

BROTHER VICTOR HEILMEIER, O. CARM.

1861-1931

By the REV. ANTHONY C. DRESSEL, O. Carm.

The Sword, April 1941

Brother Victor Heilmeier was a typical Bavarian; a rough diamond of a man—honest, faithful and true to his religion. He had a sense of humor too, and sometimes leaned too much to this side. On account of this unguarded playfulness he often ran into difficulties. He was born at Dingelfing, Bavaria, Germany, July 18, 1861. His parents were John Heilmeier and Theresa Wildemann. His childhood and youth were that of the average country boy of South Bavaria. His people, honest, sincere and truly Christian, were simple folk, direct and often primitive in their reactions.

At the age of twenty-one he came to America where he found employment on a farm in the West. He soon after that met the Carmelites; and, being a farmer, he was a welcome candidate. He entered the Order as a postulant early in 1883 at Scipio, Kansas. Here he received the Habit December 18, 1883, and made his profession December 21, 1884. When Brother joined the Order his language was supposed to be high German, but it resembled the Pennsylvania Dutch as it is spoken in Lancaster and Allentown. It was a strange structure of words—German prefixes, American slang mixed with English.

Brother Victor was an unusual man. Our late Father General, the Most Rev. Pius R. Mayer, described Victor's looks in one simple word, as he always briefly described things, playfully calling him "Spitzkopf." Brother had a high, narrow forehead which gave him a distinctly Grecian profile. His large protruding teeth were another distinctive facial characteristic. He was industrious, kind and prayerful and often could be quite amusing and entertaining. If he failed in some ways, it was through his trust of outsiders. His intimacy with them was misunderstood and sometimes dangerously misinterpreted. He himself mean while saw nothing wrong in such associates and was innocent of any wrongful intention. He was asked one time by a sincere layman what studies were required of a Brother. He smiled as if to say: "You ought to know better!" Then he suddenly replied: "All you need do to become a Brother is to put on a Habit and then work like a donkey." The gentleman to whom he spoke was shocked. Brother Victor was surprised. He thought what he had said was humorous.

For the better part of his life he was assigned to farm duties in Scipio, Kansas, where he was in charge of the large Order farm. He was an excellent worker but inclined to be rather abrupt in dealing with others. However, he could be extremely kind and entertaining. He was unusually punctual. There was no work so important that it could keep him from his religious exercises. Nor did he fail to attend to the services of the parish church. His prayerful habits often excited the admiration of others, and he did much good in his own simple way. Those who at first meeting found him rough and even crude in both appearance and manner, upon further acquaintance, forgot his roughness and were attracted to him. The school children would sometimes playfully lead him into a debate or argument of some kind and then wind up changing the "m" in his last name to "f." When they called him Victor "Heilfeier," the chase across the farm began. If he caught them, he would use a birch switch to good effect.

He was assigned for several years to the Pittsburgh Monastery; and, because there were many Bavarians in Holy Trinity Parish, the assignment pleased him since besides housework he had charge of the sacristy. Later on he was sent to Englewood, New Jersey, and then to Leonia, when Father Becher took up residence in the newly purchased St. John's Rectory. He did not fit in well with suburban life, and from Leonia he was moved to New Baltimore to take charge of the farm there. However, he did spend a few months in Pittsburgh before being transferred to New Baltimore. There he contracted an illness which for a time seemed trivial. He became more or less moody and acted strangely. He began to walk with a queer sliding and shuffling of the feet to which little attention was paid as no one thought him ill because he was often very jovial.

Toward the end of 1930 his condition became more serious and was diagnosed as that of slow paralysis. This finally culminated in a stroke which left him helpless. Resigned to God's holy will, he died there March 27, 1931. He was solemnly buried from St. John's Church. Father Dionysius Lickteig, local Prior, sang the Mass. Father Anthony Dressel and Brother Albert Dunne were present. He was buried in the little community plot in front of St. John's Church beside old Father Albert Heiman. The building of the Pennsylvania Turnpike necessitated the removal of these two Carmelites to the new cemetery farther up on the hill.