

PATRICK BONAVENTURE KENNEDY O.F.M.: 1855-1924

BY BARTHOLOMEW EGAN

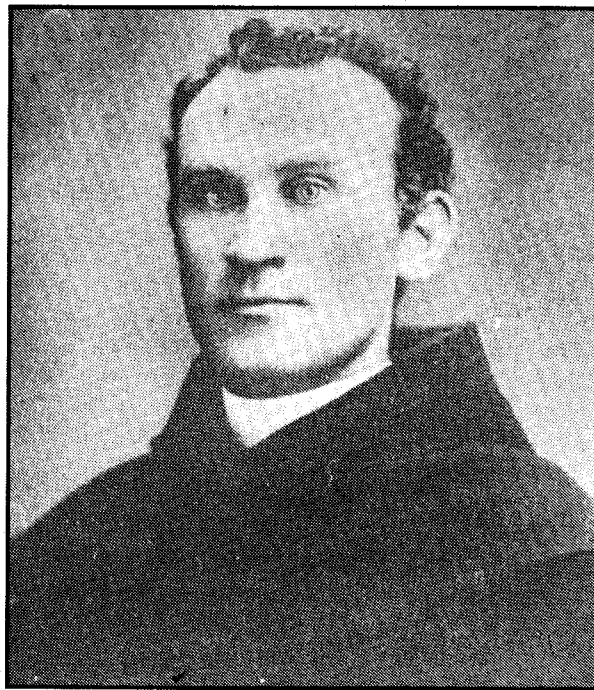
Patrick Bonaventure Kennedy, O.F.M., one of the earliest and most distinguished Franciscans to labour on the Australian Mission, was born at Corbally, Kilcoleman, Co. Limerick on 21 June, 1855. His father was Daniel and his mother Ellen (née Sheehan). Both parents came originally from Kilcornan. The Kilcoleman parish registers give 6 June, 1855, as the date of Patrick's baptism but that may be an error for 26 June, 1855. The sponsors named are Patrick Kennedy and Maria Mangan.

There were five children in the family. Richard became a priest in the diocese of Limerick and was a contemporary of Bishop Hallinan. His last years were spent as Parish Priest of Fedamore, where he died in 1925; John married a Miss Houlihan from Shanagolden; Margaret married Michael O'Brien of Kildimo and Daniel emigrated to the United States.

According to Australian sources, Patrick was educated by the Christian Brothers and at Mungret College but no records of these years have survived. He entered the Franciscan Novitiate at Drogheda on 29 November, 1876, and, on receiving the habit of the Order, was given the religious name of Bonaventure. His novitiate completed in the following year, Patrick proceeded to the Order's House of Studies at La Madonna del Piano, Capranica di Sutri in Italy. This college, founded by the Irish Franciscan Luke Wadding, is situated about 35 miles north of Rome.

His name appears on a document dated 9 February, 1878, when, with other students, he requested special permission from the Minister-General of the order to attend the obsequies for Pope Pius IX at Rome. Another document in

the archives of the General Curia at Rome commends that friar from Kilcoleman as a most observant religious. With others, he appended his name to a request that the guardian of the Irish Franciscan College at St. Isidore's, Rome, Fr. Leonard Dunne, be allowed to continue in office. This document is dated 17



Patrick Bonaventure Kennedy.

October, 1879. Like Patrick Bonaventure, Fr. Dunne was later to spend some of his priestly life in Australia.

On 1 December, 1880, the student from Kilcoleman was recommended to the Minister-General as a suitable candidate for admission to perpetual profession in the order and, five months later, on 6 April, 1881, testimonial letters for his ordination to the priesthood were issued. He was ordained on Holy Saturday of that year by Archbishop Julius Lenti in the Basilica of St. John Lateran at Rome.

The newly ordained priest put in a further year's study in Rome before returning to Ireland. His first and only appointment at home was to St. Francis, Broad Lane, Cork, to which community he was assigned in 1882 and from which he departed for Australia in September, 1885. His ministry in the southern capital seems to have been an unqualified success. When leaving, the Bishop of Cork, Dr. William Delaney, wrote of Fr. Kennedy: 'I regret very much his departure as a serious loss to the Diocese. He won golden opinions from everyone by his amiable spirit, zeal for religion and his remarkable skill and effectiveness in giving religious instruction'. The vicar general of the diocese sent a letter in similar vein and, in another letter of commendation, the Superioress of the Ursuline Sisters at Blackrock, Cork, added her encomiums.

