

THE MARTYRED ARCHBISHOP OF ARMAGH.

THE sketch we give is condensed (by the Adelaide *Southern Cross*) from an American publication.

Destined by Providence to wear the mitre and the martyr's crown, the Most Rev. Dr. Oliver Plunkett was born in the county of Meath in 1629, when the British Empire was convulsed by discussions which were to culminate in a sanguinary civil war and the regicide of the unfortunate Charles I.

He belonged to an ancient Irish family, and having evinced from his earliest years the desire of consecrating his life to God, he was sent in his seventeenth year to the Irish College in Rome. He devoted himself with such application to his studies that he was soon considered to be one of the most learned among the Irish students. Although it was the rule for the Irish priests to return to their own country after their ordination, yet at this period Ireland was a scene of bloodshed and anarchy, while the parliamentary troops were devastating the island. Oliver Plunkett remained in Rome, and was appointed professor of theology at the Propaganda, where he taught for twelve years with success.

The Archbishop of Armagh, driven into exile, died in 1669, and Pope Clement IX. nominated Dr. Oliver Plunkett as his successor. He was consecrated in Belgium, in the private chapel belonging to the Bishop of Ghent, who officiated. The new Archbishop of Armagh proceeded to London, where he remained for several months, endeavouring to soften the severe measures then proposed against the Catholics. On his arrival in Ireland, where he was liable to fine and imprisonment, he had to perform his sacred duties in disguise or at night. In two months after his arrival he held two synods and ordinations, and confirmed 10,000 persons; checked abuses and reformed ecclesiastical discipline. He presided at the General Council of the Irish Bishops in Dublin in 1671. At this council the question of the primacy of the sees of Armagh and Dublin was broached; the matter was referred to Rome, and the decision was ultimately given in favour of Armagh.

A famine commenced in August, 1674, during which Dr. Plunkett saw 500 of his flock die of starvation rather than renounce their faith as the price of the food offered by the Protestants. Their misery was keenly felt by the Archbishop, who never forsook them, though surrounded by spies, and hunted from place to place with his brother bishop, glad to get a morsel of oatmeal cake to allay their hunger. Neither being robust, they suffered much from exposure to the inclement winter season in which the prosecution burst forth.

Their usual hiding-place was a wretched cabin, where, as the primate remarked in his letters to Rome, they could see the stars of heaven through the thatched roof, and be refreshed by every shower; but that "they were resolved to die from hunger and cold rather than abandon their flocks, since it would be shameful for those spiritual soldiers to become mercenaries who were trained in Rome."

The danger of discovery occasionally compelled the proscribed prelates to exchange this poor home for the woods and caverns, where their hardships were still greater. In 1675 the persecution abated, and a few years of peace ensued, during which the Archbishop resumed his duties, correcting abuses, visiting the diocese, giving confirmation, and putting down drunkenness which was the besetting sin of the Irish.

While reforming abuses prevailing in his diocese, Dr. Plunkett incurred the deadly hatred of some members of his clergy, who on account of their vicious lives had been suspended from all exercise of the holy ministry. They joined the roving bands, and determined to revenge themselves on their archbishop; they persistently circulated calumnies against him, and on one occasion, breaking into a house where he was staying, they robbed and even threatened to murder him. Just before the outbreak of the persecution, 1679, one of these apostates, named MacMoyer, accused the prelate of conspiring against the Crown. The informer's worthless character was so well known that the grand jury of Louth discredited his charges, ordered his arrest, and he nearly incurred hanging as an accomplice of the robbers. His escape from prison was connived at, and undaunted in his malicious schemes, he continued to pursue them, aided by two other apostates and bandits. He then accused Dr. Plunkett before the Viceroy, but his evidence was again rejected.

One of his accomplices, Murphy, being prosecuted as a robber, was arrested, but making his escape from Dundalk gaol, he obtained pardon from the Government, by turning informer against the archbishop, whom he hated as virulently as MacMoyer did. These two worthies went to England, where their prejudices were received by the council under Earl Shaftesbury; and they were allowed to return to Ireland in order to convict the primate, and to collect any witnesses they liked. The old Bishop of Meath, dying just then, Dr. Plunkett left his hiding place to console the last hours of his relation and brother prelate. Ten days later the primate was discovered in Dublin and arrested by a party of militia; he was imprisoned in the castle where the Archbishop of Dublin had been a prisoner for several months.

As was very well known, Archbishop Plunkett remained in prison for six months, solely because he had not left the country in obedience to the edict. Instigated by the evil spirit, the perjured witnesses resolved to give a treasonable colouring to this detention by accusing Dr. Plunkett of holding a Provincial Council to introduce the French into Ireland; of visiting all the fortresses and maritime ports of the Island for this purpose; of assembling seventy thousand Catholics to murder the Protestants, and of sending agents to different kingdoms to obtain in order to establish the "Popish" religion, superstitions, etc., etc. In the month of June the Primate was taken to Dundalk to stand his trial on these absurd charges. No Catholic was to be allowed on the jury, but notwithstanding this precaution the false witness Murphy absconded, as he was too much afraid of appearing before a jury who already had condemned him to be hanged; and his fellow robber, MacMoyer, aware that the Protestants of Louth were in favour of Dr. Plunkett, refused to come forward without Murphy. The Archbishop was conducted back to Dublin Castle, where he

remained till the middle of October, when he was summoned to London to be tried there. The prelate for six months longer was detained in close confinement, and deprived of all communication with his friends, until the period of the trial, when he was permitted to write a few letters. In one, now preserved in the Vatican Archives, he expressly says, that he had been "brought to trial for seeking to introduce the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Faith, and to overturn and destroy the Protestant religion."

