

REV. JOSEPH JOHN WALSH, O. CARM.

1843-1909

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FATHER Joseph Walsh was one of the zealous Carmelite missionaries in pioneer Kansas. He was stationed in the Sunflower State as a young priest and returned in the last years of his life. He was born in Ossory, Ireland, June 27, 1843. As a youth he aspired to the missionary priesthood and thus we find him one of a group of young men who were being educated for the American missions. Among these future Carmelites were Cyril Feehan, Brocard Murphy, Angelus Forrestal and Elias Meyer.

From Ireland, they were sent to Transpontina to make their novitiate. Entering the novitiate August 15, 1867, Father Joseph was professed a year later. His ordination took place in Rome on May 10, 1869. After ordination, he and his companions left for America to serve in the Kentucky Commissariate. When the Kentucky venture failed, they joined our Province. The Catholic Almanac shows that Father Joseph, while with the Commissariate, attended parishes in Smithland and Hickman during 1874 and 1875.

From 1875 until 1881 he was stationed in New Baltimore. In the latter year he was transferred to St. Boniface, Scipio, where, on March 14, the baptismal record has his signature. He remained in Scipio until 1883, when he succeeded Father Gabriel Browne as pastor of St. Patrick's Church in Emerald. He held this pastorate until 1889, when the Rev. J. B. O'Connell took over the church for Leavenworth Diocese. Emerald at this time was a prosperous parish. The church stood in the midst of rich farm country and its parishioners were drawn from many miles around.*

At the time Father Joseph took charge of St. Patrick's, there was much discontentment in the Irish Settlement. The old traditions of the West were being supplanted by more restless modern ideas, resulting in misunderstandings, quarrels, and even a tinge of anti-clericalism.

Father Joseph did much to overcome these conditions. Because of him many of the old customs have survived and are still observed. The old timers, to this very day, recall him as a very saintly man whose heart and soul were in his Church and his Order. They speak of his brilliant sermons and delight in recalling his genial good humor, his ready wit and his popularity with Catholic and non-Catholic alike.

Soon after his removal from Emerald, Father Joseph became afflicted with a lingering throat ailment which deprived him of his voice and terminated his career in the pulpit. How heavy this cross was none of his companions every realized. He was an exemplary and resigned religious who knew how to take blessings and crosses alike from the hands of God. Always humble and retiring, he was an example to the whole community, was punctual at all exercises and was the embodiment of fraternal charity.

It has been falsely rumored that Father Joseph was at times morose and bitter. There is certainly no basis in fact for this assumption. The sudden death of his brother, to whom he had grown quite attached, was undoubtedly a severe trial to him. Then, too, the curtailment of his natural activity by his aggravating ailment made him more retiring than ever.

His companions in religion found him to be ordinarily amiable and pleasant. In fact, they, as well as the laity to whom he administered, have always regarded him as being very saintly. Certainly no one could say that he sought worldly glory or praise. He found his greatest satisfaction in being of service to others.

Having spent forty-one years in the Order—forty of these as a priest — he died in Scipio, August 17, 1909, at the age of sixty-six. He is buried in the community plot in St. Boniface Cemetery.

* See *Sword*: Vol. 3, p. 473.