



Barquilla de la Santa Maria

BULLETIN of the Catholic Record Society -
Diocese of Columbus

Vol. XXXVI, No. 11

November, 2011

The Catholic Conscience and the Defense of Dr. Mudd

By Lorle Porter

Prior to the Civil War, a little known, but powerful, alliance was forged among the Catholic elites of Ohio (the Ewings) and those of Maryland (Fenwick-Young, etc.). This friendship was fed by common education and intermarriages.¹

Catholic marriages, of course, came about with their own cultural connections, and Catholic education was one of the best connectors. The dream of a strong Catholic educational network envisioned by Bishop John J. Carroll and Mother Elizabeth Seaton took root not only in Maryland, but on the frontier as well. A chain of Catholic boarding schools and colleges stretched from Georgetown and Gonzaga Colleges and Visitation Academy in Washington to Emmitsburg in Maryland, to the Dominicans in Perry County and the Ursulines in Brown County, Ohio and to Notre Dame and St. Mary's Colleges in Indiana. The Ewing and Sherman children were among the first students in all these places. The trail of one Ewing family member illustrates the pattern.

Following their father's death, Neal, Mary and "Leda" (Elizabeth) Gillespie lived with the Ewings at Lancaster. Maria Ewing was their cousin. Mary Gillespie would marry the Ewings' eldest son Philemon. Leda accompanied Ellen Ewing to the Dominican Sisters' St. Mary's Academy in nearby Somerset and then followed her to Visitation Convent in Georgetown. Another classmate was Adele Cutts, the beautiful daughter of James Madison Cutts (nephew of the President) and

Eleanor O'Neal, from a powerful old-line Catholic Maryland family. Leda Gillespie, whom Ellen unsuccessfully attempted to match with one or another of her brothers, proceeded to teach near Washington, set up an illegal school for black children, sent her brother Neal first to seminary in Rome and then to fledgling Notre Dame College in Indiana. Neal received that institution's first B.A. degree and joined the Congregation of the Holy Cross in 1850. Two years later, her obligations completed, Leda entered the order's noviate in Caen, France and then joined the nuns at Notre Dame in founding St. Mary's College. This institution, and Julia Chatworth's Brown County Ursulines (to which the children of Generals Sheridan and William Starke Rosecrans were sent during the Civil War), were the principal Catholic boarding schools in the trans-Appalachian states.²

By the 1850s, education and marriage, in short, had created a distinct Catholic subculture in Ohio. Thus, when the Know Nothing bigotry hit the state in response to the flood of peasant Irish refugees, it was a hard blow for the Ewing stratum of Catholics. They were not prepared for such an unprecedented challenge to their patriotism. In any event, they determined to lend it no "dignity" by showing public anger. Disgusted by the nascent Republican's Party's flirtation with the movement, the Ewing men backed away from the new party despite their Whig heritage. Tom came home from Cincinnati Law School on the weekend "so as to

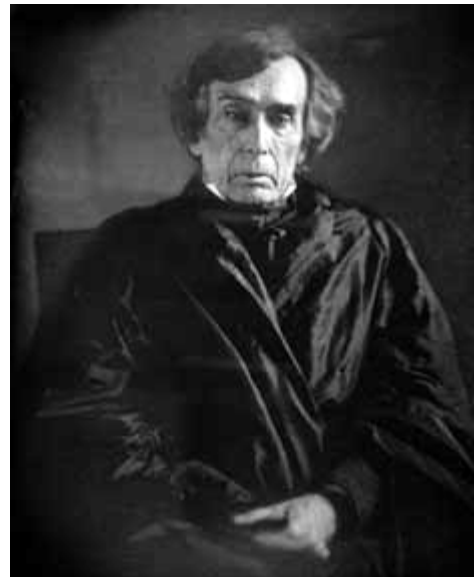
avoid voting,” Phil bolted outright and voted “full democratic” and the Senator “split the ticket but did not vote for governor.” In contrast, his long-time enemy, Tom Slaughter, editor of the *Lancaster Gazette*, ran rampant with half-truths linking the Senator with the Catholic Church. Ellen Sherman, then living in San Francisco, wrote that Slaughter “is wording and arranging his sentences so as to make it appear that Father is a Catholic as if the thought is so disgraceful that he dare not venture upon the open libel.” “Cump” Sherman himself, despite his fuzzy religious affiliation, had a bitter experience as a grand jury foreman. The *San Francisco Bulletin*, a prominent anti-Catholic propagandist, published libelous articles on the Sisters of Charity which, Sherman explained, “we knew to be false and unfounded... We had to do them justice.” The *Bulletin* then denounced the “foreman of the grand jury,” Cump, as a Roman Catholic, leading him to observe “so you see I have credit in high quarters for piety.” Nationally the same type of innuendo contributed to the destruction of the political career of John C. Fremont.³

