

A CATHOLIC CENTENARY

THE FIRST MASS IN AUSTRALIA

In a recent issue of the Sydney 'Morning Herald' there appeared a very interesting article from the pen of Mr. James T. Donovan, dealing with the humble beginnings of the Catholic Church in Australia. The history of the Catholic Church in Australia (writes Mr. Donovan) is generally regarded as having commenced with the first public celebration of Mass in Sydney on May 15, 1803. That date this year was the hundredth anniversary of the first assemblage of Catholics at a religious rite or ceremony. There was no officially-appointed or officially-recognised Catholic chaplain at the time, but it so happened that there were

Three Irish Priests

in the colony who had been sent from Ireland for alleged or actual participation in the "troubles" which followed the insurrection of 1798. These unfortunate priests, who had with them a Protestant clergyman, the Rev. Mr. Fulton, to share their fate, were described as men who had been transported for holding and advocating "seditious and rebellious principles." One, the Rev. James Harold, arrived in Sydney in January, 1800. The second, Rev. James Dixon, arrived during the same month. The third, Rev. Peter O'Neil, reached Sydney a little later. All three within a few years were pardoned, and were allowed to leave Australia. The Rev. Father Harold proceeded to the United States in 1810 and died in Dublin in 1830. The Rev. Father O'Neil was only two years in Australia. He returned to Ireland, and died there in 1846. The Rev. James Dixon left Sydney in 1808, and ended his days in Ireland in 1840. It is remarkable that the three companions in exile and misfortune lived to great ages. One was 85, the second 88, and the third 82.

Of these three Catholic priests, one only was allowed to exercise his functions as a minister of religion in Australia. The Rev. James Dixon was granted "conditional emancipation" by Governor Philip King early in April, 1803. Then, on April 21, Governor King issued a public proclamation in which he stated that it had been considered expedient, "in consequence of a communication from his Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies and War Department to grant unto the Reverend Mr. Dixon a conditional emancipation to enable him to exercise his clerical functions as a Roman Catholic priest, which he has qualified himself for by the regular and exemplary conduct he has manifested since his residence in the colony."

With this proclamation, which is dated April 19, 1803, there were published on April 21 a set of regulations to be observed by the Rev. Mr. Dixon and the Catholic congregation in this colony. Under these regulations, the Rev. James Dixon was allowed to perform his clerical duties once in three weeks at the settlements in Sydney, Parramatta, and the Hawkesbury, in rotation. In the "general orders" it was explained that, "to the end that strict decorum may be observed, a certain number of police will be stationed at and about the places appointed during the service." The last of the regulations ran: "Every person throughout the colony will observe that the law has sufficiently provided for the punishment of those who may disquiet or disturb any assembly of religious worship, or misuse any priest or teacher of any tolerated sect."

The First Mass

under the regulations published in the 'Government Gazette' was celebrated in the vicinity of the Circular Quay at nine o'clock on the morning of Sunday, May 15, 1803. On the following morning there was a Mass at Parramatta, and on the next Sunday a Mass at the Hawkesbury. The "Government Gazette" noticed where "the meetings," as they were styled, were to be held. No person was permitted to go out of his own district to attend these Sunday morning services, and the priest was "held responsible to the magistrate for his congregation going regularly and orderly to their respective homes after the offices were ended." No religious gatherings were allowed in the evening. The hour of "Divine service" was fixed at nine o'clock in the morning.

The official permission for attendance at Mass was revoked within 12 months. There had been a "rising" among the prisoners in March, 1804, and the Sunday "meetings" were discontinued on the ground that they were "gatherings of traitors." Yet it is recorded of the Rev. Mr. Dixon that when the prisoners rose in revolt, "he accompanied the commanding officer and exerted himself nobly on the side of order and humanity." The unappreciated peacemaker left Sydney in 1808.

From 1808 until 1817 the Catholics in New South Wales were without minister or ministrations. In 1817 the Very Rev. Jeremiah Francis Flynn arrived in Sydney. He had not been appointed by the Home Government, and Governor Macquarie would not recognise him or give him the desired permission to officiate as a priest. After a few months had passed this volunteer chaplain was put on board ship and sent back to Ireland. In 1819 two authorised Catholic chaplains were furnished with the requisite "appointment papers" by the Home Government. These two Irish priests, the Rev. John Joseph Therry and the Rev. Philip Conolly arrived in Sydney by the ship Janus on May 3, 1820. The credentials were accepted by Governor Macquarie, and both priests were put on the "salary list" at

£100 a year as recognised chaplains. The Rev. Father Conolly proceeded to Hobart and his companion remained in Sydney. On Monday, October 29, 1821, at the invitation of the Rev. Father Therry, Governor Macquarie laid the foundation stone of the

"First Roman Catholic Chapel"

in Australia. The "St. Mary's Chapel," which was commenced in 1821, developed into the St. Mary's Cathedral which was destroyed by fire in 1865. The Rev. James Dixon did not build any church or religious house and the honor of establishing the first "religious institution" connected with the Catholic Church is rightly claimed by the chaplain of 1821. The Rev. Philip Conolly, whose work as a missionary chaplain was confined to Tasmania, died in Hobart on August 3, 1839. The Rev. John Joseph Therry, who was made Archpriest, and who figures in Australian history as a remarkable personage, died at Balmain on May 25, 1864, in his 74th year.

