

CHAPTER IV

HOW FAR TO NIAGARA FALLS?

IT was October 15, 1837, that Father Timon said good-bye to John Lynch and sailed for the States. The farewell was more bitter to the Irish novice than to the American priest because, if for no other reason, the novice saw two of his Spanish confreres depart for the land of Niagara Falls, while he himself was told to bide his time; and one of the confreres was only ten years older than he, and the other just his own age. The older one was Thaddeus Amat, who eventually became Bishop of Los Angeles; and the younger, Michael Domenec, who in twenty-three years, after tending the parish at Nicetown and building the first church in Germantown, Pennsylvania, would become Bishop of Pittsburgh; but neither knew he was sailing to be crowned with the thorns of a mitre, nor knew that he was accompanying the future Bishop of Buffalo; and none of the three knew he was bidding farewell to the first Archbishop of Toronto whose confines would embrace the wondrous Cataract.

The young Provincial must have had high hopes for his new province. In the preceding August, on his way to Europe through Baltimore, Bishop Eccleston had asked him to take over Mount St. Mary's Seminary. But on reporting to the Superior General, the proposition was considered inadvisable: how could twenty priests of a new province run its own seminary, and a diocesan seminary of St. Louis, and begin the new seminary in New Orleans, as it had promised to do; and, besides, evangelize the vast district around the Barrens? He must get priests—priests—priests! But where could he get them? When he had landed in New Orleans he completed arrangements with Bishop Blanc for the opening of the seminary, and hurried to the Barrens. But he must get priests!

The Great Western, on April 23rd, inaugurated the first steam trans-Atlantic service: if only one priest would come over on its every trip, and supplement the number that would graduate from the Barrens! In the summer came word from the Pope that he was appointed coadjutor of St. Louis. What! Lessen the number of priests in the struggling province, instead of increasing them? Impossible! Bishop Rosati's arguments to the contrary notwithstanding! All the arguments had a weak foundation: had not the Bishop himself twice refused the mitre? And had he not refused till compelled by obedience to accept? Timon had other work to do: he must get priests for his province! If other priests and bishops had induced the Pope to think he was fit for a bishop, why, all the worse for their judgment—that's all! He must work only for one end—priests, priests for the province!

But before Christmas he was called to work in a place where especially there would be no hope for immediate vocations. For two years now Texas had been a republic. Mexico had enjoyed the sorrows of independence from Spain only for fifteen years when Texas had won its independence from Mexico. For nearly thirty years anarchy was its dominant note. Priests had been banished, Indians driven to the mountain tops or enslaved on the plains; but the new Republic recognized at last that religion was the only means of restoring order. The Pope had commissioned Bishop Blanc to investigate the religious conditions of the place. The Bishop delegated Father Timon. The latter for a time had to forsake the work of getting priests into his province for the work of restoring priests into a country. He reached Texas on Christmas Eve, but he was back in New Orleans by January 12th: he would be obedient, but would not forsake his province for long. In the following summer (1839) more disquieting news reached him: the Superior General Etienne wrote him that both he and Father Odin were proposed for bishoprics. Why couldn't they leave him alone! Certainly, Father Odin would no more accept than would he. They had work enough to do:

priests—priests for the province! In September, Bishop Rosati handed him his Bulls: Coadjutor Bishop of St. Louis! Of course, he could not accept! The Pope did not understand him, nor the conditions of the country. When Father Rosati had been appointed Bishop of Mississippi and Alabama, had not Bishop DuBourg written to the Pope, saying "If you take from me Rosati you will kill all the work of the Congregation of the Mission in the United States?" And the Congregation was not even a Province here then: it has been a Province but four years; what will happen to it if you take from it its Provincial?—In the next month, Bishop Rosati left for Rome.

