protection of the English flag at the Fort. In the latter, the nearest guns were those more than two hundred miles away at Gettysburg. Neither do we mean that the Seminary suffered because of the Civil War,—except in so far as all homes North and South suffered with the scarcity and, therefore, the high prices of commodities; and with the taxes and conscriptions. Nor do we mean that the Seminary espoused the cause of the South and suffered thereby. Less than ten per cent of the faculty or students were from the South; and sympathy for either side was as divided as it was throughout the whole country. But we do mean that at the opening of this period the aspirations and hopes of the Seminary rose as high as those of the Confederacy; and at the close that both Seminary and Confederacy faced death and desolation; and for both there was a resurrection that was as slow as it was painful.

Even in August, '57, though the seminary at Niagara had been running for four months and the Vedder property was as secure as mortgages could make it, the DeVeaux acquisition,

on which the house stood, was not even secured by mortgage. The priests were living thereon only by virtue of an "Agreement" between the Seminary and the DeVeaux Corporation. This "Agreement" contained conditions whose fulfillment in the opinion of the latter must give reasonable hopes of payment. Its ten years' term of payment was easier than the one year term of Vedder; but how could it be reasonable to suppose that this stranger, Father Lynch, honest though he might be, could equip a building, house and feed a crowd of boys, pay a faculty, remit within a year to Vedder nearly \$7,000, and then for ten years pay every year the Corporation over \$1,400? The Corporation was not unwilling to help along another educational institution on a contiguous estate, but it must be reasonably assured that its investment in a mortgage thereon would be secure. What financial backing had this man? None! Well then, what moral backing? If a man of integrity, what ability had he to swing so big a proposition? What? The faculty does not have to be paid! Every member works for nothing! That is quite a new idea! Who are these men that will work for nothing? If these men fail this Father Lynch, then willy-nilly he must fail.

Mr. Edwin Thomas, the Buffalo lawyer who without any remuneration was seeking the property for Father Lynch, had engaged in several consultations with the Corporation. He himself seems to have had some doubts about the wisdom of the priest's move. He admired the priest's faith, heart and brain and brawn; but a venture of this kind needed more than that—needed capital. Where was the capital? True, \$10,000 had come miraculously; but was God going to continue working miracles? The first miracle might see them through the first year, but what of the second? However, Father Lynch seems to have convinced him, and the lawyer had tried to convince the Corporation. He had staked his word (relying on the word of the priest) that the payments would be forthcoming on the appointed dates; and so the "Agreement" gave way to a "Contract" to deliver the deed on the aforesaid

mortgage. In August Mr. Thomas wrote to Father Lynch that at last the "Contract" was "safe in my desk," and with a sigh of relief the priest wrote to the former the following letter that breathes the sentiment, "Thank God, the property at last is ours! It seems too good to be true!"

"Seminary of Our Lady of Angels,
Niagara City, N. Y., August 5th, 1857.

Edwin Thomas, Esq.,
Buffalo.

My Dear Sir,

I received your very kind favour of yesterday, announcing the very pleasing intelligence that you had the contract in your possession, securing the property on which we reside. I felt intensely grateful to you; and permit me in the name of the Faculty of the College, the Rev. John Monaghan, V. P., the Rev. Thomas Smith, and the Rev. Denis Leyden, priests of the Congregation of the Mission of St. Vincent de Paul, and in my own name, to thank you most gratefully for your great trouble and for your singular generosity, and confidence in us, as to secure such a property for us. We shall act as to give you not the slightest trouble about the payments and the fulfilling our part of the contract. We shall pay the first installment of our gratitude on tomorrow: we shall offer the most holy Sacrifice of the Mass for you and your good family, that Our Lord may grant you an hundred fold in this life and in the next.

I am, my dear Mr. Thomas, with the greatest respect and gratitude,

Your most humble servant in J. C.,

JOHN J. LYNCH, P., C.M.,

Superior of Our Lady of Angels,
Niagara Co."

