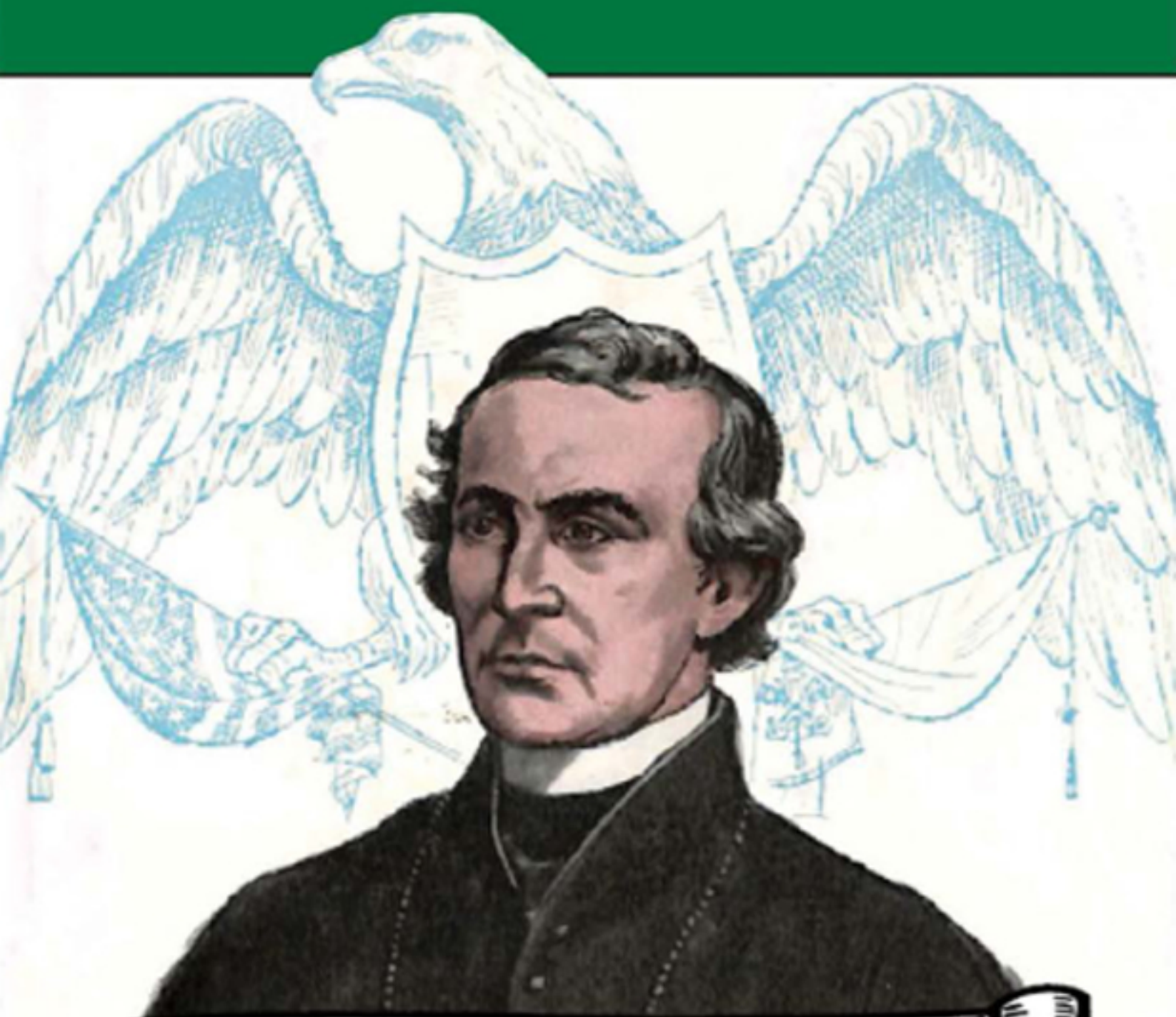


John Hughes

Eagle of the Church



Portraits in Faith and Freedom

Doran Hurley

John Hughes

Eagle of the Church

by Doran Hurley



Illustrated by Leonard Vosburgh

Print book originally published by
P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1961
190 pages in original print book edition

eBook formatting © 2017 Bethlehem Books
Maps and added material © 2017 Bethlehem Books
Cover design by Melissa Sobotta
Mapwork by Margaret Rasmussen

