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## The Priest-Poet Pastor of St. Patrick's

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Members of the Roman Catholic clergy, whether secular or members of religious orders, are seldom known for their poetic skills. There are few poet-priests who have the renown of a Gerard Manley Hopkins, for instance. Religious women are more known for their poetry. Sister Madeleva comes to mind. Yet in the early part of this century, the Dominican priest who was pastor and superior of St. Patrick's Church in

Columbus was a practicing poet. Father Francis A. Gaffney, O.P. published *Sonnets and Other Verses* in 1916 under the auspices of P.J. Kenedy and Sons publishing house in New York City.

Born in Newark, New Jersey

Francis Gaffney was born during the height of the Civil War in Newark, New Jersey. He was the

fourth of the ten children in the family of Patrick and Bridget (Powell) Gaffney and was born on June 13, 1863. Young Francis began his education in the parochial school system. He then studied with the Christian Brothers. The Dominican historian, Victor O'Daniel, writes that the Dominican Fathers at their Newark priory, St. Antoninus, helped the young classics scholar with his Latin.<sup>1</sup> This may have been Francis's first awareness of the members of the Order of St. Dominic.

#### Enters the Order of St. Dominic

Deciding that he had a Dominican vocation, in 1884 young Francis entered the Dominican novitiate then located at the venerable Priory of St. Rose near Springfield, Kentucky. O'Daniel notes that during the period of his novitiate, Gaffney continued his studies in the classics. On the feast of St. Joseph, March 19, 1885, Brother Augustine Gaffney pronounced his religious vows as a Dominican friar.

A year later, the young clerical student was assigned to St. Joseph's Priory near Somerset. O'Daniel notes that Gaffney's health was never strong. This judgment appears several times when one reads about Gaffney. Because of his health problems, O'Daniel writes that Brother Augustine was given an intensive course in philosophy and theology.<sup>2</sup> The suggestion is that Gaffney was on a rather fast track in preparation for ordination, and that his precarious state of health was the principal reason for the intensive studies.

#### The Peripatetic Life of a Dominican Cleric

On April 12, 1889, Francis Augustine Gaffney was ordained a Dominican priest in the church of St. Joseph's Priory by the Bishop of Columbus, John Ambrose Watterson. Following his ordination, the new Father Gaffney was assigned

to Dominican parishes in Louisville and New York. In 1896, he was named pastor and superior of the Dominican community at St. Patrick's Church in Columbus.

In 1901, following his term of office in Columbus, Gaffney was appointed superior and pastor of the Dominican church in Memphis, St. Peter's. Elected to the position of prior at St. Antoninus in Newark, New Jersey, in 1906, Gaffney served the customary three year term in his home city. Kansas City, Houston, and Louisville were stops for him until in 1915 he was once again assigned to St. Patrick's. In the early 1920's, because of failing health, Gaffney was assigned to the Church of St. Dominic in the nation's capital. Diagnosed as suffering from a brain tumor, Father Gaffney was placed in the Shepherd-Pratt Sanitarium in Baltimore. He died a year later on December 2, 1922, one year shy of his sixtieth year. His solemn funeral mass was sung in his beloved parish of St. Antoninus.

#### Pastoral Work in Columbus

The *Catholic Columbian* obituary notes that "though in ill-health for a long while, his death was entirely unexpected and the announcement of it brought genuine sorrow to hundreds of his friends."<sup>3</sup> The *Columbian* also carried the following tribute:

#### Friends Mourn His Loss

"The news of the death of Father Gaffney was received with genuine sorrow by his many friends in Columbus. A friendship that began with his pastorate at St. Patrick's nearly a quarter of a century ago, was cemented on each return; we loved to see him back and he was fond of asserting that he was glad to be back among his friends. He was a man with the happy faculty, not only of making friends, but of keeping them. He was affable without being patronizing, genial

without abating a jot to his priestly dignity. Had Father Gaffney chosen to remain in the world, the talents as writer and poet, so unostentatiously assumed along with the duties of his Order, would have made for him fame and gained for him a monument. He chose to remain the servant of God; surely, we may confidently hope he has gained the greater reward for his renunciation of the world and the devoting of his talents to the glorification of God rather than the fleeting applause of man."

A solemn requiem Mass was sung in memory of Father Gaffney at his former parish of St. Patrick's. The *Columbian* article states that "there was a large congregation present at the Mass besides all the altar boys and school children." In addition, the obituary lauds the important role Father Gaffney played at St. Patrick's: "Nearly all the members of the choir, with whom Father Gaffney was a favorite, were present, and joined in the final requiem for the poet-priest of the Dominican Order."

