

CHAPTER XV

VERY REV. THOMAS J. SMITH, V. C. M., THIRD PRESIDENT OF
NIAGARA

THE first official mention to be found of Father Smith's connection with Niagara is that under date of January 18, 1862, where it is recorded that he was unanimously elected vice-president of the Board of Trustees. This fact would intimate that his term as president of our institution began on that date, since the practice among us of having either the Bishop of this diocese or the Visitor fill the position of president of the Board, the local superior becoming vice-president of the same, was a long established one, abrogated only a few years ago. Private information, however, connects Father Smith with Niagara as early as 1857. He came here in July of that year in company with Father Leyden, of whom mention has already been made, and together they taught all the classes maintained during the following term for the eighteen or twenty students then on the seminary register.

Father Smith was missioned to the Vincentian college at Cape Girardeau, Mo., in 1859, but after a stay of two years at that historic institution he returned to Niagara, becoming then, as is probable from the records just cited, its third president.

In the early days of which we are writing the faculty was small, the number of students likewise small, and the necessities of the place such that both priests and boys co-operated in the performance of those duties which are now so generally if not so handsomely done by our numerous domestics and brothers coadjutors. Again, some of the priests were obliged to be away on missions or collecting tours, thus entailing greater labors on those of the home guard entrusted with the keeping up of classes.

Father Smith, who was noted for his abilities as a preacher, was frequently employed in missionary work throughout New England, New York, the West and South, in company with his brethren, Fathers S. V. Ryan, afterwards bishop; William Ryan, his brother; the Fathers O'Reilly, Father Hennessy and others. During Father Smith's absence from the Seminary his place was ably filled by his zealous assistant, Father John Asmuth, C. M., whose name appears in the records of the Board of Trustees as early as June, 1861, when

he filled the office of treasurer. Sickness, however, seems to have obliged him to resign from that trying office in 1863, for closely following that date are comments on his continued ill health, his frequent detention at the Sisters' Hospital in Buffalo, and finally his removal to Los Angeles, California, by order of the Visitor, Father S. V. Ryan.

Although the motive given in the records from which these facts are drawn is the founding of a new house in that far away region, the truth appears to be that Father Asmuth was a victim of consumption and was ordered to a more balmy climate in hopes of improving his condition. It is true that about this time Bishop Amat, C. M., of Monterey and Los Angeles, made an earnest request that his brethren should come into his diocese to labor, and in compliance Fathers Anthony, C. M., and John Beaky, C. M., were sent there together with Father Asmuth. For awhile the latter gave missions in Nevada but returned to Los Angeles and rented an old house as the beginning of an establishment in that diocese.

The Sisters of Charity had a seminary in Los Angeles at this time, and Father Asmuth was made their director, remaining in that responsible office until his death, which occurred on the 16th of December, 1865, less than two years after his departure from Niagara. Father McGill, now Visitor of our Eastern province, was present at his death and closed his eyes. It was from him we learned that Father Asmuth was born at Dudinghausen, Westphalia, November 22, 1836, and that he joined the Vincentian community on the 10th of February, 1852. He acted as superior at Niagara for a short time, probably during an interregnum, and was held in the highest esteem of all because of his unusual talents, agreeable disposition, and devotional character.

His brother, the Rev. August Asmuth, C. M., ordained to the priesthood in 1881, is an alumnus of Niagara and is at present writing stationed at Saint John's College, Brooklyn, N. Y. One of his sisters joined the Daughters of Charity, and is now at Gonzaga Memorial Asylum in Germantown, Pa., under the name of Sister Antonia.

Other priests of the Congregation who figure about this time in the records of the Board are Revs. William Ryan, J. K. Nowd, F. Burlando, P. M. O'Regan, Robert E. V. Rice, James McGill, T. D. O'Keeffe, John T. Landry and David Kenrick. Father Ryan, brother of Bishop Ryan, after long and valued work on the missions at Niag-

ara and in other houses of the Congregation lost his health and was obliged to retire from active service. He died at Mount Hope near Baltimore, where he had been chaplain for several years.