Two years after writing that letter Father Lynch received one that shocked him and all his associates: Pius IX wrote him to move across the Lake, to Toronto, as Coadjutor

Bishop of that see. On December 20th he doffed his debt of some \$20,000 and donned a mitre. True, his home would be only forty miles away, and his territory come within a mile of the place he loved; but he would be in another country altogether. "Might as well be in England," his confreres thought. Ten days later came the news that John Brown had been hanged; and the Bishop's confreres at Niagara must have thought, "How lucky! Here we are with a \$20,000 rope around our necks, and no one to spring the trap! The noose tightening slowly! Suffocated to death by degrees!" But the Bishop did not forsake his own. In five months he became the Bishop of Toronto; in ten years its first Archbishop; and in all the twenty-nine years from his exit from "Lady of Angels" to his exit from life, he showed where his heart lay. He showed it by his frequent presence, his counsels, by his conferences to the seminarians and collegians; and, when he could, by his financial aid. Even three years after his consecration we find him paying to the De Veaux the semi-annual interest of \$490.83. And one year after the consecration he has the consolation of seeing the first Niagara seminarian ordained to the priesthood,—the Rev. D. C. Wagner of Buffalo. But, withal, his removal was a severe blow to the Seminary, and to all the province. The Seminary wailed and wobbled, but did not fall.

Though the wobbling continued for some time, still no demoralization resulted in the ranks he had left. Enthusiasm may have weakened; courage did not. Father Lynch when he left Niagara was forty-three years old: his successor Father John O'Reilly, was fifty-seven when he came; but he was broken down in health. For the twenty-three preceding years, since his ordination at Mt. St. Mary's with the future Archbishop of New York, John Hughes, he had been building little churches and big ones here and there throughout the country, giving missions in neglected regions north and south, never advertising his name but always expending his energies. We read of him in the lives of other men (as, for instance, in

the lives of Bishop England and Prince Galitzin), but nothing from writings that he himself has left. We can through other lives trace him through the mountains of Pennsylvania, through the cotton fields of North and South Carolina; through the cities and towns of Philadelphia, Harrisburg, Altoona, Pittsburgh, La Salle (Ill.), St. Louis, Cape Girardeau, New Orleans, Assumption (La.), etc.; but, save for a signature or two, we can find nothing of him at Niagara. He appears to have been stricken with "cacoethes peregrinandi," a peculiar pedal nervousness that urges the patient to be elsewhere than where he is. It often attacks missionaries of long standing, and promotes inhibitions to any standing in the future. If the disease comes in middle life it becomes more chronic than acute, and hopelessly incurable. Science can segregate the germ, can find whereon it fattens, but nothing whereby it dies.

The disease, however, does not necessarily render the patient introspective, melancholy or even selfish, or prone to discouragement. With Father O'Reilly, especially, it assumed the shape of smiling selflessness and genial abandon to the cause of souls in regions beyond the Falls. His ill health did not render him ill-natured, and the burden of a \$20,000 debt never crushed his smile. In the beginning of the year '62 while Grant was marching on Fort Donelson, he, blithe in his sickness, entered New Orleans; then left it for St. Louis; and there, right after the Monitor had defeated the Merrimac, he smiled himself to death, March 4th, '62.

But his confreres on the Gorge had not been smiling so blandly. They did not have to face such playthings as cannon, but creditors who wished them well, yet who must have their money, withal. However, confidence gradually returned, and hope held her chin high. They resolved to form a solid phalanx against their debts, and so to instill faith into the hearts of their creditors. With this end in view, they incorporated under the familiar title of "The Seminary of Our Lady of Angels." Fourteen months before Father O'Reilly's death,

