

Mary Immaculate Training College.

Most Rev. Dr. O'Dwyer, having realized how far-reaching is the work of a Training College, and how much depends on the proper training of teachers, determined to add such an educational establishment to those already in existence in his diocese. A site having been procured on the South-West side of the city, which the community bought from Mr. Ebrill, Mr. Byrne, of Dublin, was chosen as architect.

The foundation stone was laid on December 8th, 1899, by his Lordship, and a memorial of the ceremony may still be seen in one of the reception rooms of the college. It consists of a silver trowel, bearing the names of the founder, Most Rev. Dr. O'Dwyer, and the Mother Superior, Mother M. Angela Bourke. Indeed, the college itself may be regarded as a memorial of the intense and practical interest of the great prelate who founded it, in all that relates to education, and a reminder of the debt of gratitude Ireland owes him for having procured for her a National University. The brave battle he fought and won on that point was a forerunner of that other great battle against injustice and tyranny, also fought and won by this dauntless champion of his people in 1916, when, by his magnificent denunciation of the savage action of the representatives of the English Government, he stayed their hands and thereby saved to the nation heroes of whom Eire is proud to-day.

From its first beginning up to the day of his death, his Lordship took an active interest in the progress of the college. He visited it weekly and never failed to celebrate Holy Mass in its chapel on its patronal feast. He rejoiced in its wonderful and immediate success, for it was indeed wonderful to see the youngest Training College in the country, year after year, not only keeping pace with those much longer in existence, but even surpassing them in the grading of its students at the annual examinations. A tribute to this success was paid by Dr. Starkie, the Resident Commissioner of Education, who, with four other Commissioners, visited the college in 1909 and attended some of the lectures. On his re-

turn to Dublin, he wrote as follows:—

“ On my return to Dublin, I hasten to write to you to express the gratitude of my colleagues and myself for the kindness with which you and your community received us. We were literally amazed at the beauty and excellence of all we saw.”

Such testimony must have been highly gratifying to the Founder of the College, but, equally gratifying and even still more so was the high moral tone and the religious spirit which has ever animated the students and continues to characterise them as teachers. This is largely the reflection of the spirit of the first Principal, Sister M. Paul Quinlan. She realised to the full the responsibility of her charge and to what degree the children throughout the country would be affected by the training of their teachers. She, therefore, applied herself heart and soul to her task and, moreover, inspired her staff with her own noble ideals. It was not without prayer and careful consideration that Sister M. Paul was chosen to launch the new enterprise. While the building of the college was in progress, she crossed over to Liverpool in company with Sister M. Veronica (now Mother M. Veronica, and since Sister M. Paul's death in April, 1923, Principal of the College), where they were hospitably received by our Sisters at Mount Vernon, and where they remained as guests for about twelve months, going daily to Mount Pleasant Training College to attend the lectures and become acquainted with the working of that famous establishment. The authorities of the latter, especially Sister M. Philip and Sister M. Xavier, afforded every possible help, and gave much useful advice, which stood in good stead in after years.

As soon as the building was sufficiently completed to admit the first set of students, Sisters M. Paul and Veronica returned from England to take up their duties, and with the aid of the Sisters given to help, they set it going.

In 1901, after the college had been for some months in operation, the formal opening took place, the Bishop, Lord Monteaigle and other public men being present.

Externally the college, as far as the main building is concerned, looks much the same

as it did on the day of its opening, thirty-seven years ago. Nevertheless, many important additions have been made. For example, the Recreation Room, known as Our Lady's Hall, the Cookery Room, and, most important of all the beautiful Chapel, which is connected with the main building by a glass-covered corridor, off which open twenty-one music rooms. The latest addition is a large wing supplying twenty-three bath-rooms, eleven of which are provided with shower-baths.

The grounds also have undergone a gradual transformation which would render them quite unrecognisable to one who had not seen them since the opening of the college. A large concrete quadrangle, as well as five tennis courts and two playing fields, provide ample accommodation for the games and sports, which are an outstanding feature of the daily programme, while glass verandas afford shelter on wet days. Various pieces of statuary add to the attractive appearance of the grounds, the latest of these being a life-sized Calvary.

Sister M. Paul continued to watch over the interests of the college till her death in 1923. Her death was a reflection of her life. Up to the last she attended Holy Mass daily, though in a dying condition, so that on the last day that she received Holy Communion at the altar rails, the priest when giving It to her changed the usual formula for the one used in giving Holy Viaticum. The success of the college, under God, was largely due to Sister M. Paul's powers of organisation, which were above the ordinary and applied to the whole machinery of the college. Truly it may be said of her "Her works praise her in the gates."

She would have been pleased had she seen the enthusiastic welcome given by the students to his Excellency, Monsignor Robinson, when, shortly after his appointment he honoured the college with a visit and congratulated the students on the crusade for modesty in dress and deportment which was started by them in 1927 and swelled to a membership of over twelve thousand.

At the general meeting of the Bishops in Maynooth in June, 1928, the crusade was formally approved by the Hierarchy in the following terms :—

"The Bishops as a body cordially approve of the crusade. Arrangements for enrolling names may be made with the P.P.'s and those in charge of other churches in the country."

