CHAPTER TWO

The Monkery

It has been the fate of five other Berkshire mansions that I know of to fall into the hands of religious orders. Anson Stokes seems unwittingly to have been a great builder of institutions, for his home in Noroton, Connecticut, which he constructed after he had abandoned Shadowbrook, is now owned by the Madames of the Sacred Heart. The magnificent estate which was once the Berkshire Hunt and Country Club and which was during the twenties the East Coast hideaway for Hollywood, was given to the Society of Jesus by Thomas Cranwell of New York and is now a private academy named for its donor. The meek have inherited the land, or at least picked it up at bargain prices.

The Jesuits had been proliferating along the eastern coast which at that time formed one province called by the hyphenated name Maryland-New England-New York. The time had been approaching for the formation of a separate province of New England. In anticipation of this split, which was not finally effected until 1926, Shadowbrook was purchased to serve the new province as a novitiate and juniorate.

In June of the year 1923, the novitiate at Yonkers, New York, consisting of seven lay brothers, five priests and forty-one novices, traveled by bus to their new home in Lenox. Many months before, however, teams of four novices had been coming to Shadowbrook to work on the grounds for two weeks at a time.
Brother Glennon, the cook, acted as superior in the absence of Father Dillon, the Minister, who came at intervals to see how the work was progressing. When Father Dillon was away, the novices and lay brother would rise early and walk to Lenox for daily Mass. While working at Shadowbrook, the novices ate canteen style at Campion Cottage off tin plates.

After the community’s arrival, all ate supper at Campion on benches knocked together out of box wood. Before the first shipment of bedsteads, they slept in the great bedrooms of the old mansion with their mattresses spread on the floor. The first year seems to have been very difficult all around. The house was unfurnished, and only gradually did the community fill the vast spaces until, in fact, they overflowed. The first year, too, it was found that the heating apparatus, originally designed for summer living and, when used during the winter, called on only to warm a few of the many rooms, was completely inadequate to heat the entire house. Brother John Ford, now one of the better known moral theologians of the American Church, was recovering from tuberculosis. He slept on a porch in a sleeping bag.

When the pioneers from Yonkers first arrived, it was the community’s holiday period—three weeks, traditionally called “villa” from the European custom of holding holidays in some house outside the city within walking distance. Since there were no classes and only a minimum of spiritual duties, time could be devoted to the exhilarating task of knocking down walls. With young men’s zest, the novices set to work with fire axes smashing plaster. Room partitions in the eastern wing on both the second and third floors were gleefully torn away. The paneling and other wood from the debris were frugally preserved to make much-needed bookcases.

The cleared areas were to serve as dormitories, one for the novices on the third floor with the juniors’ on the second. Three chambers on the third floor in the center of the eastern wing were co-opted for novice “ascetories” or study rooms. The furthest of these was Anson Stokes’ old study with its tower porch. Three more chambers on the second floor, beginning with the master bedroom which extended into the tower and in which Andrew Carnegie had died, were made into junior ascetories. Two of the
The ballroom was an ideal space for the community chapel, at its most beautiful when garlands of laurel and fir and red ribbons decorated it for Christmas.

larger bedrooms on the second floor served the juniors for classrooms, and a study situated over the front door, together with the walls of the second-floor hall, became the library.

In general, the first floor was untouched. The ballroom was converted into a chapel. The carvings over the fireplace were sufficiently heraldic to recall the military Ignatius and with the addition of his coat of arms were allowed to remain. The fireplace itself was removed and an altar, beautifully carved in matching oak, set in its place. Pews completed the transformation. While the changes were going on, the community heard Mass and performed the common spiritual duties in the “morning room” where the altar from Yonkers had been temporarily installed. Afterwards this became the novice chapter room and classroom.

The green-stained room off the ballroom, which communicated with the smaller tower, served as a sacristy, and the “pompeian” reception hall along with the large parlor were left as they were for the use of visitors. The dining room after the addition of plain wood tables and a flock of dark-wood kitchen chairs managed as a quite crowded refectory.
The west wing was left relatively untouched. The rooms on both floors of the stucco tower were used for faculty rooms, the rector’s being the one on the second floor. The other rooms, formerly master bedrooms or, on the third floor, servant quarters, were used by the faculty for combination study and sleeping purposes. The brothers who had taken vows also had rooms in the west wing.

Mr. Amory—to return for a moment to the man who proved so useful in the first chapter—repeats a story told of one of the early superiors of the Shadowbrook community which I personally am inclined to doubt. It seems, the story goes, that Mrs. Stokes met this father one day and asked him how the community liked their new quarters. The priest is supposed to have replied that they could not have been more ideal for their purposes. Mrs. Stokes, aware of shortcomings of the old mansion, skeptically asked his reasons. The Jesuit father then said: “Mrs. Stokes, the novitiate is a testing ground. It is designed to test candidates spiritually, mentally and physically, but Shadowbrook in addition tests them socially.”
I am inclined to doubt the story, first of all because it sounds a little too gushy to have come at least from any superior I have known in the Society; secondly, because in the sense in which I am sure Amory understood “socially,” it has no basis. The novices and juniors at Shadowbrook had no “social” contacts. The only people they ever met outside their own house were their pupils in the local Sunday schools and an occasional farmer whose apple crop they might help to gather. The Jesuits are not a cloistered order, but the novitiate regime comes very close to being Carthusian. And if the meaning of the story is that the baronial halls probed the capacity of these sons of immigrants for gracious living, it appears mildly ridiculous, for there was little grace to life in the converted mansion. Everything was crowded and jammed together.

The one possibly valid meaning for the story comes clear if we read the “social” test as an examination of a man’s capacity to live with his kind the life of a bee with other bees crawling over, under and around him in a packed hive, and smile while doing it. In that sense the story well describes the “social” test of Shadowbrook. The novice ascetics were equipped with specially built desks, approximately a foot and a half square; the corridors of the novitiate were lined with wash-bowls and those of the juniorate with books. The cellar toilets and shower rooms were wonders of dank confinement unmatched outside Mammoth Cave. Superiors early saw that the Stokes mansion was inadequate for its new purpose, but it would have to serve for a while. So the new community set to work to make shift and for thirty genuinely cheerful years it managed.

