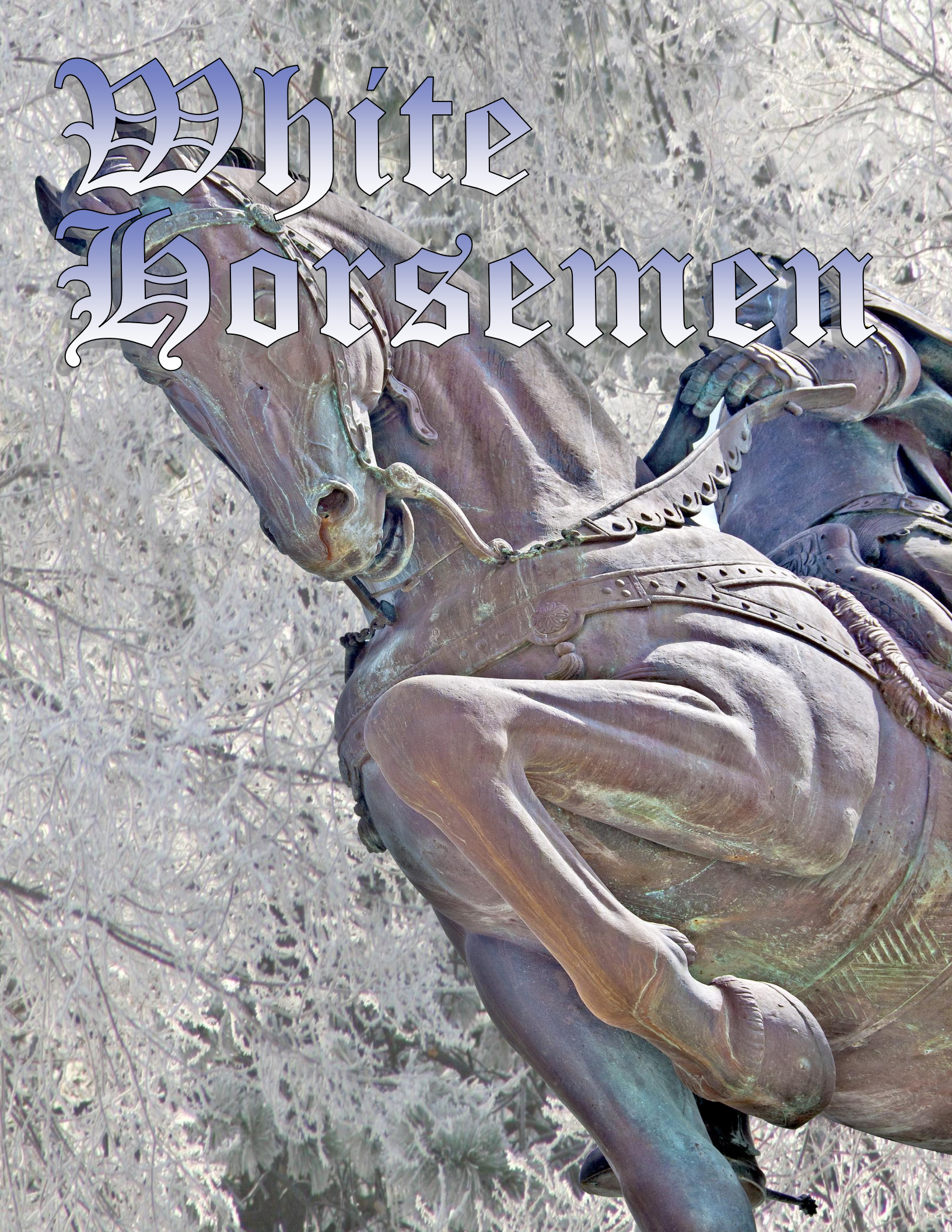


White Horsemen





White Horsemen

Author Unknown

COVER ART: White Horseman photo courtesy of www.BigStockPhoto.com

“WHITE HORSEMEN”

By:

M. P. LINEHAN

*Ah, see the fair chivalry come, the companions of Christ!
White Horsemen, who ride on white horses, the Knights of God!
They, for their Lord and their Lover who sacrificed
All save the sweetness of treading where He first trod!*

—Lionel Johnson

MOST REVEREND DOCTOR RICHARD CREAGH ARCHBISHOP OF ARMAGH 1525 — 1585

It is remarkable that County Limerick gave two Archbishops to the Irish Church in the sixteenth century and that both these Archbishops were destined to suffer martyrdom. Six years after the birth of Dr. Dermot O’Hurley in the parish of Knockea, Dr. Richard Creagh was born in the city of Limerick. His parents were pious middle-class people, his father being a merchant who trafficked in spices and saffron, the latter being then very much in demand for dyeing wool. When young Creagh showed signs of developing a vocation for the priesthood everything possible was done by his relations and friends to dissuade him from a course that would possibly lead him to persecution and an early death. However, he persevered, and we find him in 1551 in Louvain studying for the priesthood. He proved a brilliant student and became zealous as a preacher, a teacher, and a

writer. On his ordination, he returned to his native city with the idea of founding a school for the edification of the Irish gentry but Providence decreed otherwise. He was ordered to proceed to Rome.

