

CHAPTER XVI

THE CRUSADERS OF WITS AND WHACKS AND WORSHIP

BESIDES the requirements of the Regents of the State of New York, and those of the Association of Colleges of the Middle States and Maryland, various colleges amalgamated their educational efforts for one purpose or another, and stated their requirements for other colleges to be admitted into their circle. To them, also, Niagara applied for recognition, and was accorded it. It was for this reason that Niagara became a member of the Association of American Colleges, of the American Council on Education, of the National Catholic Educational Association, etc. And while the educators of the nation were recognizing the worth of the work that Niagara had been doing for so many years, the Dean, Father Edward Harrison, started in 1922 a movement to enlarge the scope of the work.

In that year he sent his men to give educational lectures at regular intervals in the vicinity of Niagara Falls. The public crammed the auditoriums. In 1924 a committee of school teachers and principals waited on the Dean and requested that these lectures be given every night during the school term as University Extension Courses, with scholastic credits given to those whose attendance and examination should prove satisfactory. It was thus that the University widened its circle of usefulness. In 1926 it gave its first credits, credits recognized by the other colleges of the Association. In this year Father Daniel Lawler became Dean of the Extension, and still widened the circle: it now embraces not only the work done during the school term with the parochial school teachers in the afternoon and the public school teachers at night in the cities of Niagara Falls and Buffalo, but during the vacation periods extends the lectures to Plattsburg and Utica,

N. Y.; Saginaw, Michigan; and Emmitsburg, Maryland.

There had been some doubt as to whether the strict wording of our original charter warranted our giving degrees of "M.A.," "M.S.," or "Ph.D." to women graduates of colleges; so on February 17th, 1928, the state amended the charter to exclude all doubt. And in the next year the University opened its doors for summer school work on the grounds, principally for the benefit of the industrial and analytic chemists who wished to advance their positions in the many plants that line the Niagara River for miles above the Falls. Professor George Banks with his assistants gave the warmest welcome to all that came to these sylvan glens and smiling plains of Acadian peace, where the only pictures to disturb the students' minds are the beauty of the place and the happy clamors of the warring waters. His welcome waxed even warmer when other courses in the sciences and arts attracted more students in the summer of 1931, just as it had waxed warmer when in 1930 Professor J. R. Wilkinson had become Dean of the University's College of Business, and had swung wide its doors for the new department on the campus and in the City of Niagara Falls.

But while enlarging the scope of mental training, the University has not forgotten the physical. However, in the latter, it has maintained a wise conservatism. The late reaction of many of the larger universities towards more of interclass games and less of extramural competition seems to be a return to Niagara's policy. Not that she has neglected athletic competition with other colleges in her class, and with many above her class. Not that she feels no pride in her record. But she has ever reasoned that athletics are not an end in themselves, but only a means to an end—a means to preserve a sound mind in a sound body. However, the sound body should be found not simply among the favored few whom nature has formed into gladiators, but should be found among all. She has ever felt that the best means to promote this physical sanity is not by having a thousand students on a grandstand strengthen

only their lungs by shouting encouragement to eleven gladiators simmering on a gridiron, but rather by having eleven tubercular students on a roof taking a sun bath, and watching the thousands (simultaneously or otherwise) daily competing for supremacy on courts of basketball or tennis, on alleys of handball or bowling, in swimming pools or running tracks, with vaulting pole or boxing glove, on the baseball diamond or football field. In this method, all would be building up muscle and sinew, blood and bone—even the eleven on the roof. This would be an ideal condition, no doubt. No grandstand would be needed. But, unfortunately, young men suffer from the common complaint of human nature—they are more real than ideal. They court recognition. They need encouragement vocalized and multiplied. The zest in interclass games will wane unless the fleetest, the strongest and cleverest have the hope of obtaining recognition for their speed, brawn or brain from the thousands in the stadium. Pull down your grandstands, and you may as well turn your bats into darning needles, and your footballs into hassocks. Since the ideal cannot be reached, the real must be encouraged, guided and curbed. Niagara has ever striven to promote interclass games; but these games cannot have the proper life unless there be a goal for the students' endeavors. And the goal to be reached is where the best in all the classes lure the thousands to the stadiums.