Many of the rooms were baptized: the “pompeian” room was named St. Joseph’s Aula and his statue in white marble replaced the fountain. (Aula is the Latin word for hall, and since both the novices and juniors are obliged to speak Latin in the house, the use of Latin place names gives them a head start.) The “morning room” which came to be the novice chapter hall was christened St. Ignatius’ Aula. The large visitors’ parlor, in view of its still secular purpose, was denied the name of a saint and called with overtones of simple monkish wonder at the luxury it proclaimed, the “silk parlor,” which name it retained throughout
the years while its grandeur slowly molted to decay. The central hall in the juniorate on the second floor was named Bellarmine, in hopes, I suppose, that the juniors would be inspired to read the books which lined its walls and become doctors of the Church when they grew up. The largest room in the novitiate which had a small chateau-like porch overlooking The Bowl received the name St. Mary’s Aula and a variety of uses through the years: recreation room, classroom, dormitory, ascetory, workshop. A small dormitory in the novitiate on the northern side overlooking the front drive had a vast ceiling and a gothic, basilica-sized window. It received a secular and realistic name, the “polar dorm.” Most of the rest of the house was designated by names more practical than devotional. The small elevator near the front door was removed, and a spiral staircase set in its narrow shaft. This was reserved for the exclusive use of the novices. No one else was much tempted to trespass, for it was a headlong, slippery helix of metal which only a novice could love. But they ran up and fell down it happily while they named it with small devotion the “iron stairs.” All the stairways, in fact, had their piety slighted. A small flight which ran from the end of father’s corridor down to the kitchen area was baldly called the “back stairs.” The stone stairs in the small tower were the “tower stairs” and the stairs in the western wing which turned around the elevator shaft were the “brothers’ stairs,” named from those who most frequently, while not exclusively, used them.

The grounds, however, were divided into gardens whose names sing like a litany: Corpus Christi, Della Strada, Consolatrix, Isaac Jogues, Aloysius. Andrew Carnegie’s pool became the Sacred Heart Pool and was allowed to retain its fountain although the thing was rarely turned on. The main drive, which ran out to the fork between the road to Interlaken and the Richmond road, became Rosary Lane, and each afternoon—pouring rain or blinding snow (the adjectives are not chosen lightly), being the only excuses—the novices in bands of three walked down it saying the Rosary aloud.

On the feast of St. Ignatius, July 31, 1923, six novices took their first vows of the Society in the morning-room chapel since the alterations had not yet been completed in the ballroom,
and started their juniorate studies. Mr. Henry B. Muollo was appointed the first beadle of juniors and Shadowbrook was ready to begin its year.

A great deal has been written by different authors, hostile, distant, friendly and frankly starry-eyed, which treats of the life of a Jesuit novitiate. I shall not attempt to go over the same matter here, but I think a little background on the life of the Jesuit novice as it was concretely lived at Shadowbrook is in place.

The Jesuit candidate customarily comes to the Society from high school; his age is about seventeen or eighteen. There is a percentage which enters during or after college—the “college men”—and some few come in as old men of thirty or more. They are usually in the minority, however, and since the word “adolescent” seems to attract the word “pimply,” we will be justified in picturing the typical young man, grip in hand and emotions in grip, bidding farewell to his tearful family beneath the intimidating towers, as a “pimply adolescent.”

The conscious reasons which drew him to ask for entrance are probably very various, but behind lies the one reason that counts, the secret Grace of God that drew him more deeply than he can possibly know. Since he is a “pimply adolescent” (and even if he is not), he has much to learn about his vocation and himself in relation to it. The two years of the novitiate are given to him for this learning. Six experimenta or “trials” have been established by the Constitutions of the Society to aid him to examine his vocation, and the Society to examine him.

The fourth of these trials constitutes the bulk of his life as a novice, “that, after his entrance in Our Lord, he should exercise himself with all diligence and solicitude in various abject and humble tasks exhibiting in them all good example.”

No doubt for the supercilious renaissance youth of noble blood and gentle breeding, “abject tasks” were a severe trial in themselves and a harsh test of vocation. But I never found that the pot-wallopers in the Shadowbrook tubs were particularly scored by the humiliation of it all. A pot-walloper was called at Shadowbrook by a quaint Latinism, culdie, a word whose meaning is not to be found in any of the dictionaries of early, middle or late Latin. It can only conjecturally be read as an abbreviation of
culinarius die, which with some vigorous stretching of grammar, might be translated as “kitchen servant for the day.” I remember one novice in a holiday mood, scrubbing away at an immense stock-pot, his head and shoulders all the way inside its mammoth mouth while he sang boisterously “Tarara BOOMdeay, I am a cul die.” The echoing walls of the massive aluminum pot sent his voice sounding up the brothers’ stairs to the novice master’s room on the second floor and brought the master and a stiff penance down upon him before he had finished the second verse. The story illustrates the attitude of most American novices towards “the abject and humiliating tasks”—they were a lark.

But it also demonstrates, I believe, the real trial for the American temperament in the novitiate order, silence. The Jesuit novice is not bound to Trappist silence, but his silence of rule is the next thing to it. I have even heard it maintained by a serious student of the religious life that the silence of a Jesuit novitiate is more difficult than that of a Trappist monastery. The Trappist is not allowed to speak at any time except when conferring with his spiritual directors or superiors, and yet he can wig-wag any message that occurs to him. I understand some become very fluent, even witty, with this type of finger talk, and the social wheels can turn ungratingly. The Jesuit novice can never, outside of recreation, speak while inside the house, unless the message is “necessary”—an exception widely or loosely interpreted according to different temperaments, always very strictly by superiors. And then the message must be communicated in Latin. Most novices, fresh from trotting their way through a high school course in Caesar and Cicero, would take the Trappist’s sign language any day. For both Caesar and Cicero prove frightfully unhelpful when one has an important message about mopping floors.

Then, of course, the traditional “great silence” (usually called “sacred silence” at Shadowbrook) was in force nightly from the end of the preparation of points for the morning’s meditation until after breakfast the next morning. During this time imminent death to oneself or one’s neighbor was about the only reason which justified speech.

