

CHAPTER XIX

VERY REV. PATRICK S. McHALE, C. M., SIXTH PRESIDENT

THE advent of Father McHale to Niagara gave to our institution one of the most erudite priests in the country. Long before his assignment here he had filled the office of Superior elsewhere with the greatest credit to himself and satisfaction to those who lived under him. Of a mild and quiet disposition, he preferred to follow the lines of least resistance, not for his own comfort so much as the comfort of others with whom he had to deal. While fully cognizant of what it meant to be a Superior, he was nevertheless unassuming in his demeanor towards his subjects, relying as a rule upon their own good sense to appreciate the relations existing between him and themselves. Hence it was that during his administration of seven years at Niagara he met with practically no opposition to his wise ordinances for the government of this house. Feeling that he came somewhat like a stranger to an institution where traditions had clustered and had been treasured by his predecessors in office, he exercised commendable delicacy in leaving undisturbed whatever had received the sanction of time, so long as improvement did not imperatively demand a change. Yet neither was he slow to discern that progress could be made and ought to be made in certain directions; and so it was that Father McHale began with prudence to effect changes, so gradually, however, and always with such regard for the memory of those who had preceded him, that when indeed radical changes had been finally accomplished, not even the most loyal adherent to local traditions could do aught but applaud the innovation.

In this respect the coming of Father McHale to preside over the destinies of Niagara may be said to have had about it a critical aspect, but one which his felicitous manner of action soon dissipated. He had never been a student here; prior to his election as our Superior he had never been connected with Niagara's Faculty, so that it was not to be wondered at if the progress of his administration was studied with no little anxiety by students already enrolled and by Niagara's Alumni. The members of the Faculty who greeted him as their President on September 5, 1894, and wished him God-speed in his duties, did not share in the general curiosity concerning his future mode of administration. Many of them had lived with him

in other houses of the Community; not a few of them had made their studies with him at the Mother House in Germantown; all were well enough acquainted with him to know that in choosing him for Niagara's new President our higher Superiors were providing us with a man for the hour. His presence among us was equal to the injection of new blood, because he succeeded to the chair of Superior unhampered by any traditions save those which our Community training renders inviolable, whether Niagara or New Zealand be the scene of our operations. His confreres knew beforehand that what was good would be preserved, what was harmless would be respected, and what was in need of repair or removal would receive the requisite attention without undue haste or loss of prestige to the memory of his predecessors.

The significance of these remarks will be appreciated when it is remembered that, for instance, the present radical departure in the rules of discipline for the study hall from what used to prevail before his time began shortly after Father McHale had been installed in office. As was said above, he was in no haste whatever to effect changes which his judgment told him should be made; old lines were removed so gracefully and so gradually that the final result excited no adverse comment. Neither must it be imagined that Father McHale assumed the initiative in these progressive movements without deliberate consultations with those who were qualified to give advice in the matter. Many of his Faculty had spent years at Niagara, not only as teachers but as boys or seminarians, and were therefore in a position to give practical testimony concerning the value of any specific rule or custom. He questioned them, listened to their opinions, and when feasible adopted them on the common sense principle that the experience and probity of his associates rendered such a course the only logical one to pursue.

It must be remembered, moreover, that Father McHale was no novice in the management of men or institutions. He had had the training of our clerics at the Mother House in Germantown confided to him not many years after his ordination in 1877. He was President of our college at Cape Girardeau, Mo., from 1885 till 1887, resigning only because ill health made such a course imperative. The administration of such an establishment, as important in every substantial respect as our own Niagara, calls for ability of the highest order, while it affords an experience in men and things not surpassed by that gained in the administration of "Our Lady of Angels." In