When he arrived there, His Holiness the Pope informed him that he was to be appointed Archbishop of Armagh and he was consecrated on Low Sunday, 1564. At midsummer, he left the Holy City to take over the care of his archdiocese, and having traveled as far as Antwerp found it impossible to get a ship for Ireland. He therefore returned to Louvain for a while. When eventually he did succeed in starting on the sea journey a violent storm necessitated the ship entering Dover. From there Dr. Creagh started out for London and arrived at that city in time to witness the arraignment of the saintly Bishop of London, Edmund Bonner, for his refusal to take the Oath of Supremacy. From London, Dr. Creagh proceeded to Drogheda, reaching that latter city on January 18th, 1565. Within an hour of his landing, he was arrested while in the act of offering the Holy Sacrifice in a nearby monastery. He was sent back to London and forced to submit to an interrogation by Sir William Cecil in Westminster Hall. From there he was taken through the streets of London to the Tower amid the scoffs and insults of the London mob, and was placed in a most loathsome dungeon in complete darkness. He was kept there for some time, but was eventually moved to a more lightsome and commodious dungeon. He was forced to submit to a further interrogation before the Recorder of London on Saint Patrick's Day and was informed by the Lieutenant of the Tower that if he were prepared to recognize Queen Elizabeth as head of the Church his archbishopric would be restored to him. Dr. Creagh's answer was that the Catholic Faith was dearer to him than life itself. Shortly after this, he found it possible to walk out of the Tower in circumstances that recalled Saint Peter's escape. For three days, he wandered through London although there was an outcry for him

throughout the city and a reward of 300 ducats offered for information leading to his re-arrest. He obtained passage in a boat to the continent and eventually reached Louvain.

After a short stay in Louvain, he proceeded to Spain hoping through the good offices of the Spanish ambassador in London to get permission from the English authorities to proceed to his Archdiocese. While there, he received an order from Rome to proceed to Ireland. By August of 1566, he was back in Ulster and for the next seven months performed his pastoral duties. On the 20th of April, 1567, he was betrayed into the hands of the English by one O'Shaughnessy for a considerable sum of money. He was brought to trial before a Dublin jury who found him "not guilty" and declared for his acquittal. The jurymen were immediately imprisoned and heavily fined for their decision. Yet, the Archbishop was not released from custody. After close confinement in Dublin Castle for six months, he again managed to escape. His spell of liberty was, however, short. He was recaptured, transferred to England, and again lodged in the Tower, where he remained for the following seventeen years. Even from there, through the instrumentality of trusted agents, he was able to exercise partial control of his archdiocese, appointing delegates and vicars, settling disputes, and issuing faculties. In the tower itself, he presided over theological conferences of his priestly fellow-prisoners from which it was possible to give direction to the English Catholics on such matters as the oath of allegiance and attendances at heretical services.

On one occasion, the Lieutenant of the Tower attempted to compel all Catholic prisoners to attend heretical services in the Tower Chapel, and strapping Dr. Creagh to a chair had him taken bodily into the chapel. When the preacher began to attack the Catholic Faith, Dr. Creagh refuted him and was so forcible in his interruptions that his captors had to take him out of the chapel as they had brought him in. Then he

was accused of having committed rape against the daughter of an officer of the Tower, but when the girl was asked to testify against him she declared that he was innocent, that he was a saint and had never as much as touched the hem of her garment.

On the 16th of October, 1585, Dr. Creagh died from the effects of poison that had been concealed in his food, having first received the Last Sacraments from a fellow-prisoner, Father Creighton. He lies buried within the precincts of the Tower.

DOCTOR BOETIUS EGAN, O.F.P.

BISHOP OF ROSS

Buttevant is today a quiet country town on the main Cork-Limerick trunk road, midway between Mallow and Rathluirc. It was not so quiet on Wednesday, February 9th, 1641, for on that day there rode into it the army of the Irish Catholic Confederation under Lord Mountgarret. The chroniclers, telling of this event, describe Buttevant as an “ould towne belonginge to the Earls of Barrymore, in the Barony of Orrery, where there was a great and ancient residency of abbots, friars, and priests.” Occupying the northeastern corner of this “ould towne” was the large and extensive Franciscan Friary of Saint Thomas the Martyr, which had been founded in 1251 by David Oge de Barry, Lord Justice of Ireland. In 1570, that Friary and its property had been leased to Sir James Barry, Viscount Buttevant. As the Franciscan records in the Bibliotheque Royale at Brussels go to show, these Barrys were good Catholics and as far as they could, favored the Friars. In Queen Elizabeth’s reign, however, the Friars were expelled from the Friary, but they continued to live in the neighborhood, and in 1603 reoccupied their convent and repaired it. The Guardian of the Friary at the time of the arrival in Buttevant of Lord Mountgarrett’s army was

Frater Boetius Eganus. He and his Community had a hearty welcome for Lord Mountgarrett and, when the latter's army took the road again for Mallow, the records say the army left Buttevant "with ten thousand prayers and benedictions from the Friars for its success."

