

Dec. 19, 1897.

THE REV. SAMUEL E. MAZZUCHELLI,

Pioneer Priest of the Portage.

OF THE MEN whose names are associated with the early history of Portage, and who deserve a prominent place among those who made an honorable record here, but few should be placed above that of Father Samuel E. Mazzuchelli. A Dominican priest, born in Milan, Italy, of wealthy parents, but animated by a religious zeal which so distinguished the Jesuit missionaries, he put all the endearments of a happy home behind him, to brave the privations of the forest, among the savages in the inclement regions of Michillimackinac and Lake Huron. He had been ordained a priest of the order of St. Dominic, at Cincinnati, in 1829 when a mere youth, and the next winter found him among the Indians at Sault Ste. Marie. "Here" in the words of an admirer, "this small slender delicate young man lived, labored and roamed for five long years, following the Indians in their summer hunts from the points where the sainted Marquette once sojourned to Green Bay and Fox River on the south, to the far-off Ontonagon and Keweenaw on Lake Superior, converting, baptising and blessing the children of the forest who adopted him as brother and loved him as an untutored nature alone can." In the prosecution of this labor of love which so engrossed every fiber of his nature, pressing closely to his breast the symbol of his faith, he at times, found his way to the portage between the Fox and Wisconsin rivers and here were the scenes of some of his triumphs and rewards of his religious zeal. Father Mazzuchelli is heard of here as early as 1831, doing missionary work among the Winnebago Indians, the famous scout and trader, Pierre Paquette, being of his flock. An old log church, (the existence of which is known to but few citizens of Portage

at the present time) which stood in what is now Adams street back some thirty feet, perhaps, from its junction with Conant street, was erected by Paquette for Mazzuchelli's teachings. The church itself was never fully completed and was only occupied when some adventurous spirit clothed with the authority of the church found his way here, and it was burned about 1840. This structure was the first one to be devoted to the cause of Christianity in what now constitutes Columbia county, and was undoubtedly the first one to be built in central Wisconsin. That the gospel has been preached longer in Portage than in any place within a radius of 100 miles must account for much of that elevated moral tone which distinguishes our town above Columbus and Baraboo and others that have been less abundantly favored.

On the occasion of Mazzuchelli's first visits here, services were conducted on the prairie between the Wisconsin and Baraboo rivers. Women of French ancestry and dusky Winnebago maidens had erected arbors and appropriately decorated and festooned them in honor of the occasion and here among these untutored folk, in his primitive surroundings, Mazzuchelli told them of the sufferings of the Savior and of the life to come. He was usually attended by the devout Miss Elizabeth Grignon, who acted as interpreter, and so this excellent lady fairly divides honor with her pater in missionary work at Portage. "Forty Winnebagoes," says the historian of the period, "were baptised and given christian names by Father Mazzuchelli. The presentation of crosses, crucifixes and beads had a wonderful effect upon the recipients of these holy favors." Pierre Paquette's daughter, Therese, still living in Caledonia, received her baptismal rites

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at his hands and she speaks with enthusiasm and devotion of Father Mazzuchelli's labors here, and Mrs. Kinzie has recorded in "Waubun" an incident which shows that temperance was one of the virtues that he had succeeded in implanting firmly in the hearts of some, at least, of his converts. A domestic had had an unusually hard day's work and Mrs. Kinzie, writing of the affair, said: "I did what it was at that day very much the fashion to do—what at home I had always seen done on washing day,—what, in short, I imagine was then a general custom among housekeepers. I went to the dining-room closet, intending to give Charlotte a glass of wine or brandy and water. My cupboard proved to be in the state of "Mother Hubbard's;" nothing of the kind could I find but a bottle or orange shrub.

"Of this I poured out a wineglassful and carrying it out, offered it to the woman. She took it with an expression of great pleasure; but, in carrying it to her lips, she stopped short, and exclaiming 'whiskey!' immediately returned it to me. I would still have pressed it upon her; for, in my inexperience, I really believed it was a cordial she needed but, pointing to her crucifix, she shook her head and returned to her work. I received this as a lesson more powerful than twenty sermons; it was the first time in my life that I had ever seen spirituous liquors rejected upon a religious principle, and it made an impression upon me that I never forgot."

Again, in reciting a most touching affair, Mrs. Kinzie said: "Agatha had been baptised by Mgr. Mazzuchelli, "so we may feel sure that his teachings were productive of good results, even if they were not permanent as, let us hope, they may have been.

Mgr. Mazzuchelli's labors after leaving the portage were so fully narrated by a gentleman in San Francisco in a newspaper communication, upon hearing of his friend's death in 1864, that it is here employed as a faithful tribute to the memory of the devoted priest whom he admired so much: "At Portage he met a few half-breed trappers and voyageurs, whose canoe and fare he shared while paddling the slow and turbid water of the

Wisconsin, and at the Fort he was kindly welcomed by the brave General Zach Taylor and Jefferson Davis. Here he remained enjoying the hospitalities of the officers' mess, and ministering to the spiritual wants of the soldiers and converted Winnebago Indians, until the opening of navigation in the upper Mississippi river in the spring of 1835.

