

NIAGARA'S PRESIDENTS

CHAPTER XIII

VERY REV. JOHN JOSEPH LYNCH, C. M., FIRST PRESIDENT—REV. JOHN MONAGHAN, C. M., REV. THOMAS J. SMITH, C. M., REV. DENNIS LEYDEN, C. M.—OUR FIRST STUDENTS.

THE announcement of Archbishop Lynch's death, May 12, 1888, was a sad piece of intelligence to the inmates of Niagara. It was the breaking of a bond that had kept the present united to the historic past; it awakened a flood of memories, all of them sacred, with the name of "Father Lynch" entwined, with his labors, his sacrifices for Niagara's welfare standing out in grandest relief. To the later inmates of this institution the good Archbishop appeared as a patriarch who had ministered at Niagara's shrine when many among us were as yet unborn. He was the pioneer who broke the way for the establishment of God's house amid the wild and majestic scenery surrounding us. He was the first to soften the rudeness of nature hereabouts by religion's sacred touch, and to raise the emblem of our Faith above the stormy waters of our river. Away back in 1856, he came, a simple priest of the Congregation of the Mission, to found our present institution, to foster its tender growth and transmit it flourishing to the care of others when the voice of duty called him away, a few years later, to assume the burdens of the episcopate.

His labors as a missionary by no means began at Niagara. Years before he founded our institution he had been engaged in that capacity in Ireland, his native country, whither he had returned after a novitiate at the Mother House of the Congregation of the Mission in Paris. From Ireland he was assigned to the arduous missionary field of Texas, going thence to St. Louis and afterwards to the Barrens, in Perry County, Missouri, where he was made superior of Saint Mary's Seminary. In 1849, and again in 1855, he was chosen to represent his confreres of the American Province in the general councils held by the Congregation of the Mission in Paris. It was on his return the second time that, at the request of Bishop Timon, he came to Buffalo and started a house of his community in the suburbs of that city. During all this varied and busy career the zealous missionary had his heart set on founding a seminary at Niagara Falls, where, as he used to say when talking to the students of later days, the praises of God, from pure and big hearts, might commingle with the incense of the cataract. How fully his desires were realized may be

seen from the address which he delivered here at the Silver Jubilee, 1881, and which is printed in full in the account of that celebration.

His active supervision over our institution, though lasting only about three years, was blessed with wonderful success, not only in a business point of view, but in that also which is the chief aim of all who preside over houses devoted to Christian education. With that tact peculiar to religious men who live interior lives, as do the saints, he knew how to win over the most wayward, to encourage the timid, to make virtue attractive, and nobility of character among the most highly prized acquisitions of the student. There are many of "Father Lynch's" early students now engaged in the various callings of life whose reminiscences of his kindness, his fatherly solicitude, his wonderful success in gaining hearts would, if published, form some of the most interesting chapters in the life of this apostolic man. It was not by terror that he ruled, but by love; he did not compel obedience by the severity of the rod, but by that higher influence which emanates from a wise, experienced head, and a good, kind heart. That affability which made him so accessible even to the occasional delinquent did not disappear after he had laid aside the simple gown of the professor for the majestic robes of the bishop.

It was in 1859, November 20th, that he was consecrated Bishop of Aechinas *in partibus*, and appointed coadjutor to Bishop Charbonnel of Toronto. He succeeded to that See, April 26, 1860, and became its first archbishop, March 18, 1870.

Whenever he came to Niagara to revisit the home that he had founded, the inmates would flock around him, reverently, indeed, as became children in the presence of a father, but joyfully, too, as having again in their midst one who would tell them of Niagara's early days, of her struggles for existence, and of the noble boys, many of whom now form the vanguard of Niagara's Alumni. His fund of reminiscence was unfailing; his manner of narrative most happy. The smallest boy could appreciate his jokes, while the dullest in the gathering around the venerable prelate could perceive the value of the moral to be drawn from his old-time stories.

The Catholics of Toronto mourned with the best of reason the demise of a beloved archbishop who had devoted nearly thirty years of his life in ministering to their spiritual wants. The good citizens of that flourishing city regretted the ending of a career distinguished for the fullness of its days and its merits. All who were interested in the advancement of Christian education, the spread of religion and

the welfare of oppressed humanity, deplored the departure from the scenes of life of one who had been foremost among the champions of whatever is best for the religious or social happiness of their humbler brethren.

The following extract from a local paper of that time will illustrate the high esteem in which Archbishop Lynch was held by the citizens of Toronto:

“On Tuesday evening all that was mortal of the once great, noble, and illustrious Archbishop of Toronto was borne from the archiepiscopal residence and placed in state in the magnificent cathedral of Saint Michael. At the evening services when vespers for the dead were sung Cardinal Taschereau presided. He was assisted by Vicar General Laurent, Monsignors Paquet and Marois, with about forty priests present in the sanctuary. Those competent to judge made the estimate that about fifty thousand persons gazed upon the saintly countenance of the departed prelate.