As a result of such harassment, which bound them together with recent immigrants under the common threat of persecution, the older generation of Catholics now saw their own entry into the upper reaches of respectable society newly threatened. Catholics like the Ewings, the Fenwicks, the Carrolls, the Taney (Chief Justice of the U.S., Roger Taney 1836-1864) and Mrs. Stephen A. Douglas had achieved status in American society despite or by de-emphasizing publicly their religion. Mrs. Douglas was old friend Adie Cutts. Adele Cutts grew up in the home of the widowed Dolly Madison on Lafayette Square in Washington and was educated at Visitation Academy (probably 1834-6). At twenty, she met the wealthy (and despondent) Senator Stephen Douglas, a widower with two small children. The couple were married in a Catholic ceremony after a whirlwind romance. Adele’s two stepsons were baptized (with their father’s consent) and educated in the Jesuit schools at Georgetown. The Douglas home was a glamorous meeting place for Washington elite. Adele inherited Dolley

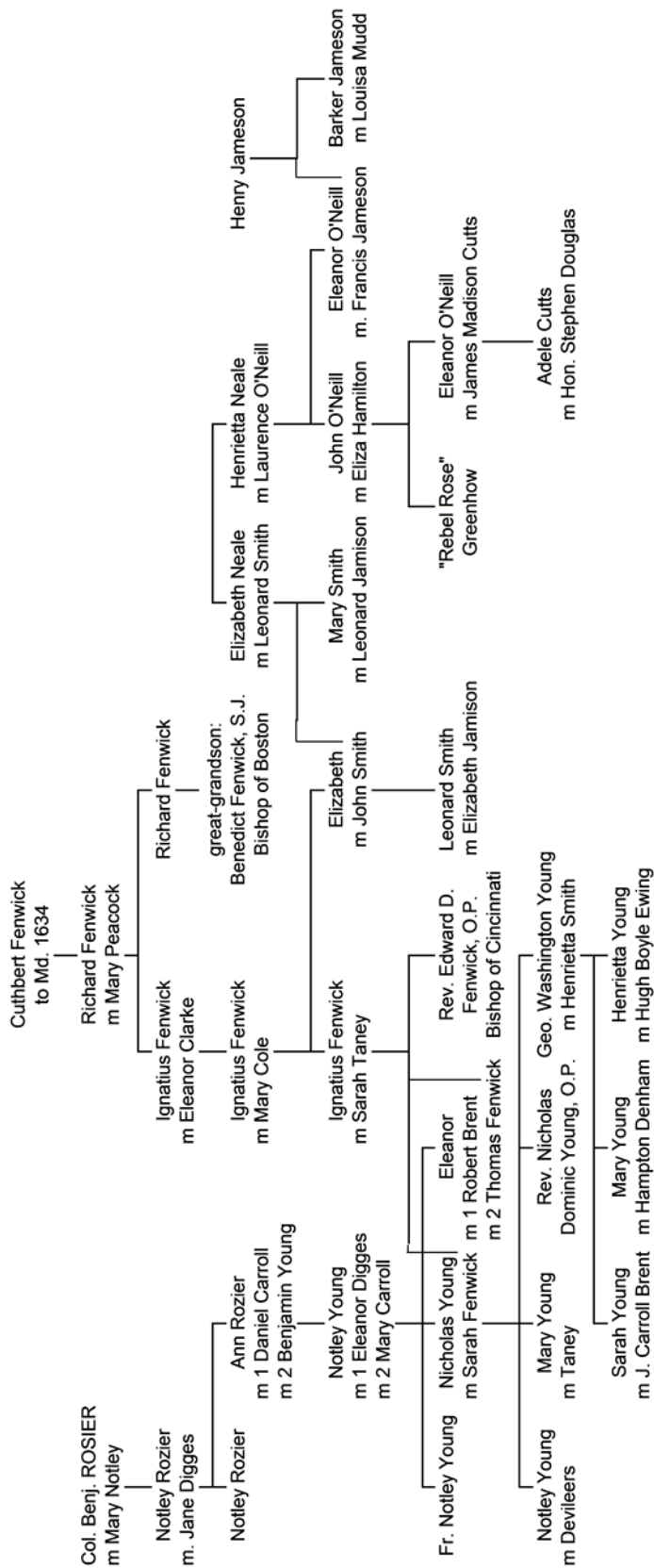
Madison’s charm and tact. She is an important example of the role played in Southern and Washington society and politics during this period. Adele and her family (including Douglas) attended St. Aloysius Church, founded by the Jesuits in 1859. Its dedication was attended by President James Buchanan and several Cabinet members. The painting above the main altar depicting St. Aloysius features current Jesuits and Adele Cutts Douglas as the saint’s mother.⁴