Revised Edition
All Rights Reserved

ISBN 978-1-932350-67-8

Bethlehem Books • Ignatius Press
10194 Garfield Street South
Bathgate, ND 58216
www.bethlehembooks.com

Portraits in Faith and Freedom

SET 6: NEW YORK AMBASSADORS OF BROTHERHOOD

Pierre Toussaint: Pioneer in Brotherhood

John Hughes: Eagle of the Church

Alfred E. Smith: Sidewalk Statesman

Statement on Portraits in Faith and Freedom

Bethlehem Books is bringing back this series of biographies originally made available in the 1950s and 1960s by publishers who wished to introduce young people to a wide range of arresting and faithful Catholic lives. Slightly edited now for the modern reader, these biographies present key people and events from the past that help us reflect anew on the meaning of freedom. They depict how powerfully men and women of faith have formed and influenced the world in which they live.

Web Resources

To access printable maps, a timeline, and other information, visit <https://www.bethlehembooks.com/john-hughes-eagle-church-864>

About Usage of Outdated Terms

In republishing the books that form our *Portraits in Faith and Freedom* series, the editors considered whether it would be worthwhile to update the authors' usage of words like "Indian" and "Negro" to the more current preferences: "Native American" and "African American." Though some editing at times proved reasonable, it was found that changing the original terms did not always work well for the context of the times in which the story takes place. Additionally, in these works—written in the 1950s and early 1960s—it is clear that the authors, as well as the original publishers, held attitudes of genuine interest and respect for Native Americans and African Americans. For that reason, in most cases, we have let the words stand.

Bethlehem Books

To

another great and truly American Archbishop
His Excellency, William O. I. Brady of St. Paul
“Joy to our youth”

