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HUGH HUGHES OF VENARD HISTORY

HUGH BYRNE - 139

It is the year 1913. With the major seminary already established at Ossining, N.Y., Fathers Walsh and Price, the two co-founders of the new Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America, are expressing their common desire to establish a junior seminary as soon as possible; but the question as to where it should be located is proving a bit difficult. As possible homes for the planned preparatory school sections all over the country were mentioned, considered and then rejected. Finally, because of its ready accessibility for the great Catholic population in the East and because of the enthusiastic support given to the new mission movement by Bishop Hoban, the diocese of Scranton is chosen as the sought-for-place. Accordingly everything is prepared and on September 8th, located in a leased building at 638 Clay Avenue, Scranton, the junior college, with seven students as its total enrollment, has its formal opening.

Since Maryknoll (as the American Missionary Society is becoming popularly known) is unable for the time being to staff its preparatory school with a faculty of its own, the students trudge off each morning to attend classes at St. Thomas College. This condition lasts until the winter of the following year when disagreement over the rental question arises. Thereupon the younger brothers of Maryknoll are forced to take up their abode at the Ossining mother-house. Living space there, however, is so scarce that, for a while, a renovated hayloft is improvised as a dormitory for the "homeless orphans."

The waifs remain at Maryknoll for three semesters until the Society secures for them, at a country site some eight miles from Scranton, a home of their own in the shape of an

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old farmhouse. Since the nearest town, Clerks Summit, is almost a mile away, the school is promised the boon of solitude in its new surroundings. So in the fall of 1916, with the enrollment at twenty-five ranging from high-school youngsters to college men, classes are resumed in the rural setting. On October 1st, the school is incorporated under the name of "The Venard Apostolic School" although this is later to be changed to "Maryknoll Preparatory College."

The summer of 1918 sees a group of Maryknoll nuns taking up their residence in a nearby cottage. With the rapid growth in the number of students it becomes quite evident that the old farmhouse will no longer suffice. Hence, with an eye to the future, a power house, designed to supply heat and hot water for the other buildings, is erected and then duly taken possession of by the students in March 1919. Soon the power house also proves inadequate and within a twelfth month erection of the long-hoped-for main building is begun. Because of the twofold reason that sufficient funds are lacking and that the extra space is not as yet absolutely needed, only the north wing and the water tower are to be built. The south wing and the chapel must be put off to some future date.

The building can't go up too soon. During the spring semester the number of those at the Venard breaks all records, close to three hundred, no less; though, be it confessed, that number includes two hundred chickens! Yes, the students really go in for the farm life. In the mornings they rise at the sacrilegious hour of 4:30 and at night, beating the sun to bed, they retire at 8:30! A strong witness to their hardy life is that long winding "S" road, that comes leading up to the front entrance of the College, built by them out of dirt excavated from the basement of the new building. When not building roads they might be out tramping along other roads on a thirty or so mile hike!

Mental activity, of course, as well as physical, has its place in their regular routine. In extra-curricular affairs there are offered to the budding missionaries opportunities to write for the inter-class paper, founded but two years

before, the "Classicum", or to take part in various dramatic productions ranging from minstrels to tragedies. Still, road-making, hiking, writing and the like are but stepping-stones to that goal that lies ahead of them, the priesthood; and so the students are cheered on to their goal by the news that the first alumnus of their school, Raymond A. Lane, is now "Father" Lane.

In 1921, after an anxious wait, the students pack things up and move over to the main building. The exodus leaves the farmhouse free for the Sisters and the powerhouse for the faculty. Things, though, are not long set up in the new dwelling till the need for a suitable chapel becomes sorely felt. The rotunda, that which should be but the entrance, is made to serve as the chapel itself; classrooms are put into use for extra Masses. Evidently a chapel must be soon erected. Yet such is not to be the case for quite a few years.

In 1924, the students, thanks to the labor of former confreres who salvaged it from a swamp land, are able to boast of a Venard lake. Not to be outdone by their predecessors however, they commence erecting a permanent athletic field and two handball courts, both of which should prove an immense help during the summer months when Camp Venard opens. The seniors of this year, in order to make a special bestowal of their own upon the Venard posterity, build an outdoor shrine to the Blessed Virgin.

Anxious to complete the building program of the preparatory school, the Society has the foundations for the parts not yet built completed in 1926. No further progress is achieved till two summers later when the Maryknoll superiors, putting great trust in Divine Providence, order the erection of the chapel and the south wing. In September 1929 the College, reaching its completion, bids an awe-inspiring welcome to the students arriving for the new term. It is quite fitting that the Venard should be adorned in all its architectural splendor by November 21, 1929, the centennial birthday of its patron in heaven, Blessed Theophane Venard.

With other preparatory schools already under way at Los Altos, California, and at Cincinnati, Ohio, and with still others in the offing, Maryknoll decides to make its first preparatory school a full-fledged college. With this end in view the Venard receives its last batch of first year high school students in the autumn of 1931. Then in the fall of 1934 the philosophy year of the junior year of college is moved down from the Home-Knoll to the Venard; on November 21, the Feast of the Presentation, the College witnesses the investiture of its first group of philosophers. At last, in June 1936, the Venard's first college graduation occurs.

On a day in February 1938, the report of Father Gerard Donovan's heroic death reaches the Venard. That Father Donovan, a former student as well as a former faculty member of the College, should suffer a violent death stuns the imagination of all. At the revelation of such news, the students are naturally saddened, but shortly, as Father Donovan himself would desire, they recapture the spirit of cheerfulness; the spirit of cheerfulness, that, may we boast, characterizes the Venard "esprit de corps" of yesterday and of today.

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It sometimes hurts to laugh. But for the sake of community life please bear the pain once in a while or buy a "painted grin." It will help the spirit immensely. Gloomy countenances will go out of fashion; smiles will be the order of the day. Instead of singing "Lord, You made the night too long" we'll be saying, "What! recreation over already?"

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