Entrances usually took place during the summer, and
at the beginning of October the first year novices were ready to start the first experimentum, provided for in the Constitutions, the thirty days, in absolute silence, of retreat according to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. Probably no little book of its size had been picked apart so much in the history of writings on the spiritual life. Especially has this been true in recent years. There is, then, no need here to attempt to analyze the Spiritual Exercises. Let me only say that despite their proven usefulness as a source for short retreats, missions and general ascetical doctrine, the Exercises are designed to have their full effect only in circumstances similar to those in which they are given to the young Jesuit novice. For Ignatius thought of them primarily as a course of exercises (he was a very literal man, and chose his few words with care, if not with brilliance) to be given to young men who stand on the threshold of great decision and who wish to make that decision as far as possible the one most aligned with the Will of God. Ignatius felt that the Exercises, once made, would never have to be repeated; for the decision to which they should point would be a life-long dedication and the ideals, the inspirations, harkened to here, would resonate throughout a man's days. For this effect two things were needed, a generous subject, docile
to the illuminations of the Holy Spirit, and the full course of Exercises for thirty days of silence and retirement.

October makes The Bowl a parti-colored splendor of blue sky, blue water and fiercely dying summer, but novices on the Long Retreat had no eyes for the spectacle. You could see them along the long slope of the farm road to the west of the house, a straggling line of hunched figures in black, heads bent, with small books in their hands, or rosaries or simply walking alone, wombed with their thoughts. There is nothing to be said of the Long Retreat at Shadowbrook, unless I were to describe the externals: how the days turned cold, the leaves perished and fell, and how the solitary after-supper walks toward the end of the month when the meditations were on the Passion of Christ took place in the dark of nights which were already winter. But the Long Retreat belongs to each man singly, and this is the story of the house.

One of the trials prescribed for Jesuit novices was never held at Shadowbrook. This was the month’s pilgrimage to be made in religious habit and without funds, begging to support oneself. It was wisely felt that in a country whose traditions are largely Protestant, and even Calvinist, mendicancy would not be considered edifying, and then there was the Depression, and perhaps the competition could have proved too stiff.

Another one of the six trials was used, only once, I believe, because it can only be performed by a novice who is already an ordained priest. Doubtless he “proceeded to the hearing of confessions and the preaching of sermons according to the dispositions of time, place and men” as the Constitutions provide.

The second trial in the Constitutions’ list of six was, quite strangely, not used until very late, until, in fact, 1947 under Father John Post as master of novices. I say strangely, because it is a good one, a genuine test of the young man’s capacity for love, his capacity, then, for Christian Living. This trial calls for a month’s service in a hospital. The Constitutions are very explicit on what this service should entail, and in what spirit it should be performed:

“The second (trial) is to serve a month in one or more hospitals, there taking their food and sleeping and spending
certain hours daily as circumstances of time, place and persons dictate, in offering help and service as they are ordered, to sick and well alike, in order that they might lower and humiliate themselves, and in the same way, prove that they have left the pomp and vanity of the world, but most of all that they may serve their Creator and Lord Who was crucified for these people whom they serve.”

The American temperament may not be dreadfully pained to be forced to mop floors, peel vegetables and weed, but coming from a background of daily showers and schoolrooms where the motto “Cleanliness is Next to Godliness” is hung above the blackboard, there are few middle-class American boys who cannot be touched by the squalor of some of the wards of a large city hospital. And that is where they worked. Each month four novices from Shadowbrook traveled to the Boston City Hospital to work anonymously as orderlies in the more difficult wards.

The last trial of the six is for the novices to teach catechism to children. I believe that when Ignatius originally established this experimentum he had in mind the men whom he had first recruited for his new Society, most of them graduates of the large European universities, licensed to face audiences of international scholars. Teaching catechism was again to be “an abject and humiliating task.” For the novice at Shadowbrook, just out of high school himself, to face a lot of his contemporaries or near-contemporaries in the role of teacher was certainly very often a trial, even if not so for the reasons which Ignatius had supposed.

Then there were added elements of difficulty. The novices who taught at the parishes of Lenox and Lenoxdale had a pipe. All they had to do was walk the few miles into Lenox center where the Lenoxdale people enjoyed the weekly adventure of a bus ride. During the winter the road to Lenox was always plowed. Those who taught in West Stockbridge, however, needed the spirit of martyrs or, failing that, the spirit of Perry, Scott or Byrd, at least during the Berkshire winter. For their journey led up the Richmond road over the ridge of Stockbridge Mountain and along a dirt road that was never plowed in the back of Stockbridge Mountain for about five and a half miles. The snow
drifting down off the ridge was frequently four, five, six feet deep. Yet it should be said that the road to West Stockbridge was a beautiful hike, overlooking the panoramic Richmond Valley which stretches off to the New York line. Sometimes, too, the pastor, anxious to have his Sunday School staffed, would send a car on the worst days.

These six experimenta which the Constitutions prescribe are designed primarily to give superiors a knowledge of the capacities of the novices; they point toward determining a novice’s canonical fitness to pronounce the three vows of religion. At the same time they have an accompanying effect on the novice himself; for unlike intelligence or personality tests, they are intended not merely to manifest capacity, but, to a marked degree, create it.

The Christian religious life had its birth in the wattle and woven-palm huts of the Fathers of the Desert. There under the frightful sun it was scorched with a character it has ever retained. The religious life which is centrally a growing experience of God must always begin and be accompanied in every stage by asceticism, the unrelenting struggle with creatures. Self-knowledge, self-conquest—these are not for the Christian the
supreme good they are for the humanist; and yet, because “God is a spirit and those who adore Him must adore Him in Spirit and in truth,” the Christian is committed to a life-long contention whose prize is consciousness and untrammeled will. For the spirit is connaturally “all at once and everything”; it is self-possessed and nothing of itself is hidden from its knowledge; it is self-controlled and so its dedication, its gifts and promises are irrevocable. The angels who, according to Catholic theology, are the only “pure spirits” outside of God achieved eternal happiness or damned themselves forever by a single act which, since it was entirely spiritual, was utterly irreversible. The Christian spirit, pressed by time and circumstance and companioned by beguiling flesh, can never be itself—which is, of course, alright with the Christian for he knows and happily accepts the fact that he is not spirit. Exclusive attention to the demands of the soul is not a Christian ideal; contempt of the body has been as fruitful a source of heresy as anything else, more so than, say, hedonism. But the sinuous reasoning of Christian paradox can immediately turn around with the question: which aberration has more often caused damnation, excessive asceticism or excessive hedonism? And then, astride, as always, the mystery and paradox of man, the Christian can reject his own question as ultimately frivolous. His course is clear. It lies between the whirlpool and the rock though both are points by which it must be calculated. He must seek salvation as a man of flesh, not through any fear of hubris, of divine anger at his presumption of spirit, but simply because his salvation has come through the God Who was made flesh. And he must at the same time strive to liberate his spirit, not for the sake of building up his character, attaining perfection or any such purely optional ideal, but in order to confront the God Who must be adored “in spirit and in truth.”