#### The Role of Literature and Poetry in His Life

O'Daniel suggests that throughout his life, Gaffney remained a sincere and devoted student. His continuous life of study no doubt assisted the development of the success he had as a preacher. O'Daniel describes Gaffney as having "a real good mind" and being "a rather eloquent preacher."<sup>4</sup> Gaffney's obituary in *The Catholic Columbian* notes that he "was in great demand for retreats and lectures." Nonetheless his service on the Dominican mission bands, which activity occupied many Dominicans at this time, was limited because of his ill-health. Gaffney appears to have been well regarded as a pastor of souls. The *Columbian* notice indicates that "Father Gaffney was a good priest, a zealous laborer in the Lord's vineyard. To many homes, saddened by death or sickness, he brought lasting

comfort and resignation by his counsel and help." O'Daniel suggests that literature and poetry were definitely an avocation for Gaffney. One suspects that he devoted a fair amount of his time to these pursuits. In addition to his poetry book noted above, this priest-poet published poetry in various Roman Catholic newspapers. For instance, *The Catholic Columbian* account of the life of Bishop Hartley's mother is accompanied by one of Father Gaffney's poems. This poem goes as follows:

#### IN MEMORY OF MRS. CATHERINE HARTLEY

Like her who sang "magnificat" of old,  
This lowly soul could boast that Mighty one  
Great things to her had done-she bore a son,  
A shepherd kind, to govern Christ's own fold.  
In rosary of hidden life she told  
Eight decades fraught with deeds which merit won,  
With yearning for her God her course was run.  
Her absence leaves our heart now bleak and cold.  
O lady of the Rosary give ear  
To our petitions for the mother's weal,  
And, guardian angel, beg her sweet rest  
In home where God shall wipe away each tear.  
When we are called, dear Lord, her joys reveal,  
Then shall we rise and call the mother blest.

O'Daniel writes that Gaffney lectured often on various topics, some of which were of a historical nature. O'Daniel, while complementing Gaffney's work in literature and poetry, writes that Gaffney's lectures "...on historical subjects, because not written from first-hand sources and lacking in due research, are not always reliable."<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, O'Daniel also notes that "the fruits of his pen reveal no little strength of will and devotion to high ideals."<sup>6</sup> He appears also to have published a booklet, *Teaching Children the Mass*, which is said to have gone through several editions.

The texts often speak of Gaffney's rather precarious state of health. O'Daniel writes that Gaffney's "indifferent health...confined him to the hospital so much..."<sup>7</sup> Moreover, he seems to have suffered much during most of his life. What caused these maladies is unclear in reading the texts about his life. Nonetheless, he appears to have possessed sufficient strength to serve quite often as the superior in different Dominican priories and houses. That ecclesiastical administration is always a stressful occupation is not to be denied. It is surprising that one finds Gaffney's name so often linked with the position of religious superior. In fact, in his study of the Dominicans in the United States, Reginald Coffey suggests that indeed Gaffney was one of the select group of rather permanent superiors which Father Lawrence F. Kearney continually used during his long tenure as Provincial of the Province of St. Joseph.<sup>8</sup>

Despite his somewhat infirm bodily state, Gaffney appears to have been a successful religious administrator. In reading about the method of operating which Kearney used as provincial, it is readily apparent that Kearney did not tolerate fools gladly. Kearney wanted only extremely competent men to fill the role of superior. In fact, Kearney once complained to the Dominican Master General in Rome that he had a difficult time finding priests suitable to serve as superiors. What this suggests is that in spite of his weak constitution, Gaffney served admirably in the role of superior in various Dominican houses over a period which corresponds to Kearney's time as provincial.

#### Examples of Father Gaffney's Poetry

Father Gaffney appears to have been an accomplished wordsmith. He possessed a real talent for using the English language to its fullest. In particular, he used his poetry to reflect upon the lives of religious persons on special occasions

like jubilees. Two such examples follow, one in honor of Sister Catherine Brown, former Mother General of the Dominican Sisters at St. Mary of the Springs, and the other for Nicholas Gallagher, a son of the Diocese of Columbus who became bishop of Galveston.

#### GOLDEN YEARS

Sister Catherine Brown, O.S.D.  
St. Mary of the Springs  
Columbus, O.

O golden rosary of years,  
What predilection thine!  
Each decade full of smiles and tears,  
As is the call divine

With lowly Maid of Nazareth.  
Magnificat now sing;  
And thus give praise with purest breath,  
to Christ, thy Spouse and King.

Thy blessed patroness indeed,  
Christ's stigmata enjoyed;  
Oh may thy soul receive like meed,  
And treasure unalloyed.

