

THE LATE VERY REV. FATHER CUMMINGS, S.M.

(From our Christchurch correspondent.)

A GLOOM was cast over the city of Christchurch last week by the brief announcement that the Very Rev. Father Cummings, late Vicar-General of the diocese, had passed away. Seldom, if ever, in the history of the Cathedral City has such deep and widespread regret been felt and expressed at the death of one of its citizens.

The late Very Rev. Father Stephen Cummings was born at Greenwich, England, on the 18th August, 1811. He was of Irish parentage, and was left an orphan at an early age. His preliminary studies were made under Dr. Todd, at a college near Greenwich. During this time he acted as sacristan of the church at Greenwich, attended to the ceremonies, decorated the altars, and made himself helpful in many ways to the rev. rector, Canon North, who, with Dr. Todd, interested himself in his young life. Joining the Society of Mary, he went to the seminary college of this great missionary order, that of St. Mary's Dundalk. After studying here for a number of years he proceeded to France, having for classfellows the Very Rev. Father Devoy, S.M., V.G. (Wellington), Smyth (Hastings), Grogan (Napier), the Right Rev. Dr. Lenihan, Bishop

of Auckland, and many other distinguished divines who are scattered over various mission fields. He made his profession in 1875, and was ordained shortly afterwards by the late Primate of Ireland. For some time he held the Chair of Professor of languages in a Marist college in France. He was next sent to labour on the London Mission. Here in the East End he wrought most zealously for a number of years, and many even now cherish kindly memories of his ministrations. Coming out to Australia in 1886, he attached himself to St. Patrick's Church, Sydney, and laboured on that mission until the following year. Then, shortly after the arrival of his Lordship Dr. Grimes, as first Bishop of Christchurch, he came to this city and placed his services at the disposal of his Lordship, who, recognising his worth, invited him to conduct a mission in the pro-Cathedral. This he did with marked success. Shortly afterwards he was appointed administrator of the parish. When severe illness overtook the Bishop, necessitating a voyage to Europe, he appointed Father Cummings administrator of the Cathedral and diocese; and again on his (the Bishop's) return in 1891 he appointed him the first Vicar-General of the diocese, positions which he filled with conspicuous ability and success, until, through illness and gradual breaking down of the constitution, he was obliged to relinquish them. This happened in March of last year, when, by request, he was relieved of his onerous duties, and authorised to take a trip to Europe.

When the announcement of his imminent departure was made from the pulpit of the pro-Cathedral, there was scarcely a dry eye in the great congregation. Very few present, however, dreamed that they were looking at the well-known face, and listening to the familiar voice, for the last time. In May of last year he left Christchurch, after having been entertained at a monster conversation, which was attended by all the leading citizens and presented with an address and purse of sovereigns. On the voyage home he was accompanied by the Very Rev. Father Le Rennelet, S.M., of St. Patrick's, Sydney, who was very attentive and devoted to him. On his arrival in Marseilles he was met by the Bishop of Christchurch who found him in a very low state of health. Here an incident happened which is worth recording. Whilst one of the party was carrying Father Cummings's overcoat, his purse, containing a considerable amount of money in English sovereigns, dropped out of the pocket. Someone suggested that he should say a prayer to St. Anthony, recourse to that saint having in numberless instances been rewarded by the finding of lost articles. To his surprise, and that of everyone three days afterwards the purse was returned by two workmen, who had found it in the streets of Marseilles. The Marist Fathers here extended every kindness to the invalid. Acting on medical advice he proceeded to Vichy, and remained there under treatment for some time. Leaving the south of France he came to England and revisited all the scenes of his youth. Whilst in England he stayed at

Paignton, one of the missions of his order, and also at the new home of the Marist Fathers, Kew, Richmond. He likewise visited Dublin and Dundalk. In the latter place, despite his shattered health, he conducted a retreat for the students at the Marist College.

Father Cummings was in constant correspondence with Bishop Grimes during his Lordship's stay in Europe. Deceased greatly desired to visit Rome, but the state of his health prevented the realisation of his wish. Just prior to the Bishop's departure for New Zealand, Father Cummings came over to England to see him off. They spent their last night in London together, and the Bishop was deeply grieved to witness the manifest signs of a final breakdown which were visible in the subject of our sketch. Both at New York and Vancouver the Bishop received letters from him in which he spoke hopefully of soon returning to once more resume his labours in Christchurch.

Father Cummings was possessed of great zeal and administrative ability. He was a gentleman in the truest sense of the word, and was universally popular and respected by both priests and people, and by every section of the community. In works of charity and benevolence he was ever to the fore, and it was a frequent occurrence for leaders of other denominations to consult him in matters of philanthropy and the bettering of the condition of the destitute, the unfortunate, and abandoned. It was never in vain that he was appealed to for assistance in a good cause. The poorest

among his parishioners were his constant care, and by them he was deeply beloved, but undoubtedly his greatest affection was for little children.

He was very much attached to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and was its spiritual director during the whole term of his residence in the city. The Brothers of the Society in Christchurch who were always so intimately connected with him are naturally intensely grieved at his decease, and at the last weekly meeting the President (Bro. E. O'Connor) feelingly referred to the sad event.

When Father Cummings took charge of the Pro-Cathedral parish there was a very heavy debt upon it. This he succeeded in entirely clearing off. He also assisted the Sisters of the Mission in clearing off the debt on the convent. He erected a fine residence for the Marist Brothers enlarged the boys' school, improved the girls' school, thoroughly repaired and renovated the Pro-Cathedral within and without, erected a substantial iron and cement fence in front of the church, and added to the church properties at Addington and Halswell.

(By telegraph, from our own correspondent).

Christchurch, February 7.
A solemn Requiem Mass for the repose of the soul of the late Very Rev. Father Cummings was celebrated at the Pro-Cathedral this (Tuesday) morning. His

Lordship the Bishop was celebrant. The assistants at the throne were the Very Rev. Fathers Chervier and Ginaty; the assistant priest at the Mass, Very Rev. Father Le Menant des Chesnais; the deacons of the Mass, Very Rev. Dean O'Donnell and Rev. Father Tubman; master of ceremonies, Rev. Father Bowers. There were also present in the sanctuary the Rev. Fathers Chastagnon, Marnane, Goggin, Deby, Crotty, Pri'e, Bogue, Salvador, Richards, Galerne, Tracy, Aubrey, and Foley. Mass was preceded by Matins and Lauds for the dead. After the Mass the Bishop paid an eloquent and touching tribute to the memory of Father Cummings. The sanctuary and pulpit were draped in black, and at the entrance of the sanctuary a canopy was placed, upon which were deposited the emblems of the deceased's priestly office.

There was a very large congregation. Miss K. Young presided at the organ.

At the children's Mass on Thursday morning (writes our Wellington correspondent) the Very Rev. Father Devoy, V.G., made feeling reference to the death of the Very Rev. Father Cummings, who had been a fellow student of his in Ireland and France, and one of his dearest friends for a great many years. After referring to Father Cummings's many edifying qualities Father Devoy asked the children to pray for the repose of the soul of the deceased.

All lovers of the Precious Blood should have a cordial devotion to the Church, and should immensely honour, revere, and prize the Most Holy Sacrament.—Father Faber.