In 1642, when representatives of the Irish Catholics met at Kilkenny to found the Confederation, Friar Egan was one of the delegates, and we find his signature appended to Acts agreed to by the Confederation dated the 10th, 11th, and 12th of May, 1642. He acted as chaplain to the army of Owen Roe O'Neill and at Benburb he pronounced absolution over the kneeling army immediately before it advanced to its brilliant victory. After the battle he was delegated to carry the banner taken from Munro's Scots to the Papal Nuncio Rinuccini who was then at Limerick. Friar Egan was a native of Duhallow, in County Cork, and received his priestly education in Spain.

In 1649, Cromwell arrived in Ireland and Friar Egan had by now been appointed Bishop of Ross. In January, 1650, Cromwell captured Mallow Castle, and having brought all the country from Mallow to the Suir under his control he turned over the remainder of Cork County to the tender mercies of Lord Broghill. Broghill had been trained in the school of murder and raping, which had earned for Morough O'Brien, Baron of Inchiquin, the title of Morough of the Burnings. Under his tutelage all Cork county was laid waste and the Catholics were hunted with savage ferocity. Bishop Egan was forced to go "on the run" in the more distant and abandoned parts of his diocese. One day returning to the lonely retreat in which he had for months lain concealed in company with some Catholic soldiers, he was overtaken by a troop of Broghill's cavalry and captured at the ford of Sullane, near Macroom. Broghill was at this time investing the castle of Carrigadrohid on the Lee. He had the Bishop brought to him and offered him not only pardon, but also bribes and promise of patronage

and security if he would renounce the Catholic Faith. Friar Egan rejected these offers with disdain. He was then brought to Carrigadrohid and Broghill offered him his life if he would persuade the garrison to surrender. When Brother Egan arrived before the castle, instead of doing as Broghill wished, he exhorted the garrison to fight to the death. He was immediately abandoned to the fury of Broghill's soldiery. His arms were severed from his body. He was then dragged along the ground to a neighboring tree and was hanged from one of its branches with the reins of his own horse. His martyrdom occurred on the 6th of May, 1650. The Louvain record of the Franciscan Order thus briefly notices this great man: "*Pater Boetius Egan, Momoniensis, Epus. Rossensis orthodoxae fidei strenuus defensor et assertor; pro qua an, 1650, glorioso martyrie vitae finem et coronidem imposuit.*" The Rinuccini MS commemorating his death, styles him a veritable seraph of the Seraphic Order, and a most glorious martyr."

MOST REVEREND ROCHE MACGEOGHEGAN

BISHOP OF KILDARE

1580 – 1644

Not all the Catholic Bishops who, by their zeal and energy for the Catholic Faith in the Elizabethan-Stuart period, earned the crown of martyrdom were granted that crown. One of these, the saintly Dominican who is the subject of the present article, died full of years in Kilbeggan in 1644 and was buried with all due civil and religious honor in his own cathedral. He was born about the year 1580, and at baptism was called after his father, Ross, who was the chief of the sect of the MacGeoghegans of Moycashel or Kinelfiacha. His mother was the daughter of Dempsey, Viscount of Glenmalure, and his birth is said to have taken place at the Dempseys at Clunagoon ancestral home.

Like many Irishmen of his generation, young MacGeoghegan was sent to the continent to be educated, his Alma Mater being the Irish College at Lisbon. On the death of his father he was summoned home to administer the paternal estate, but he chose, instead, to proceed to the University of Coimbra to complete his education, and while there he joined the Order of Saint Dominic, his name in religion being Rocchus de Sancta Cruce. For eight years he was attached to the Dominican Monastery at Salamanca. At the end of that period, the General of his Order being anxious to revive the spirit of the Order in Ireland, selected Father Roche MacGeoghegan for this mission.

The Dominican Order in Ireland at that time had reached its lowest ebb, having only four Fathers in what had once been a most flourishing province. Even these could not carry on a community life but spent their time assisting as best they could the secular clergy in the various dioceses. Father MacGeoghegan in a short time set up several Dominican houses in different parts of the country and founded a novitiate at Orlake, in the barony of Costellagh in the County Mayo. His activities were not long in bringing him to the notice of the government. He was reported as an emissary of Rome, his name was put in the *Hue and Cry* and a certain Captain Lyons was sent to Mayo to arrest him. He managed to escape from the west to Dublin where he labored assiduously for the salvation of souls, his labors resulting in several remarkable conversions. As a result of private conferences that he organized, Sir Edward Herbert, Baronet and member of the Privy Council, with all his family was converted to the Catholic Faith. Sir Arthur Blundell, Vice-Treasurer, through Father MacGeoghegan's preaching, declared that "only in the Catholic Church was there hope of salvation," and on his deathbed received the last sacraments from the saintly Dominican. When all this became known, a second writ for his arrest was issued, but he escaped in disguise from Dublin to the