Father Knowd was highly esteemed for his intellectual abilities, especially for his proficiency in botany and mathematics. He was a native of Castledermott, Ireland, where he was born January 6, 1805. He was received into the Congregation at Cape Girardeau, September 1, 1842, and made his vows at Saint Mary's of the Barrens, September 2, 1884. He was prefect of studies here in 1863. He died pastor of Saint Vincent's Church in Germantown, March 28, 1880. While yet in the old country he was one of a board summoned to England to give evidence on the condition of education in Ireland, the president of said board being the Duke of Wellington.

Rev. P. M. O'Regan, C. M., Director of Seminarians in 1862, and again in 1870, we are happy to say, still survives, and is actively engaged in professional duty at the great Kenrick Seminary, St. Louis. He was known when at Niagara for his insistence on detail, for his appreciation of "little things" in the scheme of study. This quality, while it designated him as an exact man, helped to make every student who came under his influence a successful man in point of accurate information. He was one of those drafted in 1870 from the community's professors to build up the nascent and now flourishing college of Saint John the Baptist in Brooklyn, N. Y.

Father Rice became Niagara's fourth president, and as such receives extended notice in the next chapter. Father McGill, who now governs as Visitor the Eastern province of the Congregation of the Mission in the United States (if ruling as mild as his can be called aught but paternal persuasion), came to Niagara about 1863, and was elected a member of the Board of Trustees, April 13, 1864. On the 6th of December of the same year, the day following the burning of our seminary, Father McGill is on record as having moved for the immediate renting of a suitable building in which studies could be resumed and our students kept together for the remainder of the scholastic year. His view was unanimously adopted by the members present, although obstacles of an insurmountable nature interfering later on prevented its fulfillment.

For the benefit of those who have an exalted veneration for Father McGill (and their number is legion) we append the following accounts of his birth and career, knowing that these details are always a matter of greatest interest to the admirers of a character as noble as that of

Niagara's Visitor. He was born in Ireland, May 20, 1827, and was received into the Congregation of the Mission at the Mother House in Paris, July 25, 1850. Two years later he made his vows at the house of the Vincentians in St. Louis, Mo., and was ordained priest in that city on September 8, 1853, by Archbishop Kenrick, having as companion in ordination the present illustrious Archbishop Ryan of Philadelphia.

He was prefect of discipline and afterwards Master of Novices at "The Barrens," and in 1859 he was sent as Superior to Cape Girardeau when the Vincentian institution located there became the diocesan seminary for St. Louis. After the burning of our seminary in 1864 he labored for awhile on the missions, and was then sent to Los Angeles where he remained for about nine years as Superior, building the Vincentian college in that city, and succeeding Father Asmuth as Director of the Sisters of Charity. In 1873 he was summoned to Germantown, Pa., to become head of a famous band of missionaries consisting of himself, Fathers T. O'Donoughue, Shaw, and Koop.

In 1880 he was sent to St. Louis where he remained Superior at Saint Vincent's Church until 1884, when he was recalled to Germantown and made assistant superior to Father Smith, and afterwards assistant Visitor. In 1888, when the western province was created with headquarters once more at "The Barrens," Father McGill became Visitor of the eastern division, which position he occupies to-day. In 1903 he celebrated his Golden Jubilee in the priesthood amid scenes of splendor and enthusiasm such as have been rarely exhibited even when mitred heads are the honored ones on such occasions. *Ad multos annos!*

The minute and excellent house records begun in July, 1862, by Father Thomas M. O'Donoughue, C. M., then only a cleric of the Congregation, give us the names of others besides those mentioned in the official minutes of Niagara's trustees. Among these is the name of Rev. A. J. Rossi, who was connected with Niagara for about two years, leaving in July, 1863, for St. Louis on the same day that Father O'Donoughue returned to our seminary after his ordination in that city. Father Rossi now belongs to the archdiocese of Boston, where he has a flourishing parish, to whose spiritual wants he administers with all the zeal which characterized the old Italian Vincentians in this country.

