

FATHER MATT KEEFFE

FATHER MATT KEEFFE, who is buried here in Clough, the parish church of Aghaboe, in front of the church he built, was one of the great old priests of the diocese and his memory, together with that of his friend, Father Tom O'Shea, will long be preserved in Irish history. He was born in Higginstown, Clara, in July 1811. At an early age he was sent by his parents to Burrell's Hall in James's Street, and in 1831 he passed on to the Diocesan College at Birchfield where, after a distinguished course, he was ordained priest in September, 1836. His first appointment was to Gowran, where he worked for two years. In 1838 he was appointed to the chair of Theology in Birchfield College, and when the new college of St. Kieran's opened he was transferred there. "His lectures were remarkable for their simplicity, deep research and sound judgment."

In 1843 he was sent to the Callan mission where his genius, his ability and his eloquence were displayed in a remarkable way. Of a keenly sensitive nature, his heart was grieved at the scenes which he witnessed every day around him. His ministrations brought him in contact with poverty and disease. He heard with his own ears the tales of woe which the poor tenants, whom tyrannical landlords had hurled in thousands from their holdings to the roadside, related to him and he saw with pity these stalwart people dying by hundreds of hunger and disease. In 1848 Father Tom O'Shea was appointed C.C. at Callan. In the autumn of 1849 the Callan curates determined to found a society to give confidence to the disheartened people by bringing a class less dependent on the landlord—the local shopkeepers and professional men—to their aid.

On the 29th of October, 1849, the "Callan Tenant Protection Society" was established. Its objects were specified to be "Fair Rents, Tenant Right, and Employment"; and the member's card bore as motto the famous saying of Thomas Drummond, "Property has its duties as well as its rights," and the principle recognised in the Bible as the basis of agricultural contracts—that "the husband-

man who labours must be the first partaker of the fruits." Father Tom O'Shea was masculine in frame, frank and prompt in utterance, genial and cordial in expression, of dauntless intrepidity; his comrade, Father Matt Keeffe, possessed gifts which were the complement of these qualities. Thoughtful, circumspect, forecasting, he estimated the difficulties to be encountered, and pondered on the next step in advance. The Callan Protection Society soon attracted attention. Tenant Protection Societies were formed in other districts in Kilkenny and soon after in Tipperary, Limerick and Waterford. By the spring of 1850 there were societies all over the country, even in the far North. Soon after, the National Tenant League was formed—the League of North and South—but the Callan Curates continued to take an active part both locally and nationally. Unfortunately the treachery of Sadlier and Keogh and others brought about the collapse of the League in 1855. In 1855 also Father Matt Keeffe was changed to Dunnamagan. In 1867 he was appointed to the parish of Aghaboe where he spent the rest of his life.

He continued to advocate the cause of the tenants as a member of the Queen's County Independent Club. The present church is the great work of the early years of his pastoral care. On its foundation stone, laid July 17th, 1871, is the following inscription: *Hujus ecclesiae sub invocatione S. Canici lapidem angularem posuit Matth. Keeffe, Agaboen Parochus die xvii Julii A.D. MDCCCLXXI, Pio IX Pont. Max. feliciter reqnante; Edw. Walsh, Epo. Ossoriensi.*

When after great labour and expense, the church was built and roofed in, one of the side-walls gave way, bringing down the whole edifice with it. In spite of this great disaster the courageous priest again set about the work of rebuilding, and fairly soon the parish church of St. Canice was completed. It was solemnly dedicated by Most Rev. Dr. P. F. Moran, Bishop of Ossory, on Sunday, 4th November, 1877. It was Father Matt Keeffe's deliberate intention to build a church really worthy of St. Canice of Aghaboe and you will agree, I think, that he has done so.

He was always held in high esteem by his fellow clergy.



CLOUGH CHURCH

In 1871, when the parish priests assembled to elect a Co-adjutor Bishop to assist Dr. Walsh, the aged bishop, the three names submitted for election were Rev. Matt Keeffe, Monsignor Moran and Dean McDonald. In 1873 he was made Canon of Killemary, a Doctor of Divinity about 1880, and Precentor of the Chapter in 1883.

He enjoyed vigorous health during his long life and died November 29, 1887. He is buried in front of the Parish Church underneath a horizontal flag inscribed—Beneath lie

the remains of the Very Rev. Matt Canon Keeffe, D.D., P.P., a fervent patriot, a gifted preacher and a model priest. He died November 20th, 1887, aged 77 years. May the Lord have mercy on his soul. Amen.

The high altar erected by the parishioners has the inscription in raised Lombardic letters: "Pray for the soul of Very Rev. Matt Canon Keeffe, D.D., P.P., Aghaboe, who died November 29th, 1887."

The stained-glass window over the high altar was presented by Mrs. James Phelan, San Francisco. Mr. Phelan was born in the parish; the altar was erected 1875.

Another stained-glass window is the gift of William Delaney of Minnesota, late of Boherard, 1895.

The side altar of carved oak belonged to Richard Fitzpatrick, and, after his death, was presented by his brother, Lord Castletown. Lately it has been replaced by a new altar.

The old church was built by Father Maurice Delaney about 1770. In the church were monuments to Fathers Bergin, Kavanagh, Heany and Dowling, P.P.'s of Aghaboe.

In the mortuary chapel, erected in connection with the old church by the late Lord Castletown (i.e., before 1900), is a splendid altar tomb in which is buried his only brother, Richard Wilson Fitzpatrick. Family coat of arms—a saltire on a black background—and over it a chief with three fleur-de-lis.

"Pray for the soul of Richard Wilson Fitzpatrick, Esqr., of Grantstown Manor, Queen's County, late of the Grenadier Guards, Deputy Lieutenant and Justice of the Peace for that County, who died on the XXIInd day of Nov., MDCCCL, aged XXXIX years. He was the only brother of the Rt. Honble. John Wilson Fitzpatrick, one of her Majesty's Privy Council in Ireland and Member of Parliament for Queen's County."