But, alas, Niagara has no stadium. Through Father Harrison's labors, the athletic field can well be matched with any in the country. But it is as open as the methods she has ever used in her athletic dealings. The latter should be kept open, but the former should be enclosed. To enclose it means money; and money does not come from crowds that can see without paying. Niagara is waiting for her Prince Bountiful who will rear his ramparts for the thronging multitudes. "We will hang out his banners on the outward walls." And only then will the cry of the Macbeths in the embattled booths at the entrances resound with "Still they come!"

In track and field Niagara has done practically nothing of national note. Her interclass games have undoubtedly promoted health and recreation among the general student body, but they have provided no Paddocks nor Sturdys. Since the shortening of the spring and fall terms of school, she has found the baseball season too short for effective training. Still, she has produced a Joe McCarthy and a Benny Bengough, respectively present manager and former catcher of the "Yanks;" and Earl Mac, son of the famous Connie, and his assistant manager of the Athletics; and "Red" Carroll who now as a Vincentian Missioner picks up souls from sin, instead of grounders from the infield of the Newarks; and numerous others in all the leagues.

In basketball Niagara has made a better record. The best college teams in the country have oftentimes proved not good enough for her; but these "times" have not been repeated often enough to suit the acrobatic cheer-leader, Peter Ferrari, or William McCarthy, the coach; and not nearly enough to satisfy the voracious enthusiasm of the director, Father Illig. However, with the colleges in their league, called the "Conference," they are more than satisfied—they are proud. Their thumbs in their vests, shoulders high, and their hands extended like portal lights, they sit on the front row of the bleachers, stick out their chests beyond the building line, and dare anyone to trip over their pedal verandas.

But it is in football that the most serious efforts are made and the most gratifying results obtained. Coach Sheldon Hecker, Niagara trained and tried, with his assistants and fellow alumni, Robert O'Connell and Norman Schreiber, has in the past two years surpassed even the glorious record of the Notre Dame player, Peter Dwyer, the former coach. True, the annual games with the doughtiest teams of the biggest universities of the country have not brought constant victories. Until Niagara gets her stadium too much cannot be expected. But she has always played creditably, if not victoriously. This is proved from the fact that these biggest universities

always wish her to return. She is not discouraged if sometimes Cornell, or New York University, or Pennsylvania State College wins, even by a very big margin. She is awaiting her stadium; and is courageous enough to expect that then her groves will be of "laurel and myrtle and rose." Until that time she feels more at home with such teams as Syracuse University, Rochester University, De Paul University of Chicago, and with the teams of her Conference. But most of all she is at home in the annual mutual combustion with St. Bona's. She would like to see St. Bona's beat every other team in the land—save one. And St. Bona's feel the same about Niagara. The result is that annually an irresistible force meets an irremovable obstacle. After the game the field marshal that cuts the grass, taking from his watch pocket a crystal, toothbrush and microscope, limps across the green to gather any fragments that perchance may remain; and after vainly searching on his knees for twenty minutes, restores the crystal, brush and 'scope, and hums his way homeward to the tune of the "Battle of Blenheim:"

*"And what they killed each other for,
I could not well make out.
But everybody said, quoth he,
That 'twas a famous victory."*

It is not only in the classroom and on the campus that the students find an outlet for their mental and physical energies, but (for the former, at least) in the various society rooms, also. There are the German Club, the Adirondack Club, the Bay State Club, the Buffalo Club, the Connecticut Club, the Eastern New York Club, the Knickerbocker Club, the Rochester Club, the Syracuse Club, the Western Club—all kinds of clubs except the policeman's—and the sundry literary and debating societies. In the days when student activities were not so multiplied these last flourished most abundantly; but in these days of social affairs beyond the campus and dances in big hotel ballrooms, the attractive stimulus for optional de-

bating and literary endeavor is not so strong. But the Glee Club is still "gleeing" (sometimes over the radio) under the direction of Father Salway; the Cecilian Association is still "ceciliating," undauntedly awaiting Dryden's angel to hear, and straightway to appear, "mistaking earth for heaven;" the University Orchestra still doth orchestrate "their jealous pangs and desperation, depth of pain and height of passion;" and in the "Baldwin Memorial" Conservatory of Music the University Band still raises the roof—and ofttimes Prof. Rieger's Teutonic indignation. But the activity of the literary societies is not quite so strong as it was in the days of yore. The "Seminary of Our Lady of Angels Literary Association" (the S. O. L. A.) passed away about two years ago, aged sixty. Monsignor Nelson Baker, the Vincent de Paul of Buffalo, a charter member, is not too old to mourn her loss; and the young Bishop John J. O'Shea of China, her last active censor, is not too young to feel a pang. But the Basilian Literary Association, after an existence of nearly half a century, has not "gone a-glimmering." She is quite as valiant as she was in the days when Monsignors John F. Nash of Brooklyn and John L. Reilly of Schenectady, and Fathers Matthew A. Taylor of New York City, and Charles J. Eckles of Philadelphia in their debates and orations saved the country after the Civil War. And if our present Father Burke is censor for another year, Niagara's present generation may save the country from Bolshevism.

