

## LIFE SKETCH OF ARCHBISHOP GRACE, O. P.

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Thomas Langdon Grace was born at Charlestown, South Carolina, November 16, 1814. He was the child of Irish parents, whose deep faith and religious piety infused into his soul a reverence for everything that is good and holy. To such a benign influence Thomas responded with a magnanimity of soul. We find him even when a mere boy possessed with the desire to follow his Divine Master in the priestly state. He cherished this desire as a God-given grace, and while pursuing his preparatory studies he cultivated a love for the priesthood and for all that pertained to his priestly vocation.

He was sixteen years of age when he finished his preparatory studies. The time had come to decide his future work. This was an easy matter for him for all his life he had only one desire. Accordingly we find him seeking admission to the Dominican Order. On June 10, 1830, he received the white habit of a Friar Preacher from the hands of the Very Rev. Stephen Hyacinth Montgomery, Prior of St. Rose Convent, Springfield, Kentucky, then the novitiate of St. Joseph's Province. His year of probation completed, Brother Thomas made his profession into the hands of the same Prior on June 12, 1831. To pursue and complete his studies the young religious was sent to Rome, where he remained for seven years at the famous Dominican University of the Minerva. He was ordained to the priesthood at Rome by Cardinal Patrinzi Dec. 21, 1839.

After his return to America in 1844, he was sent to Kentucky. At the beginning of his apostolic career he served on the Kentucky missions. Inspired by his piety and the wonderful success which followed his preaching the Fathers of St. Rose Convent elected him Prior, which office he exercised with fervor, devotion and humility. In 1864 he was appointed pastor of St. Peter's Church, Memphis, Tenn. He was thirty-three years old, zealous, energetic, brilliant, and of magnetic personality. Applying himself with ardor to his new charge, he soon gained the love and respect of his flock. He had a sympathetic nature which endeared him to those who knew him. He remained at Memphis thirteen years, during which he gave evidence of remarkable executive ability and business acumen. The present St. Peter's Church is a lasting monument to his assiduous labors.

St. Agnes' Academy is an evidence of his zeal for Catholic education. His love for the poor and homeless led him to seek some place of refuge for them. Of this desire was born the present St. Peter's Orphan Asylum. He was lavish in his charities, bestowing upon the poor even what was necessary for his own needs. During the epidemic of cholera in 1852, we find him, at the risk of his life, administering help with unflinching courage to all in distress. No wonder then that Father Grace held so high a place in the esteem and respect not only of his flock but also of those not of his belief. Many, indeed, edified by his fatherly and unselfish interest in others were converted to the faith.

But greater things were in store for a man of such calibre and his influence was to radiate over a wider field and shine with a more brilliant luster. At the request of the American Bishops Pope Pius IX selected Father Grace to be Bishop of the diocese of St. Paul, Minnesota. Like all great men, considering himself unworthy of such an honor he requested the Holy Father to excuse him from such a responsibility. His request was not granted, and he was commanded in holy obedience to accept the mitre. The people of Memphis were overjoyed at the honor which fell to Father Grace, but at the same time they could not but feel a tinge of regret; his flock at losing such a devoted pastor, and his non-Catholic friends at parting with a beloved citizen. The secular press voiced this sentiment when in announcing Father Grace's departure it said: "During his residence amongst us, so blameless and exemplary has been his conduct as a minister of religion, so enlightened and useful has been his life as a citizen, so irreproachable his entire bearing as preeminently a gentleman, that it may be truly said that the range of those who esteem and love him is limited only by the circle of those who know him. For to know him was to love him."\*

On Sunday morning, July 24, 1859, Father Grace was consecrated Bishop of St. Paul in the Cathedral of St. Louis. The consecrating prelate was Archbishop Kenrick, while Bishop Duggan of Chicago preached the sermon. Five days later a large delegation including a hundred Catholic Indians escorted their new Bishop to his see. The people of St. Paul gave him

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\* Memphis Bulletin, July 16, 1859.

a most enthusiastic welcome. The bells of the Catholic churches announced his arrival. That evening the Cathedral was filled to its capacity to witness the liturgical celebration of Pontifical Vespers.

The Bishop's first care was to make a personal survey of his diocese. He visited every locality where Catholics might be found, penetrating even to the most remote parts. This new field of labor was a vast territory, comprising the whole State of Minnesota, and the territory of the Dakotas east of the Missouri. Its Catholic population was fifty thousand souls. The total number of priests to care for these was twenty-seven. It was a tremendous undertaking, but the new Bishop was equal to the task. Everywhere he was accorded the same loyal hospitality that characterized his entrance into St. Paul. This was a source of encouragement for this big hearted man. This first visitation enabled him to acquire a knowledge of his flock, and become familiar with their needs, which were many. Owing to the lack of priests some were wholly ignorant of the truths of our holy faith. This grieved the good Bishop. In his first pastoral letter he urged the people to pray for more priests. He asked the rich and influential Catholics to assist in the apostolic mission of the press. He beseeched parents to watch over the souls of their children and to see that they were brought under the influence of the sacraments at an early age.