“On Wednesday morning, beginning about six o'clock, Masses of Requiem were celebrated until about ten o'clock, when there filed into the sanctuary the priests of the archdiocese and a large clerical delegation from the States, making in all about one hundred priests. After them came Mgr. Paquet, rector of Laval University, Rev. Fathers Le Clerc and Connolley, Montreal; Rev. J. E. Morcouk, Vice-Rector of Laval; Mgr. Marois, the Cardinal's private secretary; Very Rev. P. V. Kavanagh, C. M., and Rev. Joseph Alizeri, C. M., of Niagara University; Bishop Dowling, Peterborough; Bishop O'Mahoney, auxiliary, Toronto; Bishop O'Farrell, Trenton, N. J.; Mgr. Souli, formerly Bishop of the Island of Reunion, Mauritius; Dr. L. Fundren, President of Saint Jerome's College; Archbishop Fabre, Montreal; Bishop Ryan, C. M., Buffalo. His Eminence Cardinal Taschereau sang the Mass of Requiem, with Very Rev. Dean O'Connor as deacon and Father Bergen as sub-deacon of the Mass; Mgr. Gleason and Very Rev. Father Rooney as deacons of honor; Very Rev. Father Laurent, V. G., archpriest, and Mons. Martis as Master of Ceremonies.

“Bishop Ryan preached a most eloquent discourse on the life of the late Most Rev. John Joseph Lynch, speaking of him as a bright, prepossessing student, a cherished, scholarly, charitable member of the Congregation of the Mission, and latterly one of the most brilliant, versatile, learned members of the American hierarchy. After the Absolution the remains of Niagara's honored founder and first president were consigned to the grave to await the summoning of that

Master who will call the faithful dead to a full participation in His heavenly felicity."

While all who were then at Niagara deeply sympathized in the loss which the Church and society in general sustained in the beloved prelate's death, we dare to say that their grief was such as falls upon a household when its father is no more. Here, he raised for us the cross of Christ, the promise of our future victory; here, he labored and prayed that the fidelity of Niagara's children might always be commensurate with the nobility of their mother, and here, let us hope, his name shall be held in benediction and his soul remembered as long as

"The stars burn, the moons increase,
And the great ages onward roll."

Associated as procurator with Father Lynch from the beginning, and remaining at Niagara for three years after its first president had been elevated to the episcopacy, was the Rev. John Monaghan, C. M., a priest whose sweetness of character merited for him from our earliest neighbors the title of "polished, Christian gentleman." This was no mean tribute when it is remembered that our settlement on "the highest point of Mont Eagle ridge" was not then regarded with universal favor.

We learn from the records which our Community keeps of its subjects that Father Monaghan was born in Kings County, Ireland, February 12, 1796, and that he was received into the Congregation of the Mission at "The Barrens," September 27, 1854, making his vows two years later. In 1824 he went to South Carolina with the illustrious Bishop England, and was there employed in conducting an academy and also in teaching in the preparatory seminary of Charleston. Judge Gaston, Alexander Stevens, and others noted in law and politics were among his earlier pupils. Later on he went to Georgia and opened an academic school at a place called Locust Grove, but finding the call to the priesthood strong within him, he relinquished his academic ambitions and moved to Baltimore where, after completing the required studies, he was ordained for the diocese of Little Rock, Ark., then under the government of Bishop Byrne, 1845.

He served that diocese for ten years, his parish embracing eight missions, each of them so poor that their combined income did not exceed fifty dollars a year. After his entrance into the Congregation of the Mission in 1854 he was employed in teaching at the Mother

House in Perryville, Mo., for about four years, after which he was sent to Niagara to act as procurator or treasurer of our newly founded house. During the greater part of the time that Father Monaghan remained here he was also pastor of the church at Suspension Bridge, for one of the duties which Bishop Timon requested our priests to assume upon their settling here was to minister to the Catholics of the Bridge and those of Lewiston. The pastorate of these places remained within the tenure of the "College priests" for many years, often necessitating serious inconveniences to our limited personnel, and was gladly relinquished as soon as the Ordinary of the diocese found himself able to appoint priests of his own to take charge of these parishes.

Father Monaghan left Niagara in 1862, going to Mount Hope Retreat near Baltimore as chaplain. He was recalled to the Mother House later on, and after one year spent at "The Barrens" he was again appointed to serve the Sisters of Charity as chaplain of their institution at Mount Hope. Failing health obliged him to relinquish this post after several years of faithful and valued service. He retired to the new Mother House of the Vincentians in Germantown, Pa., where he died on the anniversary of his vows and the feast of Saint Vincent's death, September 27, 1877, at the age of 81 years.