And the "Robert Emmet Vincent Rice Literary Association" is still going strong after sixty-five years of constant life.

*"Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety."*

Were Father Edward J. News who died in Norfolk in 1915, and Mr. William L. Pope of Brooklyn (charter members in 1866) still alive they would say that you cannot kill her because of the undying memory of her namesake, her patron. Were the secretary of '06, afterwards Father L. B. Liddane of

Utica, still alive he would probably remark in his whimsical way that few things promote greater longevity than "rice." But Fathers George Ford of New York City, David Dooling of Utica, and Christopher King of Raven, N. Y., who are still in the prime of their lives—what would they say? Perhaps they would diplomatically agree to "leave it to the present censor, Father Flood. He is older than the society, yet younger than its youngest member. His words of wisdom ever settled all domestic and international problems sagely and definitely." And Father Flood would, undoubtedly, settle the question by saying, "Gentlemen: All together now! Sing the old song!"

*"Our members silently depart
As the years go rolling by.
With honored name some rise to fame,
And win positions high.
Some voices now are ringing
In the pulpit and the bar,
As oft of yore they rang before
In the old R. E. V. R."*

What we have said of the optional literary activities, we can say of the dramatic: they are not quite so active as they were a generation ago. Formerly, three or four plays a year were not unusual. Ambition was keen to "get a part." The weekly meetings of the literary societies afforded opportunities for the young student to "find himself" in his mental battles on the floor. Many a diffident boy became confident. Self-consciousness surrendered to courage. They even staged private dramas in their society rooms. Thus talent was found. In the 80's and 90's Father Luke Grace was an inspiration to the young. He would select the talent that the societies had found, and drill it in dramatics. Not only in Shakespearean plays, but in modern comedies, many of them written by himself. Thus the talent became refined. His successors followed the traditions he had formed. A Niagara graduate felt as much at home in a national assembly or in a pulpit as he had

been on the floor of his society. In educational and ecclesiastical circles the University became nationally known as an institution of orators, lay and cleric.

The late Father D. J. Stafford of Washington, the far-famed pulpit orator and Shakespearean lecturer, gained his youthful training in this way at Niagara. Mr. George B. Kennedy, the attorney of Buffalo, learned the trick of eloquence in these societies and dramas. The late Philadelphia physician, Dr. Thomas Larkin, could well have risen to stellar prominence on the stage had not his inclinations led him to curing diseases rather than to declaiming dramas. And perhaps to even greater prominence than he would have risen Father John Flanagan, the late eloquent rector of the Rockford Cathedral, had not the sanctuary lamp proved more alluring than the footlights. The former Secretary of Commerce under Roosevelt, Lawrence O. Murray, in these societies and dramas learned poise, precision of thought and statement. Judge Marcus Kavanagh of Chicago, who gave the Commencement Address last June, the eminent criminologist who wrote "The Criminal and His Allies" and who a few years ago was invited by the British Parliament to propound his theories before it, began his calm weighing of evidence and his lancet-probing into facts from his debates in these society halls. The Reverend Daniel Daly of Worcester before he had written his novel, "The Rose and the Sheepskin" (a novel of Niagara University life), and Father Julian Johnstone, the late poet of Boston, learned their ease of expression and beauty of thought and insight into human nature more, we think, from the literary room than from the classroom. The present Judge of New York Special Sessions, Lawrence T. Gressor; the Reverends Joseph Hurley of Erie; Robert Keenan of Winthrop, Maine; John McCreary of Syracuse; and William O'Rourke, (Porky, the inimitable portrayer of the "tramp") still come back in memory as they were in the beginning of this century as characters in the "Three Hats," "Are You My Son?" and "The Parish Priest." They would tell you that a great deal of