The Provincial sent back the Bulls, proposed Father Kenrick for the honor, and sent word for more priests. Work was multiplying beyond their strength. He had but twenty-two priests, and work enough for two hundred. In the following year (1840) at the request of Bishop Hughes he took over the New York Seminary at Fordham, and installed Father Villanis as Superior; but his hopes for priests were slow in maturing; and even those he had were listening to the seductive calls from their native land (Italy, France, Spain) where the wars and rumors of wars were melting into the songs of peace. In about a year's time he had to give up the Fordham Seminary that eventually should become Dunwoodie. But still trusting that God would listen to his prayers for priests, in the next year, he assumed command of the Philadelphia Seminary, and installed the faculty of Fathers Maller, Penco, Frazi and Thomas Burke. And in the spring of the year, even before he accepted the Philadelphia Seminary, he was again taken from his work for the Province and by the Pope appointed Prefect Apostolic to Texas. But he himself went not immediately: he appointed Father Odin as his delegate. The evangelization of all Texas was to be given to the Vincentians. Five hundred more priests would be needed. Where would the Provincial get them? The Frenchman in Texas tried to make up somewhat the deficiency by doing the work of a few dozen himself. In the winter the little American

joined him; and when they were parting in the January following (1841) the American clapped the Frenchman on the back and in effect said, "Bully! Keep on ploughing! I'll have to go back and get more priests!—Do you need anything? Oh! a shirt! Sure I can give you a shirt!" So the American took off his shirt, gave it to the Frenchman, and, mayhap, singing the "Marseillaise" returned to the States if not "sans culotte," at least "sans chemise."

But what has all this to do with Niagara University? A great deal, as events will show. Strange as it may seem, except for the fact that Texas had become a republic and that Fathers Odin and Timon had been sent there, Niagara University might never have been built. After John Lynch had bidden goodbye to Father Timon and the two Spaniards, he went back to his books; and, as a side issue, to the study of anything connected with Niagara Falls. But his French libraries supplied very little information regarding the region during the period of the American Revolution, because of the fact that very little happened there during that period. The Colonial General Sullivan had thought it wiser not to try issue with the English soldiers within the Fort. The soldiers had a holiday. The Indians that had fled for protection from Sullivan did most of the fighting—and in their own way. They scurried out on scalping parties, brought back their reeking prizes and received their blood money, and went on protracted whoopees. The Fort became known as the Scalp Market. And a year before Sullivan's Raid there was one outstanding high festival at the Fort: it was the winter when Washington was praying at Valley Forge, and grieving at the tracks of blood that his barefoot soldiers left upon the snow. On December 14th, 1777, an English courier came running into the Fort with the startling news that the war was over! Howe had whipped the life out of Washington! Two days later some Delaware Indians whooped in with even more welcome news—Washington was dead! A few days still later an escaped British prisoner brought "authentic"

news right from within the ranks of the enemy: "Certainly the war is over! Gates has the dead General's place; but what is he? Why, only the other day nine thousand of Percy's men licked the bloomin' tar out of Gates's! Yes, Sir; and even before that, seven thousand Irishmen had deserted Gates and are now fighting with Howe." History does not record the fact, but we feel sure that some Irishman sitting in that crowd of listening British soldiers must have said: "No wonder we whipped them!" Only one other thing of interest happened in the Fort: ten months after these reports had been brought to the Fort, the ill fated ship, "Ontario," laden with troops and merchandise, sailed from the Fort amid much cheering of comrades on the heights; and even to this day no one knows just what happened; no trace of it ever has been found. It was the "Ship that Never Returned."

If the information that the impatient student of Paris gained of the Revolutionary period was meager, the current news of the Falls was less. The iron rails and terrific speed of fifteen miles an hour were revolutionizing the tourist trade at the Falls; and the railroad that was coming from Lockport past the old tavern into Suspension Bridge lengthened its tracks along the river to its terminal immediately in front of the Cataract House. Had it gone a few yards further, it had gone into the rapids above the Falls. And the rival railroad that was coming from Buffalo, not to be outdone, steamed straight down Falls street to First; had it kept on going, it would have jumped the cliff into the river below the Falls. Tourists came from all over the world. And English soldiers from the barracks across the river thought so well of the railroads that it was quite a frequent occurrence for the deserters to plunge at night into the comparatively still waters below the Falls, swim across, and next day depart on the railroads to all parts of the world. But only the strongest and luckiest could make the swim: it became quite a pastime for tourists to go down to the Whirlpool to see if perchance a soldier's body was "whirling around today." Sometimes for several days the

same body would form this ghastly amusement for the curious.

