

## CHAPTER XII

### THE DAYS OF RECONSTRUCTION

**T**HE days of reconstruction of the Southern States and of the Seminary of Our Lady of Angels began in the same year; and both began on the ruins of fire, death and desolation. But the Seminary had one advantage: it had no carpetbaggers who, while advising the sufferers how to reconstruct, were raking the ruins for pelf. Its priests scattered throughout the country told the story from many pulpits, and met responses that enkindled hope. Every student at his home proved himself a broadcasting station better than a modern radio, in so far, at least, as static never interfered with his enthusiastic advertisement. Even the European press reported the disaster. Pope Pius IX through Cardinal Barnabo wrote to Bishop Timon: "His Holiness is greatly grieved that the Seminary of Our Lady of Angels, in charge of the Congregation of the Mission, was entirely destroyed by fire, and that a pious young student, Thomas Hopkins, lost his life . . . The Holy Father thinks that he cannot so deeply deplore the calamity without showing his earnest solicitude to aid in the rebuilding of the Seminary by contributing towards its reconstruction." The Pope contributed a thousand dollars.

However, it was a very bad time to build: everything was so high, in consequence of the war. On Mt. Eagle Ridge the only things that were low were the walls of the institution, the finances and the temperature. But higher than the prices of labor, material and commodities were the hopes of the builders. They had three hundred acres of land, \$60,000 of debts and losses,—and confidence in God. With this one asset and all these liabilities they planned to build in stone three sides of a quadrangle four stories high, the open side to face the east; and another building, that, instead of completing

the square, would from the eastern end of the southern wing run at right angles south. From a thousand feet in the air the whole structure would look like a big dipper with its convex side facing the river, and the handle running parallel with it. It was a bold dream that would mean an expenditure of at least \$200,000. Its furnishings would mean another \$100,000. Incidental debts added to their present ones would mean still another \$100,000. It took a brave man to face the future without a cent in his pockets and say "I'll build a \$400,000 plant, and God will furnish the means."

Of course, they would not begin the whole clump of buildings at once. They would begin with the southern wing that runs almost due east and west, and build on the foundations of the structure that had been destroyed. They worked fast. By the September following the fire they had finished three stories of the wing that now houses the Dean's Offices, the Library and the Seminarians' Chapel; but in those days the first floor of the present Library was the study hall; the gallery was the floor level of a dormitory; the present Seminarians' Chapel was another dormitory; and when the wing had been completed, the present arched roof of the chapel roofed another dormitory. All these dormitories were eventually occupied by the collegians. The top dormitory was not completed when the students returned in September, but a temporary roof was thrown over the structure.

When the students had returned they saw that on the main building under construction work had progressed so far that it was awaiting its corner stone. This is the building that is now occupied on the first floor by the six Administration Offices, the four Seminarians' Parlors, the Library Annex and a few living rooms. This wing was completed in '66; and when completed, the Priests' Recreation Room occupied part of the present Treasurer's Office; the Treasurer's Office then was located in the present Library Annex, except that between the Office and the present main Library there was a priest's bedroom. The Seminarians' Parlor then occupied a

major part of the present main Parlor; the northern end of the present main Parlor was a Guest Room. Opposite the Parlor were the President's Office (on the corner), his bedroom and another priest's room. The second story held the priests' rooms, and their chapel (over the present Library Annex). The floors above were occupied by seminarians. The middle stairway in the Administration Building then continued to the basement where were the refectories and kitchen. The priests' refectory was to the right as you would come down, and the kitchen to the left. The seminarians' and collegians' refectories were to the left.