This cultural elite was now threatened by a wave of anti-Catholicism. They now saw their own freedoms as well as those of the less well-stationed under attack. Once the Civil War began, such fears were strengthened by the wartime tendency of many in the North to equate Catholicism with Confederate sympathies. In the 1850s and the 1860s, it would have been easier for prominent Catholics to step aside and publically embrace a more acceptable creed, but for the devoted ones that was never an option. Some like New England philosopher and convert Orestes Brownson took to the lecture circuit; others quietly strengthened the network which faith and education.

During the war, the Ewings amassed a brilliant record in the Union cause. Three of the four



*Chief Justice Roger Taney
(Library of Congress)*



brothers went to war, with Hugh and Tom attaining the ranks of Brigadier General and Charley that of Lieutenant Colonel and Inspector General of the 15th Corps. All of them served at one time with their foster brother Major General William Tecumseh Sherman. Despite such records, they were still in a country in which their church was in a delicate position. The rapidly escalating size of the Catholic population fueled nativist fear of the influence of the “autocratic” Church of Rome upon democratic institutions which had barely survived the war. Furthermore, the victors resented the Vatican’s apparent wartime sympathy for the South. The Vatican was the only foreign nation to recognize the Confederacy (although powers like Great Britain and France managed to profit off the South’s “independence”). And, at war’s end, it was revealed that Adie Cutts’ Aunt Rose O’Neale Greenhow was the famous “Rebel Rose” who was convicted of spying for the Confederate government during the war. On top of this, there was a widespread belief that President Lincoln’s assassination had been orchestrated by Catholics. This might well have been devastating to Catholic rights and freedom.

The possibility existed—in imaginative minds. The national trauma produced a lynching mood in Washington which was fueled by rumors of a Jesuit plot behind the Lincoln assassination. In later years, provocateurs such as ex-priest Charles Chiniquy would launch an avalanche of books and pamphlets, still circulating as late as the Kennedy West Virginia campaign of 1960, trumpeting the dark tales of the “Jesuit plot.” But during the months following the Lincoln murder and the trial, a credible case failed to materialize. Although two of the defendants, Mary Surratt and Samuel



Adele Cutts Douglas
(Library of Congress)

Mudd, were Catholics, and fugitive John Surratt was even an ex-seminarian, a convincing Catholic conspiracy failed to jell—not for want of trying, however.