the legislature had granted the charter of incorporation; and after his death, Father Thomas Smith, his successor, gathered the stricken flock around him, and fanned the waning enthusiasm. He had Father Lynch's daring faith, his breadth of vision and a surer grasp of things financial. Now, what would you suppose a man like that would do who had a \$20,000 debt on an institution that, on account of its nature, would never be self-supporting; in a year when prices, because of the war, were flirting with the clouds? Yes, that is just what he resolved to do—to build. He would inaugurate the "stone age" of Niagara's series of edifices. This stone structure would be a hundred feet long by forty-four feet wide, running at right angles east from Father Lynch's old room. The foundations and much of the superstructures are still there today, forming the wing occupied by the Library, the Dean's offices, and the Seminarians' Chapel. They simply had to build. In September '61 there were eighty boys, and quite a few seminarians. Like the rich farmer in the Gospel, Father Smith's barn was bursting with plenty,—plenty of boys. If he did not soon build, the boys might any night rock their cradles adown the Gorge. In the spring of '62 he had a faculty that simply ached with energy. They were Fathers Asmuth, Leyden, O'Regan, Rossi and Rice; and there was a young seminarian from the Barrens, a Thomas O'Donohue who in the preceding December had supplanted Abraham Ryan. Curiously enough, Thomas could have said that he was learning his three "R's" with the "S.L.A.,"—"Regan, Rossi and Rice with Smith, Leyden and Asmuth;" but a greater necessity was to find how to learn his last year's theology while teaching six classes and acting as prefect over the collegians. Still, he found time to take long walks, swim in the river and keep a diary. And his older confreres were as energetic as he.

On April 4th all the faculty and students gathered in the study hall that was temporarily fitted up as a chapel, saw him raised to the subdiaconate by Bishop Timon, and followed him in procession outside for the Bishop's blessing of

the ground for the new building. Four days afterwards, excavations began; and so energetically did they and the masons work that in sixty days Father O'Regan could celebrate the completion of the first story by taking the boys on a wild goose chase down the Devil's Hole. But Sunday, June 8th was the greatest day that Niagara ever so far had seen,—the laying of the corner stone on top of the first story, north west corner. It was a "beautiful warm day with refreshing breezes," the diarist tells us, and the twenty-five hundred people could not think of all crowding for the Mass into the study hall that was again fitted up as a chapel. There was a great celebration! Everybody was there, including the Provincial. Great prophecies were scattered as cheerily as God had scattered the sunshine. Two little dark clouds of mortgages hung in the horizon, but the jubilant spirits would not let them rise. Father Smith would take care of those clouds. He had been on collecting tours for some time, and had gathered about \$15,000. Yes, he would need that for the new building; but he thought of another way of financing it. A Mr. Thomas Burke, a financier of St. Louis who had a son in the Community and who understood the aims and mettle of the priests better than outsiders could be expected to do, consented to become a member of the Trustees of the Seminary and to loan it \$14,000. So on November 10th, '62, Father Smith paid off the DeVeaux mortgage in full; and on the following January 17th received the loan from St. Louis. On the 1st of the year Lincoln had set free more than three million slaves; but not one of those freed men felt as jubilant as these priests. It was this jubilant crowd that Thomas O'Donohue met in June when he again joined Niagara's faculty—this time as a priest. But two things that happened shortly after his arrival may have dampened but did not drench the spirit. The first was because Father Smith's health broke under the strain, and he was ordered away temporarily; and the second, because Lincoln's Proclamation of Conscription did not exempt priests.

Father R. E. V. Rice, the Assistant Superior, took tempo-

rary charge of affairs. He was a man twenty-six years old, a priest three years and of frailer health than Father Smith. But he was such a man as would not look well with robust health—would seem another person. A delicacy of temperament accompanied the delicacy of health. However, he was the kind for whom you would predict many years on earth—never very many miles away from death's doors, but never in a hurry to enter. We would fancy that his constitution resembled that of Cardinal Pecci who in fifteen years would be known as Leo XIII and who at the end of a long life would say that "the secret of longevity is the possession of an incurable disease." He was thoughtful, gentle and kind. He was persuasive rather than forceful; or, better, he was so forceful precisely because he was so persuasive. He drew you after him, rather than goaded you before him. His patience would wear out your obstinacy. His reprimands seldom stung. You knew you had his sympathy, even when he was probing the malignancy of your actions; and after the operation, you felt angrier at yourself than at him. He was not a man to lead a charge on a battlefield, but rather one that could persuade rioters to lay down their arms and go home. Lincoln gave his Gettysburg address shortly after Father Rice assumed the leadership of Niagara. Their birthplaces were within about two hundred miles of each other. It was at Gettysburg, Lincoln afterwards said, that he became a Christian. Had he been born and bred in Catholic surroundings; had his vision ever veered towards the supernatural; had he become a Catholic priest; and (if you can imagine all these things) had his body been less rugged, he would have been, we fancy, a man like Father Rice. But the former was eminently practical and strong-willed? So was the latter. His practical mind saw wide horizons and the straightest roads that radiated thereto. Supernatural light does not cloud the views of earth, but clarifies them. And his strong will, once that he was convinced it towered towards God, an earthquake could not move. It lost none of its strength because it was ivy-clad with