Of course, the building when completed did not have the spacious, sunlit, magnificently equipped kitchen that now you see. That basement wing was added in '28 under the Presidency of Father Dodd by the Procurator Father Duggan. Neither did the building of '66 have the present welcoming facade. The olden one had its arms out to await your coming to its bosom: the present one has its hands out to pull you to it. But that old building had two things the present has not: it had a cozy, vine-clad veranda in front; and a mighty fine pump in the rear, o'er which now stands one of the many modern, white-enameled, cakeless ice boxes. Why, that pump was there (though maybe little in use save for horses) when the S. O. L. A. was a little Wayside Inn. Situated as it was at the rear of the old Half Way House, we suppose that the dear old thing should have been called "A Tail of the Wayside Inn,"—one that wagged whenever a village wag of Lewiston hesitated at the main entrance oft in the stilly night, and said to a toper, "Have a drink?" and then walked the friend straight through the bar to the back yard; and, leaning on the moss-grown pump, sang in anticipation of Tennyson,

*"But such a tide of moving seems asleep,  
Too full for sound and foam,  
When that which drew from out the boundless deep  
Turns again home."*

The toper, mystified, might ask, "What is that?" and the friend reply, "That, old top, is 'Crossing the Bar'; we just did it." Perhaps the toper, remembering "The Princess" that had lately appeared, might reply: "You asked me to drink! Well,

*"Ask me no more; thy fate and mine are sealed.  
I strove against the stream, and all in vain!  
Let the great river take me to the main!  
No more, dear love; for at a touch I yield,—  
Ask me no more!"*

We are not sure of all this; but we are sure that the rusty, squeaking sentinel had, in its history as ice-cold well and friendly pump, locked in its chill heart the secrets of three hundred years. It had listened to tales of warriors white of face and red, told by participants in the wars between Neuters and Senecas before Champlain had sailed down the St. Lawrence; told by participants in the French and Indian wars, in the French and English wars, in the Revolutionary War, the Mexican War, the Civil War, the Spanish War, the World War,—in all the wars since the Iroquois roasted priests on the rocks of the wigwams to the annual wars of recent years when collegians of Allegheny and Niagara roast one another on the gridiron of the campus. And now it is gone! And with that pump has gone the cozy porch. Oh, if James Whitcomb Riley had been here three years ago, when thirst and shade and privacy succumbed to utility, necessity and beauty, he certainly had written poems on "The Vines that Cluster Yonder Porch," and "The Passing of the Back Yard Pump." The former no longer shades the sons of men, and the latter slakes not their thirst.

But the thinness of purse rather than the pulse of poems engaged the attention of the builders of '65. Despite the fact that debts mounted faster and higher than the walls, they reached not half the altitude of the builders' ambitions and energy. For four years they kept building until they had no money to pay even their back taxes,—until the state advertised

the Seminary for sale. This would be a disaster worse than the fire: the fire left at least the land and hopes; the sale would leave but dishonor and despair. Prayers again were pitted against hopelessness. Someone would help. God would not allow His work to fail. May 16th, '68, dawned, the day advertised for the sale, and the taxes were still unpaid. Then, a few minutes before the sale, a friend from the most unexpected quarter stepped into the Comptroller's Office at Albany and paid the bill. Who was this friend? We know not. His name should be enscrolled in gold among Niagara's benefactors. We have before us the letter written by the Comptroller, but he mentions not the benefactor's name. Who among our oldest teachers or alumni can tell us his name? His coming was an answer to prayer, and his name as well as his deed should be recorded in the annals of time as well as of eternity.

What now would the builders do? Why, they resolved to keep right on building,—and they did. At the close of '68 they had finished the present Administration building, finished the north wing, and had topped the south wing with its final story. Then they rested for five years, and began what took them fourteen years to finish,—the Alumni Chapel wing.

On March 4th, '69, the day that Grant took the oath of office as President of the United States, Bishop McQuaid of Rochester, at the dedication of the new seminary, addressed the two hundred and twelve students and as many clergy and friends. Its three buildings made an imposing structure on the heights above the roaring river. An infirmary was then on the second floor of the north wing, facing the gorge,—the space now occupied by rooms numbered 126, 127 and 128. The Seminarians' Chapel was in the basement, at the eastern end of what is now the Collegians' Refectory; and the Collegians' Chapel with its spacious sanctuary and arched roof occupied the present third and fourth floors of the entire north wing. Commodious choir stalls and seven beautiful altars at the eastern end, and (after some years) a sweet toned pipe organ at the western end, and soft-tinted windows facing the north, eventually

made the place more beautiful inside than many a cathedral in the United States today. A new day seemed to have dawned for the S. O. L. A. The builders were thankful to God and proud of His work.

