

BROTHER AUGUSTINE VAN SNEPSEN, O. CARM.

1866-1918

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Brother Augustine van Snepesen was born in Wamels, Holland, April 25, 1866, of Peter van Snepesen and Helena Pom-pen. On April 28, 1866, he was baptized at St. Victor's Church, Wamels, and received the name of Engelbert. His boyhood days were spent in his native town where he also attended school. He had already decided to become a religious and a follower of our Lady of Mount Carmel long before other boys concerned themselves about vocations. In 1882, when but sixteen years old, he left home and crossed the ocean for America. Brother Augustine was one of several boys who had left Holland and who had come to the United States at the invitation of the Very Rev. Anastasius Smits, our second Commissary General. Brother Gregory van der Erf and Brother Stanislaus Slenders were two other members of this group.

Although these boys intended to study for the priesthood, there arose such an urgent need for Brothers that they were asked to enter the novitiate for Brothers. It seemed undoubtedly a queer change, but looking back one now realizes that the move was part of God's great plan. Brother Augustine and Brother Gregory proved to be magnificent examples of the Carmelite Brotherhood and ideal religious. They were efficient workers and prayerful men, who never complained or hinted that they had aspired to the priesthood but had sacrificed their aspirations because of the Order's need. Brother Augustine entered the novitiate at Niagara Falls March 25, 1883, and was professed there a year later. He was the most versatile Brother of our Province. He was always in demand since he proved himself to be an excellent cook, tailor, clerk, office worker, carpenter, painter and plumber. As he mastered any work assigned to him, he was sent from Community to Community to make the general repairs, whether it was the clothing of the men or repairs on the monastery itself. Wherever he was stationed, whether in Pittsburgh, Chicago, Leavenworth or Niagara Falls, he was highly regarded both for his simple and fervent piety as for his ability to deal gently and kindly with all. His diplomacy and tact saved the Fathers many cares and trials.

He was one of the pioneers of the Chicago Community, and here he was best able to show the extent of his talents. Besides the cooking for thirty men, the taking care of the much patching and the mending, which the poverty of the Community necessitated, the various errands to banks, business houses and other institutions fell to Brother Augustine's lot. He was truly an all-around man; and yet, besides this multiplicity of duties, Brother Augustine often filled in as furnace man and janitor. He was always in good humor and never too tired to do an extra chore although he was always up at five in the morning and never retired before ten o'clock at night. Despite his seeming little over-intimacy with the boys, who often teased him, he was always respected by them and they listened willingly to any lecture which he might—when occasion required it—give them, for the boys knew that he was their

friend, as many an extra lunch, sandwich or cookie proved.

Like most Hollanders he enjoyed a cigar, but that was probably his only diversion and distraction. His was a full day, and it was not this excited, bustling employment usually accompanied with a quick temper. His outlook on life was jovial and hopeful, nor was he above taking part in a harmless joke.

An humble illustration of this was to be found in his teasing of old Mrs. Welsh who, after the famous "Shack" had been torn down, had attached herself to the college. A mischievous twinkle at such times burned in his eyes. He could appreciate a joke even when it was on himself. As a result of one of these arguments with Mrs. Welsh while she was enjoying her morning cup of "tay" after Mass, she voiced her famous analysis of the Carmelite Order: "Sure, all the Fathers are good, holy men. God bless them! I have my doubts about these unfinished priests (the clerics), and these wild lads around here that call my house a shack (the postulants), and as for these brothers, sure it will take many a long day before they know anything about cooking or keeping themselves or the monastery straight. As for you, Brother, sure this is only hot water, and I have plenty of that at home."

Brother Augustine was ready to join in any fun-making and was an excellent companion. No outing would be complete unless Brother was along, but even then he was at the service of all. His work was always done with the utmost care and with the positive, Dutch cleanliness. Whether it was a sacristy or kitchen that fell to his charge, no one could be more scrupulously exacting than he.

While Brother Augustine was a veritable dynamo and only his ceaseless activity could accomplish the endless work piled on him each day, he was extremely pious. After a long, hard day he always found time for his own private devotions to which he was deeply attached, and he spent many a fruitful half-hour in the chapel at night after the rest of the Community had retired. His piety was not of the demonstrative type. Those who were associated with him knew his solid faith. When he thought nobody was looking, he would bless himself and silently offer to God the work he was about to do.

In the early days of the Chicago foundation he must have been sorely tried, but he never complained. He kept going in his tireless fashion. Often he was unjustly blamed or accused, but for him that was just another part of the daily program. He would take the praise or blame even-temperedly and patiently. He had sacrificed too much, and his faith was too fervent to permit him to refuse a cross. Ever active, energetic, agreeable and happy in his work, he became an indispensable, vital part of the college and Community. It was a grief-stricken Community and school which saw him become one of the victims of the 1918 influenza epidemic. He was one of the three who succumbed to the epidemic in the Chicago monastery. His tireless work with the other sufferers of the Community wore down his resistance. On January 20 he was forced to retire to his room. He died on January 22 at the age of fifty-two. He was survived by a brother living in Holland, Michigan, and

relatives in the Netherlands.

There was a solemn Mass of Requiem for him at St. Cyril's Church. Father Aloysius Reilly preached a very effective sermon in which he told simply of the sacrifices Brother Augustine had been called upon to make. He was buried with due solemnity in the Carmelite Fathers' plot in Mount Olivet Cemetery, Chicago.

Brother Augustine had spent sixteen years as a member of the St. Cyril Community. Too often his usefulness and his services to the Community were taken for granted, for his humility never permitted him to push himself to the front. Hidden beneath his lighthearted joviality was a prayerful Carmelite and a good religious. The Order would be rich indeed if it possessed more Augustines.

Ralph Waldo Emerson describes Brother Augustine perfectly in his essay when he speaks of the Dutch gentleman: "Manners are the happy ways of doing things: each one a stroke of genius or of love, now repeated and hardened into usage." This happiness, this genius and love were characteristic of Brother Augustine. The history of Carmel in Illinois would be much less colorful without him. All who knew him, priest, brother, cleric **or** student, treasure the fondest memories of Brother Augustine as friend, counsellor and a grand example of a true religious and loving servant of our Lady, Queen of Carmel.