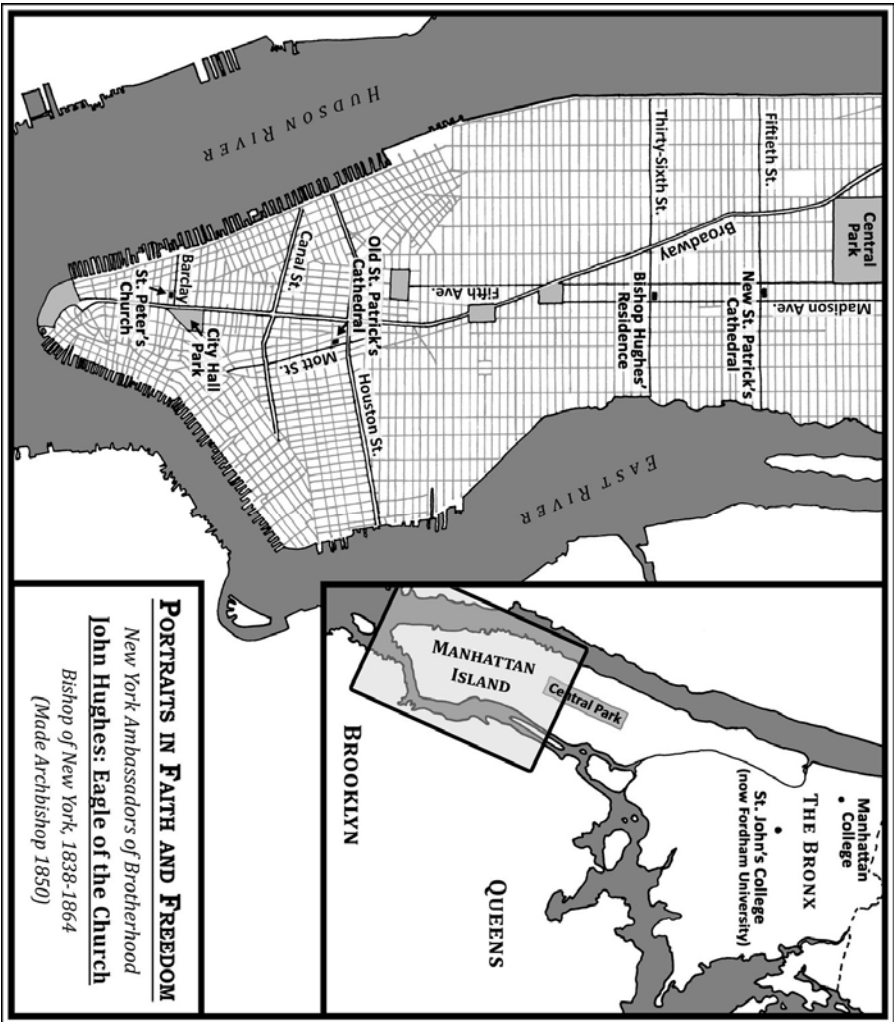
and for my godchildren

Joanne Carroll Maher
Jeremiah Cahill
Margaret Mary Nemchik

Contents

Web Resources	v
Maps	1
1. “God Closes and Opens”	2
2. The Eagle Soars	11
3. The Young Bishop	20
4. The Schoolhouse First	31
5. American and Irish	41
6. New York’s Archbishop	51
7. “Where Thy Glory Dwelleth”	65
8. Supporter of the Union	73
9. The Good Fight Ended	85
About the Author	91
List of titles in Portraits in Faith and Freedom	92

Maps



PORTRAITS IN FAITH AND FREEDOM

New York Ambassadors of Brotherhood

John Hughes: Eagle of the Church

Bishop of New York, 1838-1864

(Made Archbishop 1850)

1. “God Closes and Opens”

Claudit et aperit

—Archbishop Hughes’ episcopal motto

AFTER SLUGGISH and stormy days, the battered old sailing ship welcomed wind in its sails and sun on its decks. Twenty days out from the Irish coast on the long weeks’ voyage to America, it was one of the few days since sailing that the steerage hatches had been opened and the sick and weary pilgrims to the future allowed on deck. It was a poor ship and they were poor people, Irish emigrants seeking the hope and promise of a new life in a new land.

Thus far they had been treated more as cargo than as paid passengers. The baked bread and hard cakes they had brought in their chests had long since gone. There had been disputes and quarreling over sleeping space and over rights in turn to the single cooking fire. And oatmeal that was a healthy and hearty dish at home as “stirabout” was gagging aboard ship, with no exercise and too hasty cooking.

The passengers crowded to the rails now instinctively, taking great breaths of the clean sea air. Nothing was to be seen but a waste of waters, for all they hung eagerly over the rails. Still the broad blue sky and the white clouds were to them “a gift of God and the Lady Mary” after the stifling, sickening days of being herded like cattle below decks.

An old sailor coiling rope had his eye caught by a young lad as far to the bow of the ship as he was allowed to go. The youth was pressing his lithe young body urgently against the bulwarks as if to push the ship on and on by his own youthful strength.

Sailor Sullivan in his own youth had often manned the luggers that in the dark of the moon had smuggled Irish patriots from Berehaven and Dursey Island to France and Spain and priests and wine back to Bantry Bay. He remembered one young priest he had helped smuggle back whose Holy Sacrifice he had later served at the Mass Rock high up on Hungry Hill. The youth reminded him of him. He finished his coil and went up to him.

“Easy does it and far on the way.” He clapped the lad on the back. “Don’t strain yourself now, my lad. ’Twon’t do a bit of good,

or I'd try it myself. It's been a slow voyage and bad. But now, St. Brendan and good winds, that's all we need. Say a good prayer to the one for the other. That's a deal better than trying to push the ship by your lea-lone."

John Hughes turned quickly, then grinned. The old and grizzled West Cork sailor had used the Gaelic "ma gossoon" in calling him "my lad." It gave him friendly kinship. But his thoughts had been so intense that he continued them in his speech for all his friendly grin.

"I am afloat on this ocean, looking for a home and a country in which no stigma of inferiority will be impressed on my brow simply because I expressed one creed or another."

"Do you tell me now?" said the sailor, not a bit taken aback since his own thoughts had been of the young priest in the mountain dawn. "Well, you're a lad of spirit anyway, but I could see that from the first. You'll make out. And I don't think I'd care to be the one to cross you once you had your mind made. You're from the North by your way of talking, but the rebel's in you for all that. What special is on your mind now you want to get to America so fast and determined?"

His voice was kindly and understanding, and the Cork lilt came gently. John Hughes had found no congenial friend below decks. The lack of cleanliness from the unfortunate people who were ill and the fretful squabbling about cooking rights had lowered his spirits. He had drawn into himself. Now, for all his natural reserve, he felt deeply that he must pour out his heart to someone.