So confident were they of the continuance of His help that we find them insisting that, though debts may rise, the standard of education must not lower; and the qualifications for admission into the collegiate department must be narrowed rather than widened: there must be no ambition in the breasts of the faculty simply to increase registration. Numbers do no more make a college than "walls a city make." Quality rather than quantity must be the badge of the scholars; and the quality must be regulated by standards, not of wealth nor "blue blood," but of brains and heart. "The bluest blood is putrid blood; the people's blood is red." But this red blood must be untainted with the world's idea that coin makes character. The faculty, true to its Vincentian training, must feel that it will be a sad day for the Church in the United States when only the child of the rich may aspire to the sanctuary; and so must bend every effort to see that no deserving boy be barred from the priesthood because of the poverty of his parents. The college department was to be considered principally as a developer of vocations to the secular clergy. Not that every boy entering the college must have the positive intention of entering the seminary; but the faculty must have the positive idea that applicants for admission must be of such mental and moral fibre that the wish to enter it might possibly develop. The faculty remembered that in the first four years of the infant institution, of the handful of students who entered thirty-five became priests. Now that the registration numbered over two hundred, a like proportion of vocations must be sought. Hence in the College Catalogue of '69 we find the builders, despite all their debts and catastrophes, insisting that the S. O. L. A. is "principally for the training of priests. If others are accepted, it is only by way of exception." It took bold men to print that while they faced

poverty. It was tantamount to saying to the parents: "In this college we must have discipline suitable for the training of priests. We wish not your boy if he be not subject to authority."

A priest must be a soldier of the cross. A soldier must learn discipline. As a means for such training there was introduced at this period into the collegiate department military drill. But there were other men, not of the seminary nor college, but of the vicinity, who also were drilling. These post-bellum days were those of the Fenian raids from Buffalo into Canada. There was no connection between the collegians and the Fenians; but some of the Canadian farmers, watching the maneuvers on the college campus from across the river, stroked their beards and wondered if another raid was preparing. True, the collegians in their drills used at first nothing more bellicose than broomsticks; but to the distant gazers those broomsticks perilously resembled muskets. And the gyrating masses of young humanity on the campus enjoyed the fears of the farmers, enjoyed the command for "double-quick" across the campus to the precipice, where they would drop on one knee, point the "weapons" westward, and watch the farmers scurry to cover. Maybe it is only a coincidence, but it is a fact that it was during these days of drill that Brock's monument was rebuilt; the memory of the worthy warrior would enkindle patriotism in the breast of yeomanry.

Now that the excitements of the Civil War were past, Niagara Falls took up something more than Fenianism to attract the tourists and provide the necessary American thrill. So another "Maid of the Mist" shot the rapids to Lewiston, the second one in thirteen years. But within the institution on the Ridge there were disturbing rumors that somewhat robbed the scholars of all thrills; the rumors spread that in a little while no more fishing lines would in the absence of prefects be lowered from the back windows of the two wings to surreptitious peddlers of sweet meats and Sweet Caporals. These unconscionable harpies in times of silence and study

pushed their carts down the highway that once had been the roadbed of the Lockport, Lewiston and Niagara Falls Railway, and beneath the rear windows announced their presence by a tinkle or two of a little bell. It would be unnoticed by all ears save those awaiting its advent. Coin enwrapped in notes would immediately dangle from lines from almost every window. Now the rumors flew that a monopoly in restraint of trade,—in perfect annihilation thereof, was about to be inaugurated. For twenty years the rails of the old railroad had been removed; but now Dame Rumor whispered that they were to be replaced from the Bridge to Lewiston. Peddlers could not push their carts along railroad ties. Something must be done about it, or these vendors might perish from the face of the earth! Washington should investigate, and legislate to make the world safe for democracy and peanuts. And, besides, what musical hearts (save those of the prefects) would not prefer the sweet tintinnabulating bell of the ice-cream man to the harsh clang of the "iron horse"? Or the lilt of the lollypop to the lunge of the locomotive? This trysting place with the peddler was even more exciting than the antics of Signor Balleni who in those days stretched his rope across the cataract and tried to outdo the thrills of Blondin of fifteen years previous. Why, it was more exciting than even the opening of the new Suspension Bridge.

