

AHUILLE'

by

Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.

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[11-3-1978] ?

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[FRANCE]

This evening, on uncovering this very beautiful plaque of marble, which has been placed on the wall of the baptistery of the church of Ahuille, it seems to me that we are repairing an injustice in the forgotten memory of Father Edward Sorin.

Born in the Manor House of La Roche a few hundred meters from here, his name was barely known by a few people only a few months ago.

The book of Father Lemarie' and the publicity which has been given it in the press recently have suddenly brought Father Sorin to light in the province where he was born.

This monument will be a durable way of remembering for posterity the important role which he played with his companions in the foundation of the University of Notre Dame of which I have the honor of being the President after him for the last twenty-six years.

If at Notre Dame, where the statue of Father Sorin is well known by the students and visitors in the United States, his fame was great, it is regrettable that this handsome figure of a priest and apostle is so little known in the country of his birth.

For it is here in this parish of Ahuille' that he was born, it is here that his earliest education was made. A man is what he is, only by his beginnings.

It is to his family, La Roche, it is to the pastor of Ahuille, it is to all the surrounding people that young Edward Sorin owes his availability, his generosity, his energy, even his passion which

characterized him for the rest of his existence and made him receptive to the workings of the Holy Spirit.

After the torments of the great French Revolution and immediately after the Napoleonic victories, French youth, particularly in these regions of Maine and of Anjou, were dreaming more than ever to give themselves to great causes.

After the military battles across all Europe and the disenchantment which followed the crumbling of the fragile empire of Napoleon, deeper and more durable values than the passing glow of victories acquired at the price of violence, were calling souls which were the most sensitive to Divine Grace.

This brought the great French missionary impetus across Europe, but also across the world. It was the germination of religious institutes and congregations answering to the specific needs of the expansion of the Church.

At Le Mans, Father Moreau had just brought together in a single family the Brothers of St. Joseph of Father Dujarie and the Priests of Holy Cross.

Barely had the congregation been formed, the founder saw well beyond the department of Maine and was called to answer the appeals coming from far away lands.

It is thus that on the 5th of August 1841, seven religious of Holy Cross left Le Mans for New York under the direction of the young Father Sorin - he was only 27 years old - thirty six days to cross the ocean as in the time of Christopher Columbus, but with unshakable courage from the beginning of this journey. The hesitations of the Bishop of Vincennes before his great plans did not dull his enthusiasm. He adopted America for good. He was to remain an American citizen

whose confidence in the destiny of his new country would not be betrayed for the whole length of his life.

After a number of difficulties so well described in the book of Father Lemarie, he was sent in November of 1842 by the Bishop of Vincennes to the location of Notre Dame du Lac in the bitter cold. After eleven days of travelling with horse and cart, he settled in the midst of woods and fields covered with snow living at first in a simple log cabin, which still exists. Everything began from there.

With his companions from Mayennais, Father Auguste Lemonnier his nephew, and Father Gouesse both from Ahuille also, with Father Cointet from Le Roë, Alexis Granger of Daon, with Brother Vincent (Jean Piau) from Courbeville, with Father Anselme (Pierre Caillot) from Gennes, with Brother Joachim (Guillaume Andre) from Evron, and finally Brother Gatien (Urbain Monssimier) barely sixteen years old, native of Cheméré Le Roi, he created from these a school certainly of modest proportions at first, since in 1852 there were 80 students, 140 students in 1857, 213 in 1860, but from the beginning on the 15th of January 1844, by virtue of an act of the General Assembly of the State of Indiana, Father Sorin and his colleagues were constituted and recognized as a corporation, enjoying all the political rights due to the name and title of the "University of Notre Dame du Lac" under whatever name the said corporation will be perpetuated in full power and authority to confer and deliver in the liberal arts and sciences, in law and medicine, the degrees and the diplomas conferred and delivered in the other universities of the United States.

There was only then to walk in the way which lay ahead, and that is what Father Sorin did, that is what his successors did

animated by the same spirit, following the example of this great pioneer.

What has happened to the University of Notre Dame of our day? Today the University of Notre Dame has become the center of Catholic life in America.