addition to these two offices, he had held that of Superior at our church of the Immaculate Conception, Baltimore, for two terms, after the first of which he became Superior of Saint Vincent's Church in Germantown; after the second, lasting till September, 1894, he resigned to accept the presidency of Niagara. Experience of such diamond quality as that which Father McHale possessed at the time of his accession to the chair vacated by Father Kavanagh indicated to all who were willing to learn that the interests of our institution were certain to be promoted under his administration. He was progressive but not radical; for instance, he removed the old whitewashed fence which straggled along the western boundary of our campus, an eyesore to the traveling commonwealth, but he never eliminated any rule whose continuance from 1856 until his accession had advanced the real interests of Niagara's students. The gnarled stump of the old oak was blown out of place by commercial dynamite after the oak itself had been burned, through accident, during the presidency of Father Kavanagh, and the band stand erected under its shade by Father J. T. Landry, in the '70's, had been slivered into toothpicks by the falling giant. Yet Niagara's far-famed scenery never suffered, but, on the contrary, was in many respects improved under the direction of this æsthetic President. The Band, no longer able to play under the spreading branches of

The oak that had stood as a sentinel gray
Watching the centuries vanish away,

was invited to take possession of the Faculty porch, and blow itself, if it liked, into musical convulsions. No tradition with meaning and a moral ever suffered at the hands of this conservative yet wideawake President of Niagara.

All will agree that with an unmortgaged treasury, such as Father Kavanagh left upon his retirement from office, it was only right that much needed improvements, repairs, and additions should have been made in our surroundings. That they were successfully made, and that they are to-day no longer luxuries but practical necessities, evince at once the foresight of Father McHale and the advancement which Niagara has made within the past twelve years.

There were thirteen priests on the Faculty when Father McHale became Superior in September, 1894; Father Hayden, C. M., assistant; Fathers S. V. Haire, C. M.; F. L. McCauley, C. M.; D. J. Downing, C. M.; L. A. Grace, C. M.; R. F. Walters, C. M.; Rev. J. J. Sullivan, C. M.; J. J. Elder, C. M.; J. V. O'Brien, C. M.; R. H.

Albert, C. M.; M. J. Rosa, C. M.; E. L. Carey, C. M.; and P. J. Boland, C. M. Father Walters was Treasurer, Father Sullivan, Director of Seminarians; Father Albert, Prefect of Discipline; Father O'Brien, assistant Prefect of Discipline; and Father Rosa, Prefect of Studies. We have already paid our pleasant debt of remembrance to Fathers Hayden, Haire, McCauley, Downing, and Albert. Fathers Grace, Walters, and O'Brien, though they have seen service under three Presidents, are still anchored at the old spot and must abide in patience until the presidency of Father Likly is treated in our pages. We commend them meanwhile to the charitable prayers of their former associates, promising that as they have waited so long all uncomplaining they will be rewarded when the time comes.

Rev. James J. Sullivan, C. M., came from St. Catharines, Ont., to Niagara in 1870, as a student, and after a four years' course entered our novitiate in Germantown, March, 1874. He was ordained in 1880, and remained on the Germantown Faculty for about thirteen years, or until his transfer to Niagara at the opening of studies in 1893. During the greater part of the time that he served at the Mother House he was employed in the delicate task of Director of our Clerics. His experience in that position was of greatest advantage to him and to the young men under his guidance when he was placed in the office of Director to our Seminarians, September, 1893. During the two years that he remained in this position he won the esteem of every one in the senior department because of his fairness, his pious example, and his insistence on the observance of rule. This last trait may seem an unusual cause for admiration on the part of a student body, but it must be remembered that seminarians come here with well-defined notions of what is expected from them, and with a clear enough understanding of the relation between rule and a vocation to the priesthood. Vigilance over the slightest requirement, inflexible adhesion even to the form of things prescribed, will be certain to foster a habit of self-discipline without which a cleric promises, should he succeed in persevering, to become one day an object of worry to his bishop if not of open disedification to the laity. The seminary is a sort of camp where the militia of Christ's army is trained for future battles against the triple enemy of souls. He who cannot or who will not conform to the established discipline even in little things proves thereby that he is unworthy of a commission in the ranks of the Church's spiritual warriors.