A large portion of his flock was Indian. He was particularly solicitous for their spiritual and temporal welfare. During his visitations he often had occasion to stop over night at the home of some Catholic Indian. Thus he soon learned their language and customs and taught them the mysteries of religion. Conditions on the reservations were very bad. The Indians had advanced little from their primitive mode of life. Repeatedly they asked the government for missionaries, but their request was ignored. Thanks to the efforts of Bishop Grace the government was brought to a realization of its duty to these poor children of the forest. They commissioned a number of devoted priests to labor among them and gradually the natives were induced to lead a more civilized life.

It would be difficult to form a true estimate of the sufferings and privations of a pioneer prelate such as Bishop Grace in visiting his flock. The country was wild and unsettled for

the most part. There were no railroads. The only lines of communication between the settlements were rough trails, which had to be travelled on horseback. This was trying enough for the Bishop even in summer time when conditions were the best. In the depth of winter when he was summoned on a sick call it was not unusual for him to be caught in a blizzard that often put him in danger of death from cold and exhaustion.

Bishop Grace was also solicitous for the political welfare of his people. Two years after his consecration as Bishop the Civil War broke out. Fortunately it did not directly affect the State of Minnesota. As a true American citizen he urged his subjects to stand by the Union, and explicitly stated their duties in this respect.

After the war the Ku Klux Klan and the Know Nothing Party were a constant menace to the country. They were especially hostile to Catholics, Jews, and foreigners. To offset any danger and to guard his people, he published another pastoral letter in which he stated in a masterly way their rights. "Respect the rights and liberty of every one, but do not suffer your own rights as citizens to be unknown and trampled upon by others. Abstain from party strife; preserve your independence and do not become the mean tools of bold and intriguing men. Acknowledge vassalage to no party; free master of your acts, conscious of your rights, and in the assertion of them using your reason and judgment to determine you in your political actions and associations, holding your right of suffrage as something sacred, to be exercised conscientiously for the common good and the good of the country."

With keen foresight he encouraged Catholic emigration to the Northwest. He established agencies both at home and in the East which sent trustworthy literature to Europe. In this way Catholic emigrants arriving at our eastern ports received suitable information, advice, and protection, and many were induced to settle in the fertile Northwest where priests could look after their spiritual welfare. By this means Bishop Grace both protected the faith of these newcomers and built up the Catholic population of the Northwest. With the growth in population followed the increase in churches, and stations. In a little more than a quarter of a century the Catholic population jumped from 50,000 to 200,000. The total number of churches



and stations was 250 and these were attended by 150 priests. The usual helps and aids of a Catholic community were visible all over the diocese, hospitals, asylums, and protectorates which prove that the poor, the friendless, and the orphan were dear to his heart. He also founded a Catholic Union composed of the influential members from the twenty-seven Catholic Societies of the diocese. Its purpose was to combat the enemies of the faith. Laws, forbidding the exercise of religion in the State institutions, had been passed. Through the efforts of this Catholic Union the Bishop erected a Catholic Industrial School and Protectorate for the education of the homeless and wayward.

Bishop Grace visited the Holy Father three times. He was present at the opening sessions of the Vatican Council in 1867, but had to return to his diocese after a short while. It is interesting to note that Bishop Grace was the first Bishop in the United States to consecrate his diocese to the Sacred Heart, and he has also the honor of being the first to dedicate a church in honor of the Blessed Virgin under the title of Our Lady of Lourdes.

From 1874-1884 the Bishop began to grow feeble. The constant strain of an active missionary life had begun to exhaust his strength. During this period of his life he directed the affairs of his diocese from the seclusion of his home leaving the execution of his plans to Father John Ireland then rector of the Cathedral. It was at this period that Father Ireland was chosen to succeed Bishop O'Gorman as Bishop of Dubuque. Bishop Grace could not resign himself to part with Father Ireland, who had become his staff. He sent a petition to the Holy Father asking him to cancel the selection and to have Father Ireland appointed as his coadjutor with the right of succession. To make his plea stronger he set out for Rome personally to beg the Holy Father to grant his request. His petition was granted. Father Ireland was consecrated coadjutor Bishop of St. Paul and titular Bishop of Maronea. The ceremony took place in the Cathedral of St. Paul on Dec. 21, 1875.

On July 24, 1884, the Bishop celebrated his silver jubilee as Bishop of St. Paul. On that occasion his clergy held a reception at which they paid hearty tribute to the virtues of their beloved Bishop, and presented him with a large purse. Seven days later he resigned his see, and was made titular Bishop of

Menith. On Sept. 24, 1889, he received the title of titular Archbishop of Siunia.

He lived quietly for the remaining years at St. Paul's Seminary, where he died on Feb. 22, 1897, eighty-three years of age. He was buried in Calvary Cemetery, St. Paul. Archbishop Ireland was the celebrant at the funeral ceremonies, while Bishop Shanley of Fargo delivered the sermon.

We trust that it is more than a fancy that Archbishop Grace's career, especially his pastoral labors, strikingly resembles that of his great patron the Apostle of the Gentiles. Like the Apostle the Archbishop had a vast area under his care; before his death his original territory was divided into three dioceses. As St. Paul appealed for his rights as a loyal citizen, so also did the Archbishop in his defence of the Church against her enemies. Like St. Paul he was a pioneer, a pathfinder, who joined to his vision and his strength the guilelessness and humility of a child. It is but natural then that both in the Order of St. Dominic and in the Archdiocese of St. Paul the memory of Thomas Langdon Grace should remain forever fresh and green. Bro. Philip Archdeacon, O. P.