President Jimmy Carter, on the occasion of his reception of an honorary doctorate at the same time as the Cardinal Kim of Korea, and Cardinal Arens of Sao Paolo in Brazil, took advantage on the 22nd of last May of the platform of the University of Notre Dame to announce to the world his new foreign policy.

Paul VI during the time when he was Archbishop of Milan received the honorary doctorate from the President Eisenhower in 1960.

Notre Dame is one of the three centers for liturgical development designated by the authorities for the inspiration of the Church in the United States. The majority of the national Catholic American organizations have their annual meeting at Notre Dame.

At this time we have 60,000 alumni and we grant 2,000 diplomas each year, 120 doctorates and 400 masters.

Our 9,000 students come from 50 states of the union and 64 foreign countries. The property of the University extends over 600 acres and comprises approximately 100 buildings. It is really a town with its police force, its fire department, its post office, its hotels, its hospital, its printery, and its autonomous water and heating systems.

The University has a special library building which is the largest in all America, having a capacity for three million volumes, and at the moment a million and a half books.

The annual budget of the University is of approximately 80 million dollars, that would be approximately 400 million new francs or 40 billion old francs, of which most must be provided annually from

private funds (except for 10 million dollars for scientific research).

The President of the University has now the official title of Ambassador of the United States, of President of the Rockefeller Philanthropic Foundation, and President of the Council for Developing of Over-Seas Populations in the federal capitol: Washington. He will preside in Vienna next year, in 1979 with the rank of Ambassador at the conference of the United Nations for over-seas development. A large number of the 800 members of the faculty or of the administration, at the same time as they exercise their official functions are also active in civic and religious organizations.

All this extraordinary extension comes from the prophetic vision and the faith of Father Sorin. To demonstrate this I will cite one episode from his life:

Almost exactly 100 years ago, on the 23rd of April 1879, the entire work of his life was almost wholly destroyed by a terrible fire. The reaction was immediate; at the age of 65 he found again the energy of his beginnings: "I came here," he said, "at the age of 28 with 300 dollars and six helpers from Holy Cross, to a small piece of land and a log cabin, and I founded a university to be dedicated to Our Lady. She must have destroyed it after 37 years to show me that my vision was too restricted. Tomorrow we shall rebuild it larger and more beautiful than ever. And when it is finished, we will place at the summit a golden dome and a statue of Our Lady in gold, all the way at the top to crown our labor, so that all those who will pass by will know, on raising their eyes why this University grows and prospers."

May I say on the spot where he was born and lived his childhood, that Notre Dame is also a splendid monument to the faith and the prophetic vision of its founder and creator: Father Edward Sorin.

and his children. Monsieur Lemonnier still remembers the last visit of his great uncle in Ahuille and has in the house of his birth a great quantity of letters and of souvenirs of Father Sorin.

FATHER HESBURGH'S THANKS TO THE GATHERING

I wish to express here thanks to all those who have contributed to this bringing to life again of the memory of Father Sorin in the land of his birth:

To Father Lemarie who revived again the many aspects of the personality of Father Sorin, describing his zeal, his untiring activities, the social and religious climate where he worked, each one of these statements being backed up by a vast and precise documentation.

To Monsieur l'Abbe Gendron, pastor last year of Ahuille, and to his successor Monsieur l'Abbe Maltret who were willing to allow that this memorial be placed in their church.

I wish also to express my gratitude to Monsignor Collin, Rector of the Catholic University of the West who honors the ceremony with his presence and who was willing to have the University assume the expense of printing the book on Father Sorin.

To Monsignor Carton, director of the English department of the University.

To Canon Galienne, director of Catholic teaching in the department of Mayenne, representing the authorities of the diocese of Laval.

To Monsieur the Mayor of Ahuille and the Council who received us with such kindness.

To the journalists whose articles contributed to the importance of this occasion.

And finally I want to show my gratefulness to all those who are around me tonight, to my brothers in Holy Cross and to the parishioners of Ahuille.

And naturally I must especially salute Monsieur Lemonnier Dubourg

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Dear Dick:

Enclosed is a transcript of M. Cackley's translation of Father Hesburgh's talk at Ahuille. Verbatim. Good luck.

Best,

Wendy

Wendy Clauson Schlereth
University Archivist

Enclosure

Do you want the tape back?