

# The Corrigan Years

9534

Early New York bishop was a man of learning and defender of the Church

By JAMES F. JOHNSON

One hundred years ago, on Oct. 10, 1885, Cardinal John McCloskey died after 20 years as head of the New York Archdiocese.

There was no speculation concerning his successor because Bishop Michael Augustine Corrigan, the coadjutor, was standing in the wings, so to speak. He held the post of coadjutor for just exactly five years, before which position he was bishop of Newark for seven years.

The bishop's parents came from the vicinity of Kells in County Meath. The Corrigan family settled in Newark, N.J. (part of the New York diocese until 1853), and it was in the schools of that city that the future archbishop received his education before going to Rome. Subsequently, he would have a very important identity with Seton Hall where he served as president for a decade, and labored beside Bishop Bernard McQuaid who was destined to make noisy outbursts in the New York Province—and well beyond. When Bishop Bayley was elevated to Baltimore from Newark in 1872 the obvious choice for succession was the youthful Bishop Corrigan, already in charge of the diocese and only 33 years old.

In the Corrigan years the organization of the Church in America was totally different from today. John Williams of Boston had little interest in affairs outside his enormous New England Province. Feehan of Chicago was in poor health. Patrick A. Kenrick of St. Louis was becoming infirm and moving to a day when he would be 50 years in the hierarchy. Hence, it becomes obvious that the influence of the Atlantic Seaboard prelates guided Church policy until the opening years of our century.

Archbishop Corrigan faced up to the obvious problems of a growing diocese—the need for new parishes, schools and various institutions. He launched a program for the founding of St. Joseph's Seminary (Dunwoodie), and he attended to the all important task of the completion of St. Patrick's Cathedral, which looked rather headless since its dedication in 1879. He completed the twin spires which enclosed a 19-bell carillon made in Europe's



Archbishop  
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Corrigan

best foundry. He enjoyed the esteem and confidence of his provincial bishops—five in New York State and two in New Jersey. His relationships with the genial and gentle Cardinal James Gibbons in Baltimore and with Archbishop Patrick J. Ryan of Philadelphia were pleasant; the latter was a frequent preacher in St. Patrick's Cathedral for special occasions.

Among the major issues of concern to Archbishop Corrigan were the schools question—public versus parochial—the founding of Catholic University and the institution of an apostolic delegate for the U.S. Msgr. Francesco Satolli, the first delegate, was hardly a trained diplomat and was at a loss to understand the democratic approach of American prelates. The final very painful episode—one that involved Archbishop Corrigan in particular was the Father McGlynn case. This Manhattan pastor joined hands with Henry George who was ex-

pounding his "single tax" theory. The whole affair was not very crucial, but nevertheless when Father McGlynn went overboard for the cause, disobeying the archbishop's strictures, he was suspended. This only accentuated the situation and brought the pros and cons into sharper conflict.

Unaware of what the future could bring, this strangely oriented cleric said that the Vatican should be broken up and the pope should come to New York and walk down Broadway in a street suit, an umbrella under his arm. It didn't all turn out that way—but the pope came eventually under a much different set of circumstances.

Archbishop Corrigan survived into our century. He is no mythical figure from the past. He was well called Michael Augustine—Michael the defender of his Church, Augustine—a man of learning.

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