gentleness. He was a born ruler; but, to change the simile, a ruler that knew how to hide the machinery of command under the exterior of amiability. Of the fourteen Presidents that have ruled Niagara, many, we think, may have won as much respect, but none so much love.

On July 28th, not many days after Father Smith's departure, the conscriptions began at Lewiston; and Father Rice was drafted. Automatically he became a soldier in the army. His priests were dismayed. He could get a substitute; any one of his priests would go in his stead. He would not permit it. He could buy his exemption by the payment of three hundred dollars. He would not hear of it: Niagara needed the money more than it needed him, etc. They might as well try to move a boulder in that raging river as to try to move the giant mind in that frail body. So with an assumed gayety they would make merry the few days that remained before he would march away. In passing, they would give the military salute; and outside his door would furnish impromptu expressions of musketry and cannonading. But the merrymaking was but a mask of breaking hearts. Here was a man with the enthusiasm of a Lynch, a winsomeness of a Rosati and the piety of a De Andreis, going to leave them when most they needed him. But their real sentiments were shown on his return from Lockport whither he had gone for his examination, and where he was rejected because of his ill health. Pandemonium broke loose. Now would Niagara come into its own! We do not know, but we think that he must have said what Father Likly, another President of Niagara, said in 1919 when he heard it remarked that only his sickness had prevented his becoming the Provincial,—“Thank God for my ill health.”

The closing months of '63 seemed more propitious than ever. Since April 20th of that year it had been a real college, with a charter from the state to confer degrees. In October the Seminary had twenty-six students, and the other departments about seventy. The new building, occupied since the begin-

ning of the year, gave rise to dreams of future expansion. The November battles of Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge simply nerved the faculty for the coming financial battles on Lewiston Mountain and Mt. Eagle Ridge. The following January opens up with great expectations, greater hopes, and the greatest excitement: there are ninety-nine collegians. Will not the Good Shepherd go hunting out there in the desert of the world somewhere for the one sheep that will make the fold an even hundred? The boys speculate on what his name will be? How big? How heavy? Will he come this week? "Bet y' he'll come next!" All January goes, and the one lonely sheep appeareth not. All February follows. But on March 1st, one Thomas Healey marches onto the campus, wonders at his popularity among total strangers and at their interest in his height and weight and fleetness of feet. By April 15th there are one hundred and six boys, and twenty-five seminarians; but none of the newcomers reach the dizzy popularity of Thomas Healey. Let Grant be appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Northern armies on March 12th! What is that compared with the honor of the fellow who is to be elected spokesman to appear before Father Rice and request "a recreation day tomorrow?" Let May come with its Battle of the Wilderness and Sheridan's raid through Atlanta to the sea! What are they compared with the march of the collegians to the Reservation, and the battle of lacrosse sticks with the Tuscaroras?

The young, but extremely sober-minded prefect, Father O'Donohue, must have often "talked it over" with Father McGill, the lighter-hearted director of the seminarians: Here are these young boys and men! They do not realize the agonies and wailings that the war in the South has brought to the homes all over the country! Many of their own brothers and fathers are in the ranks: where are they tonight? Orphaned children are crying for bread in the South; and here are these boys worried only over who will win tomorrow's game. Many of their mothers are on their knees right now, begging

God not to make them widows. They will watch sleepless beside many a crib tonight; while these boys—why, they are hardly off their knees after night prayers, when they're dead asleep in bed. Youth cannot worry over what it does not actually see and hear. The thoughts of youth may be long, long thoughts; but they're no longer than its eyesight or earshot.

