

CATHOLIC HEROES OF "76"

"Whilst our country preserves her freedom and independence we shall have a well founded title to claim from her justice to the equal rights of citizens as the price of our blood spilt under your eyes and of our common exertions for her defence under your auspicious conduct—rights rendered more dear to us by the remembrance of former hardships." These words were addressed to President Washington, in 1790, by the Catholics of America. Washington replied,—"I presume that your fellow citizens of all denominations will not forget the patriotic part which you took in the accomplishment of our Revolution and the establishment of our government."

There were then Catholic Patriots who fought, bled and died in our struggle to be liberated from the servitude of foreign powers. We have the testimony of America's first President; we have the pages of history which bear witness to their deeds; and finally even Congress in our own days erects monuments to perpetuate their memories. The end we have in view then in this paper, and indeed a pleasant task, is to try and put in relief the influence they exercised upon the continental army together with the role they played in bringing the war to

a successful issue. There are many in the faith entirely ignorant of the tremendous part our Catholic forefathers had during the crucial moments of American history and hence are at a loss to cope with those who antagonize the Church on this score.

The best records tell us that there were about 30,000 Catholics in the Colonies at this time. The five "Intolerable Acts" had tried them to the extreme. They were persecuted by the government, they were deprived of the right of franchisement and even barred from military service. Still with all this, when the news of the battle of Lexington was noised abroad, there were no hearts that swelled more with patriotism than those of America's Catholic subjects. Grievances were laid aside, insults were forgotten and with a few exceptions they took their places in the little continental army by the side of those who had despised them. One common cry was on the lips of every loyalist, "Freedom or die in the attempt." The Annals of the nation record a very singular coincidence here. It is strangely interesting to see English bigots with their Puritan ideas and Irish Catholics so united. This however can easily be accounted for when we appreciate

how the hearts of the latter were steeled against British despotic rule which had crushed their every hope abroad and even wielded its sway there where they had sought freedom.

Congress realized only too well how much depended on her Catholic subjects. Already Congress had seen 150,000 Canadian Catholics alienated from the cause through the unmistakable blunder on her part of raising a "hue and cry" against religious freedom granted to her northern neighbors through the Quebec Act. This served as a lesson however, and Washington strained every nerve to prevent any further separation of Catholics at home. In fact it was with this end in view that he himself took such strenuous measures in abolishing "that ridiculous and childish custom of burning the effigy of the Pope" on, what was called, Pope's night.

The same prudent tactics were employed by him to win over the Catholic Indians of Maine and other states. That the savages were well grounded in the Faith is evident from the words of Colonel Allen to the authorities, "the Indians continue steadfast friends and make earnest entreaty for a priest to be sent to them as soon as may be."

Even bigoted Massachusetts promised to furnish priests for the Indians if they would fight or at

least remain neutral. It must have been a strange sight to see these old Puritans building altars and seeking priests for that religion so detested by them—it was policy on their part. Among the Indian characters, that of the Catholic Orano, chief of the Penobscots, stands out foremost. In fact the example is classic among the authors. While much could be said of this faithful warrior, still it will suffice for the end we have in view and at the same time gain an insight into the lofty sentiments of this noble soul, to quote the native's own words, "We love our religion and will defend it and we will defend the country." Here indeed is one who had learned to combine love of country with love of religion, and America will ever venerate his memory.

Sifting down through the countless names that appear on the records for this special period we come to three that stand out paramount. They are styled as the "*Three Fathers of '76.*" Pulaski, Kosciuszko and Barry, Catholics all three of them. Pulaski, "*Father of the American Cavalry;*" Kosciuszko, "*Father of the American Artillery;*" Barry, "*Father of the American Navy.*" In a word, Catholics headed three of the nation's most important defensives. These are not merely arbitrary titles but acknowledged, either directly or indirectly by

Congress itself as will be seen.

General Count Casimir Pulaski, Father of the American Cavalry. Washington held this commander in the greatest repute and wrote him personally to this effect,—“I have a high sense of your merit and the merit and services and the principles that influenced the part you have taken in the affairs of this country. The disinterested and unremitting zeal you have manifested in the service gives you a title to the esteem of the citizens of America and have assured you mine. (Washington to Pulaski, Nov. 24, 1778). On September 5, 1777, he was officially invested by Congress as “*Commander of the Horse*” and on September 21, of the same year, Washington issued an order that he be in command of the American light Dragoons with the rank of Brigadier-General. To Pulaski is to be accredited the first organization of our Cavalry and it was under his personal supervision that the raw material was whipped into fighting form, officers erected and the whole divisioned off in an appropriate manner. Owing to his excellent services in Poland, we may feel assured that no one more apt could have been found to fulfil so difficult a task and it is only when we realize how sadly deficient our army was in this department, when compared to the trained troops of His Majesty,

that we may proudly point to our Catholic General as a leader truly providential to the Nation.