West. It was customary at this time for great crowds to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Well of Saint Brigid in the county of Roscommon. Father MacGeoghegan took advantage of these gatherings to instruct vast numbers in their faith. Judge Gosport was present at one of his sermons, resulting in his resigning his Judgeship, with its salary of £400 a year, and was received into the Church. The Provost of Trinity College, Richard O'Donal, son of the Lord of Duharegan, being moved by the exhortations of Father MacGeoghegan, renounced the Provostship and was reconciled to the Church. The list of Father MacGeoghegan's converts includes the Protestant Vicar—General of Kildare, Thaddeus O'Donellan. The Government was now alarmed at the result of his activities. It was declared an act of felony to harbor him, and a reward of £200 was offered for his arrest. The chase became so hot it was thought desirable that he should leave the country. He resigned his office of Provincial and proceeded to Belgium where for many years he labored in building a convent of his Order for Irish students' at Louvain. In 1629, he was promoted to the vacant see of Kildare.

In that year there were in the whole diocese of Kildare only three native priests. The new bishop energetically set about remedying this state of affairs. He revived the old schools and in a few years the ancient diocese of Saint Brigid had a numerous clergy, second to none in the island for learning and piety. Through the years of his episcopate, Bishop MacGeoghegan was continually subject to persecution by the minions of the government and dogged by their spies. Again, he was forced to go "on the run." To all these sufferings he added many acts of voluntary self-denial, frequently slept on the bare ground, and otherwise mortifying himself. He sold everything he possessed to relieve the distress of the poor, and it was his custom to distribute food and other alms with his own hands. He restored and

consecrated the ancient cathedral of Kildare and performed there the sacred ceremonies of religion with solemn pomp. As has been said earlier, he died at Kilbeggan in 1644 after a lingering illness. In his will be bequeathed to the poor the price of three horses, the only earthly wealth he possessed. He was mainly instrumental in restoring the Order of Saint Dominic in Ireland at a period during which the heroism of its martyrs was to shed fresh luster on the Irish Church.

REVEREND THADDEUS MORIARTY, O.P.

1653

The Dominican Priory of Holy Cross, Tralee, was originally built and endowed by John Fitzgerald, Prince of Desmond, in 1243, that is seven hundred and three years ago. John Desmond and his son Maurice were interred in the Abbey in 1261. Three hundred years later another John, Earl of Desmond, died as a Dominican of Holy Cross. In 1540, the Priory was suppressed by Henry VII, but its final desecration and ruin was the work of Cromwell's soldiery in 1652. By 1756, there were only two Dominican Fathers in the vicinity of Tralee. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, a small band of the fathers attempted to establish a community at Knockanure but was asked by the Bishop of Kerry to take up parochial duties in various parts of the diocese. Then, in 1861, Dr. David Moriarty, Bishop of Kerry, restored the Dominicans to Tralee and on September 14th, 1871, the present church was opened. During the seven centuries of its existence, many distinguished names have been listed on the role of Holy Cross Priory, not the least distinguished of these being that of Father Thaddeus Moriarty, who was hanged in Killarney on October 15th, 1653. Father Moriarty was born at Castle Drum in the vicinity of Tralee. The date of his birth is uncertain, but in 1629, he was a student in Spain. In 1651, he was prior

of Holy Cross. That was the year that saw the fall of Limerick and the death of the Cromwellian, Ireton. He was succeeded by Lieutenant-General Ludlow, who made himself responsible for the “pacifications” of Kerry. The execution of all priests and friars was part of this plan of “pacification” and Prior Thaddeus Moriarty was one of the victims. The following is an extract from the panegyric on Father Moriarty by another famous Kerry Dominican, Father Dominic O’Daly.

“He was a man distinguished for his knowledge of theology, and also for his virtues and noble character. Captured by the heretics (who for a long time previous had known him by reputation), never did a bride go more joyfully to her nuptials than he went to prison, nor was a hungry man more anxious for a banquet than he was for the gibbet. On hearing that he was sentenced to die, he pressed and kissed the hands of the messenger who brought the news, and distributed money among his jailers and the soldiers who were to lead him to the gallows. Before being hanged, he lifted the minds of the Catholics who were standing around with a beautiful discourse on the excellence of the Catholic religion, the inconstancy of human life, the uncertainty of the hour of death, and of martyrdom as the most secure road to Heaven. What filled the minds of the onlookers with wonder and admiration was his countenance after life was extinct. Though wan and emaciated in appearance, owing to his long detention in prison, he seemed to be transfigured after death and even to emit rays of light, so that the very executioners confessed that it was like the face of an angel. He indeed gave a singular example of humility and patience during his whole life and was never known to be angry. He showed such patience during his suffering in prison that the heretics said he was a fool, for he despised life so much that when he was stripped and flogged he patiently bore it all and did not even give the slightest sign that he felt pain at all, being led just like a lamb to slaughter. He answered all the

questions put to him by the judge with so much freedom and candor that even his enemies confessed that he knew not how to tell a lie.