Rev. C. J. Becherer is another of Niagara's early teachers mentioned. In 1863 he was prefect of the boys besides teaching Moral

Philosophy, German, and Greek. After his departure from here he was stationed at Brooklyn, Los Angeles, Cape Girardeau, from which place he left for New Orleans in the summer of 1878 only to fall a victim of yellow fever then raging in that city.

Father Thomas M. O'Donoughue, C. M., first appears in Niagara history in an exhaustive account given by him of our Sixth Annual Commencement, Wednesday, July 2, 1862. Although part of this programme is mentioned in a previous chapter, we shall record it here in its entirety, both for the sake of preserving the names of some at least among our old students and of showing what was Niagara's literary standing in the "auld lang syne."

Veni, Sancte Spiritus,	By the Choir
Speech, Happiness of serving God in the Sanctuary . . .	David Chase
Song, Rock of Liberty	By the Choir
Speech, Deleterious Influence of Light Literature	J. McGee
Song, Rover's Grave	Choir
Speech, Devotion to B. V. M. (French)	John Gorman
Song, Stand by the Flag	Choir
Speech, Civilizing Influence of the Catholic Church	P. Daly
Song, Memories of Home	Choir
Magnificat (Greek)	D. Ryan
Song, Ever of Thee	Isaac Wells
Dialogue, Subject: Geography,	T. Furlong, D. Ryan, Wm. Nyhan
Song, The Harp that once	Wm. Connelly
Speech, Sacerdotal State (Latin)	M. W. Kelly
Song, Harmony	Choir
Speech: Benefits conferred by the Monks on Agriculture, Literature, and Science	William Connelly
Dialogue, Doctrines and Tenets of the Catholic Church	T. Hopkins, P. Fitzsimmons
Song, Twenty Years Ago	Ed. McCarty
Speech, Peasant and Servant (German)	Issac Wells
Song, Starry Hours	Thomas Furlong
Speech, Persecution of the Church	Martin Carroll
Song, Mountain Tree	Choir
Speech, What We have been Taught	James O'Hare
Poem, Mater Misericordiæ	T. Furlong
Song, Happy Are We To-night, Boys	Choir
Distribution of Premiums	<i>To Deum Laudamus</i>
Address to the Audience,	Very Rev. S. V. Ryan, V. C. M.

Father O'Donoughue was Director of the Seminarians in 1863 and until 1870, besides teaching several of the higher classes in the junior department. He left Niagara for Cape Girardeau in February, 1870, and after holding various positions in our houses was placed on the missionary band in 1873. After about twenty years of most successful work in this trying employment he retired from the field in favor of the younger generation now engaged in harvesting souls according to Saint Vincent's method. At present Father O'Donoughue is superior at our church of the Immaculate Conception in Baltimore.

Father David Kenrick, C. M., was among the first students to enter our institution when it was opened in Buffalo in 1856. He is mentioned in 1863 as a member of the House Council, and was Procurator at the time of the burning of the Seminary in 1864. He was one of those who went from place to place gathering funds for its reconstruction. He held many responsible positions after severing his official connection with Niagara, among them that of Superior of Saint Vincent's Church in St. Louis, after the division of provinces. In 1903 he went as Vice-Visitor on a tour of inspection of all the houses under the government of Father Smith, who was prevented through feeble health from traveling. It was while thus engaged that Father Kenrick met with an accident in the railway station at El Paso, Texas, which resulted in his death February 1, 1903.