In early May, 1865, George Alfred Townsend, wartime journalist for the *New York World*, reported that all the conspirators were Catholics. By the end of the year, mysterious propagandist Abbot A. Abbot's full blown conspiracy charges were in print in *The Assassination and Death of Abraham Lincoln*. Even Asia Booth, having read such allegations, wrote of her actor brother to a friend on May 22, 1865, during the trial that she was:

shocked and grieved to see the names of [Booth's boyhood friends] Michael O'Laughlin and S[am] Arnold [among the arrested]. I am still more surprised to learn that all engaged in the plot were Roman Catholics. Wilkes was of the faith professedly and I was glad that he had fixed his faith on one religion for he was always of pious mind.

Asia Booth, herself educated in a "Carmelite convent in Baltimore" and later a convert, had assumed, as many accusers did, that O'Laughlin and

Arnold were Catholics because of their distinct Marylander Catholic surnames. Fortunately for American Catholics, Booth's own conversion, if it ever occurred, remained a secret. Rumors still abounded though that the murder was the result of a Catholic plot.⁵ It was time for most Catholics to assume a low profile. But not for General Thomas Ewing, son of former Senator Thomas Ewing, who, although perhaps non-practicing, was culturally a Catholic.

Ewing was one of the country's outstanding lawyers, former Chief Justice of the Kansas Supreme Court and a man with political ambitions. To him, Mudd was not simply a country doctor whose life could be sacrificed, however regrettably, under the guise of justice. Rather, he was a brother in faith whose rights and reputation and family's religion required defense. Thomas Ewing could not turn away. The whole force of his training and heritage made him take a stand.

(To be concluded)



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Special thanks to Darlene Shryock and Amy Daquila for technical assistance

NOTES

- 1) The Boyle-Gillespie impulse to preserve the Catholic tradition extended to sending little sister “Sissie” (Maria Theresa) “A nun doll for her birthday,” Ellen Ewing to Hugh Boyle Ewing, December 14, 1841.
- 2) Burton, *Three Generations*, 143; Anna McAllister, *Flame in the Wilderness, Life and Letters of Mother Angela*, (Patterson, New Jersey: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1944), 229. “Mother Angela,” *The New Catholic Encyclopedia VI*, 489-90. Papers of the Brown County Ursulines, The University of Notre Dame Archives.
- 3) Ellen Sherman to Maria Ewing, October 29, 1854, October 16, 1855; William Tecumseh Sherman to Henry Smith Turner, October 5, 1856, March 18, 1858. Ewing Family Papers, The University of Notre Dame. This was Fanny O’Neill’s convent.
- 4) Adele Cutts, internet.
- 5) William Hanchett, *The Lincoln Murder Conspiracies* (Urbana, Illinois: The University of Illinois, 1983), “Reductio ad Absurdum” 234-241. Constance Head; “Insights on John Wilkes Booth From his Sister Asia’s Correspondence,” *The Lincoln Herald*, (Harrogate, Tennessee: Lincoln Memorial University Press, 83, Winter 1980), 542-543. Dr. Mudd’s cousin Sister Joseph was a member of this convent. Nettie Mudd, *The Life of Dr. Samuel A. Mudd* (New York: Neale Publishing Company, 1906), 181. On Dry Tortugas, Arnold and O’Laughlin were moved to Mudd’s room to be nursed of yellow fever. O’Laughlin died. Arnold was a handy man on Mudd’s Maryland farm after his parole. Benn Pitman, *The Assassinating of President Lincoln: The Trial of the Conspirators: Courtroom Testimony As Originally Compiled by Benn Pitman*, (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1954, xxiii), 10.

Mudd, *The Life of Dr. Samuel A. Mudd*, 164. Feelings about the conspirators ran high even despite the acquittal after a trial based on the same evidence, of John Surratt in 1897. Hanchett, *The Lincoln Murder Conspiracies*, 203-206. The undercurrent of belief in a Catholic conspiracy existed long after and fed Nativist movements of the Twentieth Century. A famous Catholic Conspiracy pamphlet was Abbot A. Abbott, *The Assassination and Death of Abraham Lincoln*, (New York: American News Company, 1865). An example of the influence of Abbott’s book is George J. Schmutz, *The History of the 188th Pennsylvania Infantry*, unpublished manuscript, 1913, William L. Clements Library Manuscript Depository, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

“The greatest mistake of our Government in the prosecution of the Assassins [*sic*] was to constantly keep out of light the religious elements of that terrible (*sic*) drama. You can see that the Influence of Rome is almost Supreme in Washington and no doubt had it occurred in the time of peace and tried under a civil tribunal instead of military court two or more Jesuits would have been executed. That was not done through cowardice as you may think but through wisdom. The Civil War was hardly over, the Confederacy though broken down, still living in millions of hearts.