When the judge asked him why he did not obey the edict of the government, he answered that he was bound rather to obey God and those who held God's place in his regard, those who had commanded him to exercise his priestly functions. The judge's wife warned the judge to have nothing to do with the blood of this innocent man, but he said he was compelled to shed it otherwise he would expose himself to danger. Indeed, in every way, the holy man showed himself an apostle and a true disciple of Christ, following in His footsteps with all the marks of the true minister eloquently described by Saint Augustine. He was put to death on October 15th, 1653."

One of the most treasured possessions of the present Dominican Priory in Tralee is an old chalice that bears the inscription, "Orate pro Carolo Sughrue qui me fieri fecit pro Conventu Traliensi—Priore Thadeo O'Moriarty, 1651."

"Pray for Charles Sughrue who had me made for the Tralee Convent Prior Thadeus O'Moriarty, 1651."

This chalice was found accidentally by Dr. David Moriarty, Bishop of Kerry, who restored it to the Dominicans when they returned to Tralee in 1861.

REVEREND DANIEL O'BRIEN

DEAN OF FERNS

1655

*"They knelt around the Cross divine,
The matron and the maid."*

These are the first lines of a poem describing the holocaust of Catholic lives offered up in Wexford in October, 1649, following the occupation of that city by the army of Cromwell. "It was the 11th of October, 1649," writes the venerable bishop of the diocese of Ferns, Dr. Nicholas French.

"On that lamentable day my native city of Wexford, abounding in wealth, ships and merchandise, was destroyed by the sword, and given a prey to the infuriated soldiers by Cromwell, that English pest of hell. There, before God's altar, fell many sacred victims, holy priests of the Lord; others, who were seized outside the church, were scourged with whips; others were hanged; some were arrested and bound with chains; and others were put to death by various most cruel tortures. The best blood of the citizens was shed; the very squares were inundated with it, and there was hardly a house that was not defiled with carnage and full of wailing. In my own palace, a youth, hardly sixteen years of age—an amiable boy—as also my gardener and sacristan, were cruelly butchered; and the chaplain, whom I caused to remain behind me at home, was transpierced with six mortal wounds."

One of the priests who escaped from the bloody shambles was the Rev. Daniel O'Brien, Dean of the diocese. He had been educated and ordained in the Irish College of Compostella and ever afterwards cherished such an affection for Spain and its people that he was popularly known as Father Daniel the Spaniard. He was a zealous prelate and had a remarkable number of conversions of Protestantism

to his credit. He led a most holy life and so won the affections of his flock that they would have willingly shed their blood in his defense.

After the fall of Wexford, he lay hidden in the house of a nobleman in the neighborhood but continued stealthily to exercise his sacred ministry. Cromwell's spies were constant in their endeavors to ferret out the hiding places of the Catholic clergy. They noticed a number of persons proceeding to the house where Father O'Brien had refuge, and surmising that the Holy Sacrifice was being celebrated, they approached unperceived in a boat and threatened death to any person who left the house.

The officer in charge then commanded that the priest should be delivered up or otherwise he would order his soldiers to shoot down all those in the house. At this, the venerable Dean came out from the room where Holy Mass had been offered and addressed the officer saying, "Why do you trouble those good people who have done nothing wrong? I am the priest who has offered up the Holy Sacrifice; if that is a fault, it is all mine." He was at once seized, and everything he had was taken from him. The officer was particularly insistent in obtaining the chalice. He filled it with ale and triumphantly drank the ale. It is related that he had scarcely done so, when he fell down in a terrible paroxysm, roaring and moaning aloud in an agony of pain. It is further related that the holy priest, seeing his misery, and filled with compassion for him, made the Sign of the Cross over him and his pain was immediately relieved. The officer returned the chalice to Father O'Brien, and ordering his soldiers to march away, he allowed Father O'Brien to remain unmolested.

In the succeeding years, the venerable Dean was repeatedly arrested and thrown into prison, but though the influence of some of the friends of the Governor of Wexford the Catholics were able to secure his

release. Finally in 1655, sentence of death was passed upon him. Because of his long sufferings and his repeated imprisonments, he had become quite disabled and almost unable to stand. He received the intelligence of his forthcoming martyrdom with unfeigned delight and the night before his execution his strength returned in almost miraculous manner so he was able to walk erect to the scaffold.