Our seminarians soon become impressed with this fact, especially

when they have a Director like Father Sullivan, to whom the theory of the spiritual life has long been an open book, and whose personal character illustrates clerical exactitude to a remarkable degree. They learn to observe the rule for its own value, and as they find themselves progressing happily towards the consummation of their desires, the priesthood, esteem for such a Director takes possession of them, abiding with them long after seminary life is over.

In September, 1895, Father Sullivan was missioned to Saint John's Seminary, Brooklyn, as Director of Seminarians. Later, he became Superior of that institution, remaining so for four years, after which he resigned in favor of Father McHale, C. M., and resumed the office of Director. When the Very Rev. Robert A. Lennon, C. M., Director of the Sisters of Charity in the United States, was obliged through failing health to retire for a while from active service, Father Sullivan was appointed to relieve him, taking up his residence at Emmitsburg, Md., where he is at present located.

Rev. M. J. Rosa, C. M., by birth a Canadian, came to Niagara at the opening of studies in 1892, and remained until the close of studies in 1895. He was Professor of languages, and was also Prefect of studies for two years. During his term of service here he was deeply interested in all that concerned the happiness of the students, conducting for their amusement many theatrical and similar entertainments. His ability as a preacher was recognized by our higher authorities, who placed him on the missions where he is at present engaged.

Rev. Edward L. Carey, C. M., made his studies at Niagara, leaving, in 1885, for Germantown, returning, as one of the assistant Prefects to Father Dennis Downing, in 1889, and after his ordination to the priesthood, reporting once more to his Alma Mater, September, 1893, as Professor of languages and mathematics. He succeeded Father Theodore B. McCormick as Prefect of studies in 1896, remaining in that position until the close of the scholastic year, 1899, when he was removed to Brooklyn, where he is at present engaged in collegiate work.

Rev. Patrick J. Boland spent two years on Niagara's Faculty, 1894-1896, as Professor of languages and mathematics. After serving for some time in Brooklyn, he was placed on the missions, and is now attached to our house in Springfield, Mass.

Rev. Theodore B. McCormick, 1884, gave several years of valuable service to his Alma Mater, as a member of her Faculty, beginning

with 1888, when, as a cleric, he was assistant Prefect, with our present Superior, to Rev. J. W. Moore, C. M. In 1895 he was Prefect of studies, and after his removal from Niagara he was engaged in Germantown and Brooklyn in professional duties. He possessed among other qualifications the faculty of interesting the students in athletics and histrionics. He wrote several fine plays while here, producing them on our local stage to the pleasure of our college audience and the improvement of those who were permitted to take part. Niagara boys of his days wish well to good-natured Father McCormick in his present labors in the diocese of Trenton.

The Prefect of discipline from 1895-1897 was Rev. James F. Kennedy, C. M., an alumnus of Niagara, 1889, who was Professor likewise in the preparatory and later in the collegiate department. His assistant was Rev. John J. Brady, C. M., the first year, with the addition of Rev. Edward M. Farrell, C. M., in the second year of his Prefectship. Father Kennedy's rule among the boys was successful and popular, especially in what related to the introduction of larger liberties than the first Prefect himself had enjoyed when he was an inmate of the study hall. The movement towards an enfranchisement of the juniors from the severe exactions of previous years may be said to have been inaugurated about this time, because of the more lenient policy adopted by Father McHale, and promulgated through his Prefects. Anyone acquainted with the temper of college boys will understand how freely they shower plaudits upon an officer who gives them liberties where their predecessors had found only rigid, and, to their inexperienced minds, unmeaning restrictions. But the college boy is not only generous with his praises but likewise discriminating in his estimate of official character. He knows from Christian instinct if not from books, that priest and gentleman ought to be synonymous terms. In Father Kennedy's case our boys found the terms strictly interchangeable, thus doubling their appreciation because of his courteous manners and his liberal rule. After leaving Niagara Father Kennedy served on the missions with headquarters at Germantown until the opening of the present scholastic year, when he was made head of the mission band established at Niagara.