The loss of so valuable a confrere in such an untimely way was a severe shock to the aged Visitor. It may be that his subsequent rapid decline in health was owing in no small degree to the sorrow caused by the death of his official representative. When on September 23, 1905, a telegram came to the priests at Niagara announcing the death of their venerable confrere heartfelt grief at the demise of one who had done so much for our institution was quickly followed by our discharge of those religious functions which are the surest testimony of reverence and love for our faithful departed. Father Hartnett, C. M., represented our Faculty at the obsequies at "The Barrens" in the unavoidable absence of Father Likly, President, who had left Niagara to attend the funeral of lamented Father Frank Henneberry, '79, in Chicago.

The formal expression of our sentiments towards Niagara's third president was voiced in the following terms shortly after the announcement of his death had reached us:

Not since the death of Niagara's fifth president, Father Kava-

nagh, in 1899, has this institution lost a friend of greater worth than the Very Rev. Thomas J. Smith, who died on the 23d of September, 1905, at Saint Mary's Seminary, Perry County, Missouri. With us in 1857, quite from the beginning, as professor and then as third president, Father Smith, even after his retirement from active association with Niagara, manifested his deep interest in our institution, which, it may be said, he helped to found, and to which, when opportunity was afforded him, in 1883, he lent his splendid and successful financial energies. It was as Visitor of the Congregation of the Mission, to which office Father Smith had been elevated in 1879, that he was able to show in a most particular manner how dear to his heart was the "Old Niagara" of which he had once been president, and whose priests were now subject to him as their general superior.

It was the old story which the College and Seminary of "Our Lady of Angels" had to tell its former president when in his official capacity as Visitor he came to the scene of his earlier labors. It was the story of large responsibilities and slender resources, of debts inherited from former times or contracted through misfortunes which no commercial foresight seemed able to avert. This condition of things may appear inexplicable to the managers of educational houses whose resources never fail because they are drawn from funded millions. But it is a condition of things to which Catholic educational institutions are peculiarly liable because of the absence of state aid, the too frequent indifference of moneyed Catholics, and the extensive charities which Catholic colleges and seminaries must dispense if they would fulfill one chief reason for their existence—the education of poor but worthy aspirants to the priesthood.

If such a thing were possible as the discouragement of any faculty that ever controlled the interests of this house, the Vincentian Fathers stationed here between 1878 and 1883 must have had good cause to question if Providence indeed required further sacrifices from them to maintain our cross-crowned home above the stormy waters of Niagara. The region hereabout is typical of the struggles which Niagara's pioneers endured to preserve that which, under the effectual assistance of such friends as Father Smith, has developed into the widely known Niagara University of to-day. The rushing cataract, the perilous rapids, the seething, booming waters as they tumble over rock-bound obstacles, may well recall to those who know the history of our institution the almost Titanic efforts of a Lynch, a Smith, a Rice, and a Kavanagh to keep our citadel of Christian education in the place where it had been first planted.

Yet, as all is not tumult along our waterway, as there are pleasant places where the tired waters seem to halt, as if refreshing themselves for further struggles, so in the history of Niagara University have we pleasant reminiscences, encouraging periods of success, especially after a great blanket of debt had been lifted from our energies through the financial manipulation of Father Smith, and we found ourselves free to begin our much-desired improvements. The "Niagara" of to-day, with all its developments and all its splendid promises for the future, is a fact only because of the foresight exercised by Father Smith and his supporters twenty odd years ago.

In 1886, when the western province of the Vincentian community was formed in the United States, Father Smith became Visitor of the newly-established section, with headquarters at the famous "Barrens," Perry County, Missouri, the old homestead of Saint Vincent's sons in North America. Although he had been in active service for nearly thirty years prior to his appointment as Western Visitor, his stalwart frame and robust health enabled him to carry on the arduous duties of his new position until within a few years ago, when the malady which terminated his life began to manifest itself in a serious manner. After fifty-one years of membership in the Congregation of the Mission, this "Grand Old Man," Niagara's friend, is gathered in his 74th year to his sleeping brethren in that hallowed spot, "The Barrens," where so many of Niagara's earlier teachers first imbibed the spirit of their saintly founder, Vincent de Paul.

May he rest in peace.