From that striking pulpit, he addressed the assembled crowd, exhorting them to be devoted children of the Faith and of the Holy Church and then laid down his life for his Master on Holy Saturday, April 14th, 1655. Two other priests were hanged with him—the Reverend Luke Bergin of the Cistercian Order and the Reverend James Murphy, a secular priest. The three had been tried by a jury of protestants who returned a verdict that no crime had been proved against them, but the judge, having informed the jury that there no greater crime than to be a Catholic Priest, a verdict of guilty was immediately pronounced. The bodies of the three holy clerics were buried within the ruins of Saint Francis' Monastery outside the walls of the city, and according to a manuscript *History of the Irish Bishops*, by Dr. John Lynch, a brilliant light was repeatedly seen emanating from the spot where they were interred.

JOHN JAMES MURPHY, BLACK EAGLE OF THE NORTH

BEGINNING IN CORK

The summer of 1845 was a fair one, so fair that the harvest of that year promised to be the richest gathered for a generation. Suddenly, in one short month, in one week it might be said, the withering breath of a demon seemed to sweep the land, blasting all in its path. In one night whole tracts of potato growth changed from smiling luxuriance to a

shriveled and blackened waste. Hunger and famine stalked the land. People traveled from rural areas to the towns and cities to buy food in the markets.

Many fell in the streets never to rise again. Ravenous creatures prowled round barns and storehouses stealing corn and potatoes and cabbage and turnips—anything they might eat. The very fields had to be watched by a man, gun in hand, or the seed would be rooted up and devoured raw. Into this scene came the Established Church of Ireland with its offer of food and soup if only the hungry would accept membership of that church. If in such circumstances there were perverts, can they be blamed? Take the parish of Goleen in Cork City. Here the parson was also the local landlord and a bigot. He had a double lever, the fear of starvation and the fear of eviction. Every day saw more and more defections from the Catholic Church. Then one day there rode into the parish on a fine black hunter a new priest. He set about providing food and plenty of it for the starving people. The loyal Catholics were heartened, the leakage was stopped, and those who had fallen away were reconciled to their Church. And what a reconciliation! Up to the gates of the parsonage they were marched and there, where the devil's work had been done, it was undone. So did Father John Murphy, Black Eagle of the North, beat the soupers of Goleen.

MOVING ON TO CANADA

The scene changes to a clearing in the virgin forests of Canada. There a French-Canadian priest has pitched his camp. He has no flour to make Hosts for the Holy Sacrifice and then down the little stream that bordered the clearing there drifted a birch-bark canoe paddled by what he believed was an indian. The Indian shared his flour with the priest

so he could make hosts. The priest was surprised at the soft cadences of the Indian's English. No wonder, for the Indian was born not on the banks of the Saint Lawrence but on the banks of the Cork Lee. It was John James Murphy, one time an officer in the navy, now a hunter in Canada. In the course of his journeys, the Corkman had fallen in with a tribe of indians and had thrown in his lot with them. They initiated him into their tribe, crowned him with feathers, and dressed him in all the accouterments of an indian brave. To them and to all of the Five Nations, he was known as the Black Eagle of the North.

In Black Eagle's wanderings through the forests, he came one day upon a green glade in the center of which was a statue of the Blessed Virgin. There in that silent glade there came back to him the faith and the teaching of his childhood. Perhaps the spirit of some martyred Jesuit was hovering around that neglected shrine.

So, he returned to his tribe, washed off his war paint, relinquished his chieftain's features, and started off on a long trek, down the Hudson River, across the broad Atlantic, over the European continent to Rome, to commence his studies for the priesthood.

ORDINATION IN ROME

It was a red-letter day for the group of young priests. Yesterday they had been ordained. This was the morning of their first Mass. Among them was the one-time midshipman, Black Eagle of the North, now Father John Murphy. He had nobody to help him to say his First Mass, so he rang the bell that was placed outside the vestry door. There, several older priests were waiting to help the newly ordained. The first of them, a very old man, who had been reading his office when the bell rang, stood up and accompanied Father Murphy to the altar. They both bowed to the Cross, mounted the steps, and then looked at one

another in that side chapel in Saint Peter's. The old priest, a retired French Canadian missionary was that same missionary to whom Black Eagle of the North had given wheaten flour in the heart of the Canadian forest to make Hosts for that same Sacrifice that he himself was now about to offer in the very center of Christendom.

CORK AGAIN

Cork today has many monuments to the zeal and charity of Father John Murphy. He was responsible for the founding of the Mercy Hospital in 1857. He brought the French Sisters of Charity to the North Infirmary and found the money that built their Church and Convent. He was responsible for building the lovely church of Saints Peter and Paul. He was appointed Archdeacon of Cork in 1874 and in March, 1883, he went to his eternal reward.

May he rest in peace.