The month of April, 1835, found him bidding adieu to his kind friends at the Fort, and floating down the "Father of Waters," but not expecting, in the then sparsely settled state of the country to find a priest before reaching St. Louis, a distance of six hundred miles. By the terms of the Rock Island Treaty, made with the Sac and Fox Indians at the close of the Black Hawk War, the whites were permitted to settle in the "Dubuque Lead Mines" on the first day of June, 1833, and there our young missionary found a village nearly 20 years old, containing a very large proportion of Irish Catholics, who had lived on the east side of the Mississippi for years, in the mines around Galena and Mineral Point, and had successfully defended their homes through the forays and battles of 1832. They had one visit from Father McMahan of Galena, in the fall of 1833, but he died of cholera soon after. A Father Fitzmaurice was sent there by Bishop Rosatti of St. Louis, in May, 1834, but he, too, died at Galena in August following. When, therefore, they implored Father Mazzuchelli to remain with them, it was essentially the "voice of the people crying in the wilderness," but there were impediments which should first be removed before he could consent. They were in the Louisiana Purchase, in what is now the State of Iowa, and under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of St. Louis, as was also Galena, in the State of Illinois, while all the opposite bank of the Mississippi, in what is now the State of Wisconsin was governed by the Bishop of Detroit, of whose diocese Father Mazzuchelli was a priest. But earnest petitions were sent to both Bishops, and he was permitted to remain, the present Bishop Baraga having supplied his place among the Indians.

On the Fourth of July following, a procession might have been seen marching through the streets to the music of fife and drum, while the hills resounded to the cannon roar of a detachment of United States artillery. The people of town and country, without distinction of class or creed, participated, in their holiday attire, and after an appropriate oration the day was sanctified by the laying of the corner stone of a large granite church, which afterwards became the Cathedral of the diocese of Dubuque.

But the prophetic eye of the Christian philosopher soon saw the vastness of the field that opened before him in the near future, and he determined that all the faculties with which he was endowed by the Almighty should be actively employed. He pressed on the attention of the bishops assembled at Baltimore, the immediate importance of erecting a See at Dubuque, and succeeded in having a bishop installed there, six years before the consecration of those for Chicago and Milwaukee. He obtained by gift and purchase several acres of town lots around his church, a neighboring tract for a graveyard, and six hundred acres of rich and well-timbered land, embracing an arable mound, 500 feet high, for a college and other religious purposes, within four miles of a town which he foresaw would be a large and populous city. He built a brick church of an ornate style at Galena, and secured extensive grounds for convent and graveyard purposes. He did the same at Mineral Point, Shullsburg, Potosi and various other places in Wisconsin—and at Davenport, Burlington and Iowa City, etc., in Iowa—until he became celebrated not only as a church builder but as an architect. The first legislature of Iowa engaged him to draw a plan for their new capitol, which cost \$120,000. The supervisors of Joe Daviess County, Ill., employed him to plan and superintend the building of a large stone court house; and even on matters of legislation his advice was sought by the leading men of the country. He was never known to miss an appointment in the duties of his sacred ministry. Rain, hail or sunshine, whether the thermometer stood at thirty degrees be-

low or ninety above zero, he was always present at the appointed hour, whatever the distance or the object. His sermons and lectures were carefully adapted to the comprehension of his hearers, fervid, eloquent and exceedingly interesting and diversified on controversial subjects; but he was never known to write a discourse. Today he was found at the mansion of the affluent; tomorrow in the hovel of the poor; but for all alike, he had the modest look of persuasive eloquence, whose command was irresistible. There he is, high up on the scaffold of a church, with coat off and sleeves tucked up, industriously at work in brick and mortar. In the evening you see him in the pulpit, discoursing on some abstruse questions of Christian philosophy, and tomorrow he lectures before the governor, judges and legislators on the science of political economy, but always and everywhere present when the sacred duties of the ministry require. Wonderful little man! Always at work and never tiring of doing good for the benefit of religion, literature and science.

Some two years after the arrival of bishop, he took a survey of the field of his six years' labors, and concluded that churches and priests had become sufficiently numerous to warrant a steady and uninterrupted progress of peace and Christian edification. He was yet young and zealous enough for some new enterprise, and he wrote to the superior of his order in Rome for permission to establish a mission at the mouth of the Columbia river on the Pacific coast; but that region had already been set apart to the Jesuit fathers, and he was disappointed. In the fall of that year, 1841, he was permitted to visit the historic city of his birth, where he received a liberal family present, with which, on his return, he purchased the Sinsinawa (a Dakota word signifying, Young Eagle) Mound. The mound was the property of Gen. George W. Jones, so well known as Wisconsin's first territorial delegate in Congress and Iowa's first United States Senator, who died but recently." A correspondent of The Milwaukee Sentinel writing of it said: "Father Mazzuchelli had become intimately acquainted with Gen. Jones, who found in him a man of rare culture and noble