Rev. John J. Brady, C. M., Father Kennedy's vigorous assistant for two years, was of athletic frame and inclinations, so that college sports at Niagara were not without an inspiring promoter in the energetic second Prefect. At present Father Brady is chaplain of Mount Hope near Baltimore, where he ministers with all charity to

the afflicted, and aids the convalescents with the most tonic exercises known to the promoters of physical culture.

Rev. Jeremiah A. Tracy, C. M., came to Niagara as a Professor in the autumn of 1895. He was employed at first in the preparatory and in the collegiate department as teacher of physical geography, Latin, penmanship, Greek, and algebra. Later, he taught calculus, natural philosophy, and rhetoric. In 1900, on the removal of Father Carey to Brooklyn, he became Prefect of studies, remaining in that office until January, 1903, when he was called to Germantown and placed on the missions, in which field he is at present successfully laboring.

The opening of studies in 1897 found Rev. P. J. Conroy, C. M., 1889, installed as Director of our Seminarians. Having been a member of the senior department prior to his departure for our novitiate in Germantown, he was already well supplied with that practical knowledge which goes far towards making the work of a Director easier and more successful. Moreover, he had held a similar office in the Brooklyn Seminary, so that he may be said to have possessed the requisite experience for guiding our young aspirants to the priesthood. During the six years that he remained in office, he devoted all his splendid energies to his special work, seldom going abroad, teaching philosophy, rubrics, homiletics, and kindred branches with unwearied regularity and most gratifying success. When our new mission house was opened in Springfield, Mass., in 1903, Father Conroy received due recognition for his labors at Niagara by his appointment as Superior of our latest institution. A facile and entertaining speaker, well versed in all that pertains to ecclesiastical learning, he has already won the esteem of experienced churchmen by the manner in which he has conducted our newest missionary venture.

A single year at Niagara was sufficient to convince Rev. John P. Molyneaux, C. M., that Brooklyn Bridge was greater than Suspension Bridge (no longer suspended), and the East River more navigable than our turbulent flood of waters. Father John came from the "City of Churches," legally only a borough, to Niagara at the opening of studies in 1897, teaching, with commendable resignation, arithmetic, bookkeeping, and physical geography, while going the rounds as assistant Prefect to Father Talley. On the death of the latter in March, Father Molyneaux became first Prefect, continuing in that office until the close of studies, when he received the glad tidings to return to Brooklyn, where he has been stationed ever since. All who are acquainted with Father "John P." know him to be

courtesy itself, an indefatigable laborer in the Lord's vineyard, and if he made known his preference for one little patch in that great field over another little patch far northwest of it, he only manifested through his candor of character what others may have hidden through over prudence.

After some lads have been here for a while they learn to sing with tolerable fidelity :

“ This is our home, our college home,”

but it is only around the Kalends of Commencement day that their diapason swells high above our rushing torrent as they chant in chortus:—

“ We love her rocks and river
Where'er we chance to be,
Then hurrah for Old Niagara
And her lovely scenery.”

There are other lads, again, who fall in love with our surroundings as soon as they catch a glimpse of our cross-crowned dome towering above Niagara's waste of waters. “ It is good for us to be here,” they say to themselves, and they live up to the edict, and when at last they turn their faces from the dear old spot, as, for instance, on Ordination day, they do so with the sad conviction that they are leaving the dearest college home on earth. Sentimental reasons may exaggerate this conviction in certain cases, but we of the present Faculty will not go on record against its general truthfulness, especially as not a few among ourselves have known no other home for years except that which is sheltered under the dear name of Our Lady of Angels.

Rev. William J. Egan, now engaged in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, was earnest and popular, whether as Prefect or Professor, during his term of service here, from September, 1898, until his departure from our midst after the close of studies in 1905.

Rev. John P. Downing, C. M., now attached to Saint John's College, Brooklyn, was assistant Prefect here from 1899-1901. His pleasant disposition made him popular with the boys on the campus, and successful with them in the class-room, while his liking for Niagara made it regrettable that the need of his services elsewhere should have deprived our Faculty of so valuable a member.