In a burst of speech he told the gnarled old man that he was from County Tyrone, born in the village of Annalaghan on St. John's Day, June 24, in 1797. It had once been O'Neill's land, Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone. Now it was a land of Scottish "planters;" and the Old Faith and the people who shared it were bitterly persecuted.

The sailor's hand moved up to rest on his shoulder. To prove his understanding he said that he, himself, was of the Clan O'Sullivan, of the O'Sullivan Bere, Lord of Bere and Bantry, who had been the great O'Neill's friend.

John Hughes told his own new friend that he was the third of seven children of Patrick Hughes and Margaret McKenna. His father had been a stout farmer who could have made out well had he

not been a devout Catholic in an Orange, or Protestant, community where the Irish penal laws rode heavily on the people.

“Once as a boy, I was returning from a peaceable night errand for my Da when I was stopped on the road by a band of five Orangemen and five bayonets thrust at my breast. It was only when one man, a near neighbor, recognized me as my father’s son that I was allowed to go on without harm. And I was only a boy. Had I been older I might well have been cruelly beaten for no reason at all save that I was Catholic. Yet always my father took no sides, but tried only to live at peace with the neighbors, bearing no one any hate or ill will.”

“I know, I know well.” The sailor tightened his grip on John’s shoulder. “It is why I took to the sea in earnest when my old people died and no longer needed me to shield them.”

“But worst of all, and it nearly broke my mother’s heart,” John continued with tight lips, “was when my little sister died. There was a priest in the neighborhood at the time and we got word to him. There was no question of a Mass, but someone guessed who he was and he was not even let enter the burying ground to bless her grave. It was then I knew as surely as if God Himself had told me that for the saving of my own soul I must leave Ireland.”

More quietly he told of his schooling at Augher and later at Aughtnacloy, walking miles to get the little education available. He had studied from odd books when he worked on his father’s farm holdings away from the homestead. Then he had hired himself out to the head gardener of the Montray family whose great estate was nearby. That, too, gave him a chance to improve himself.

“They praised my green thumbs,” he said pridefully, then ruefully, “even if they hated the green I wore in my heart but couldn’t wear in my cap.”

His father and his elder brother, Patrick, had given up the unequal struggle and sailed for America a year before. Now he was joining them so that with his work and wages they might more quickly bring his mother and the rest of the family to America’s free land.

“Then maybe when that is a done thing,” he said, now somewhat shyly, “the time may come and the way will be opened for me to realize the one dream I have in life for my own self—a

dream I hold with my whole heart and soul and which my mother shares with me.”

“God guide your hand and your heart,” said the Sailor Sullivan gruffly, “for I have a mind your dream is no selfish one. God and Mary bless it and you.”

“Oh, they will. They will! I know it so surely. No matter what striving lies ahead.” The youth’s tone was buoyant with belief. “For many a time have I thrown down my rake in the meadow and kneeling behind a haystack begged God and the Blessed Virgin to let me become . . . a *priest!*”

It was in 1817 that John Hughes saw for the first time the free land he was so to love and proudly to serve. He went first to Baltimore after he landed. His brother Patrick had found work outside the city. John’s first job was assisting the gardener of a nursery on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. He plunged into the work eagerly. It was what he felt best suited to do. But the job was only temporary. The coming of winter brought it to an end.

He joined his father at Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. Work of his liking was hard to find, but work of any kind he was glad to do. He was young and strong and his immediate objective was to help his father raise as quickly as possible the moneys needed to send for his mother and sisters. He gladly went as a laborer to help build a millrace and a bridge a little distance from Chambersburg.

He boarded while the work went on with a teacher, Master Mullan, who was of the same period and devotion to scholarship as Abraham Lincoln’s first teacher, Master Zachariah Riney.

Master Mullan used to jest with John that it was London Bridge he was building, and that the attic room the youth rented was London Tower.

“Take your books and your candle to the Tower. And away with you,” he would say after John had eaten his evening meal. It warmed Master Mullan’s heart to find a strapping, vigorous youth eager for books and reading rather than sports or idling. He pressed his own books on John eagerly.

