

RISE OF ST. DOMINIC'S

Stronghold of Catholicism in South Washington.

ARTISTIC IN APPOINTMENTS

Present Magnificent Edifice Erected on the Ruins of the One Destroyed by Fire in 1885—Brief Mention of the Labors of Its Succession of Pastors from Father Willson to Father Kent.

On the corner of Sixth and E streets southwest stands the magnificent structure, St. Dominic's Church. Its massiveness and the beauty and grace of its architectural lines place it in the foreground of the many edifices that adorn the Capital City, and by many it is considered to be the most beautiful church in Washington. The church property occupies half a block, upon which, in addition to the church, are erected a large pastoral residence, a well-appointed schoolhouse, and a capacious hall. Around these are well-kept lawns, adorned with shrubbery and silver maples. Beautiful, indeed, is St. Dominic's, and proud is the congregation of its glorious history and the proportions it has assumed. Its career has always been onward, and, like an individual or a nation, its joys have been intermingled with sorrow, but, under the dispensation of a kind Providence, the Dominican Fathers, who have labored for the good of the parish since its very inception, with the loyal support of the congregation, have been able to surmount every obstacle that besets the path to success.

The church is Gothic in design; is two hundred feet long by eighty feet wide, and surmounted by a lofty steeple. It is constructed of granite, with brownstone trimmings. The main altar is a masterpiece of the woodworkers' art; it is highly and artistically carved and almost reaches the ceiling of the sanctuary. In the center is a life-size image of Christ crucified, on the sides of which are statues of the Blessed Virgin, St. John, St. Rose of Lima, and St. Dominic, the patron of the church. The ceiling of the sanctuary is decorated with gilded stars and about midway between it and the apex of the altar is a large electric star, typical of the Star of Bethlehem, which is only illuminated at Christmas time.

The Holy Name Chapel.

On each side of the high altar and along the sides of the church are erected altars to St. Joseph, the Blessed Virgin, the Lady of Lourdes, St. Anthony, and the Sacred Heart. There is also attached to the church on the south the Holy Name Chapel. Its interior is finished in wood and is remarkable for its beauty; its principal use is as a repository on Holy Thursday.

The windows of the church are of stained glass, and on the walls between each are placed handsome raised stations of the cross.

The organ is said to be the largest in the city. It is 30 feet in height, 28 feet in width, and 14 feet in depth, and its beauty is in keeping with its surroundings.

The history of St. Dominic's dates back to 1853, when the Dominican Fathers were authorized by Archbishop Francis P. Kenric, of Baltimore, to erect a church in South Washington.

The first pastor of St. Dominic's was Very Rev. George Willson, O. P., who built the old church on the corner of Sixth and F streets, the site of the present hall and school. It was a modest structure of brick, and was for years a landmark. During the pastorate of the lamented Very Rev. J. A. Bokel, O. P., the movement in the direction of a new church received its initial impulse. Father Bokel was the central figure in the movement, and under his direction the plans and specifications were drawn.

Father Bokel's Crowning Work.

It is difficult to pay a fitting tribute to the mind that conceived this lofty, majestic structure in the days when Washington was to a large extent a quagmire and the parish sparsely populated. Certainly Father Bokel was capable of great ideals and possessed of exquisite taste. No greater tribute can be paid to his memory than the simple assertion that there never was a pastor of St. Dominic's Church who was more beloved by his flock than Father Bokel. He made constant visitations to both the rich and the poor and his genial disposition was always productive of good.

Father Bokel broke ground for the new church on November 9, 1865, the feast of all saints of the Dominican Order, and ten days later the corner-stone was laid. Work continued until the walls had reached a height of twenty-five feet, when the operations closed for several years.

Father Bokel had for his assistants Fathers Call, Ralph, and Young, the latter being a grandson of Notly Young, one of the original proprietors of Washington.

In 1870 Very Rev. M. B. Fortune was transferred to Washington from Memphis, Tenn., and was made pastor of St. Dominic's. He was a man of indomitable energy, and ere long that quondam forsaken-looking pile became the scene of great activity. In 1872 work was resumed, and on St. Patrick's Day, 1875, mass was said for the first time in the completed church. On June 13 following, Archbishop Bayley dedicated the edifice.

Builder of the Convent.

Very Rev. J. A. Rochford succeeded Father Fortune as pastor. He was well known in this community for his intellectual attainments. He was very popular with the members of his parish, and they cheerfully co-operated with him in all his undertakings. He further beautified the surroundings of the church by erecting St. Dominic's Convent, the home of the priests attached to the church.

Very Rev. P. C. Call was next appointed to the pastorate. He was an affable gentleman, and his sterling worth was fully appreciated by his flock. He was noted for his humor and the quickness of his wit.

Father Call's successor was Rev. E. D. Donnelly, who was stationed at the church but a few months when an appalling calamity befell the congregation. On the 12th of March, 1885, just ten years after the completion of the church, its bell, then used for sounding fire alarms, summoned the people of the parish to witness the doom of that grand temple which their labors and generosity had made possible. A fire had started in the engine-room. Soon the writhing flames began to lick the interior, and ere long the walls, ruined roof, and a smoldering pile of debris were all that were left of that handsome church.

On the following Sunday a temporary altar was erected on the tops of some pews that had escaped the conflagration, and in the midst of the smell of charred wood the people shivered at their devotions. The old church was again pressed into use, and those who were unable to gain entrance to the services testified to the rapid growth of the congregation.

St. Dominic's Church was, indeed, a mass of ruins, but the same zeal, energy, and generosity which had erected it in the first instance caused it to rise, phoenix-like, from its ashes. Some months later, on rosary Sunday, the doors were again thrown open and the congregation was ushered into St. Dominic's, more beautiful and imposing than ever. Short-

ly afterward the schoolhouse was erected. Its first floor is taken up with large, bright class rooms, and on the second floor there is a commodious hall.

Added the Lofty Spire.

The next pastor sent to St. Dominic's was Very Rev. P. A. Dinahan, O. P. During his administration Father Dinahan erected a steeple upon the church. He did much to enhance the beauty of the church property, but his health compelled him to resign before the expiration of his term of office. Father Dinahan was succeeded by Very Rev. J. C. Kent, O. P., who served as pastor for three years. During his term of office the steady progress of the congregation was maintained and the debt on the church was greatly reduced.

Then came Very Rev. J. P. Moran, O. P. He made a very progressive pastor, and to him is due the installation of the electric lights in the church and the addition of some beautiful statuary.

The present pastor of St. Dominic's is the Very Rev. J. C. Kent, O. P. On account of his former successful administration, he was returned to St. Dominic's for a second term. Father Kent is a man of strong character, ever attentive to his priestly duties, and his great business capabilities have placed his parish in a flourishing condition. During his administration, Father Bokel, who had been again assigned to his old flock, departed this life full of years and mourned by young and old alike. The present incumbent bids fair to rival Father Bokel in meriting the good wishes of his congregation.

The priests and people are justly proud of the past record of the congregation; they are firmly united by bonds of love; their joys and sorrows are mutual, and all are intent on the continued well being of the parish.