“Murderous and formidable elements of discourd was still seen everywhere to which the hanging or exiling of those Priests would have given a New Life. Riots after Riots would have accompanied and followed their execution and the government thought enough blood and fires and devastation and bad feeling had been endured for four years.”

“Everybody was for peace and the government thought the best interests of humanity was to punish only those who were publically and visibly guilty that the Verdict might receive [*sic*] the approbation of all without creating any New Bad feelings.”

St. Rose Mission, Spring Mountain Burials

(Concluded, from Vol. XXXVI, No. 10)

- 1911, Feb. 28 Catherina Eva, age 6 weeks, daughter of Percel Chas. Krownapple and Rose (born Hamer), died in Chicago, buried Mar. 2. Francis P. Reynolds
- 1911, Aug. 2 Rosina Miller, age 14, daughter of Philip and Anna Miller at [of] Millersburg was buried. FPR
- no date, Margaret Wattson (nee McGrady), born in Ireland, age 53. FPR
- 1912, Feb. 7 Joseph Clement Weil, stillborn son of Louis and Lucy Weil (nee Dete). FPR
- 1913, Feb. 7 Ignatius Schodorf, native of Germany, died, age 60, buried Feb. 9. FPR
- 1913, Sept. 29 — Brophy died, age about 59, received all the sacraments but his wife and children had him buried at Warsaw on Oct. 1. FOR
- 1914, Feb. 24 Adalide Krownapple died, age 60, buried Feb. 26. FPR
- 1914, Aug. 6 Maria M. Heft died at Coshocton Hospital, age 24, born at Spring Mountain, buried Aug. 8 FPR
- no date, infant son of George and Delilah McDevit.
- 1915, Mar. 10 Maria Krownapple died, age 61, native of Glenmont, buried Mar. 13. FPR
- 1917, Jan. 15 Philip Miller died in St. Francis Hospital in Columbus, age 61. John J. Fagan
- 1917, March 4 Mary Ault died at St. Anthony's Hospital, Columbus, age 74. JJF
- 1918, Mar. 23 Paul Krownapple died at Topeka, Kansas, age 15 years 11 months 27 days, buried March 27. JJF
- 1918, May 12 Jacob Hamer died, age 80. JJF
- 1919, May 26 Hugh McDevitt died, age 72, buried May 26. JJF
- 1919, July 9 James McDevitt died, age 78, buried July 11. JJF
- 1919, Sept. 16 Paul Milless, age 19, was buried at St. Rose after a sung Mass at Newark, his home. JJF
- 1920, Jan. 5 Patrick Dougherty, age 76, was buried at St. Rose, after dying in the infirmary in Coshocton. JJF
- 1920, Feb. 13 Donald Krownapple, age 9, was buried after sung Mass at Sacred Heart Church. JJF
- 1923, Mar. 13 Harold Anthony Krownapple, age 1 month, was buried. Austin Tague
- 1923, July 9 Mary Elizabeth Herberick was buried after sung Mass in St. Rose Church by Father Goetz; died July 6 in Columbus, age 68 years 5 months 15 days. Rev. Fr. Schick by Rev. Fr. Goetz
- 1924, Sept. 3 John Weber, age 67 years 14 days, was buried. Vincent Schiele
- 1924, Nov. 10 John Andrew Krownapple, age 83 years, was buried. Vincent G. Schiele
- 1925, Aug. 6 Mary Adaline Phillips was buried. VGS
- 1926, March 1 John Heft, age 70 was buried. VGS
- 1926, Apr. 10 Mary Phillips was buried, age 83. VGS
- 1927, May 19 Adalaide Frances Poorman was buried, age 5 hours. VGS
- 1927, Nov. 14 Margaret Krownapple was buried, age 79. VS
- 1928, Jan. 26 Anthony Hamer was buried, age 88 years 9 months. VS
- 1928, Feb. 1 Joseph Krownapple was buried, age 77. VS
- 1928, July 14 Theresa Isabelle Herberick was buried, age 81 years 9 months. VS
- 1928, Nov. 8 Elizabeth Out was buried, age 89 years 18 days. VS
- 1929, Jan. 7 Mary Ann Daugherty was buried, age 76 years 3 days, died in Coshocton. VGS
- 1929, Jan. 21 Accy Haverick was buried, age 90 years 1 month 1 day. VGS
- 1929, June 29 Henry Watson died, age 73 years. VGS