More than that, he sent word to the priest who as a “saddlebag missionary” rode through the area that he had a promising young scholar staying with him. Samuel Cooper was the first American priest John Hughes knew well. Mr. Cooper (for the term Father

was not yet in use) took great interest in John. He helped him with the Latin he was studying under Master Mullan's guidance, correcting the old schoolmaster's honest errors in self-taught grammar and pronunciation. He encouraged John to begin the study of Greek. He lent him minor theological works by Bishop Richard Challoner from his own small store. When Mass was said at Master Mullan's house or at a walkable distance in miles, John served Mr. Cooper as acolyte and reported on his studies.

Chambersburg was only thirty miles from Emmitsburg in Maryland. There, hardly ten years before, Father John Dubois, an exile from France, had established Mount St. Mary's College, which, except for the Sulpician Seminary in Baltimore, was the first United States preparatory school, college, and seminary for the training of priests. It was a poor and struggling college, on its way to full status as a seminary.

John's little savings had gone regularly to his father. With his and Patrick's help at last in 1818 the passage money was sent to Ireland to his mother and sisters and the family was reunited.

The reunion was joyous and blessed. But after the early excitement was over John's mother took him aside.

"Are you holding fast to your dream, my son?" she asked. "It is the thing most often in my prayers."

Her eyes lightened when he told her of his studies with Mr. Cooper and Master Mullan. Because they shared the dream now, he felt free to tell her that he had tried with their encouragement to be taken as a student at Mount St. Mary's College once the journey money for the rest of the family had been raised.

"The fees are small but I could see no way to pay them. And it's not as if it were a rich college. The money is needed just so it can keep going. They were right to refuse me. I'd only be a burden—for the only thing I had to offer was my hands."

"Your hands—of course, your hands! Your green hands, John, that make God's green things grow so richly. Did you tell them how you worked for the Montrays and how the gardener gave praise to your face, that dour man? And the job of work in the gardens you had here at first? No! I thought not. It is only as a laborer they think of you who have beguiled the priest and the Master.

"They grow their own food or much of it at this priest school, you tell me. Go again to them and tell them that you will work in



The volume he was scanning earnestly with a pointed finger was *The Confessions of St. Augustine*—and in Latin. It was far beyond the learning Father John Dubois thought John had. He had him read an early passage in translation. It was well and freely done.

The priest was not given to quick decisions; but he made one then, on the spot, in the orchard. “You are not wasted in the work you are doing here. I came to tell you that. Your hands are not wasted nor your body. And I see you are not letting your mind go

their gardens and orchards for even half-schooling. Show them, on trial, how God's things grow for you. God gave you those hands, John! Offer them to study in His service. We've no need more now of your help. Just bring those hands back to me—blessed.”

Father John Dubois listened gently as was his wont to the new pleading of this so earnest young man. “So earnest—so American in his vigor,” he commented to himself, “even though he is not long here. It is wrong to give him hope; he is as yet not well-schooled and of an intellectual crudeness. But it might be more wrong to send him away.”

He told John finally that he could give him a post tending the college gardens but could pay him little more than his board and keep. He could hold out little hope that it would be possible for John to attend classes. Perhaps; but he could give no promises.

It was all John and his mother had prayed might happen. To John it was a blessed ray piercing the clouds. He startled Father Dubois by asking if he might get to work at once—there were still several hours until sundown.

He flung himself into the task of making the college garden flourish with vigor. Even had he thought of such a thing, the job would have held no humiliation for John; for everyone, faculty and students alike, did some work with their hands at the struggling Mount St. Mary's.

His training in Ireland and those green thumbs stood him in good stead. He added to the size of the vegetable patch and planted different varieties. He pruned the apple and pear and peach trees as he had been taught, so they bore richer fruit. The sparse meals in the college refectory grew in wholesomeness and appeal. The delighted students now often offered to help John in little ways in their free time. He was generous with an apple or a bunch of grapes.

Even gentle Father Dubois, who rarely knew what he was eating, began to notice that his appetite was growing and that he did not mind nearly so much having his work interrupted to be called to the table. One day he tucked up his cassock when the thought struck him and made his way out to the farm lands to tell John how pleased he was. It was in the brief time at noon that the lad snatched for his own dinner. But he found John under a tree deep in study, his packaged meal beside him untouched.