Easily the most unusual feature of his new life was for the usual novice (who, while he did practice a good garden-grown variety of piety during his life in the “world,” was ordinarily not acquainted with the sheer falls and crags of religious questing) was its flinty aspect of asceticism. I remember well the startled, uneasy gasp of laughter that swept through first ascetory when toward the close of our habit retreat the retreat master suddenly
in the midst of a conference on penance produced what he called “our instruments of penance” with a conjurer’s flourish from the folds of his cassock. He was sitting up against the door to the tower porch and the things he was holding dangled in silhouette against the distant blue of Stockbridge Mountain. A small serpentine whip and a length of wire links and points about ten inches long—shaking them at us slightly, he told us that the whip was called the discipline, the wire affair, the chain, and that we would be expected to find good use for them both. The effect was grotesque and very comic I thought. In fact, I can remember being convinced that he was performing some elaborate spoof; and so thought we all, until a few days later when we received our habits and found the discipline and chain laid out with loving care beside the long-desired black robe and cincture. He wasn’t kidding.

The discipline was taken in the dormitory before retiring. After the last visit to the chapel around 9:15 the novices would come hurrying up the iron stairs and into the dormitory. There they stripped to the waist and stood beside their beds, holding their disciplines. When all were ready, the manuductor, or senior novice, would snap out the lights, and with the sound of an immense threshing machine loud in the darkness everyone would set to work with a will laying the cords across his shoulders. The chain was a cat’s-cradle of baling wire, equipped with perhaps fifty or sixty pointed ends which stood up and pressed into the skin. It was worn around the thigh at least two mornings a week from the time of rising until after breakfast.

The discipline and chain were two come-on performers on the outside platform of asceticism. “The real show is inside, folks.” And like all come-on performers they were flashy and somewhat meretricious. The grim sight of fifty or sixty hunch-backed men waiting in the dimly lit barn-sized dorm with small scourges dangling from their crooked fingers, the tight-lipped strain of moving painful legs without a limp—these were the necessary and traditional theatrics of an experienced Christian asceticism, but by themselves they were nothing. They could be less than nothing, positively harmful, “sources of pride” as all spiritual masters agreed. A new first-year novice (one of the
primi) inevitably marveled at the crisp casualness with which his elders in religion ran up the iron stairs, stripped and prepared to beat themselves. He wondered the first two months or so that he wore the chain whether he could ever school himself to stride so briskly with pain brilliant on his wincing legs as the rest of the community seemed to do. Unconsciously, while almost unavoidably, he had adopted toward corporal penance precisely the attitude which the spiritual warned him against. For asceticism must never become athleticism merely. It is more than the urge to take cold showers, long walks—to “take it.” It is connected with the urge that sets little boys turning cartwheels and climbing trees when little girls go past the playground. That, despite the fact that the athlete is frequently moved by the noble ambition of self-improvement and the show-off by an exhibitionism, popularly contemned. The little boy upside down from the tree branch is an inchoative lover. He may one day do great deeds for fair lady, or native land or God, for his efforts are related to another person, however little the other is realized as person. He is impelled by the first fingerings of love. The athlete is a solipsist, and if a confirmed athlete, I’ll wager, a confirmed narcissist.

Productions triumphed over minimal resources, setting up lights and scenery at one end of the first-floor conference room. This play was notable because the actor third from the left was James H. Dolan, who later became provincial and established Fairfield University.
The human soul is a great ocean and these young men were invited to dive down to the extent of their staying power into its shifting deeps. Freud and the others have few surprises for the serious student of asceticism. No matter how gratefully he may greet the psychologists’ concepts and, at times, their terminology for the clarification they afford, he recognized most of the phenomena as familiar, even in great part already usefully categorized by the masters of the spiritual life, even, alas, to the aberrations. Pride and sensuality may sound like rather robust terms in which adequately to sum up man’s wrestlings with the dark angel of self, but their myriad and vermicular approaches have been well charted throughout the history of Christian strivings. To know their fully nuanced definitions is to know much of man. To rebuff them at every approach is to be a saint. And it was sanctity that the novice was after.

Thus he had to learn to ply his whip and buckle on his chain, to do it casually and without pride—not because he was strong, but because he was, strong or weak, to the limit of his gifts, a lover. From the first moment he sprung out of bed in the pre-dawn gloaming of the big dorm, knocked the snow off his blankets (it was there often enough if his bed was beside a window), and ran shivering into the sink-lined corridor to the early night hour he returned to roll into his cocoon of blankets once again, he sought to live in the insistent spirit of St. Bernard’s great question: “Why have you come?” It was motive he questioned continually throughout his tightly scheduled day. He sought to purify, deepen, make more adult and free every action and the reasons for action. It was tough sledding at times. He perhaps no more than the boy acrobat knew the One for whom he performed. Like the child, he had not touched the Other’s personality; he was merely impelled to action by the presence of his audience galvanizing hidden motives. Yet he knew what he wanted. He strove to allow that Presence to penetrate his consciousness ever deeper, and he hoped that by fidelity to its promptings one day he could experience full the interchange of person to person, that he could say “thou” to God with the same incandescence that he now said “I.”