Pulaski fell during the attack on Savannah while urging on two hundred light horsemen with his well known battle cry “*Forwards, Broudern, Forwards*”. A grape shot had pierced his groin. In a moment he lay prostrate on the field of blood within a few yards of the foe’s battery. In spite of the flying of steel the men reverently bore their beloved General from the din and strife to a place of safety. Major Rogwouski rushed to his side but arrived only in time to hear our hero utter those words so familiar and dear to the Catholic heart, “Jesus, Mary, Joseph,” and then all was over. Thus had Pulaski lived, giving to our country that which man holds most precious and thus did he die with the truest and noblest of Catholic sentiments.

General Thaddeus Kosciuszko, Father of the American Artillery. Here is another Catholic Pole, who served the nation well during the dark days when freedom from foreign tyranny was all but despaired of. The first effective system for thorough organization in the artillery department of the United States’ Army was drawn up by Kosciuszko. In fact this was the only recognized system of field and horse manoeuvres at America’s disposal when the second war with

Great Britain broke out. Knowing the merits of the Pole's work, the War Department on August 1, 1812, issued the following decree: "Manoeuvres for horse artillery, as altered from the manual of General Kosciuszko and adopted to the service of the United States are hereby ordered for the government of the several corps of artillery in the said service." This fact, together with his activities in making our artillery more efficient rightly gives him the title of "*Father of the American Artillery.*"

It was he who taught the American army the science of engineering in the erecting of military strongholds, trenches, bridges and the like, but especially did he win a name for himself at Saratoga. There is no reader of American History who does not know the importance of this battle. The field of Saratoga was truly the "Thermopylai" of America's struggle for independence. From this date on the star of hope had begun to rise for the Colonies while that of England had already begun to set—in a word it was the turning point of the struggle. The keen eye of our Polish hero readily saw the advantage of this location—just between the Hudson and Saratoga Lake—for it was so situated as to enable us to halt the British on their way south. The result for the enemy was over-

whelming since it was there that 10000 of Burgoyne's army surrendered, and as a consequence it secured for us the assurance of the aid of France. When we realize that without this victory independence might never have been secured and America perhaps turned into another Ireland, then can we in all truth say that the nation's destiny was decided by the Catholic General, Kosciuszko.

The story of Commodore John Barry is so well known that there is no need here to enter into detail. He is the recognized "*Father of the American Navy*". Statues have been erected in the foremost places of our large cities, while Congress not more than ten years ago expressed its will in this matter. If an epitaph sums up a man's character and tells of his deeds, well has Benjamin Rush, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, portrayed the traits of Commodore Barry, "He fought often and bled once in the cause of Freedom. His habits in war did not lessen his virtues as a man nor his piety as a Christian".

It is impossible to mention here all the Catholic heroes of this most eventful period. No less than four score officers were Catholics, while Washington himself testifies that over one-half of his army were Irish. Washington's personal body guard, the "flower and pick

of the army" was made up of a good number from the same faith. His secretary and aid-de-camp, John Fitzgerald, was likewise a Catholic. These are cold facts of History which many only too often forget.

Then if we look at the war from a European standpoint, it takes on the appearance of everything Catholic helping America,—on Feb. 6, 1778, Catholic France signed a treaty and lent us her aid; Rochambeau with his fleet and troops was welcomed with open arms by Protestant New England; the two Catholic Kings of France and Spain placed \$400,000 at our disposal while over \$6,000,000 was a gift of the French clergy alone. Finally, it was through Spanish diplomacy that Europe was banded together into one allied camp as it were, ready to assist at any emergency.

All this being true, it was only proper that a solemn *Te Deum* should be sung in old St. Joseph's Church, Philadelphia, on July 4, 1779, to commemorate the out-

come of the war and give thanks to Him Who directs all things wisely according to His all Divine Providence. Washington, together with all his officers, as well as the members of Congress, were present on the occasion. Thus our Religion which in "'74" had been declared as one "fraught with impious tenets" was at last recognized, but it took the blood of our forefathers to awaken the nation to the fact that one *can* be a Catholic and an American at the same time. These two go hand in hand, making him to "render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's and to God the things that are God's", and there is no Catholic today who does not bear in his heart the noble sentiments expressed by Archbishop Ryan in 1884: "The Church is the Mother of my faith, the guardian of my hope for Eternity: America is my country, the protectress of my liberty and my fortunes on earth."

Antoninus Marchant, O. P.

I WONDER.

A woman once on Calv'ry stood
And wached her God-Son's soul depart.
O Mother, was't for love of us
Thou didst not join His Sacred Heart?

Hugh Welsh, O. P.