their success is due to the debating floor and the dramatic stage. The physicians, Drs. Hugh McNeiley of Cleveland and Thomas Phelan of Chicago would endorse the view that dramatics and dialectics helped form their minds for diagnoses and dietetics. The Reverend James Bray of Lockport, N. Y., before he had built up his wonderful historical library (possibly the most valuable private historical library in the state, and guarded by the best historical mind) had built up a wonderful tenacious memory; and exactitude of thought in the ponderings of evidence, the characters of authorities, the patient searching into sources, and the niceties of expression learned in great measure from the society debates. Where did the late Father Barrett and the present Dr. L. Hanley begin that ringing eloquence and that cultured professional success if not from contact with the highest thought expressed with that literary excellence which is demanded by the literary societies and dramatic clubs? Where learned the Reverend Walter Lee of Geneva, N. Y. that incisive persuasiveness? Where did the Fathers James and John Flynn of Brooklyn learn, the one that Shakespearean trend of thought, and the other that serious manner of convincing, if not from these societies? Where got Fathers James Hanrahan, Superintendent of Schools of Albany diocese, and Patrick Clune, Superintendent of Schools of Trenton diocese, that sense of order and educational evaluation of minutiae, if not from the clash of minds that debating entails? Where did Father Gleason of Niagara Falls, and Monsignor Duffy of the Buffalo Cathedral learn that patience in listening but from the youthful habit of listening to an opponent's presentation of his case? Would you not say that the late Archbishop of Chicago, James E. Quigley; and the late Bishop Dunn of Peoria; and the Bishops James Hartley of Columbus, Thomas Lillis of Kansas City, Frank Howard of Covington, Francis Tief of Concordia, Edmond Gibbons of Albany, and John O'Shea, C.M., of China, all helped their training for the mitre by the poise, patience and perseverance

gained from the debates and dramas of other years at Niagara?

But why has not this traditional dramatic, literary and dialectic training at Niagara the same strength that it used to have? There are several reasons. First, audiences do not support today as eagerly as they did a generation ago these debates or amateur theatricals. America has become pleasure-mad, and culture has somewhat lost its charm. People love to court distractions and they hate to think. They prefer laughter to thought, vaudeville to drama, and the actor on the film to the actor in the flesh. Secondly, the school terms today are a great deal shorter than they were a generation ago, while the vacations at Christmas, Easter and summer are longer; but the amount of scholastic territory to be covered by the students is just as large—maybe larger. This fact means that the student must intensify his efforts to gain the same results that a generation ago could be gained only by a longer period of study. Consequently, he has not so much time as formerly for optional efforts outside the classroom. But the third, and essential reason is this: we have no auditorium—have not had since the fire of 1913 consumed Alumni Hall. When it was rebuilt in 1918 it became Alumni Chapel. The old Shakespearean Hall that took in the third and fourth stories of the seminary wing could no longer be spared as an auditorium: the influx of students begot a crowded situation that had to be faced. So half the Hall was converted into the Seminarians' Chapel, and the rest of the space into rooms. Thus for eighteen years Niagara has been without an auditorium. True, we have a beautiful, spacious library and two gymnasiums that serve well enough for lectures to collegians and seminarians; but we need a real auditorium to conserve the old Niagara spirit that finds expression in debates and dramas and the old-time *gaudeamus*. Till that auditorium be built Niagara will miss what has always been a part of its training. Four years ago Father Kilb tried to revive the old-time spirit by reviving the drama, but became discouraged: no facilities for proper training. Two years ago Father Francis

McDonnell tried it again: hired a theatre in the city. But the price was prohibitive of future efforts; and besides, young men cannot be expected to go nightly three miles for rehearsals even though the theatre were available. This past scholastic year Father Frederick Burke has given us two excellent performances; but he and his actors are working under too great a handicap. We hope that he will not become discouraged. The old-time Niagara spirit seems flitting in the offing, searching for a place to land. We hope that Father Burke and his troupe, despite all difficulties, will give us two more next year; and with undaunted courage will keep on working till some good-natured benefactor comes along, opens his check book and cigar case at the same time, saying, "Oh yes! Here—have an auditorium on me!"