Certainly one of the more difficult aspects of his life
was what was called variously, “regular order,” “de more,” “the ordinary duties.” The day’s schedule was shredded into little bite-sized chunks of time; the bell calling him to one task after another flays the spirit more effectively than the discipline. There were two periods of prayer (an hour in the morning, a half hour in the evening), two periods set aside for examining the conscience, two for spiritual reading, two for class or study, two for manual work. The first of these was called manualia and was mostly light housekeeping. The other called laborandum was a more extended period of work in the early afternoon and frequently included outdoor assignments which were considered as desirable as recreation. Even when the assignment was to the kitchen, every effort was made to allow the work to be done out of doors. Beneath the kitchen and running approximately its length there was an open cellar area, forming what I suppose would today be called “a patio.” From its row of gothic arches which sunk neck deep below the ground level, it was named (with what technical accuracy, I cannot attest) the “subcloister”. There on sunny days from early April to mid-October the kitchen crew squatted on stools and gossiped over colanders of peas and mounds of purpled turnip. The anxiety for outside work was dictated by the imperative of Latin talk which held empire in the house. Recreation was, of course, a time of liberation from Latin, but not entirely. There were two periods of recreation (everything seemed to go in pairs)—one following lunch and the second after dinner. They were both about 45 minutes long, but even they were divided. Recreation was held outdoors, summer and winter, blizzard and wind storm. Rain and rain alone had power to move the recreation to shelter on the long porch which ran behind the chapel and along its southern side. Each novice was assigned to a band of three by the manuductor; these were his companions for the time and no others. “Breaking bands,” even to shout a remark, was considered a fault. To call the bands home since no one but himself and his sub carried watches, the manuductor fifteen minutes before the end of recreation would shout “Last quarter. All home.” The long-drawn cry, hooting like the old radio signature of Refrew of the Mounted pulsed slowly out through the unlighted paths and down over The Bowl, and when it found the distant bands, it
chilled like a flight of owls across the moon. For the cry was the signal to begin Latin-talk again.

On holidays and, if I remember correctly, Sundays, the entire period of recreation could be conducted in English. Then the black bands of three, gathering in the driveway before the porte cochere for the end of recreation, sounded, as well as looked, like the convening of a rookery. There was a shrill gabble of over-intense voices, as each strove to finish his anecdote. Scarcely hearing one another, they jockeyed for the last word. For when the sub-manuductor whanged his bell from the main doorway, silence fell louder than sound. A good performer could time his curtain line with a precision any playwright could envy, and leave his companions struggling against a desperate ebullience of sniggers.

Sniggers, guffaws, chuckles—laughter, as many visiting lecturers found out to their disconcertion, was always a feature of novitiate life. It would be a serious error to conceive of these tyro ascetics as grim. There were, no doubt, strains in this life. The
novice with his face lined with forced austerity, his head sunk
tortoise-like between clavicles, was, indeed, a common enough
sight, and perhaps even a necessary stage in the development of
almost all. But the over-pious novice too often was simply self-
deceived, naïve. Naïveté may be the product of our best instincts,
but ultimately, because God is never served by irreality no matter
how well intentioned, it had to pass. A novice who had learned
to step through the intricacies of the daily order’s minuet, to
kneel upright for his ninety minutes of prayer, to chain his
wilder appetites was often tempted to picture himself already as
a companion of the angels, competent to wear his nimbus with
becoming modesty. He had to realize that he was still a spirit
mired in flesh, that ambitions which burned more brightly real
than anything he saw or knew around him were still mirages
unfulfilled, that he was still a man with a piece of road to travel
yet. Everything conspired to keep him realistic: the advice of his
novice master, the counsels of spiritual writers, the growing frus-
trations of prayer (for divine gifts do not encourage falsehood),
and, since humor and health are synonymous, the pressure of
healthy humor.

Novices laughed at everything. The disproportion
between aspiration and accomplishment which is perhaps a
definition of the comic was continually before the eyes of these
men who twice a day for fifteen minutes picked over their souls’
ruck of motive and broken desires. They live a close life where
character could not be hidden from even the myopic. They were
islanded, trained in common tasks, conversant with a special-
ized vocabulary that permitted shorthand allusion immediately
understood by all. It was wit’s paradise. Unfortunately, like most
family humor, it is hopeless to attempt to translate it. It may
though be stated that it was honest humor, genuine and affec-
tionate, but, as it had to be, impudent, irreverent. There were the
bootlegged nicknames (everyone should have been addressed as
“Brother”). There was the inexhaustible fount of faculty’s eccen-
tricities. The monastic practice of publicly telling one’s fault in
the refectory could be a real humiliation and was often hilarious.
When a man forgot the formula, he was helped out by a whis-
pering voice from one of the tables giving him the formula for
confession or the act of contrition. There was the man who said a *culpa* for “breaking a whole stack of unbreakable dishes”; the man “who killed a horse”; the two culprits who, having heard Brother Perry tell the hired farmer that “Stella” was ready, anticipated his wishes and led the poor thing to the bull themselves. They almost succeeded in killing both themselves and the badly frightened cow. Their *culpa* was worded to the delight of the community who had, of course, heard the story, ‘for actions unbecoming a religious.” Then there was the man who was learning to drive and who came whipping in the farm pick-up down the roller coaster road toward the back kitchen porch just as all the novices were coming in from *laborandum*. Five men in the back leaped up and caught at overhanging branches and were left dangling as though they were the leavings of a lynching while he came careening straight at the vegetable peelers behind the kitchen who were running away like an alarmed chicken yard. One man tripped over his long apron and lay, his face slashed with terror, one arm stretched out in supplication towards the hurtling truck. The driver his foot still glued to the accelerator suddenly swerved to his left and dumped down over an eight-foot parapet into the garden called “Stanislaus, Patron of Novices.” There the truck, now crumpled like old paper, somersaulted once and lay nose to the ground, sobbing quietly. The driver whose imperturbability was legend climbed out unhurt and that night told his chuckling “dear fathers and brothers” that he was at fault “for being careless with community property.”