MOST REVEREND JOHN MACHALE ARCHBISHOP OF TUAM

BOYHOOD

John MacHale was born in Tobbernarine, a village on the eastern slopes of Mount Nevin in County Mayo, on Quinquagesima Sunday in the year 1791. He died in the Archbishop's House, Tuam, on November 7th, 1881. His long life, therefore, coincided with some of the most stirring events in recent Irish history and his part in those events was no unworthy one. He was seven years old when Humbert's French landed in Killala and an ineradicable impression was left on his boyish mind by the fact that the priest who had

baptized him and whose Mass he had often attended, Father Conroy, was arrested for the assistance he had given the French. Father Conroy was then tried and hanged on a tree in Castlebar.

EDUCATION

Young MacHale's education began at a hedge-school at Lahardane. Here he learned to read and write English and acquired an elementary knowledge of Latin. In his later years he told that at the age of five or six he wore a piece of wood around his neck on which notches were cut by his parents whenever he was overheard speaking Irish at home, and for which he was punished by his teacher when he reached school. It should be noted that this was a "hedge-school" practice. This particular story has often been quoted as evidence of the means taken by the later national school system to kill the Irish language.

John showed so much ability at the hedge-school that rumors of it reached the ears of Dr. Dominick Bellew, Bishop of Killala. The Bishop's interest in the boy was raised and, in 1807, he nominated John as a bursar in Maynooth College. In those days, there were neither buses, trains, or even stagecoaches connecting Maynooth with the West of Ireland. Young John MacHale traveled the long journey on horseback. His college life was so successful that even before his ordination he was selected to fill the Chair of Dogmatic Theology during the temporary absence of the professor. He was ordained priest on 26 July, 1814, and the following August was appointed lecturer to the Chair of Dogmatic Theology. He continued on the staff of Maynooth College until 1825.

HIEROPHILUS

The British Government had endowed in 1814 the Kildare Place Society to assist popular schools with grants and to establish model schools. In the schools so assisted all religious teaching was to be excluded, but the Bible without notes or commentaries, was to be used as a schoolbook in the higher classes. In theory, the schools were non-denominational; in practice, the system was one of thinly-veiled proselytism. Dr. Doyle of Kildare and Leighlin, the famous "J.K.L." and Daniel O'Connell had already attacked the activities of the society. They were now joined by Professor MacHale who, under the pen name of "Hierophilus," addressed a letter to the Catholic clergy of Ireland warning them of the insidious nature of the methods of the society. This letter was the forerunner of many others of the same type and in the same strain and they gave evidence of the coming of a new type of Catholic priest who would no longer be content to exist on sufferance and in silence but who would speak out boldly in defense of Catholic rights and privileges. They were the beginnings too of Dr. MacHale's role in the creation of an education system that would be acceptable to Catholic Ireland. His contribution was not small. His attack on and criticisms of the national system of education were primarily responsible for bringing into being the present system of primary education, a system that is not a state system but a state-aided system specially suited to the beliefs and traditions of the people. Dr. MacHale left his mark not only in the field of primary education but also in that of secondary and university education. He introduced the Franciscan Brothers, the Irish Christian Brothers, and the Mercy Nuns into his Archdiocese. He condemned the proposals of the government as embodied in the university scheme known as the Queen's Colleges, and played a very big part in creation of the Catholic University.

ECCLESIASTICAL CAREER

Professor MacHale was appointed Co-Adjutor Bishop of Killala in March, 1825, and succeeded to the See on the death of Bishop Waldron in 1834. During these years, he was responsible for building the cathedral in Ballina. A month later, he was nominated to the vacant archdiocese of Tuam. During his long occupation of this historic metropolitan see, he spent himself in the spiritual and material needs of his flock earning from O'Connell the title, "Lion of the fold of Judah." Even during his lifetime, his white marble statue subscribed for by the clergy of the archdiocese was erected outside his cathedral. It was unveiled by A. M. Sullivan, who said in the course of the unveiling address:

"As the eagle may gaze on the sun, so may the eye of John of Tuam look into the whole of his past life, and find no inconsistency there to dazzle or dim its vision, no public act that he can regret or wish blotted out."

His figure was almost legendary in the Ireland of his day. "As far back as the living memory of man extends," wrote The Times in his obituary notice, "His name has been identified with the most stirring events in the political life of his country."

Nuàla Costelloe, his biographer, thus sums up his life's work:

"All his energies and all his talents had been devoted unsparingly to the moral and material welfare of his people. His successes were those of a strong man and his mistakes those of an honest one. He earned the gratitude of his country for his over a half century fight for her liberties and independence and the people of his own archdiocese did well to inscribe his statue, 'Connacia Grata.' "

CANON SHEEHAN OF DONERAILE

On Rosary Sunday, October 5th, 1913, the Angelus was ringing in Doneraile. In the Bridge House, the parish priest lay dying. He heard the bell, and being told it was the Angelus, remarked, "It is the passing bell." In a few minutes, he would ask the question inscribed on his memorial cross, "Where dwellest thou, Rabbi?" By his passing, Doneraile lost a beloved pastor, his country a great Irishman, and literature the most outstanding ornament of his time.