1929, Dec. 2 Ada Drusilla Krownapple died in Spring Mountain, age 50, buried Dec. 5. VGS
 1930 Sept. 16 Anna McDevitt died in Spring Mountain, age 86, buried Sept. 18. VGS
 1931 Feb. 13 Carroll Edward Poorman died in Spring Mountain, age 2 years 9 months, buried Feb. 16. VGS
 1931 Mar. 2 Catherine Ann Hamer died in Spring Mountain, age 88, buried Mar. 5. VGS
 1931 Aug 20 Harold Dean Phillips died in Spring Mountain, age 1 year 1 month 27 days, buried Aug. 24. VGS
 1931 Dec. 28 Edward Krownapple died in Spring Mountain, age 55, buried Dec. 30. VGS
 1934, Mar. 25 Ruth E. King died in Killbuck, age 6 years, buried Mar. 28. VGS

1936, Dec. 22 Agnes Krownapple died in Spring Mountain, buried Dec. 24. Eugene F. Dunn
 1938, Aug. 16 Vincent Didinger died, age 2 years, buried Aug. 19. EFD
 1939 Nov. 23 Anna Margaret Bucklew died in Warsaw, buried Nov. 26. EFD
 1943, Nov. 1 George Logsdon died in Stillwell, buried in Stillwell Cemetery Nov. 3. EFD
 1943, Dec. 12 Mary Jane Weber died in Walhonding, buried Dec. 15. EFD
 1944, Jan. 28 Margaret Heft died in Canton, (age 76?), buried Jan. 31. EFD
 1946, Dec. 6 Robert Lee Hagans, son of Mrs. Charles McClain of Warsaw died, buried Dec. 9. [unsigned, but in the hand of Rev. John W. Kerrigan]

Abstracts from the *Catholic Telegraph*

(Continued, from Vol. XXXVI, No. 9)

May 21, 1859

Anniversary of the Philopedian Society of St. Joseph's College, Ohio.

The proceedings of the Society were marked by a great degree of enthusiasm, judgment and good taste on the part of its members.

After the repast, which was of the most sumptuous style, upon the suggestion of Rev. Dr. Lilly, the able and very gentlemanly President of the College, the Society, with all the invited guests, adjourned to the spacious hall used for Library purposes and Literary exercises. Here the ensign of the Republic and the banner of the Society, as they greeted our visions, seemed also to indicate to our understanding that as intelligence had reared the mighty columns of American Independence, so must intelligence also preserve them from decay.

[Toasts were offered for Gen. George Washington, The President of the United States, Our College, Hon. Stephen A. Douglas, "Clay, Webster and Calhoun," Gen. Winfield Scott, The President of St. Joseph's College, The Phil-Historic Society, and The Philopedian Society. Responses were spoken by Dr. Flagy, T. J. Maginnis, Wm. E. Finck, Wm. T. Dutton, David H. Boullt, Rev. Dr. Lilly, Rev. F. J. Dunn, and Geo.M. Dittoe.]

May 28, 1859

The lectures that are to be delivered in the Cathedral, by Rev. S. H. Rosecrans, D.D., will be given at four o'clock in the afternoon.

The seminary treasurer received \$41.67 from the Church of the Sacred Heart, Pomeroy.

Death of Rev. Thomas Martin, O.S.D.