Attempts at sermons in the refectory and in speech class were often a delight and the reader in the refectory was sure to amuse the novices. The daily reading from the *Roman Martyrology* was eagerly anticipated. The wonders there found which an earlier, less critical age attributed to the saints, the macabre details of ancient slaughters were sure to trip their hair-trigger risibilities, particularly if the nervous reader announced that these took place in “the persecletion of Dioclution”. It was amusing to be told by the young man reading *The Rules* that no Jesuit could “have books without leaves.” The yearly commemoration of the industrious fellow who vowed never to waste a minute and consequently spent the time he took walking from his cell to the refectory each
day translating the Psalms into Greek verse, never seemed to edify as much as it tickled. One refectory incident is especially dear to me with that rueful affection we save for life’s embarrassing moments, for I was the blushing, thick-tongued villain of the piece. That time the community heard that St. Francis Borgia “was grateful for the warmth of the room,” that “after the cold journey, he was cheered by the sight of a red hot brassiere, glowing in one corner.” Living in community, it was at times hard. St John Berchmans called it his greatest mortification. But it was what gave contour to the novice’s shapeless adolescent character. Of course, by this time it must be evident that it would be a serious error to conclude that, because all were submitted to the same rigorous training, all were supposed to be patterned alike. Any Jesuit community is a many-splendored thing. Each house of “Ours” displays the complete spectrum of human personality, glowing gloriously, from the infra-reds through the ultra-violets and beyond. The earliest domestic witticisms the Shadowbrook novice learned were two stock phrases used with tiresome repetitiveness to describe the community’s rich diversity: “If it’s a nut, we’ve got it” and “If you can’t find it on the counter, we’ve got it on the shelf.” (This last harked back to the earlier, roomier days when occasionally old or sick fathers were sent to live out their days in the novitiates.) These tattered old gags were heard over and over, for each new group of postulants were always struck by their succinct summation of what was the most striking feature of their new life. They are fallen among strangers, fantastic as Martians, improbable characters whom they called “Brothers.” It was an exhilarating, difficult, laughable, strained, wholly new and important experience. Through it they were formed into sanctity.

There is much elided in this account of novitiate life at Shadowbrook. We have not mentioned the Thursday picnics, once held in a draughty old chicken-house where the nose remembered the former tenants, but in recent years in the fine stone building equipped with fireplace and piano which Brother Perry built at the lake shore. We should have to take up pages describing the walks held on Thursday which in my day were brutal endurance contests where one group vied with another in getting as much
mileage out of the few hours before six o’clock supper as the
human ganglia could stand. But it would be a hopeless task and,
I fear, of limited interest, to attempt to chronicle even a small
share of such events. Still we cannot by-pass Christmas.

Christianity is supposed to have canonized the pagan
mid-winter feast because she found it impossible to persuade the
sentimental Nordics to give it up. The northern soul needed an
interlude of high wassail, roasting deer and mead-hall-thumping
song to endure the winter stretch of blank days and long nights,
and so Christmas became the feast it is. There may be more
Christmassy places than the old Shadowbrook mansion with its
chunky stonework lapped in snow, its retinue of winter-liveried
pines, and its big interior rooms with their fireplaces and their
warm richly paneled walls, but if there are, there are few of them
in North America. H. Neill Wilson’s castle never looked better
than when celebrating the feast which was developed in castles.

The preparations began early. To inquiring first year
novices, who, may be, had a touch of homesickness and might ask
wistfully, “Say, Brother, how do we celebrate Christmas around
here?,” the second year man would inevitably and infuriatingly
reply (in Latin) “Videbimus, frater.” “We shall see, Brother.”

From about the middle of November, and sometimes
as early as late October, the snows begin in the Berkshires and
Shadowbrook would already start to take on its Christmas look.
(I don’t suppose that every Christmas there was a “white” one
but such is my selective memory.) Around the beginning of
December, usually on the feast of Francis Xavier, Laurel Day
would be declared. The whole house (for this was a “fusion”
day when novices and juniors could speak to each other) would
go on a picnic up to Baldhead, where a great fire would be lit in
the old abandoned reservoir and food cooked by a crew of Jesuit
woodsmen. The areas where the laurel was most plentiful had
been carefully scouted by the men in charge of the operation and
a large map of Baldhead indicating the best picking appeared
on the bulletin board that morning. It was always covered with
caricatures of the community and domestic jokes drawn with a
wicked eye for the foibles that seem to sprout like stored onions
in the cellar air of community. I think the pickers were divided
into teams and for the team which brought in the largest amount there was some sort of prize. I know that there was a prize for the individual who gathered the heaviest bag—he was put in charge of the next year’s Laurel Day. Since the novices and juniors enjoyed “fusions” at only rare intervals, it was a grand occasion for renewing old friendships amid Currier and Ives surroundings and even a good deal of laurel somehow got picked.

Throughout December the novices worked in St. Mary’s Aula during recreations, twining the laurel into wreaths and streamers. This was frequently a great joy too, because it meant they were not forced to go outside and “enjoy themselves” walking around the sub-zero paths. And English was permitted during laurel twining—a benison, believe me!

Christmas Eve was a fast day, of course, but the great bustle of decorating crews made the hours, sustained only by a little salt cod, go swiftly. The chapel received most attention, and the dark-green, burnished laurel against its oak wall and ceiling made a handsome sight. The flower-crew drove down to O’Brien the florist on the road to Lenox and came back with the poinsettia and red and gold chrysanthemums they had previously ordered, then retired to the wine room at the bottom of the tower stairs where they spent the day contorting their flowers into surprising and sometimes very successful arrangements. Hip-booted, in mackinaws and with axes over their shoulders, the tree-crew ranged the snow fields of Baldhead for nicely shaped evergreens. Hemlock was laced into the carvings on the main staircase, and the ungainly affair seemed almost graceful. The community retired early because of the midnight Mass.

High on the wall of the novitiate dormitory whose ceiling rose to the roof there was a door leading into the unfinished attic. Behind this door shortly before 11:30 on Christmas Eve the junior choir used to gather quietly. Suddenly they threw open the door. The colored lights which were strung around it shone down into the dark and sleeping dormitory. At the same time the director would drop his hand and the first triumphant blast would come pouring out: Hodie Christus Natus est!

The second-year novices were used to this, of course, some of them had been lying awake waiting for it, and waiting to
see the reaction of the primi. It was a simple device, an old device, but it never failed. The poor primi came bounding, comically tousled and bewildered, out of their beds. Some one was sure to shout, “Hey what’s going on here?” Some one else was sure to wake up with a foolish beatific grin on his face, convinced he was in heaven. He would be found boring everybody at table during the next morning’s deo gratias breakfast (one at which talking was permitted) by explaining carefully how beautiful and moving he found the experience, how, honestly brother, he thought he was hearing angels. Every year there was someone who heard angels.

After about ten minutes of carols the juniors moved off to wake up the rest of the house with song, and novices got up and dressed for Mass.

Jesuits are not renowned for their liturgical practice. As a matter of fact we have quite a bad reputation on the matter; frequently a parish priest who sees that he has a Jesuit come to celebrate some solemn liturgical function, will laughingly say, “O, I know how you fellows are. I’d rather do it myself.” Then he goes out as often as not and makes a complete mess of it. It is rather infuriating. I think it should be stated somewhere and perhaps this is as good a place as any: the story that Jesuits cannot properly assist at solemn functions is, by and large, a canard. Solemn feasts, the Holy Week ceremonies—all these are carried out in our houses with exactitude and beauty I have rarely witnessed elsewhere, and no where more meaningfully than in the Shadowbrook chapel.

