

H1097

NOTES ON HAMILTON

By S.M. Angela Finn I.B.V.M. 1973.

The nuns of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary had been repeatedly requested by the famous Dean of Hamilton - Dean (later Monsignor) Michael Shanahan. For a long time, our loved Provincial could not grant his wish, owing to pressure from other sources. However, she gave him a community in 1905. The first band was headed by Mother M. Hilda Benson, who had founded the first Training College in Dawson St. Ballarat in 1884. M.M. Hilda was a trainee of the famous College of Notre Dame, Liverpool, England and a Diplomee of the English Education Board - a very gifted and holy person. The Institute carried on for eighteen years until 1923. I was one of the last to leave, after six years of a happy life there. A residence which had been a private Boarding and Day School was up for sale and the Dean procured it. It was very suitable, as a detached school building beside the main building, provided for a Primary School, while the residential section provided, with changes, for a Day School.

Hamilton, in those days, was more primitive than it is now in the flourishing city it has become. As I remember it - it was a lovely town in the Grampians, beautiful in its surroundings. We did not have all the conveniences available now-a-days, yet, the lovely, simple, generous people, with their wonderful kindness, is a very happy memory for me, in my declining years. The Dean and his curates have, also, a grateful remembrance in my prayers.

There were several reasons for our having to leave Hamilton, the main one being that we had to teach half-grown men!! We had to keep them until they gained the Merit Certificate which gave them entrance to the State High School. The limit for boys was the Kindergarten stage, in Loreto (as we are more usually called). Consequently, according to our Constitutions, we were unable to continue. Though the sisters who taught these boys carried on valiantly, and were happy in their work, there were difficult times of course, where strong measures had to be taken. Yet, I never heard any nun report that a boy spoke rudely, or disrespectfully to any of them. They were most loyal to us. We all know the saying that "boys will be boys" and the Hamiltonians were no exception. There are many amusing incidents that I could tell, but they might be out of place here. (In last month's Hamilton paper (Sept.) one copy had reports of two of the deaths of our first boys - Ruggiero Rizzo and John Sheahan R.I.P.) There have been several priests and nuns the product of those eighteen years - two nuns in our Institute - S.M. Judith Sullivan and the daughter of our first Day Scholar Vera Mawson - S. Mary Braithwaite. I know also that two, at least, joined the Sisters of the Good Samaritan.

Some of the nuns who gave their best to Hamilton, during those years, were S.M. Alacque Butler, Sisters M. Ursula Lyons, M. Monica, Bonaventure, Agatha, Jerome, M.M. Kostka Barry, who had been a Superior (she was born in the district), Sebastian, Veronica, Colombarmus, Joan, myself (Angela), Joachim, Dolours and others whom I cannot recall. The last Mother Superior was M.M. Barbara McDonald. I have a snap of the last nuns, before leaving (though several had already gone to Portland or Ballarat) but the four members who finally stayed to tidy up, as best we could, were - Srs. M. Joan, Agatha, myself and the Superior. We had been under the impression (mistakenly) that the Sisters of the Good Samaritan would come in the day we left. As we had no definite word, and the Blessed Sacrament was still in the house, we asked one of the Ladies of the Parish to take over for the night. The Blessed Sacrament was received the next day, and the house closed.

It was with sad hearts that we left Hamilton, but we left it in the good hands of the Good Samaritans who have continued, now, for fifty years.

I understand that a new, beautiful, modern school has been built in a more convenient area.

May God continue to bless their good work and I ask them to say a prayer for the Sisters of Loreto of the earlier years, most of whom have gone to their Eternal Reward.