The proposal that Fr. Kennedy join the Irish-Australian Mission emanated from Rome in response to an appeal for more priests. This appeal came from Fr. Leonard Dunne, who had been appointed to take charge of the mission in Sydney. Three Irish friars had arrived there on 18 May, 1879, and Archbishop Vaughan assigned them the Waverley district of that city. Soon the

Franciscan sphere of responsibility was enlarged to embrace the districts of Paddington and Woolhara. Three more Irish Franciscans arrived in 1880, one of them being Fr. P.F. Kavanagh, well-known for his writings on the Rising of 1798. The Irish Franciscans catered for an enormous area which included such noted landmarks as the Randwick Racecourse, Bondi Beach and Watson's Bay - in short, almost the entire eastern suburb of Sydney. It became popularly known as the 'Franciscan District'.

The German Assistant-General of the

order, Father Aloysius Lauer (later elected Minister-General) put forward the name of Fr. Patrick B. Kennedy as a suitable priest to strengthen the 'Australian team' of Franciscans and the Irish Provincial, Fr. John A. Jackman, invited to volunteer for a 6-year spell in the new mission. Fr. Kennedy agreed, though there were some medical reservations which were happily overcome. So, in late 1855, he left with three other friars for the Southern Hemisphere. The leader was Fr. Patrick Slattery, with Fr. Kennedy as

in Australia on 5 March, 1893, and watched it grow from a tiny presbytery to a magnificent friary. He himself was guardian there from 1893 to 1901, a burden of responsibility he never ambitioned. At times, shortage of manpower and money seemed to herald the closure of the mission. Matters were not helped by the attitude of the new Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal Moran, who proved a difficult man with whom to do business—even to the extent of threatening Kennedy with censure of dubious

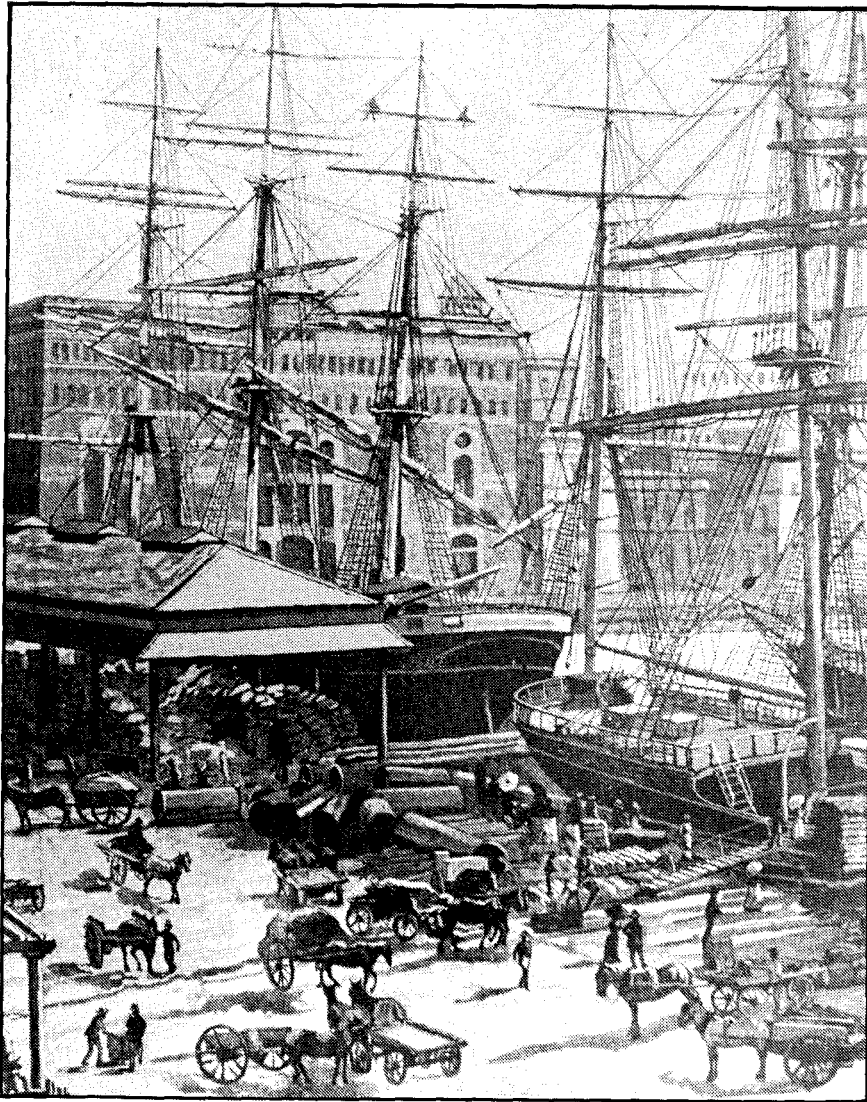
Australia by the Minister-General. He once expressed a wish to die at Rome or in the Holy Land.