The Liturgy should create an intimacy between the celebrant and the worshippers for it is a community worship; the small warm Shadowbrook chapel unifies the pews with the altar in much more than a physical sense. The Liturgy should be a solemn act of great dignity and beauty, for it is the highest worship of God; the genuine beauty of the room, the carefully rehearsed singing, the rich vestments (heavy gold brocade, generously cut for solemn feasts like Christmas), the slow grace of the ceremonies—all made a solemn Mass at Shadowbrook a beautiful action, conscious of its purpose and determined to be as worthy of it as human limits allowed.

And the best was always the midnight Christmas Mass
with, maybe, soft flakes drifting in under the chapel porch and swiveling to the ground in the light from the big windows or perhaps with the vast winter vault opened to its unimagined depths and its whole glitter of worlds bending over our small planet, still stupefied at the audacity of the claim it had made and commemorated this night - to possess the Creator of them all. The Mass was the peak of the Christmas observance.

After Mass the community was served cocoa or hot bouillon with crackers from a large cart that was wheeled into the lower staircase hall or “outside refectory” as it had come to be known. Sacred silence was still observed, but with little dips of cups and swift furtive smiles, greetings, dumb but happy, were exchanged. Then one by one they straggled off to bed.

Christmas day was an anti-climax, but where isn’t it? There was a fusion, and presents from home to be opened (and turned into the socius or minister the next day) and after the evening dinner, an entertainment.

The shows at Shadowbrook used to be staged in the old morning room, now the novice chapter and conference hall. A marvelous portable stage had been constructed to fit into the alcove behind the Doric pillars. By the time I made my novitiate the boards looked like they were stolen from a hockey rink, they were so worn and scratched, and the thing protested vocally any time an actor did more than sit still—very annoying when the scene called for tension and the occasion of much un plotted humor. I remember one production of _Oedipus Rex_ when we went in for elaborate “mood” lighting. We had a row of salt-water dimmers flaring and bubbling out in St. Joseph’s Aula. There was a follow-spot held in the gloved hands of a man on a stepladder and a flood-light, fashioned from an old sun lamp and worked by a hero who stayed curled up in the fireplace throughout the show, so that long eerie shadows could be thrown against the back set during one particularly affecting sequence. Everything went swimmingly until Oedipus came down the steps of his palace, heavily pounding his feet as he stalked the blind Terisias with shouted accusations. The heaving stage almost threw the spot man off his ladder. But this happened in the juniorate, which deserves a separate treatment.
The juniorate is an entirely different life. After two years of mutual testing the Society approves the novice for vows and the novice has to come to the decision that he belongs in the life of a Jesuit. He is then allowed to pronounce his three simple religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. The vows are absolute and perpetual on his part, but the Society reserves the right to release him from them, if at any time throughout the course of studies it becomes clear that he is not fitted for the Jesuit life. The Jesuit, as a matter of fact, is on probation until his solemn vow day between fifteen and seventeen years after his entrance. The second two years of this probation are usually spent in the juniorate, depending on his previous education. For juniors study a course roughly equivalent to the first two years of a college arts course: the humanities, the Latin and Greek classics, English literature, modern languages and history. And at Shadowbrook they were cocks of the walk.

After the novitiate that pimply adolescent who came in two years ago is now in his own mind, at least, proficient in spiritual matters with his purpose in life firmly fixed. He may not, in fact, have attained the maturity he credits himself with; quite surprising if he ever does that, but there is no doubt that he has a more articulated rationale, a more profound understanding of himself and his aims than most young men of nineteen or twenty. On his vow day he arrives at accomplishment, all the accomplishment which Shadowbrook puts immediately before his eyes. If there are years of peak and trough still before him, they are mercifully hidden in the joy of his own habit (no longer the misfitting castoffs of the province), a biretta, and the privilege of wearing clerical dress outside the house. It is almost as though he were already ordained, already shouldering the wheel. The Shadowbrook juniors on the summer morning of the vows used to walk in groups to Lenox or around Mahkeenac with the single purpose of dressing in the Roman collar and black suit, the suit which had hung unused for two years in a closet, reeking of moth balls, off the big dorm, and which was referred to in reverent tones as “the vow suit.”

I remember that once, soon after my vows, I made a trip to the eye doctor in Pittsfield. Standing waiting for a bus,
I saw two nuns coming along the street. It had been some years since my parochial school days, but that instinctive hunch of the shoulder, and quiet discomfort of the stomach—reflexes conditioned by many rulers and pointers competently wielded—began again. I shuffled the feet, I cleared the throat, and when they drew within earshot hissed the parochial-school greeting which no man can make sound controlled and casual: “Morn’s ssstirss”. And lo, there was apprehension in their eyes too—a reflex conditioned by events and experiences it would be rough to speculate on. They bobbed in unison and back came the startling reply: “Good morning, Father.” An incident like that puffeth up.

But while the junior might give the impression to the novices of being insufferably self-assured, he actually is a hard and meek enough workman. The classes were at least four a day and the matter difficult. During the month of May, however, his class schedule became extremely light for this was the period of repetitions, when the year’s work was gone over in preparation for the final oral examinations. Throughout the school year except for the recreation periods and holidays, the junior must study at his desk when not in class, but during repetitions he is free to study where he wishes. And so little groups of two, three or four
would take off immediately after the morning class for the slopes of Baldhead, the Tanglewood meadows, or a boat drifting over Mahkeenac where flights of swallows dipped and feinted at the toy-sized waves. The meadows clinked like Mass bells with the songs of bobolinks and the solitary thrush in the deep woods intoned a plainsong chant. There are no statistics on this but I believe that the New England Province since the opening of Shadowbrook has produced more minor lyric poets than perhaps any other in the history of the Society.

There were five men on the faculty for the first year. Father John Harding Fisher was both rector and master of novices; he was later to become novice master at the Wernersville novitiate in Pennsylvania and rector of Fordham University. Father Gerald Dillon was the minister and also novice professor. Father Francis J. Lamb was spiritual director of the juniors, Father Joseph J. Williams treasurer, and Father Joseph S. Hogan the only teacher in the juniorate. Father Dillon was the first Jesuit to be buried at Shadowbrook.

