

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO

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HE year of 1930 marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the foundation of the Convent of the Immaculate Conception. Located on the campus of the Catholic University in Washington, D. C., this beautiful Gothic structure is the central House of Studies of the Dominican Order in the United States. During the last quarter of a century, year after year, it has sent forth bands of young men, sons of Dominic and priests of God, to carry unto a waiting world the message of Christ. Many and varied have been their fields of labor, yet always have these alumni held in fond regard the home of their priestly education; some of them have returned in later years to seek well-earned rest beneath its sheltering roof; all of them have looked back, in pleasant memories, to holy and happy days within its walls. After twenty-five years this venerable convent can look with pride to the fruit of its early training; after twenty-five years it can boast, justifiably, of long and unremitting service for the cause of the Church in the United States.

When, in 1897, Reverend L. F. Kearney, O.P., S.T.M., was elected Provincial of the Province of Saint Joseph, two facts confronted him: one, the growing inadequacy of the Studium at Saint Joseph's, Somerset, Ohio; the other, its correlative, the urgent need of a new House of Studies. Likewise, in beginning activities for the immediate alleviation of this need, two facts influenced his choice of a suitable site. One was the ideal of Saint Dominic, himself, that wherever possible the Houses of Study of his Order should be erected in or near a University center; Paris, Bologna, Salerno, Oxford, all the great Universities of the thirteenth century had known the Friar Preachers, not only as students but as doctors and professors. The other was the rapid progress of Catholic University, at that time only in its infancy yet facing a brilliant future. Consequently, towards the close of the year 1902, a plot of land, facing on the campus of Catholic University in Washington, D.C., was pur-

chased by the Province of Saint Joseph. The plans of the proposed convent, originally drawn up by Père Bioley, O.P., distinguished Belgian art critic, were modified to suit American conditions by Rev. R. J. Meaney, O.P., under whose supervision the construction work was placed.

On April 23, 1903, first beginnings were made. The turning of the first sod and the breaking of grounds, a simple act in itself, was made an occasion of great solemnity. Among those present on that memorable day were Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop Ryan of Philadelphia, Archbishop Farley of New York, Monsignor O'Connell, Rector of Catholic University, Father Proctor, Provincial of the English Dominicans, and many other distinguished clerics and laymen. Work on the foundation was pushed rapidly forward; on August 16th of the same year, the corner stone of the new convent was placed by His Excellency, Most Reverend Diomede Falconio, Apostolic Delegate and, by a happy coincidence, a member of the great Order of Saint Francis. The sermon on this occasion was preached by Cardinal O'Connell, at that time Bishop of Portland, Maine, who took as his theme "the wedding of the old and the new"—the union of the centuries-old Order of Preachers with the new University; the bringing of the zeal and sanctity of an old religious life into new and fertile fields.

Little more than two years later, the Convent of the Immaculate Conception, a magnificent example of Gothic architecture, beautifully finished in light grey lime-stone and embodying in its strong lines every ideal of the Order of Dominic, was completed. In August, 1905, the students and faculty of the House of Studies at Somerset, Ohio, were transferred to their new home and a new era had dawned for the Province of Saint Joseph. Exactly one hundred years after Father Fenwick had left Baltimore for the wilderness of Kentucky, there to open first foundations of the Dominican Order in this country, the sons of that same Order took possession of their new and beautiful Studium. On August 20, 1905, the College was officially opened and blessed—a simple, unpretentious event, with Cardinal Gibbons the only invited guest.

More solemn ceremonies marked the final dedication of the choir chapel on February 4, 1907. In the presence of His Excellency, Most Reverend Diomede Falconio, Apostolic Delegate, Solemn High Mass was celebrated by Father Bede, O.F.M., Guardian of the Franciscan Monastery, assisted by members of

his Order as ministers. Representatives of the various Religious Congregations, located on the University Campus, joined with their Dominican brethren in carrying out all the splendor of the liturgy. Present in the choir were distinguished members of the clergy, among them, Monsignor Cerretti, Reverend Doctors Shahan, Grannan, Pace, Aiken, Hyvernatt, and Poels, all of Catholic University; Reverend Father Judge, S.J., and Very Reverend Father Elliott, C.S.P. A letter and blessing from Pope Pius X was read by the Reverend Provincial, Father Kearney, who also preached an eloquent sermon on "the dedication of another temple to the honor and glory of Almighty God." During the course of his talk, Father Kearney emphasized the fact that this House of Studies would stand as a monument to the generous spirit and lasting gratitude of the poor of the United States, those poor whom his brethren had so faithfully and zealously served.

Reverend D. J. Kennedy, O.P., S.T.M., who had been Prior at Saint Joseph's, was appointed first Prior of the College of the Immaculate Conception. His task it was to guide the destinies of the new convent during its early and critical years, a task that he performed well and wisely. Even in later years, after the burden of superior had been laid aside, to be taken up by others, Father Kennedy continued his labors in the House of Studies, devoting himself to the education and training of young men for the priesthood. Prior, Regent and Professor, he worked unceasingly for his beloved students. The story of the House of Studies is the story of Father Kennedy.

The story of the College of the Immaculate Conception is the story of the progress of the Dominican Order in the United States. In 1905, the community in Washington numbered only thirty; today it counts its members at one hundred and fifteen. Twenty-five years ago, this College was the only House of Studies in the Province of Saint Joseph; today it directs the activities of two subsidiary Studiums—the House of Philosophy at River Forest, Illinois, and the House of Theology at Somerset, Ohio. Truly, the faith of Father Kearney in the future has been amply justified. May the Mother of God, Mary Immaculate, bless and ever guide the convent dedicated to her honor, on this, the twenty-fifth anniversary of its foundation.