Archdeacon John McEncroe, who arrived in 1832, Dr. William Bernard Ullathorne (1833), Archbishop John Bede Polding (1835), Archdeacon Rigney (1838), Bishop Francis Murphy, of Adelaide (1838), Archbishop Goold, of Melbourne (1838), and Bishop Wilson, of Hobart (1842), are counted among the ecclesiastics who have "built up" the Catholic Church in Australia. Archbishop Polding, who had charge of the See of Sydney from 1835 till his death in 1877, was succeeded by the Most Rev. Roger Bede Vaughan, who died while on a visit to England in 1883. Dr. Ullathorne, who brought the first nuns—the Sisters of Charity—to Sydney in 1838, and who largely helped Archbishop Polding in the work of establishing churches and schools, ended his days as Bishop of Birmingham, England, with the rank of Archbishop, in 1889. Since 1884 Cardinal Moran has been

Archbishop of Sydney.

Of the priests who were active in Church affairs in the Sydney diocese 50 years ago there is only one survivor—the Very Rev. Archpriest Sheehy, parish priest of Ryde. This venerable cleric was ordained in "old St. Mary's" 51 years ago. He was for many years Archbishop Polding's Vicar-General. The late Archdeacon Rigney was the senior member of the priesthood, his period of service in Australia covering 65 years.

Archbishop Murphy, of Hobart, and Bishop Murray, of Maitland, are the two veteran members of the present Australian hierarchy. Dr. Murphy, who has worn the mitre of a bishop 56 years, came from India to Tasmania in 1865. Bishop Murray was appointed to Maitland in the same year.

The spot on which the first Mass was celebrated 100 years ago is not known. All the traditions of the "nursery-stage" of the Catholic Church in Sydney cling about St. Mary's Cathedral. Of the first cathedral, which was commenced by Archpriest Therry, and completed by Archbishop Polding, nothing is left save the picturesque and time-worn front in College street. But the present cathedral building has associations which, to many Catholics, are full of "fond regrets and tender recollections." Part of the site was for a long time occupied by St. Joseph's Chapel, which was used while the first St. Mary's was in course of erection. The place is not less valued as having been the residence of "the first chaplain," and the first bishop. In this regard there seemed to be a singular fitness in the manifestation of Catholic sentiment which two years ago led to the removal of the remains of Archpriest Therry and Archbishop Polding from the Devonshire street and Petersham Cemeteries to St. Mary's Cathedral. The remains of these "old soldiers" of the Catholic Church now rest in the glamor rather than the gloom of the eastern aisle, with the groined stone roof like the outstretched wings of a carved angel over them. And with the Benedictine Bishop and the pioneer priest there are two other "faithful servants well remembered"—Archdeacon McEncroe and the Rev. Daniel Power, who came to Sydney in 1827, and who died at Parramatta in 1830. Now that it guards the dust of four of the ecclesiastics whose work stretched back to the early part of the nineteenth century, St. Mary's may be said to contain, as an "imperfect epic" in stone, all that is historically and pathetically interesting in connection with the growth and advancement of Catholicism in this part of the world.

At a representative meeting of the Catholic laity, held in the Central Club rooms, Melbourne, his Grace the Archbishop presided, and the questions of ways and means with regard to the proposed Cathedral Hall was discussed. A statement of receipts and expenditure was presented, which showed that the sum of £4117 8s 10d had been subscribed up to date, and the debit balance amounted to about £3000. The estimated cost of the hall would be over £5000. It was unanimously decided to proceed with the erection of the hall as soon as possible. In reply to Mr. Slattery, his Grace the Archbishop said that non-Catholics would be admitted to the club rooms. The announcement was received with applause. His Grace briefly outlined the aims and objects of the club rooms. The boys would be instructed and provided with suitable recreation, and nothing left undone to make the club rooms as attractive as possible to the young people of both sexes. In regard to the men's club, literary and social advantages would be placed within the reach of the members, who would have the privilege of introducing country friends as honorary members of the club.