



Matthew Gibney
Perth.
Australia.

The following is an extract from the All Hallows Annual of 1923



From the Mission Field

NEXT December the Right Reverend Matthew Gibney, Titular Bishop of Balanaea, will celebrate the diamond jubilee of his arrival in Western Australia, the field of his prolific labours for over half a century, and now the home of his restful old age. Eighty-eight years ago he was born in Co. Longford, and after completing his ecclesiastical studies, was ordained in June, 1863. Almost immediately after his ordination the young priest bade farewell to his friends, and set sail on the long voyage to his chosen mission—the distant Convict Settlement on the Swan River. The sailing ship, *Tartar*, bore him across the world, making the trip from England to Fremantle in four months. His apostolic zeal found scope even on the voyage; for the records of Perth Cathedral tell us that Father Gibney instructed and received into the Catholic Church several of his fellow-passengers. Landing in Western Australia at the close of the year, he lost no time looking round him, but sprang at once into the arena in which he was destined to become such a noble athlete of Christ.

As a bishop he was a builder for God. One who reads the long list of churches and schools and convents that sprang up under his direction between the years 1886-1910, cannot but be amazed by the courage and foresight which they connote. These buildings mark the wonderful path of the progress of his diocese, and remain as lasting monuments to the driving power of a simple faith worthy of the missionaries of old.

“The foregoing biographical details will be sufficient

introduction to a few reminiscences of a career which seems to us to have the greatness and glamour of the heroic. . . .

"Let me begin by relating a personal experience of the Bishop's kindness and thoughtfulness. It happened somehow that I—at that time a student of the Irish College at Rome—was told off to accompany him on his visit to St. Paul's Basilica. When we entered the church he prostrated himself on the floor and kissed the pavement, remarking simply, as he stood up: 'St Paul was the great patron of missionary priests and bishops.' On the way back to the city I pointed out to him the *Cimitero Inglese*, adding that the body of Keats and the heart of Shelley were interred there.

"'Tell the driver to bring us there,' he said. At first I thought he wanted to see the tombs of the English poets, just as any visitor might; but as we drove on he told me the wife of a non-Catholic doctor whom he knew in Perth, had died in Rome, and was buried there. 'The poor fellow will be pleased when I write to tell him that I went to see her grave,' he added. After some little trouble we found the grave which, like many graves in that beautiful cemetery, was overgrown with violets. He gathered a few flowers carefully, and in due time sent them over the seas to the bereaved husband. It was a little thing, perhaps; but it was eloquent of the bishop's heart.

"Once, during his missionary travels, he became lost in the Bush. For days he rode hither and thither, but could find no way out. At last, one morning he said Mass with his last Host, and, mounting his horse, threw the reins on his neck, saying: 'I will leave it to you to find the way out this time.' The horse started off, and after some hours walked straight to the door of a settler. Father Gibney entered the house, and found a girl making bread. He told her that he had been lost for days, and was very hungry, whereat she set about making a huge omelette for him. Having eaten heartily of it, he thanked her and set forth on his journey. Before he had ridden very far he became sick, fell off his horse and began to vomit. Meantime the men of the house had

returned to find the girl in terror. She had put arsenic into the omelette by mistake. They hurried on after the priest and came upon him as he lay stretched on the ground, still vomiting. His herculean strength, probably aided by the overdose of poison, saved him, and he was soon able to continue on his way.

“Another time, during his travels, he remembered that he was near the home of a non-Catholic settler, who was married to a Catholic wife. They had several children, none of whom was baptised. Several priests had gone there before, but the husband had always refused to allow the children to be baptised. Soon after Gibney found himself on the banks of a river, roaring in spate. Knowing the danger, and the probable fruitfulness of a visit, he pulled up his horse and pondered whether it was worth the risk of trying to cross. The horse made up his mind for him, and plunging in of his own accord swam across safely. When the house was reached the husband was out, and the wife said she was afraid to have the children baptised in his absence. However, she suggested that the priest should go to bed while she dried his wet clothes at the fire. In a short time the husband returned, and after a conversation with his wife, went into the room where the priest was resting. ‘Did you cross that river to-day to baptise the kids?’ ‘I did,’ replied the priest. ‘Well, you can do it then. It must be worth something if you took that risk.’ The children were of various ages, and some of them required catching. As the priest poured the water on the head of one sturdy lad the latter shook his fist threateningly, and said: ‘Don’t you do that to me again!’

“No account of Bishop Gibney’s eventful career would be complete without some record of his adventures in connection with the bushrangers. Travellers between Sydney and Melbourne usually have their attention called to the site of the old Glenrowan Hotel, near Albury. It was in this hostelry that the Kelly gang was surrounded one night by a large force of police, who set fire to the building and

poured volley after volley of lead into the flames, where the men were trapped. The noise of the firing brought to the scene Father Gibney, who happened to be in the district on business just then. He told the officer that he was going into the burning house to assist the men, some of whom were now dead or dying. The officer informed him that he must go at his own risk, refusing to order a cessation of the firing. So with the bullets whistling over his head the priest went into the flames and ministered to some of the poor outlaws who were still alive. The leader, Ned Kelly, escaped, but was afterwards captured, being shot in the feet in spite of his heavy suit of home-made armour. When in jail, after being condemned to die, he was visited by Father Gibney, who prepared him for death and stood by him on the scaffold.

"Bishop Gibney is still a living link with the events of those spacious days in Australia. In his home beside the Swan River he will lay down his Breviary to welcome with his old-time hospitality the priests who love to visit him and to hear him talk of the years that are gone. With the snows of nearly ninety years crowning his brows, and with that great burden of days pressing on his giant shoulders, he lives in perfect peace with all mankind; for, like Dante, he knows the secret of peace: *E la sua volontate é nostra pace.*"

The foregoing, slightly curtailed, is taken from an interesting article in *America*, by the Rev. James Kelly, Ph.D.

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His Grace Archbishop Barry celebrated the Silver Jubilee of his priesthood on June 24th, last year. We heartily congratulate His Grace, whom it
Archbishop was a delight to meet on the occasion of
Barry his recent visit to Ireland; and we pray, and even believe, that in length of days, in piety, learning, and in culture, he will maintain the noble traditions of his predecessors in the See of Hobart.

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In June last year the University of Loyola, in Chicago,