The crowning joy in connection with the crusade was the following message received from His Holiness :—

"Right gladly and most cordially the Holy Father imparts the Apostolic Benediction to the Promoters and Members of the Modest Dress and Deportment Crusade and Children's Guild for the Promotion of Modesty, organised by the Training College, Limerick.

"CARDINAL GASPARRI,

"Secretary of State to His Holiness."

When in the following year the members forwarded to His Holiness their congratulations on his Golden Jubilee, they received this gracious reply :—

"Dear Members,

"The Holy Father was very grateful for your expression of homage and devotion and of congratulation on his Golden Jubilee. His Holiness was pleased to learn of the remarkable increase in membership in the Irish Modest Dress and Deportment Crusade.

"His Holiness gladly renews the Apostolic Blessing to all the members of the Staff and the Students of Mary Immaculate Training College, and to all those who are members of this campaign for the preservation of Christian modesty.

"Very sincerely yours in Christ,

"P. CARDINAL GASPARRI."

Next after religious instruction, the most important subject on the curriculum is the practice of teaching, this being a direct preparation for the students' profession. Every student is required to spend, under the supervision of the College Professors, six weeks in each year of her training in the practising schools in charge of the community. The students go to and from the schools in buses and receive a royal "send-off" from the "young hopefuls" each afternoon when returning to the college.

Since its first establishment, the college has been essentially national in character, and our native tongue has always had an honoured place on its curriculum. At present it is not only the medium of instruction but also of ordinary conversation.

Irish courses for Religious were conducted several years in the college during the summer vacations. The first of these was exciting in the extreme. It took place during what is known as "the troubled times." The Civil War was in progress, and as the Republicans occupied the south side of the city, and the Training College is on a hill in that direction, numerous bullets from the opposing party made their way (unintended by the shooters) into the building.

The following running diary gives some idea of the state of alarm in which the occupants of the college lived during this period, which they playfully styled "The Third Siege of Limerick." The Irish course for Religious was fixed to start on July 4th, and it was expected the students would have departed on July 1st, but, as will be seen from the diary, very unexpected occurrences detained some of them till July 3rd, while the main body of them took their departure in a state of alarm immediately after the conclusion of an intensive Irish course which had been appointed for them by the Education Board.

**"THE 21 DAYS SEIGE OF LIMERICK"
—1st TO 21st JULY, 1922.**

Friday, June 30th.

The students write the paper set for the conclusion of their four weeks' Irish Course. The usual packing on the eve of departure begins after dinner. Suddenly the news goes round that, owing to the disturbance all over the country, there is danger of the trains ceasing to run, and all who can travel that evening are advised to do so. Result—immense excitement—in an hour or two only forty of the hundred students are still in the college. The scene of bustle, etc., indescribable.

Saturday, July 1st.

Those of the remaining students bound for the West, succeed in getting a train. About half a dozen for other districts are unable to get away.

Sunday, July 2nd.

Students reduced to four; two for Dublin and two for the midlands very disconcerted at inability to get away, as the nuns for the "Irish Course" are to occupy the college next day.

Monday, July 3rd.

The four students set out for their destination on a small barge, with a prospect of three days' travel on same, their trunks to act as seating accommodation—"Necessity has no law."

The Sisters for the "Irish Course" begin to pour in about noon. Non-arrival of those from Newcastle West and Abbeyfeale, the means of travelling being unavailable.

Tuesday, July 4th.

Owing to stoppage of trains, the official appointments of Professors are not forthcoming. The morning class of each grade is conducted by a Sister, so that no time is lost. In the afternoon the professors, who applied to the Board for appointment, decide to begin teaching on their own responsibility.

The missing country Sisters arrive.

July 5th to 10th.

The study of Irish proceeds with great zeal, the Sisters being so absorbed in it give little thought to outside events, though now and then a few shots are heard.

July 11th.

Great excitement aroused by a visit of two Aldermen who state that, in view of impending events, the college may be required as a refuge for the citizens, and that the nuns must be ready to vacate it at eight hours' warning. Between 10 and 11 o'clock, p.m., knocking is heard at the outside gate. Several "citizens" who have brought beds, etc., with them, apply for admission. Circumstances do not allow of this, so they go to Mungret College.

July 12th.

Classes conducted as usual. The professor of the elementary grade appears rather nervous. She recommends the Sisters to move back their desks, so as not to be

in a line with the windows, as hostilities are expected to begin that evening. The Sisters, half-laughingly, comply. Suddenly, a shot rings out, and a bullet crashes through one of the plate glass windows. All jump to their feet. The professor rushes from the platform; some of the class prostrate on the floor, and finally all find themselves in a "shell-shocked" condition on the corridor. When recovered from the shock, their zeal for the language causes them to resume operations in a safer zone on the lower flat. Dinner and recreation as usual, and then Office. Just as the "Benedictus" is being recited, a sharp report is heard; a bullet whistles through the air and a voice cries out "I'm struck"; one of our Sisters is the victim. She falls on her knees, believing herself dying (as blood is flowing freely) and commends herself to the Lord.