On this, thy Pentecost, dear friend,  
May wisdom uncreate,  
With all his Gifts on thee descend,  
And all thy yearnings sate.

St. Mary's be thy Cenacle,  
Illumed with Holy Fire,  
Whose warmth will ever thee impel,  
To seek thy heart's Desire

#### FELICITATIONS to THE RT. REV. N. A. GALLAGHER, D.D. on the Thirty-third Anniversary of his Consecration as Bishop

The Years of Christ, you have fulfilled today,  
As pastor true and shepherd always meek;

Like Him, your labors were the lost to seek,  
 His Word you spoke and courage checked dismay.  
 A blessed fruitage burgeoned on your way,  
 Which Christ-like sacrifice did oft bespeak;  
 Your mind, care-burthened low, but soul, ne'er weak;  
 God blessed us with you, Bishop dear, and may  
 He e'er sustain, when you the wine-press tread,  
 And of your diocese make vineyard rare,  
 And apostolic laborers supply!  
 The countless souls, which you to 'Christ have led,  
 At judgment will repeat this grateful prayer:  
 Like the Beloved may you to Christ be nigh.

Gallagher was consecrated on April 30, 1882, so this poem was written about the time Father Gaffney returned to Columbus. Another jubilee Father Gaffney observed was the golden jubilee of Good Shepherd Convent in Columbus, which also occurred in 1915.

GOLDEN JUBILEE OF THE CONVENT  
 of  
 THE GOOD SHEPHERD  
 Columbus, Ohio

A golden arras, matchless in design,  
 You deftly wove in fifty blessed years;  
 Its warp is charity of hue divine,  
 Its woof is sacrifice and sorrow's tears.

'Tis fit to hang in halls of heaven's home,  
 Where Christ, the Shepherd-King is now enthroned,  
 Where welcoming He bids all come,  
 For w hom He has all guilt condoned.

Most faithful spouses of the Shepherd kind,  
 Who came to seek and save the souls once lost,  
 Who shelter gave them from sin's biting wind,  
 And to Him steered their bark, when tempest-tost.

Your spirit was of Christ, the gentle Lord,  
 Who did not break the bruised reed, nor quench  
 The smoking flax. By cheering deed and word,  
 You won these souls, though reeking of sin's stench.

The sower, sowing patiently his seed,  
 The harvest burgeoning with joy awaits  
 What you have garnered, by each blessed deed,  
 Your angel, leads you to the heavenly gates.

And pointing to the fields of golden wheat:  
 Behold! he says: your sowing and the yield.  
 The souls of penitents and Magdalenes, who greet  
 You, in your Shepherd's harvest-field.

Acrostics were a particular penchant of his. In acrostics, the first letters of each line, taken together, spell out a word or set of words indicating the person or a theme central to the poem itself. This example from Gaffney's prolific poetic pen was written at the Silver Jubilee of Fr. Kearney, his Dominican Provincial from St. Joseph's Province. At the time of his jubilee, Fr. Kearney lived at St. Thomas Aquinas Rectory in Zanesville. The reader will note that the title of the poem is spelled out by the first letter of each line of the poem:

DOMINIC'S SENTRY  
 An Acrostic written for the  
 Silver Priestly Jubilee of  
 Very. Rev. L. F. Kearney, O.P., S.T.M.  
 1883-1908

Divine the largess of the natal-morn  
 Of Her who was Omnipotence to bear,  
 Majestic maiden-Mother, who all fair  
 Imparadised this orb, so long forlorn.  
 No gift like peace, and thou to us hast borne  
 It, silver-pinioned, through dun clouds or care;  
 Composite grand, of lore and virtue rare,  
 Sublimely has thou robe of Aaron worn.

Secure for him, O Queen Immaculate,  
 Enfoldment on thy wimpled robe of grace,  
 Nigh sainted Dominic, thy favored one,  
 That when his labors Christ will contemplate,  
 Recounting all, his name in gold will trace:  
 Yea, more, and supplement it with: Well done!

That his Columbus experience had an abiding influence on Father Gaffney's poetry is reflected by the number of poems devoted to persons residing in Ohio's capital city. His book of poetry was published in 1916, shortly after his return here. Had it been published later, even more local persons and events doubtless would have been commemorated in it.

While in Houston, he met a former Columbus resident, Sister Evangela Donohoe of the Dominican Sisters of the Sacred Heart. (For her story, see the *Bulletin*, Volume XVIII, page 274.) He wrote this acrostic poem in her honor:

SAINT JOHN, THE EVANGELIST  
To Sister Evangela, O.S.D.