And Lewiston, too, was having its excitements, one constant and one sadly transient. The constant excitement was caused by watching the new way to cross to Queenston: you did not any more have to be rowed across; you could speed across in a real, honest-to-goodness ferry boat; and the motive power was produced by horses pulling a cable through a pulley. The sadly transient thing was sad not because it was transient simply, but because it should have happened at all. A poor misguided American who perhaps had suffered wrongs at the hands of the British government, thought to right the wrongs by insult. On April 17th, 1840, he crossed to Queenston and blew up the monument of the beloved Brock. Naught but a shattered shaft remained. The indignant citizens voiced their just protests, and held meetings to rebuild immediately; but it was thirteen years before their patriotism conquered their parsimony. Dickens had to come and excoriate them and the mother country for allowing a hero's memory to be honored with a splintered shaft; and it took eleven years for the pen of the writer to prick the hearts of the people to remember him who had died for them.

We are not sure, but we judge that it was shortly after the blasting of the monument that John Lynch was ordained in Paris. No doubt, he was telling his friends that he would write to them from Niagara Falls; but soon his Superior was telling him to go back to Ireland and stay there. And thither he went, and ministered in a parish and lived the life of a missionary in his native land. But hope dies hard in the heart of the Irish. He kept in touch by letter with Father Odin, and, doubtless, with Father Timon, too. And besides, Bishop Rosati came to Paris shortly after Father Lynch had left for Ireland; and, I suppose, pleaded his cause with the Superior General. We have found no record of the priest meeting the Bishop on this trip, but we know how the latter always used every endeavor to get priests for the States. The Bishop him-

self was never to return to his diocese. In January, 1842, the Pope sent him to Haiti to try to settle the difficulties of the government with the Church there. He succeeded where the mighty Bishop England twice had failed; returned to Rome in February, 1843, with his report; and in the following September he died. But he had not yet gone to Haiti when Father Lynch received word that Father Odin had at last prevailed upon the Superior General to tell the Irish Superior to allow Father Lynch's departure for the States. It must have been some time in April, 1841, that the priest was on the high seas bound for New Orleans, wondering how long it would take to go from his port to the Falls. We judge that as he was nearing his landing Father Odin was on his way up from Galveston to the same place. The latter certainly made the journey about the beginning of May. Possibly, he came up for the purpose of meeting the Irish priest. But whatever the purpose, we know that the news that greeted him must have exploded from his mind all thoughts of Ireland and all its priests: Bishop Blanc handed to him his Bulls of appointment as Bishop of Detroit! He a Bishop! To be sure, he must refuse! Why, of course he was honored, and grateful, too; but he was not after honors, and he could be just as grateful without them. However, he would confer with Father Timon. So he hastened to the Barrens. They both concluded that this thing of being offered mitres was getting a trifle monotonous, and dangerous to the interests of the Community; and they both agreed with the sentiments of a letter of the Superior General stating that if any more accepted mitres he would suppress the Province. Yes, the best thing to do would be to write a polite refusal to the Pope, and to run back to Texas right away. It may have been that while they were settling the question so, the young Irish priest was standing on the docks of New Orleans, asking questions: "Twelve hundred miles to Niagara Falls! Well, I'm half nearer than I was in Ireland, anyway!" At the end of May the American and the Frenchman picked up the Irishman,

and reached Galveston on the 29th. Still the last must have been asking questions: "Fifteen hundred miles to Niagara Falls! If I keep on getting nearer in this way, soon I'll be further away than when I started! I thought I'd be at least in the same country as the Falls!" If any of the cowboys on bronchos loped by I suppose the priests must have told him that soon he would be riding one of them, and would see lots of falls—more than he wished.