Another pious laborer has been snatched away from his holy work, but happily not until he had been able to devote to it all the energies of a long life—until he had labored long and accomplished much.

The Rev. Father Martin, whom we have just lost, was born in Ireland, near the town of Kilkenny. He came to this country about the year 1818. From his boyhood his aspirations were directed toward the priesthood and entrance into some religious order. Arrived here he determined, if it were God's will, to realize his dream, and accordingly applied for admission to St. Rose's Convent (Dominican), Springfield, Ky. He was made happy by obtaining his admission. At St. Rose's he completed his studies, and in the year 1824 was ordained by the Rt. Rev. Bishop Fenwick, of Cincinnati. The Bishop applied to the superior of the Order to permit this young Dominican to go to the diocese of Ohio, as

the number of priests therein at the time was very small. The permission was accorded, and Father Martin accordingly left for his new diocese, and was stationed by Bishop Fenwick at the Mother Church of the great Western State: St. Joseph's, in Perry County. There he joined the Very Rev. N. D. Young, and the two priests, during some years, did the entire spiritual work of the vast tract of surrounding country. Some idea of the amount of labor these two pious and indefatigable men accomplished may be had when it is remembered that at the period of which we write there was no priest to be found between St. Joseph's and Cincinnati. Fathers Martin and Young attended the Catholics that were then scattered at long intervals throughout all the counties of Northern Ohio. A sick call at twenty miles distance was an ordinary occurrence, and they often had to travel on horseback from fifty to one hundred miles, in cold or rain, to bear the bread of eternal life to those who were about to yield up the life of earth.

In this manner Father Martin labored at St. Joseph's until about the year 1836, when he received permission to visit Europe. He remained about a year in Rome and then returned to this country and to his convent at St. Joseph's, where there was now a community of his order established. After remaining there about six months, he came to the diocese of New York and was requested by the Most Rev. Archbishop Hughes to go to Utica, where difficulties existed. By dint of perseverance he succeeded in putting an end to them, and brought back peace, union and prosperity, to the Catholic cause in Utica. His success in his difficult task seems to have shown him the particular mission for which he was designed, and how he could the most effectually labor for the Church of God. When all was serene in Utica, he went to West Troy where the horizon was cloudy, and troubles were growing apace. He succeeded in dispelling the clouds and leaving the horizon bright and clear. His work done, he prepared to depart, and in compliance with the desire of our Most Rev. Archbishop, took charge of St. Peter's Church, the affairs of which were then in a very disheartening state, and succeeded in restoring order and regularity.

But he never rested. As soon as a congregation

was formed or united and a church completed or freed from debt, he asked to be removed to some other place where there was still more difficult task to perform. From St. Peter's he was sent to Rondout, and when he had successfully finished his labors there, he was placed at St. Bridget's Church in this city, and united the elements of its present prosperity. From St. Bridget's he went to 42nd street Church, and having disembarrassed it was sent to St. James's parish to fill up the void left by his predecessor there who had succumbed under the labors and difficulties of his position, and there after so many conquests in the cause of the Almighty, he himself succumbed. After a life of pious and unceasing activity he is at length at rest. He was aged almost 65 years.

The Rev. Mr. Martin was gifted with one of the highest virtues of the pastor: a Christian patience with [i.e. which] no difficulties, no troubles, no annoyances could ruffle. His persistency in carrying out a good work was as firm as his faith, and as unostentatious as his piety. His energy was intense, though contained, and untracable by the casual observer, and he was endowed, in an eminent degree, with all the qualities which, combined, give the power of organizing. He was eminently an organizer, both in the material and spiritual.

As the Most Rev. Archbishop himself said, in his remarks on the occasion of the obsequies, he was a model priest. The intelligence of the good Father's demise will be received with regret in the various parishes which have known his goodness and his labors, and all his former parishioners will fervently unite in praying that he may rest in peace.—*N. Y. Tablet.*

The remains of the late Rev. Mr. Martin were interred in the Cemetery at St. Joseph's College, Perry Co., Ohio.

(To be continued)

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197 E. Gay St., Columbus, Ohio 43215
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