It would be useless and dull, perhaps, to list all the fathers who have lived and worked at Shadowbrook during the years from 1923 to 1956. They were, let it only be said, an enthusiastic, intermittently brilliant lot of men whose influence on the men of the province has not and will not, for some years, cease reverberating.

Two of Shadowbrook’s six rectors were afterwards consecrated bishops: Father Rice who succeeded Father Fisher was first made rector of the newly opened mission school in Bagdad, Iraq, then afterwards, bishop of Belize in British Honduras. Father John J. McEleny was made rector of Fairfield University in Connecticut, provincial of New England, and is presently the bishop of Kingston, Jamaica, British West Indies.

Throughout the years the members of the Shadowbrook community have been active in retreats, missions and various pastoral works in the surrounding towns. During the C.C.C. days they were the chaplains of the camps at Becket, Bear Mountain and Lalu Cascades. Sometimes juniors accompanied the fathers to tote the portable organ, serve Mass and Benediction and practice their rhetoric by way of exhortation to the
camps. Once these domestic missionaries proved their jibs were out as rakishly as their brothers’ in the “bush” of distant lands. The spring rains washed out the fording of a river near one of the camps; the army trucks which had been sent to fetch them refused to attempt the crossing. So into the turbid waters strode these unassuming Greek professors, stemming them with hearts of controversy.

In 1949 a society wedding took place in the green-stained sacristy, and the old frump of a house had a brief remembrance of her former glory. During the thirties Dr. Serge Koussevitzky bought a gracious white mansion from Kate Buckingham, the Chicago millionairess. His new home was on a much higher slope of Baldhead directly behind Shadowbrook. The novices and juniors used to ski on the open slope behind his house during the winter holidays, and the old conductor would occasionally visit the novitiate during the summer, dropping in unexpectedly for Benediction to hear how the choir was progressing. And so when his niece, the Princess Maria Leuchtenberg, was to be married to Joseph di Pasquale, the orchestra’s first viola, he asked permission to have the ceremony performed at Shadowbrook. It was a quiet affair (few of the novices and juniors were even aware that it took place), but the green room looked lovely and a string quartet played from Handel and Mendelssohn.

In 1952 the U.S. Air Force inaugurated a Sky Watch at Shadowbrook. Until the fall of 1956 it was maintained on a twenty-four hour basis, with both novices and juniors sharing the duty. The large tower which overlooked The Bowl ended at the attic level in open battlements, and there, beneath the improbably hostile sky where three states were visible through binoculars, summer and winter, night and day, paced the lonely figure of a monk. It was great fun, and for the novices particularly whose day is customarily cut frustratingly into little bite-sized chunks of time, the hour on the Sky Watch was a duty eagerly anticipated. They could read or write uninterrupted, except for occasional trips to the phone to report aircraft. In the beginning this was quite a chore, since there was no phone except the one in the porter’s lodge three flights downstairs. But eventually a special line was run up through the elevator shaft to the tower, and from
that time on they could play at soldier in proper ease.

Only once did Shadowbrook figure in the main current of events, and then its role was a quiet one. Four neat young men in business suits moved their bags into Campion Cottage. This happened occasionally when someone by special arrangement would make a retreat under one of the fathers on the faculty. It was relatively rare, however, since Shadowbrook was not a retreat house, and the fact that there were four of them was decidedly unusual. Brother Timmy Cummings who ran the bakeshop in the basement of Campion was sure there was something strange about them: “funniest retreat I ever saw. They slept all day and were out all night.” The rumor got around that they were Trappists from the monastery in Rhode Island which had just burned down, but what Trappists were doing in business suits and carrying brown leather luggage was difficult to explain. Only the rector knew that they were F.B.I. men who had come up to find some papers or other over in a barn in Lee and had asked to stay at Shadowbrook as about the most unobtrusive place around. It seems they found what they were looking for and the incident of the G-men and monks passed without either party getting to know one another.

By the spring of 1955 the inadequacies of the old house for its new purpose had become too painfully evident to ignore
any longer. The General of the Society had been for some years issuing ukases to the successive provincials of New England ordering them to construct a new novitiate. The provincials, however, were able to plead a lack of funds, an argument with powerful ability to turn aside superiors’ wrath, and the situation went on unchanged. The continuing hope was that they would eventually be able to save enough money out of the ordinary revenues to build the necessary building, but the needs of the growing province swept away their hoardings as fast as they accumulated. Reluctantly Rev. William E. Fitzgerald took the step his predecessors had been anxious to avoid, and organized a special drive for three million dollars to build a new Shadowbrook.

St. Ignatius founded his Society as a mendicant order. The Catholic Church has never been tainted with the Calvinist ethic that tends to look upon a hand-to-mouth existence as somehow a curse from God, that finds nuns begging in the streets at least an irritant, a disturbing, when not a revolting sight. The Church knows that her Divine Founder “had no place to lay His head,” and she cheerfully accepts the fact that her destiny is to travel through the centuries with outstretched palms. So it was not simple shame which caused the New England Province to hesitate before asking for funds. Rather it was a consciousness of the number, variety and worth of the demands already being made on New England’s Catholic community, to build churches and schools to accommodate its increasing numbers, hospitals for its sick, orphanages, homes for the aged and on and on. But finally, convinced of the justice and necessity of their cause, the Jesuits began the “Shadowbrook Drive” with all the appurtenances of modern mendicancy—with kickoff dinners, brochures, committees, lists and a flood of mail. Mr. Joseph Sullivan of Lowell accepted the chairman’s post and Father George V. McCabe was appointed executive director.

Meanwhile life continued in the old Stokes mansion. Laurel Days, Habit Days, Christmases, examinations, prayer—a round quite different than the previous ones which used to make the lights of the great house glow in the woody hills like a liner in the midnight sea. Now by ten each night, the bulky lines of stone and red-tiled roof faced indistinguishably into the forest,
unless, perhaps, a yellow square from an isolated room where some father prepared his class or hurried to finish his Office, still marked where Stokes had built the “ruby of the Berkshires.” And when the first grey dawn unveiled The Bowl there she came emerging from the night as sudden as the mountains; a landmark no less necessary to the countryside than the tossed hills.