The death of Cardinal Moran in 1911 seemed to ease the friar's problems, but his successor in Sydney, Archbishop Michael Kelly, though maintaining a close personal friendship with Fr. Kennedy, created numerous unforeseen difficulties, particularly about financial matters. Far-seeing man that he was, Fr. Kennedy came to the firm conclusion about 1915 that there was no future for the Franciscan Order in Australia without native vocations. The Church herself now enthusiastically endorses this policy in missionary lands.

Kennedy set about providing Australia with a preparatory college and novitiate for aspirants to the Order. Rome granted the necessary permission in 1915, and a benefactor offered six acres of land in the Blue Mountains, about forty miles from Sydney. Strange to relate, the plan was thwarted by Archbishop Kelly, but the Lord provided. A chance meeting between Kennedy and Bishop Dunne of Bathurst brought an invitation from the bishop to this diocese, and a large farm at Rydal became the preparatory training-ground for young men aspiring to enter the Order of St. Francis. It was opened in 1918, and five young Australians entered immediately. Another of Fr. Kennedy's initiatives was the publication of *The Crusader* magazine, but at first it was refused an imprimatur, or permission to publish, by Archbishop Kelly. However, it later appeared, and continued in circulation for many years.

Fr. Patrick Bonaventure Kennedy died on 9 April, 1924, at St. Vincent's Hospital, Darlinghurst, Sydney. His obsequies and funeral to Waverley Cemetery two days later were truly a diocesan occasion. A congregation of about two thousand attended. These included Archbishop Kelly himself, numerous clergy of many denominations, and a large body of laity. The panegyric was preached by the Archbishop. Despite their many personal differences he described Fr. Kennedy as 'a man of singular activity and his works were all for God'. Written tributes came from the apostolic delegate, Archbishop Cerretti, later a cardinal; from Archbishop Spence of Adelaide, and bishops O'Connor and Gleeson.

All the available evidence about Fr. Kennedy's character indicates that he was a truly Irish patriotic priest, endowed by nature and grace with outstanding educational gifts, and was a saintly and humble Franciscan. Pastoral-minded, he much preferred to be a friar amongst friars than a superior but, in this latter capacity, he always endeavoured to give the example of practising what he preached. The poor and down-trodden had a special appeal for him, and he spared no effort to re-habilitate prisoners in society. His memory deserves to be honoured in his native West Limerick, which may be justly proud of his achievements.



Circular Quay, Sydney, in the 1880s.

vicar. Written permission to celebrate Mass at sea and hear confessions was granted to the four by Henry Edward, Cardinal Manning. Amongst the group was Fr. Thomas A. Fitzgerald, a native of Kilkenny, who achieved notoriety with his homely Irish novels, *The Five of Trumps*, *Homespun Yarns* etc. They landed at Sydney on 23 January, 1886, and, from that day until his death, the West Limerick Franciscan witnessed the Church and the Franciscan Order go from strength to strength in this far-off corner of the then mighty British Empire.

Fr. Kennedy was present at the official opening of the headquarters of the order

grounds, a threat which Kennedy vigorously and successfully repudiated. The friars' confidence in their guardian never wavered and, in 1893, he was appointed head of the order in Australia. It was at his own request that he was relieved of this post in 1901, only to be succeeded by Fr. Fitzgerald who, in turn, was succeeded by another Franciscan from West Limerick, Fr. Leonard Begley from Camas, Newcastle West. Patrick Kennedy moved to Edgecliff in 1903 and remained there until 1915, when he returned to Waverley. In 1908, he volunteered for work at the sanctuaries in the Holy Land but was persuaded to remain in