Priests who are now on Niagara's faculty, and who were then scholastics in Germantown, recall how tenderly Father Monaghan used to speak of Niagara's early days, how vivid was his recollection of even the smallest details connected with his experience and that of Father Lynch as pioneer priests in building up "Our Lady of Angels." He was suavity and gentleness itself; truly "a polished, Christian gentleman," so amiable that it was said of him by a life-long companion: "I do not remember ever to have seen him angry." *Requiescat in pace.*

In July, 1857, Rev. Denis Leyden, C. M., became a member of Niagara's slender faculty under its first president, having been transferred from St. Mary's Seminary, Perryville, Mo., together with Rev. Thomas J. Smith, C. M., afterwards Niagara's third president and later on Visitor of the Congregation of the Mission in the United States. In an interview which our present superior, Father Likly, held with Father Leyden only a few months ago the latter commented with much emphasis on the "deplorable state of poverty" in which he and his companion were obliged to journey from "The Barrens" to their new mission on the banks of the Niagara, a distance of about

600 miles, at a time, too, when traveling was anything but a luxury. It was intimated that their condition was one of unnecessary misery through somebody's parsimony rather than one into which they had joyfully entered because of the poverty of their Mother House.

It is possible for those who control the purse strings of a community to develop "an itching palm" (no doubt through motives of frugality), and, in their mistaken zeal for religious economics, to press a handful of coppers so closely that the squeezing process will affect not only the coppers but those who receive them. The prime object of Father Leyden's reference to this episode in his early life as a traveling missionary was not to censure the good superior of that day for his unintentional parsimony, but to point out a valuable lesson which his companion, Father Smith, received on that occasion, and which he ever afterwards put into practice, whether as local or general superior. He supplied his men with money enough to travel decently, so that they had no need to voyage "by canal," or pass their hats around before they could get back to their base of operations.

The numerous friends of Father Leyden will be interested in the following reading:—"He was born in New Glasgow, Lower Canada, October 7, 1832; was received into the Congregation on the 22d of December, 1853, at 'The Barrens,' making his vows two years later on Christmas day. He and Father Smith, late Visitor of the Western Province, made their novitiate together. After his ordination Father Leyden was sent to Germantown, Pa., as pastor of St. Vincent's Church, holding that position for about five years, during which time he built the present girl's school taught by the Sisters of Saint Joseph. From Germantown he was missioned to St. Louis as assistant superior and later on, was called to 'The Barrens' where at present writing he is resting from his labors of forty-five years in the priesthood, cheerful though an invalid, having met with an accident through which he is permanently disabled. He has sustained his reputation as a good preacher and conversationalist, possessing a phenomenal memory and an extensive, critical knowledge of history."

The compilers of this work would deplore more than any other the omission of names prominently connected with the administration of Niagara's first president. But in a task of this kind it is well-nigh impossible to gather in all who had a share in making the local history of these early days. Some may be overlooked entirely; others may be assigned to periods later than those in which they were actively engaged on the faculty or in other important capacities. Every

record extant has been searched; every one likely to afford additional information has been questioned *viva voce* or by letter, and yet omissions, we feel sure, have occurred. We can only trust that our readers will be indulgent with us, especially when they take into consideration the difficulties which would beset themselves if they were to attempt the arrangement of minutiae covering a period of fifty years.

An unsigned paper, yellow with age, and bearing every mark of authenticity, tells us: "The following claim the honor of being the first inmates of the Seminary when, on the 21st of November, 1856, the present Archbishop of Toronto opened the institution in Buffalo:

"Charles Poinsett, Buffalo, N. Y., age 15, entered November 21, 1856; John D. Vaughan, Buffalo, N. Y., age 15, entered November 21, 1856; William Molloy, Buffalo, N. Y., age 11, entered November 21, 1856, John J. Lamey, Buffalo, N. Y., age 12, entered November 21, 1856; Francis O'Reilly, Buffalo, N. Y., entered November 21, 1856; Hugh Mulholland (Ireland), Rochester, N. Y., entered December 5, 1856; David Kenrick, James Rogers, Edward Cullen, Paul Hogan, Martin Zimmerman, John Fuell, Edward Rigney, Thomas Ryan, Charles Leaton, and Thomas Roach."

All these students, excepting the last four, came over to Niagara when Father Lynch removed the Seminary from Buffalo to its present site on the banks of our river. Eight others, newcomers, were added to the list: Austin Keough, Ambrose Keough, Timothy O'Leary, William Denty, John Bede, P. V. Kavanagh, William Carland, and Michael Cunningham. Thus, twenty students made up the list of attendance in 1857. Twelve years later "two hundred and twelve gathered within Niagara's walls for purposes of study."