

A SKETCH OF ST. LEO'S



On the 10th day of November, 1888, the Reverend Father Harty, after ten years of zealous and fruitful labor at St. Bridget's Church, was appointed by the late Archbishop Kenrick to organize a new parish, in the then almost uninhabited part of the city, lying northeast of St. Bridget's and west of the old Visitation Convent. The people of St. Bridget's lamented the loss of their beloved priest, but willingly sacrificed him to the larger good of God's kingdom. In all that area, which is now densely populated, and containing more than a thousand Catholic families, there was at that time, only fourteen years ago, but one hundred and thirty-five families. It is the old story of the mustard seed, illustrating the growth of the kingdom of Heaven.

Immediately upon the information of his promotion, Father Harty took up his new work. Neither the people of the new parish nor the priest of the new parish were strangers; they had known and loved one another in old St. Bridget's. With enthusiasm, therefore, they flocked around their new pastor, and in a few weeks a modest little church was erected. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was offered for the first time on the third Sunday of Advent, or about five weeks after his appointment to the new parish.

After getting his people together, and, with prophetic eye, seeing the great possibilities of the future, Father Harty began the erection of the new church. The spacious lot on the northwest corner of Twenty-third and Mullanphy streets was obtained, and ground for the new church was broken on the feast of St. Joseph, 1889.

On Sunday, September 1st, the same year, the corner stone was laid. It was the occasion of a grand demonstration by the Catholics of the city. The Right Reverend Bishop Hennessy, of Wichita, officiated. He was assisted by the late Vicar General, the Very Reverend P. P. Brady, and a large gathering of the Reverend Clergy. Many of the Catholic Societies of the city formed at Twelfth street and Washington avenue, and marched in a body to the site of the new church. It was a beautiful autumn day, and the crowd attending the ceremony was enormous. Perhaps, a larger gathering was never seen at a like occasion. The

sermon of the day was preached by the Very Reverend F. V. Nugent, C. M., President of the Kenrick Seminary. It was one of his masterful efforts, leaving a profound impression on the vast throng.

St. Leo's has a frontage of seventy-two feet on Twenty-third street and extends back on Mullanphy street one hundred and seventy feet. The style of architecture is early English Gothic—which flourished in the age of Richard I., King John and Henry III. The material used in the foundation is the best quality of stone, laid in hard cement. The church proper is built of hydraulic pressed brick, laid in red cement, with stone trimming. The height of the walls to the spring of the rafters is twenty-nine feet, and from the spring of the rafters to the apex of the roof, sixty-five feet. The front of the church is adorned with a massive granite vestibule, fifteen feet deep, and extending across the entire width of the building. A very remarkable feature of the edifice is the roof, finished entirely in hard wood, with an elaborated pattern in trefoil, quarter-foil and cinquefoil. The main rafters are of mammoth proportions, being sixty-five feet in length. The best Maine slating covers the roof. A graceful spire, one hundred and sixty feet high, points to Heaven. Within the belfry there is a chime of sweet-toned bells. All the finishings on the inside, including the pews and confessionals, are of oak. The large Gothic windows are fitted with gorgeous opalescent glass, that furnish a rich mellow light to the interior. The church presents within a most beautiful effect. There is no pillar to mar the unity or symmetry of the magnificent auditorium. The pews offer seating capacity for a thousand persons, which may be increased to twelve hundred when necessary. The basement of the church is fitted up as a chapel, with a seating capacity of a thousand. It is used for the week day Masses, confessions and parish meetings.

To the west of the church, and immediately adjoining it, is the parochial residence; a large, three-story double house, containing fifteen apartments. It is most admirably adapted as a vestry, the sacristy being right off the main hall.

A recent addition to St. Leo's is the new school, which was erected last year at a cost of fifty thousand dollars. It is a handsome three-story building, containing twelve class rooms, with libraries, music room, superintendent's room and a large assemble hall. In the basement there is space for a bowling alley, billiard room, and toilet rooms for the children. The grade of the school is from the kindergarten to the advanced commercial studies. The youth who finishes in St. Leo's School is well equipped for any position in mercantile life. The school is in charge

of the Sisters of St. Joseph, whose remarkable efficiency in educational work is well known throughout the country. Whilst Father Harty has a watchful eye upon these lambs of his flock, the more immediate and detail work of the school is under the supervision of Father Gavin.

The secret of success in St. Leo's and the explanation of the great work accomplished is the wonderful and edifying unanimity that has ever existed between priests and people. In all the needs of the parish, spiritual and temporal, there has ever reigned the sterling bond of unity. It explains the work achieved; it is the covenant of larger deeds for the future. Not a need of the parish is announced that does not find a host of willing workers. The people enter the cause, heart and soul, and success is their goal. The relation of a priest to his people is indeed like the shepherd to his sheep. This olden simile finds exemplification in St. Leo's. Our Divine Master paints the unity of the shepherd and the sheep in His simple words: "He goeth before them, and the sheep follow him, because they know his voice." This harmony of purpose, this singleness of end, has brought the parish to its present military-like precision and organization. Here is a city of souls in the narrow compass of parish lines, working en masse for a single purpose—the up-building of God's kingdom, under a suave and gentle priest, whose life mirrors the Master.

The result of this condition both in spiritual and material affairs is evident. In things spiritual from the 58,000 persons, who, during the past year, received their Lord, in the Bread of Life. In things temporal it finds expression in the \$222,000.00 that has been expended on the parish institutions. Unity of purpose and greatest possible organization is the watchword of St. Leo's. The Societies for all conditions of life, and the special devotions, for many phases of piety, are so many arteries through which course the vitality of the parish. Through these Societies, frequent Confession and Holy Communion is greatly increased, thus engrafting a living union with the True Vine, whence all life and strength and beauty flow.

Thus, briefly told, is the tale of St. Leo's. The past through God's sweet smile has wrought much; the future is in His keeping.

