

REV. ALOYSIUS MICHAEL REILLY, O. Carm.

(1878-1928)

By the REV. ANDREW L. WELDON, O. Carm.

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Father Reilly was born on June 10th, 1875, in Drumbody, County Cavan, Ireland. His father's name was Bernard O'Reilly, and his mother's maiden name was Anna Hughes. When the "O" was dropped from the family name is not known. It was omitted either by the family when they migrated to America or by Father Reilly himself. His baptismal record and the novitiate records spell the name "O'Reilly." He was baptized Michael, and was the youngest of four children. About the year 1877 the entire family left Ireland for America. They landed at Halifax, Nova Scotia, but after a short stay came to the United States and settled permanently in Montclair, New Jersey, in a section then well populated by Irish immigrants — locally called "Ferry." (Father Augustine suggests that it was in this section of Montclair that the phrase "fighting Irish" originated.) After attending the local parochial school, Father Reilly entered Saint Francis Xavier College, New York. Here he made his high school and college studies, graduating with the degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1897. He attended Seton Hall College during the year of 1898 and was granted the degree of Master of Arts.

On September 12th, 1898, he left Montclair for the Carmelite novitiate, New Baltimore, Pennsylvania. He arrived there on the 14th of September and received the Habit on October 18th of the same year. After the novitiate he was sent to Rome to complete his priestly studies. He attended the Appolinaris University and was ordained by Cardinal Respighi on May 24th, 1902, at Saint John Lateran. Returning to America, he was stationed at the newly formed Saint Cyril College in Chicago. He was popular with the faculty and student body; a genial disposition won the former and an active interest in athletics attracted the latter.

The Provincial Chapter of 1909 appointed him Prior of Niagara Falls, but he refused the office because of ill health, the result of an appendicitis operation and a neglected foot injury which had caused an acute attack of blood-poisoning. Shortly after his return to Chicago he was appointed pastor of Saint Cyril parish; but, although his classes were reduced, he continued to teach in the College. He began

Tuesday devotions in honor of the Infant of Prague in 1912. To the prayers in honor of the Infant of Prague he added prayers *for the beatification of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus*. Just when these latter prayers were commenced is a matter of dispute. However in 1913 the popularity of these Tuesday devotions forced him to schedule an afternoon and an evening service. He was granted permission from the chancery office to give public Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament twice on Tuesday. *Thus he began the first devotions in honor of the Little Flower to be held in Chicago and possibly in America** It was to the people attending these devotions that Father Dolan first proposed the project of the Society of the Little Flower which he founded in 1923. During his regime as pastor Father Reilly purchased the property upon which Saint Cyril Grammar School now stands. In 1918 the college courses at Saint Cyril College were discontinued, and Father Reilly was relieved of his teaching duties.

At the Provincial Chapter of 1921 Father Reilly was assigned to Bogota as an assistant and to engage in missionary work. In 1924 he was transferred to Englewood to be occupied exclusively with missionary activities. The Provincial Chapter of 1927 appointed him Prior and pastor of Mt. Carmel parish in Tenafly. During Lent of the same year he had discovered that he was suffering from diabetes. Father Lawrence, the Provincial, wanted him to go to a sanatorium, but after a few weeks in a local hospital he begged to be returned to active duty — saying that he preferred to die in the harness. During the early part of 1928 he became dangerously ill. The doctor ordered an immediate rest; Father Reilly, however, refused to leave until after the Lenten season. Accordingly he left Tenafly on Easter Monday for Chicago, arriving on Tuesday morning. He was taken to Mercy Hospital on Thursday afternoon. He was very sick, how sick no one knew until the doctors at Mercy Hospital reported that he was dying. He died early Friday morning, April 21st, 1928. The following Monday a Solemn Mass of Requiem was sung in Saint Cyril Church which was jammed to overflowing by the laity, religious, and the clergy. The body was then sent to Tenafly where the final funeral services were held. He was buried in the Carmelite plot in Mount Carmel Cemetery, Tenafly.

Such is the mere factual biography of Father Reilly, but that does not reveal the real man. Physically he was short of stature, well-knit, and graceful of movement. His lack of height was more than offset by his dynamic personality. His features were regular and pleasing. As a teacher he excelled in English, Oratory and

Elocution. In his later years, when other work kept him from the classroom, he read much, particularly the classics and preferably poetry. One of his hobbies was to keep a copy of any poem written by a non-Catholic poet which in any way praised our Blessed Mother. The charity that he did while pastor will never be fully known. He was always eager to discover and to help those in need. Many a basket of food and clothing was delivered anonymously to the poor through his kindness. To cite one particular example, the husband of one family was laid up with a broken leg; the wife and one of the two daughters were taken seriously ill shortly after-ward. The other daughter in her distress appealed to Father Reilly. He not only secured donations large enough to pay for a trained nurse, so that the daughter could continue to work, but he also visited the family every afternoon for over a month, relieving the nurse for an hour or so and entertaining the sick people by reading to them.

As a preacher he was always forceful and dramatic. During the war he was always in demand to act as a toastmaster or speaker at any South Side patriotic gathering or demonstration Catholic or non-Catholic. His success as a speaker is perhaps best illustrated by the sermon he delivered at the funeral of Brother Augustine. At its conclusion there was not a person in the church, religious and clergy included, who was not weeping. As a missionary he was everywhere in demand. Niagara Falls will long remember the mission he gave at our Lady of Peace Church when not only the church itself was filled but also the graveyard surrounding the church. No one was better pleased than he himself with the rapid growth of devotion to St. Therese and with its expansion from a mere parish activity to a nation-wide devotion through the Society of the Little Flower. He often said that taking part in the Little Flower novenas gave him the greatest pleasure of all his missionary work. He was always ready to help, whether it was as a confessor or preacher of the day, or as a guard of the overflow crowd for whom his good-natured smile and cheerfulness made the time of waiting less tedious.

His early death deprived the Province of an industrious worker, a religious who was ever zealous, and a man whose kindly advice brought courage and renewed inspiration to many a Carmelite for whom the way was hard. A one sentence biography would of necessity characterize him as a delightful companion, a loyal friend, a pious priest, and a true servant of our Lady of Mount Carmel.

* Father Reilly's work for years in favor of the beatification of Saint Therese is sometimes forgotten and cannot be overemphasized. Hence the italics used on parts of this page. *(Editor's Note.)*

(May I gratefully acknowledge the help given me by Father Augustine, boyhood friend of Father Reilly and a fellow-novice; by Father Leo who sent the data of the novitiate records; by father Anthony, his companion on the missions; and by father Becher. Author's Note.)