But poor Father Rice had more to worry him than peddlers and Suspension Bridges. What he wanted was someone to build a bridge across the river of his raging debts. True, he had anchored his stanchions on the Rock of Ages; but the bridge he was endeavoring to build had human cables; and whatever is human is weak. The building of the new Suspension Bridge might be thrilling, but it was sorrowful, too; it was exacting its dole of tragedy from the workers. The builder of bridges across debts must, also, expect tragedies. His fellow workers might labor night and day, and sing as they worked; but he knew that sorrow as well as sweat must cement the stones and weld the bolts. Just as he was beginning to imagine that his



spiritual engineering was a success, just a few months after the Vincentian headquarters at the Barrens had been removed to Germantown, Pennsylvania, the builder saw his bridge tremble and almost collapse, because his chief human support, his Provincial, Father Stephen Ryan, was removed. Pius IX ordered the latter to leave his new home and take the place of his dead confrere in the see of Buffalo,—the seventh leader that in forty-four years the Vincentians had lost to the episcopacy. Father Rice needed the help of one who thoroughly understood Niagara's aims and struggles. This was the era of the famous Black Friday (September 24th, '69) and Niagara's era of prolonged "Fridays," each blacker than the one before; the era of promissory notes and promiscuous loans.

Father Rice borrowed from a Buffalo Bank and paid the \$14,000 mortgage to Mr. Burke. Then almost immediately borrowed from a New York City company \$25,000 and paid Vedder \$10,000; and wondered where he could borrow more to pay the same gentleman something on the \$20,000 of another mortgage he had taken, and something on other loans from other creditors. He felt that he could do so, could even pay all future taxes, if someone interested in the education of young men for the priesthood would only recognize what sacrifices his fellow priests were making, and loan him \$200,000. But financiers have a habit of requiring for collateral something more than personal honesty, integrity and sacrifice. They shook their heads dubiously at the scheme of men, strong in mind and body, working a lifetime without wages for the sake of a spiritual idea. This was about the financial condition in the beginning of '74; and facing it, the priest resolved at last,—to sell the place? Not a bit. He resolved to build again.

He had long admitted the present necessity of having the General Chapel on the third floor of the seminary wing; had long admitted its spaciousness, and its interior of plain but dignified beauty; but just as plainly did he recognize the dis-

advantages of its situation. The collegians for their daily Mass, frequent visits and evening devotions had to pass through the corridors of the seminary to reach it. He had learned well how St. Vincent, to carry out the wishes of the Council of Trent, had succeeded in solving the seminary problem where other saintly and mighty minds had failed; even a sainted Borremeo had failed. St. Vincent had found the solution in the absolute separation between collegians and seminarians; the nearest contact must be that of vision only,—the contact between the nave and the sanctuary. Obviously, this could not be where collegians had to pass through the seminarians' quarters. Yes, they marched in ranks to Mass and evening devotions; but if vocations were to be fostered the young collegian must be taught the beauty of frequent individual visits to the Blessed Sacrament at odd times in spare moments. This private converse with his Lord in the tabernacle would instill tender piety into the heart of the generous youth, whether he eventually trended to the steps of the altar or to the marts of worldly commerce. He must be taught that his Lord is waiting for him any hour of the day, to listen to his worries and his wishes, to calm the undue anxiety of study, to curb untoward ambitions, and to the heart that ached with discouragement to give the courage to try again. No moment is lost if spent for God.