But if the literary and dramatic societies have somewhat abated in their scope and strength, the religious societies have not. Father Thomas O'Connor sees to that. The League of the Sacred Heart still appeals as strongly as of yore. And the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin weekly meets for an instruction, for confession, for prayerful song and for adoration of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. This December, 1931, the Sodality will be sixty-seven years old. Some of the charter members are still living. Fathers Walters, Antill, Hickey and Traynor are some of the ones among the charter members dead. But Father James Hennelly is still living. Almost totally blind, he is shambling along the corridors of the Mullanphy Hospital, St. Louis, humming to himself, "O Me Darlin'." Monsignor Nelson Baker, too, almost totally blind, is still alive. He can still grope his way through his orphanages, hospitals, homes for the aged, workshops, schools, and his superb basilica. He is never too blind to recognize the poor and the abandoned. And there is another charter member, one not thinking of shambling, groping or dying—Father Martin Lee of Medway, Mass. He is still as chipper as a chipmunk chasing squirrels. He can still drive his auto on Sundays to North Bellingham or Millis, say his Mass at eight o'clock,

drive home, say another Mass at ten, baptize a few babies, settle half a dozen disputes, then eat his breakfast and wonder where the curates of this weakened generation get their headaches from long fasting. From present indications, he will be able to do a hornpipe at our centenary in 1956; and maybe afterwards begin a post-graduate course in the Georgetown School of Foreign Service for future work as Ambassador to the Court of St. James.

There is another society that has arisen in the last few years, and has done excellent work—the Catholic Students' Mission Crusade. In both the seminary and college, the students, under the inspiration of Fathers J. Garcia and T. O'Connor have their hearts kindled to espouse the work of Christ the King, and by their prayers, energy, talents and encouragement give all the sorely needed help to those who are working in home and foreign mission fields. Almost every week some missionaries pass through Niagara, and seek shelter beneath her hospitable roof; and oftentimes by their addresses add energy to inspiration.

This past June 29th to July 2nd the Crusaders held their National Convention at Niagara University. Twenty-five hundred strong they came from almost every state in the union and from many provinces in Canada. Missioners from China, too, from Africa, India—everywhere. To Father Garcia with his assistants, Fathers Meade and O'Connor, are due the magnificent entertainment, and religious enlightenment, and true Crusadal fervor, united with the strict business order that ruled the Convention. For the occasion railroads reduced their fares all over the country. Father Garcia had his committees at the stations, and had ready his busses to carry the delegates to the University grounds. And at the end of every perfect day he had again the busses ready to take the young women delegates for the night to Stella Niagara Seminary, to the Casa Maria, to St. Mary's Hospital, and to Loretto Academy across the river in Canada. The clergy stayed in the Faculty House of the University, and the laity in the rooms of the college and

seminary. Bands and orchestras enlivened almost every meeting outside the Chapel. The President, Father O'Byrne, greeted the enthusiastic gathering with a warmth that left no doubt of the welcome. After the evening dinner on the 29th, Father Aloysius Link, Buffalo's Diocesan Director of the Propagation of the Faith, viewed the throng in the big gymnasium and sounded the welcome of the diocese; and the Dominican Father Edward Hughes poured out a torrent of eloquence that swept their souls on flood tides to other scenes and centuries "when knighthood was in flower." At the Pontifical Mass said by the Right Rev. Bishop Turner, Archbishop McNicholas of Cincinnati preached. It was the first Pontifical Mass sung on the renovated campus, and the sermon was as beautiful as its setting. Various meetings of the several groups followed for the next three days, interspersed with auto rides and guides to the many historic sites of the region. Two and a half centuries looked upon them as they stood in old Fort Niagara. If the old Fort could have spoken as it gazed upon these youthful hearts burning with the Crusaders' faith of centuries ago, it would have said that the faith is as strong in the hearts of the young of today as it was in the hearts of their sires a thousand years ago. We feel sure that it would have so spoken had it witnessed on the afternoon of July 1st the soul-stirring pageantry of the Ritual of Initiation as portrayed on the University campus. The Middle Ages lived again, and throbbed above the hymning waters of the gorge. Father Meade was as another Louis VII directing the hosts; and the voice of the veteran actor, William H. Mordaunt, as the voice of St. Bernard firing the young Crusaders to higher endeavor for Christ the King. And not thirty minutes journey from them was the cross at Fort Niagara, standing on the very spot the cross had stood two centuries and a half ago — the Cross whereon was writ, "Christ Reigns, Conquers, Commands."