The life story of Canon P. A. Sheehan can be told in a few lines. Born in Mallow on March 17th, 1852, he was educated in Fermoy diocesan college and Saint Patrick's College, Maynooth. Ordained in the Cathedral, Cork, on April 18th, 1857, he was loaned to the diocese of Plymouth until 1877. Recalled to his native diocese of Cloyne, he served as a curate in Mallow and Cobh; and in 1894 was appointed parish priest of Doneraile.

Perhaps it happened this way, to quote Daddy Dan of My New Curate, "The bishop sent for me and said with what I would call a tone of pity or contempt, but he was incapable of either, for he was the essence of charity and sincerity, "Father Dan, you are a bit of a litterateur, I understand. Kilronan is vacant. You'll have a plenty time for poetizing and dreaming there. What do you say to it?"

To a priest of Father Sheehan's romantic and literary turn of mind, the parish to which he was appointed was in many ways ideal. Situated at the western end of that narrow stretch between the Nagle Mountains and the Ballyhoura Hills, which, tradition says, the mythical Mogh Ruith received as a reward from the grateful Munster men; every townland in it is an evocation of the historic past. There is Glenanaar, where the mighty Finti battled with the sons of Morna; Carron, where Lughaidh Macon lost his throne and his poet; Kilcolnian with its

memories of Edmund Spenser; Ballinamona with its memories of Edmund Burke; Oldcourt where sleeps Father Eoin O’Keeffe, the poet-priest of the penal days; and Bridge House from which the great Archbishop Croke, then Canon Croke, went to the Vatican Council and an Australian Bishopric. Father Sheehan was to do his part in adding to the fame of the area for, before his death, Doneraile was to be a household word on five continents and a place of pilgrimage for lovers of literature drawn from many countries.

Canon Sheehan’s first literary venture, *Geoffrey Austin, Student*, seemed a failure, but it brought him an invitation to write a series of tales of clerical life for the *American Ecclesiastical Review*. The result was *My New Curate*, which ran as a serial in the *Review*. It was an immediate success.

Foreign scholars of prominence considered its picture of clerical life so perfect as to claim for it a place among the best of their various countries’ modern works of fiction. Thirty thousand copies of it were sold in eighteen months and it was translated into most European languages. It would take more than a short article to describe the Canon’s other literary ventures in detail, but the appeal of his books can be gauged by the following particulars of their sales supplied by Longman, Green & Company to Father Michael, O.F.M., Cap., and published by Father Michael in the *Capuchin Annual* of 1942.

Blindness of Dr. Gray,	18,400;
Glenanaar,	11,700;
Graves of Kilmorna,	13,000;
Lisheen,	11,600;
Luke Delmege,	12,000;
Miriam Lucas,	11,300;
The Queen’s Fillet,	11,500.

The gross total of the figures quoted by Father Michael is 102,800. That the works had not simply an ephemeral value but deserve the title of great literature is thus shown by Father Michael when he states, "German university students wrote theses on various aspects of Canon Sheehan's writings, including his humor. Our students in the National University and in some of our ecclesiastical colleges are still presenting their theses on Canon Sheehan for their M.A. degrees."

However, Canon Sheehan was not only a great writer. He was a holy priest, a conscientious pastor, and a most lovable character. From the little infants who thronged around him when he visited their school, to Lord Castletown, the Protestant occupant of Doneraile Court, he was esteemed by all as guide, philosopher, and friend.

"At the time when, at Mr. Birrell's request," writes Lord Castletown, "I was endeavoring to form a basis of consent between the various political parties for the building of a national university, I received immense assistance from my friend Canon Sheehan."

The Canon was mainly responsible for providing the town with electric lighting, and a new and up-to-date scheme for water supply. During his pastorate, practically every acre of land in his parish was transferred from the landlords to the farmers. He was the moving spirit in the local branches of the G.A.A. and the Gaelic League. In those days, Doneraile was a favorite venue for Gaelic athletic tournaments and he has given these tournaments immortality in a paragraph in *Paregra* and in the opening chapter of *Glenanaar*.

Space would not allow us to quote all the tributes paid to Canon Sheehan's literary genius even during his own lifetime. These tributes came from such different types of men as William O'Brien, M.P., of Land League fame; Chief Justice Holmes of the U.S.A., son of the author of *The Autocrat at the Breakfast Table*; the Hon. D. H. Madden,

Attorney-General and Vice-Chancellor of Dublin University; and the American humorist, Joel Chandler Harris (Uncle Reshus). Sir F. C. Burnand described Canon Sheehan as “one of the best-read men of his day,” while the famous Count Leo Tolstoy named him “the greatest living novelist.”

Nihil Obstat:

Carolus Doyle, S.J.,
Censor Theol. Deput.

Imprimi Potest:

✠ Joannes Carolus,
Archiep. Dublinen, Hiberniae Primas
12 March 1948



This e-book was produced by:

The Seraphim Company, Inc.

**8528 Kenosha Drive
Colorado Springs, CO 80908-5000
www.servi.org**