And besides, Our Lord deserved a house all His own, where He can appeal to others in a way He cannot when His Audience Chamber is but another room of the same building. We even today can appreciate Father Rice's contention; even in our busy cities we see the mute appeal of a building wholly dedicated to God's service. In the tumult of the world such a place oftentimes stirs the depths of the heart when sacred song, and stately ceremonial, and thunderous organ leave the heart unmoved. They of the faith feel it so, whether they have been born and bred in the atmosphere of belief, or have come there-to and dwelled therein for years. Yes, they feel it so, though they may no more advert to that appeal than they advert to

the air they breathe. But they not of the faith advert to it, and are puzzled at it. On week days they may pass a Catholic church on the crowded highways. They sense that there is something different from all other buildings, from all other churches. What is that difference? People at the entrance are casually sauntering in and out, as though they belonged there. Some linger on the steps as though loath to leave. Most of them seem strangers to one another; only a few nod acquaintanceship. But no one seems a stranger to the building, though he may have come upon it unaware,—perhaps never before had seen it.

If the observer follow suit and enter he senses an indefinable calm. The roar of traffic without pounds upon the walls as upon cushions,—like the moaning of a distant ocean at night. The traffic seems miles away, though it is only maybe thirty feet. Children's voices from an adjoining school-yard may pierce the stillness; but there is a tinkling to them, like the tinkling voice of birds sometimes heard while the thunder rolls through the woodlands. A man in labor's garments enters, slips into a rear pew, and seemingly unconcerned takes from his pocket his rosary. A woman leisurely walks up the aisle, and for minutes (that seem hours) kneels still as a statue before the golden door of the tabernacle. Two little girls, dragging a baby brother that toddles half sideways and half backwards, almost race from altar to altar, as though they were trying to say the greatest number of prayers in the least number of moments: their lips are always moving, even when their hands are over baby's mouth to stifle his ambition to awaken echoes. A young woman, possibly a stenographer, in smart modern dress before the shrine of the Blessed Virgin kneels in "maiden meditation fancy free," strangely oblivious of the infant's lung power. Her eyes are upraised and fixed on the face of the statue as though she were awaiting its voice. A gray-haired woman sits motionless in the first pew, her hands folded over her gingham apron, her faded shawl lifted from her shoulders to her head. She seems

contentedly listening to something,—a whisper she can hear without straining. Now and again a sighful groan floats about the church. It is hard to tell whence it came, and no one seems to care whence. Possibly it came from that old man kneeling beside the pillar who bends low his head in a ridiculous position over the pew before him,—like a man awaiting the stroke of the guillotine. He mutters something as he strikes his breast. A young man, maybe a bank clerk, is rising and kneeling, rising and kneeling at stated distances along the walls. He gazes upwards, seeing something beyond the crosses and the pictures. But the strangest part of the whole scene is that no one notices anyone else,—except, perhaps, it be that schoolboy who flings his books upon the pew and leans his little weight now on one knee, now on another, and entwines and disentwines his fingers, and moves his lips as quickly as he moves his eyes. He sees everything, but notices nothing. One would surmise that he did not notice even what he was saying, did not one see that furrow between his eyes. He is intent on something. Maybe he is praying for a sick mother at home; or, more probably, for something foolish and boyish,—perhaps, to have “lots of strike-outs” in the game he is about to pitch. He is the last one in, and the first one out,—in a terrible hurry. But no one is conscious of anything untoward,—except the non-Catholic observer. More than of anything else, however, he is conscious of the quiet, the peace, the unnatural calm; and cannot fathom whence it comes, cannot apprehend that it is breathed from the real presence of Our Lord within the tabernacle, cannot realize that it is this breath which flatters every heart as with a touch not quite impalpable.