Another whose stay among us was short, embracing only the scholastic year beginning with 1899, was Rev. John J. Lee, C. M. After good work here as Professor of languages and mathematics, he

took up the more active life of a missionary, resigning later on to return to the quiet of the class-room. At present writing he is a member of Saint John's College Faculty in Brooklyn.

The Professor of physics, chemistry, astronomy and languages this year was Rev. George J. Eckhardt, C. M., who left us the succeeding year, but returned a year later, remaining until the close of studies in 1905. He is now stationed at Saint John's College, Brooklyn, doing the same good work that characterized him at Niagara.

Rev. Joseph J. Elder, C. M., was born at "The Barrens," Perry Co., Mo., in 1857. He made his classics at Cape Girardeau College, and entered our Congregation in 1879. After his ordination in 1885 he was sent to Saint John's College, Brooklyn, where he was Treasurer for several years. He was transferred to Niagara in Father McHale's first year as President, remaining here until September, 1905, as professor of French and mathematics. His proficiency in music, and his willingness to aid in any movement intended to advance that art at Niagara, made his services of great value to the Cecilian organization, of which he was censor for a number of years. It was largely through Father Elder's efforts that the present sumptuous quarters of the N. C. A. were provided in Alumni Hall.

The short-term and the long-term confreres who lived at Niagara with Father McHale can bear testimony to a fact not always observed by those outside of our Community or family circle. He was, indeed, liberal towards the students in granting permissions; he was as lenient with the seminarians as their exacting and somewhat immutable rules would permit, but indulgence in neither of these respects exhausted his generosity. He kept first place for his Community brethren.

When, at the opening of studies in 1901, Father McHale was missing from Niagara, having gone to Saint John's, Brooklyn, as President of that institution, grief, wide and sincere, took possession of our household. Accustomed as we are to changes, confident as we have reason to be that God provides in great emergencies, we could not help experiencing a feeling of anxiety for Niagara's future. This, however, was rather a tribute to the ability of the outgoing officer than any well-founded doubt concerning his successor. The acceptable standard which Father McHale had established and maintained in all the departments of the University could not be lowered without retroaction of a most pernicious nature, yet it must also be advanced to greater perfection — a something which Father McHale was certain to accomplish had he not been summoned to another field of labor.

It was not long, however, before joy succeeded to sorrow, and certainty to speculation, when the assistant to Father McHale in his last year at Niagara was announced as his successor in the office of President. Father Likly's accession assured us that Father McHale's broadening policy would be maintained and advanced to the widest limit consistent with our fundamental principles.

In his present position Father McHale is occupied with more numerous duties than when he was at the head of our University. Besides having a college and seminary under his charge, he is pastor of one of the largest parishes in the Brooklyn diocese, and maintains a parochial school for the thousands of children belonging to his flock. In addition to all this, he is Vice Visitor of our eastern province, an office which is far from being a sinecure, since it has already entailed frequent visits to our houses on account of our Visitor's disinclination to travel far from Germantown, owing to precarious health. In relation to traveling officially, by the way, Father McHale has had more, perhaps, than falls to the lot of the average Vincentian. Shortly after the war of the United States with Spain, he was sent, in company with Father Hartnett, now of our Faculty, to Cuba, to investigate the condition of our Community in that and the neighboring island. Last year he was commissioned by our Superior General, Father Fiat, to visit our Spanish confreres in the Philippines, and report to him concerning their present status. He was received with the greatest cordiality by our Spanish brethren, and was able through their co-operation to make a full report to our chief Superior. Again, as we write, Father McHale is outward bound on board the *Majestic*, this time for Ireland, where he is under commission to represent the Superior General in an official visitation of our establishments in that country. We are sure that the open-hearted welcome which the American confreres extended to Very Rev. Malachy O'Callahan, C. M., when he paid an official visit to our institutions in the name of the Superior General in 1893, will be more than reciprocated by our Irish C. M.'s towards our cultured Father McHale. To him, Niagara's sixth President, the personal friend of so many on her staff, we pray a long life of usefulness in the sphere which he has continued to honor by his talents and his virtues.