And Father McGill would want to know what the prefect was going to do about it? These boys will meet sorrow soon enough. Just train the boys to keep the idea of God before them; and when they meet sorrow it will lead them to Him. In the meanwhile, why I—I hope they'll win tomorrow!

The autumn term opened up with a bang. A fragment of a diary in a hand unidentified, but certainly of a priest, states that there are "nine professors, twenty-five theologians, twenty philosophers and one hundred and eighty boys." A household of two hundred and thirty-four in such an institution only seven years old astonished the neighbors, the priests and its founder. What would it be in fifty years? In a hundred? God surely was blessing His work. In the first four years of its existence about one hundred and fifty boys sought admission. Thirty-five of them eventually became priests. All the thirty-five had not as yet completed their studies by December '64, but they all would. Hopes ran high. True, debts soared apace with them; but no matter: they would come down in God's own time.

The winter set in with its consequent worry to prefects and teachers to keep the mind of youth on the coming recitations rather than on the coming Christmas holidays. On November 29th nearly two hundred and fifty faculty, students and help crowded the little chapel for the novena in preparation for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception on December 8th. But that was one novena which the crowd never finished. At two o'clock in the afternoon of December 5th a fire broke out, and there were no adequate means to fight it. In three hours only the foundations remained, a few rocks of the new stone

wing, and the charred remains of Thomas Hopkins, a Brooklyn secular seminarian who while fighting the flames had been pinned beneath some falling rafters. The Southern Confederacy and the Seminary fell at practically the same time: four months after the last ember of the blazing building had been extinguished, the last cannon of the war shot its last ball.

All the neighbors, with that generous instinct of the human heart which in distress makes all men kin, threw open their doors, and spread their tables. Most of the boys with youthful heroism said they would stay and help to build. To build? To build with what? \$40,000 worth of property had gone up in those flames! Everything had burned except the land,—and \$20,000 debts! Debts are fireproof! You cannot build with \$60,000 in arrears! “No,” sighed the gentle and imperturbable Father Rice, “you’d better go home!” That night, our unknown diarist informs us, most of them had gone: he himself took about a hundred with him on the ten o’clock train for New York City. Thirty remained in the barn, protesting that they did not wish to go. The next day, Bishop Timon came in the deep snow, gathered the thirty stalwarts around him in the barn, spoke to them of the inscrutable designs of God, of His chastising those whom most He loved, and of the soul of the young man whose charred bones lay in the box beside them. Life was nothing: death in God’s love, everything. He has gone: we will follow. May God have mercy on his soul, as we hope He will have mercy on ours. The young hearts gathered around the remains and knelt to say the “*De Profundis*.” To the snow clad heights above the racing waters they bore him. The evening sun glinted the Canadian plains with gold. In the shadows of the canyon, flocks of sea gulls white as snowflakes shrieked with every ecstasy of life as the priest said of the dead, “May the choirs of the angels receive thee, and mayest thou have rest everlasting.”

The Sisters of Charity in the Buffalo hospital,—our ever

constant friends from the beginning, to whom we owe debts that we can never repay, and by whom the payments would not be accepted if we could—received the thirty students who said they would study there even during the Christmas vacation, and return to the Ridge just as soon as they should be allowed. Bishop Timon offered an abandoned house of the Oblate Fathers; but Father Rice thought he should not accept till the Provincial should sanction it. In January the Provincial came, and judged that the best move would be to send the boys away. So Father J. T. Landry took eight to the Vincentian college at Cape Girardeau; Father Anen, a crowd to the Barrens; and the remaining "Loyalists" returned to their homes. But before they had gone, Father Rice was taken down with smallpox; and just about the time of their departure, Father Kenrick, the Procurator, was injured in attempting to board a moving train. "Yes," said one student in departing, "God certainly loves Niagara an awful lot; but so far as I personally am concerned, I'd prefer Him to express it in more congenial ways."