No one more keenly appreciated than did Father Rice the value, almost the necessity of a home for the Lord, separate from all other buildings. He would build this home. What! should a bankrupt contract still further debts? Father Rice would have replied: “Yes, if the debts be for the Lord. He will see that His debts will be paid. Is not the training of

young men for the priesthood His work? Is not a separate chapel, when possible, a necessary means? The only things requisite for the builders are faith and exemplary lives. He will furnish the material means. The Alumni of eighteen years will help me in the project." There must be no delay. So, as soon as the weather broke in the spring of '74, the priest broke ground for the Alumni Chapel. In three months he laid the corner stone, then worked more slowly: his ready cash had vanished more quickly than he had anticipated. If only financial aid should come as faithfully as taxes and interest on mortgages! Laborers, no more than he, can without prejudice to digestion eat promissory notes. Still, he will not halt the work: only slacken it. In eleven months the walls are only eight feet above ground,—just above the top of the basement windows. He can go no further; so he throws a temporary roof over the structure, and allows the juniors of the college department to use the hall for their recreations.

A perfect drizzle of promissory notes, even for provisions, fell upon the roof. But for the financial rainmakers the sun must shine—eventually. However, before it could shine for the rainmakers, it must first shine for the drenched debtor. For the latter it shines spasmodically,—whenever he can negotiate another loan to pay off the interest on a mortgage foreclosing. If the priest does not really rob Peter to pay Paul, he at least is forced to persuade Peter to part with some cash in order that he may silence Paul. But in a few months Peter has become another Paul, and the priest must hunt still another Peter, who just as quickly changes his financial personality. In these bewildering metamorphoses, the poor priest soon cannot well tell just who is Peter, and who Paul. He collapses completely. His physicians order a sea voyage; his many friends surround him with their proffered aid. His superiors consent; he does not. Then they command. But he must build his chapel to the Lord! Must he leave his beloved Niagara in all this financial entanglement? There was an old, large gnarled apple tree that grew a little west of the present

statue of the Little Flower. Age had slashed large gashes into its sides. To the invalid it seemed that its heart was almost exposed. It always looked so lonely in the winter; but in the spring it always managed to smile contentedly, cheerfully, with the smile we so often see on the very old who are awaiting death. Every winter seemed to be its last; yet every spring it gave promise of another year. Father Rice loved the old tree. It seemed to know him and understand him. In the warm weather he loved to sit beneath its arms and say his office, or watch the boys at play, or the workmen raise stone on stone on his chapel to the Lord. And now he must leave all. He felt that he never again would see what most he loved. To his confreres at parting he said, "Finish the chapel; that will be my monument. And bury me beneath the old apple tree."

On April 3rd, '78, he sailed for Europe.

*"My feet are wearied, and my hands are tired;  
My soul oppressed.  
And with desire have I long desired  
Rest,—only rest."*

On the following July 25th, in Castleknock, Ireland, he died.

His confreres respected his parting wish as best they could. But many months passed before his body reached Buffalo. After lying in state in the Cathedral it was brought to the graveyard of his brothers, where in its simple tomb it lies today. For many years afterwards it became the ritual of the Alumni at their reunions to leave the banquet hall and march in procession to his grave for the reciting of the rosary; and for many more years old, gray-haired priests whom he had taught would come from the four corners of the country and ask, "Where is his grave?" They would rise from their knees beside the tomb and would stammer, "A sweeter, gentler saint I never knew among the sons of men." Today a collegian or a seminarian occasionally strolls to the brink of the precipice, and, bending to decipher the weather-beaten in-

scription, says aloud, "I wonder who he was?" The poor, dear dead, they are so lone! How soon they are forgotten! On September 12th, 1860, in St. Vincent's Church, St. Louis, three young men had knelt at the altar for ordination: Abraham J. Ryan, Patrick M. O'Regan, and Robert E. Rice. The first lies among his Children of Mary near Mobile Bay; the second, who died in Los Angeles, in 1928, lies within sound of the Pacific Ocean; and the third atop the precipice of the thundering Niagara; the extremes of country, north, south and west. In the Hall of Fame, Richmond, Virginia, a living portrait of the first stands beside the central figure of General Lee. Between the Potomac and the Gulf the world has built more than twenty monuments to his honor, lest coming generations forget the sweetest singer of a Lost Cause. A simple inscription marks the grave of the second and the third: He lived, he labored, he died. But what has either accomplished? Where are their many monuments? The world knows not even their names. They both worked for God,—as did the first. Ah, well, that is never a "Lost Cause."