Sublimely signs the Patmos' seer, his rune,  
Indicative of that blest land where one  
Surcease of pain doth find; and as the sun,  
The Lamb of God e'er shines. O wondrous boon!  
Each sapphire street with beauteous crystals strewn,  
Reflects a pearly gate and golden dun!  
Eternal crown by sacrifice is won,  
Vidette-Divine will lead to victory, soon.  
An evangel be thou in life and love,  
No knowledge but of God mayst thou reveal;  
Guard well the little hostages of Christ.  
Enshrouded in the garb which Dominic wore,  
Like him replete, O be thy soul with zeal,  
And with thy Spouse in heaven thou'lt keep thy tryst.

The Priest-Poet from St. Patrick's

While not a well person for much of his life, nonetheless Father Francis A. Gaffney led a productive and spiritually enriching life. Never associated with an academic institution, his poetry would have been written during the odd moments when he found the time, especially during the busy years when he was a religious superior, either prior or vicar/pastor. That he

accomplished so much indicates a dedication to his work breathing the life of the religious spirit through the words or poetry. To be sure, he was not a Gerard Manley Hopkins. Nonetheless, the Priest-poet from St. Patrick's needs to be remembered as a cleric dedicated to the religious care of those in his charge and as a person using the venue of poetry to express the importance of religious sentiments.



Note on Sources

The author first became aware of Father Gaffney, his Columbus pastorate and his published poetry, through the discovery of his book, *Sonnets and Other Verses*, at Ed Hoffman's bookstore on Arcadia Avenue. The histories of the American Dominicans by Victor O'Daniel and Reginald Coffey provided the relevant biographical information. Don Schlegel discovered Gaffney's obituary from *The Catholic Columbian* in a recently acquired collection of materials from Father John Priest and donated to the Catholic Record Society by John Conroy. This collection also contains a handwritten letter from Father Gaffney to the then seminarian, John Priest, when he was a student at Mt. St. Mary's in Cincinnati.

- 1) Victor O'Daniel, O.P., *The Dominican Province of St. Joseph* (New York: 1942), p. 449.
- 2) *Ibid.*
- 3) *The Catholic Columbian*, Obituary, "Father Gaffney, Poet-Priest of Dominican Order," no date.
- 4) O'Daniel, p. 450.
- 5) *Ibid.*
- 6) *Ibid.*
- 7) *Ibid.*
- 8) Reginald Coffey, O.P., *The American Dominicans* (New York: 1970), p. 495.

## Additional Origins of Columbus German Catholics

(Continued, from Vol. XXI, No. 7)

Kegelmayer, Joseph F., born June 11, 1866 in Ironton, O., son of Georg Keglmaier and Maria E. Schultz [or perhaps Schulty?] from Ruppertsberg, Rhein Baiern. Georg, from München, born April 23, 1829, died June 20, 1886; Maria E., born January 4, 1827. Wife Ernestine Mayer, born July 5, 1868, Columbus, O., daughter of Carl Mayer and Elisabetha Zahn. Carl Mayer born January 27, 1839 in Emingen, Würtbg.; Elisabetha born October 27, 1841 in Geisingen, Württemberg. Married June 21, 1888. (two children)

Kochendörfer, Franz, born December 12, 1832, Herdt, Rheinpfalz, son of Michael Kochendörfer and Maria A. Wolf. Wife Magdalena Bury, born May 29, 1829 in Döningen, Donau Öschingen, Baden, daughter of Christopher Buhri and Maria Held. Married at Holy Cross. (eight children)

König, Peter Joseph, born April 18, 1846 in Anstein, Baiern, son of Anton König (December 23, 1805) and Anna Maria Dichtmüller. Wife Maria Derrick, daughter of Peter Derrick of Columbus. (three children)

Leibold, Anton. His wife's name is here given as Haensler. (See *Bulletin*, XVII/184.)

Lovinger (Lovener), Johann, born October 15, 1836, son of John Lovinger and Catharina Dirschell, from Regensburg. Brother of John, for whom see the *Bulletin*, XVII/185.

Ludwig, Franz, born May 29, 1861, son of John Ludwig and Paulina Block, from Gross Rinderfeld, Tauberbischofheim, Baden. Wife Catharina Werner, born January 14, 1872, dtr. of Adam Werner. Married in April, 1888.