Dr. Plunkett was arraigned May 3, 1681, at the bar of the King's Bench for high treason. Thirty-five days were granted to bring over witnesses in his favour from Ireland; but taking into consideration the length of time requisite for the messenger's journey to Ireland, the difficulty of collecting reliable witnesses, the delay caused by copying records proving the worthlessness of the prosecutors, and the stormy weather that finally retarded the witnesses, we are not surprised to find Dr. Plunkett placed on trial at Westminster before a prejudiced jury surrounded only by the perjured conspirators of the prosecution. He was refused the delay of a few days to enable the appearance of his witnesses, who had landed, and were hastening to London. The trial proceeded without them, and the contradictory false evidence of a few wicked apostates being eagerly accepted, the jury did not hesitate in returning a verdict of "guilty," which caused the doomed prelate to exclaim, "*Deo Gratias*," with all a martyr's joy and courage. Dr. Plunkett was once more brought up to receive his sentence on June 14. Obtaining permission to speak, the primate in a quiet, dignified speech, pointed out the fallacy of the absurd charges of treason and the wicked malice of his accusers; at the same time acknowledging that he had fulfilled all his duties as a bishop. Sentence was then passed upon the Archbishop, who returned to prison to prepare by prayer and penance for his glorious death.

The day of execution was fixed for July 11; and according to an account given of the proceedings, the keeper of the gaol going early in the morning to see if the fearful death awaiting the primate had made any impression on the dauntless spirit he admired so much, he found Dr. Plunkett sleeping quietly, and he perceived that the Archbishop on awakening was not in the slightest degree shaken by the prospect of his horrible sufferings, but "went to the sledge as if he had been going to a wedding."

In compliance with the brutal customs of the period, the noble prelate was stretched on a hurdle, and drawn from Newgate to Tyburn, where an immense crowd assembled to watch the atrocious execution of a Catholic bishop. Calmly he mounted the scaffold, and addressing the people he declared his innocence as to the accusation of high treason; he prayed for the king and the royal family, freely pardoned all his enemies, and implored the mercy of God, through the merits of Christ, the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, of the holy angels and saints of Paradise. With this simple declaration of faith springing from a loving heart, the courageous and high spirited Archbishop submitted to his dreadful execution by hanging and quartering. His fortitude and calm demeanour remained unshaken to the end. A priest who was present at the scene wrote that the saintly prelate had the look of an angel descended from heaven about to return thither, having rendered immense glory to the Catholic religion by his angelical deportment in death.

The scattered remains of the holy Archbishop were allowed to be collected and buried at St. Giles' Church, according to the last request, near the bodies of the Jesuit fathers who had lost their lives at Tyburn in the same grand cause. The body of the martyred prelate was found incorrupt three years later, when disinterred for removal to a Benedictine monastery in Germany. The head enshrined in a silver case was presented to Cardinal Norfolk, who bequeathed it to the Dominicans in Rome. The head was transported from Rome in 1721, and confided to the care of a community of nuns who with their prioress, Catherine Plunkett, a niece of the martyred primate, had come to Drogheda to establish once more in Ireland a convent of the old Dominican Order, where successive generations of Irish virgins have since dwelt, preparing by their holy lives on earth to follow the Lamb for all eternity in Heaven.

CATHOLIC CONCERT.

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THERE was only a moderate audience at the Academy of Music last night at the concert held in aid of the repair fund of the Catholic Presbytery. The front seats were well filled, and the gallery had a fair patronage. The entertainment certainly deserved much more support, and the programme was an excellent and tasteful one, both as regards the vocal attributes of those who took part in the evening's entertainment, and the class of music that was produced. But of course, there has been rather a surfeit of amusements lately and classical music will not always draw a large gathering. The first piece produced was a duet "*Ave Sanctissima*" by Mrs. Bruce, and Miss Duggan, in which there was a pleasant and harmonious blending of the voices, and which was a good performance. Mr. Christie followed with "*The King of Love my Shepherd is*," and which he sang with much expression. Miss Toober then sang the sweet and favourite song "*Dream Faces*," for which she was loudly applauded. The next was a fine song by Mr. Harston "*The Stowaway*," which he sang with spirit and great feeling, and for which he received well-deserved applause. Mrs. Bruce followed with "*O Maria*," a pretty song, which she sang admirably. Miss O'Reilly succeeded with "*The Organist*," a really grand song, in which the remarkable compass of her fine voice was exhibited to the fullest degree. This song was specially composed for and dedicated to Miss O'Reilly by a Sydney composer, and she did not only justice to herself in her rendering of it last night, but also to the talent of the composer. In response to a determined demand for an encore she gave "*The Three Maids of Lee*," a capital song. This concluded the first part, and the second portion of the programme began with "*Silver Moonlight*," a pretty duet by Misses Duggan, and McLoughlin. Mr. Grubb's song, "*The Last Sweet Words of Mother*," was another fine song, and he was accorded an encore. Miss O'Reilly was next with "*The*