Some of the Sisters gather round her, and one (at risk of her life) flies to the lodge, to send a messenger for priest and doctor, and determines to go herself with a companion if no messenger is found. As the lodge keeper opens the gate, a priest, with another gentleman, happens to be passing. He sends the latter for the doctor, and comes himself to the patient, who is by this time in the sacristy. Soon after, a Redemptorist Father is also on the scene, and a doctor, with some members of the "Red Cross Department," arrives. These do all that is needed for the poor sufferer. Willing hands prepare a bed in an adjoining room. Later, the Sisters are much relieved to hear that her state is not so serious as was feared at first. Meanwhile, they take refuge round the walls of the chapel, not knowing when another shot may come to claim a fresh victim, and the alarm is all the greater since they know not how the bullet entered the chapel, as no window is broken. The doctor puts an end to this painful uncertainty by tracing the course of the bullet through the oak door on the corridor outside the chapel, in which the aperture made by its passage is to be seen. When the supper bell rings, what a joyful surprise to find that the lowest corridor (a safe spot) has been transformed into a refectory! The remainder of the evening is spent in arranging "dug-outs" for the night, as each is left free to select her own. Anxious faces peer into dormitories, looking for safe corners, which are decided on and again disregarded,

as some loop-hole for a bullet is noticed; mattresses are borne hither and thither—the windows being barricaded by some of them, and those used for sleeping purposes are removed from the beds to the floor. The idea that "unity is strength" prevails, as one cell has its floor lined with nine mattresses, so that careful navigation is needed for each intending sleeper to reach hers; and when the hour of repose comes, the would-be slumberers lie down in day attire, ready for pending emergencies.

July 13th.

Too unnerved to engage in study; the day is spent in barricading; forms are placed round chapel walls and the benches vacated. About mid-day a bullet shoots through the roof of the kitchen. The victim of yesterday is removed to St. John's Hospital in a motor; relics and Sacred Heart badges are hung up on all sides.

July 14th.

Fresh alarm at finding a bullet has penetrated a music-room during the night; the day is spent as yesterday; constant alarm from shots.

July 15th.

The "Siege of Limerick" continues. Chaplain unable to come for Mass, owing to the heavy firing. Great anxiety all day. Rev. Dr. Clune, Killaloe Diocese, calls towards evening and offers to conduct an Irish Class till the ordinary professor can resume. Same ceremony as regards "dug-outs." Windows all over the college left unhasped fearing a "mine explosion."

July 15th to 20th.

Siege continues; almost every day marked by entrance of a bullet, sometimes two. Nervous strain very high, and scarcely any sleep possible. All the same, the Irish Course valiantly continues, two of the three professors being able to attend, and Rev. Dr. Clune takes the senior class for an hour each evening. On the 16th a Free State officer calls to advise the Sisters not to sleep at north side of the college. Fresh consternation and some removals to new "dug-outs." Strange apparitions at bed-time, restless spirits wandering about with pillow round head by way of protection from stray bullets!!

July 20th.

Alarming rumours of arrival of "big guns." Great operations expected to take place during the night; at 1 a.m. the sky is lit up with flames; some of the Sisters rise and say the "Rosary" aloud, others hear the prayers and conclude a Sister has been shot; others imagine the college on fire and that men are coming up stairs. Meanwhile, in the upper flats, figures glide about peering out of windows at the awful flames which seem to light the sky. At length a great tramping is heard, which turns out to be the marching of the Republicans, who are obliged to vacate their headquarters, the New Barracks.

July 21st.

The New Barracks, a smoking ruin, plainly visible from upper dormitories. A

little later news of the awful night's work comes in. The Republicans all over the city, when shelled by the "big guns," had fled from the barracks, setting them on fire before leaving; bringing the "twenty-one days' siege" to an end.

The dreaded explosion of the mines is averted by a brave priest who, at risk of his life, cuts the fuse before the fire has time to reach the mines.

Fervent thanksgiving in every heart to Our Blessed Lady of Limerick, whose picture had been brought into the "choir" at the beginning of the disturbances, and in whose honour daily prayers for the safety of the city were recited.

The following lines to the memory of its founder, may form a fitting conclusion to the history of the Training College :—

In Memoriam.

Most Rev. Dr. O'Dwyer, Bishop of Limerick,

died August 19th, 1917. R.I.P.

Lover of Truth,
Hurling base falsehood sternly down the
steep;
The Age's champion,
Hater of the wrong,
Causing the Land's crushed heart with joy
to leap.

Fearless and free,
Sounder of trumpet blasts,
Ringing far out the marge of Eire's shore;
Kingly of mind,
In history of thy land
To hold an honoured place for evermore.

Churchman renowned,
Defender of the Faith,
The glory of a glorious Hierarchy;
Serving Thy God,
Thy flock, thy native land,
With selfless, unperturbed constancy.

Fitting it was
That in a blaze of light
Thy sun should set upon thy earthly day;
Gone,—but the name
That tyrants learned to fear
Is writ in Eire's grateful love for aye.