Luff, Andreas, born September 28, 1839, son of John Baptist Luff (April 30, 1807) and Sophia Kinle (January 24, 1810), from Aldorf. Luff came from Bundorf, Oberamt Herrenberg, Schwarzwald Kreis Württemberg. Wife Anna Maria Weber, born July 31, 1836, daughter of Nicholas Weber (September 24, 1812 from Lützenwardt, Oberamt Horb, Württemberg) and Maria Edelmann (July 31, 1812, from Imnau, Oberamt Hiperloch, Sigmaringen). Married May 15, 1860 at St. Mary's, York, Pa. (seven children)

Maier, Joseph, born July 31, 1855 in Oberamt Rottweil, Württemberg. Wife Adelia Am. Call. Buff, daughter of Joseph Buff. Married at Holy Cross church. (eight children)

Meier, Joseph, born March 11, 1821 in Balzhofen, Bühl, Baden, son of Christian Meier and Scholastica Friedmann. Wife Elisabetha Becherer, born December 11, 1845 in Columbus, daughter of Joseph Becherer and Josepha Volz. Married at Holy Cross in 1873. (five children)

Meyer, Francis Jacob, born May 10, 1856 in Chillicothe, son of Jacob Meyer and Eva. Wife Maria Magd. Ilk, born July 4, 1858 in Portsmouth, daughter of John Ilk and Carolina. (three children)

Müller, Johannes, born 1786 in Kasterholz, Canton Schlettstadt, Elsass. Wife Catharina Wernert. (four daughters)

Muth. This older book gives the data that was published in the *Bulletin*, Volume XVIII, page 200, but under the name of "Killian Muth" instead of Gilbert Muth.

Naus, John Alois, non-Catholic, born Sept. 17, 1847, from Dauphin, Dauphin County, Pa. Wife Catharina Koch, daughter of P. Koch of Columbus, born March 15, 1853. (three children)

Nesser, Theodor, born January 20, 1850, son of John Nesser and Elisabetha Sorgen, from Kirsch, Trier, Rheinprovinz. Wife Catharina Steinbach, daughter of Catharina Steinbach and [from?] Hirtzlei, Bernkastel, Rheinprovinz. Married December 22, 1874 in Völklingen, Saarbrücken, Rheinprovinz. (one son)

Nieuzyla. (See the *Bulletin*, Vol. XVIII, p 200.) This record places the marriage of Jacob and Anna in the village of Kranowitz.

Nonnenmacher, Johan, born December 25, 1843, son of Joseph Anton Nonnenmacher and Regina. (Regina was born March 25, 1807 in Osterburken, Baden and married Nonnenmacher in Osterburken, Kr. Adelsheim, Baden). Wife Mathilda Hannauer, born Aug. 26, 1849 and died July 15, 1886. Married at Holy Cross. (four children)

Oberting, John, born June 15, 1852, from Hellring, Lothringen, son of John N. Oberting and Theresia. Wife Maria Shepard, born January 8, 1851 in Greensburgh, Indiana. Married May 28, 1872 in Lawrenceburg, Indiana. (two sons)

O'Neal, William, born June, 22, 1846, from Louth, County Louth, Ireland, son of Michael and Margaret O'Neal. Wife Christina Redel,

daughter of Franz Redel of Columbus. Married March 31, 1875 at the Cathedral. (Seven children, the sixth born in Corning, Perry County, in 1884)

Rath, John, born April 8, 1823 in Ödingerberg, Regl. Amsberg, Westphalen. Wife Sibylla Koch from Bechen, Kreis Mühlhausen, Cöln. (six children, all born in Germany) According to this book, the John Rath who married Margaret Sauer was John Rath Junior.

Reeb, Jacob; data for him is as printed in the *Bulletin*, Volume XVIII, page 201. Wife Elisabeth Ruffing, born February 19, 1852 in Columbus, daughter of Peter Rufing and Elisabeth; Elisabeth born May 10, 1821 in Mittelbetzbach, Rheinkreis, Baiern, daughter of Lambert Martin and Barbara Didjun.

Roth, Georg, born 1814, died January 23, 1873, from Kleinmünster, Unterfranken, Baiern. Wife Marianna Schaller, born August 10, 1814, Kirchlautern, Hasfurt?, Unterfranken, daughter of Jacob and Francisca (Ept) Schaller. She married secondly Georg Smith, born July 3, 1810, died 1892, from Schwalbach, Wetzlar, son of Carl Lahn and Elisabetha Smith.

Ruetty, August junior, of Columbus. Wife Ella R. Meyer, born September 2, 1864, daughter of Carl Meyer and Elisabetha Zahn; Elisabetha was born October 27, 1842 in Würtemberg. Married in 1887 at Holy Cross Church. (five children)

(To be continued)

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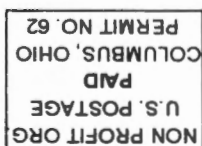
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