

HISTORY OF CATHOLICITY,

IN NEW ALBANY AND JEFFERSONVILLE, AND FLOYD
AND CLARK COUNTIES, IND.

Catholicity in this section of Indiana had its beginning, some say on "Floyd Knobs," in Floyd county, while others claim equal distinction for other points along the river, notably Clarksville, which adjoins West Jeffersonville. in Clark county. Claiks-ville was originally a small settlement on the Indiana shore of the Ohio, just opposite Rock Island, where General Clark used to have his headquarters.

There are old settlers who affirm that there were groups of Catholics along the Ohio on the Indiana shore at and near the present sites of Jeffersonville and New Albany before they began to settle on the "Knobs," and that there are traditions of their meeting to recite the rosary in common on Sundays. Among them, aside from a number of Kentuckians, were the ubiquitous Irish, the more easily contented German and the daring and penetrating French. Some few of the Irish drifted farther on, or retraced their steps, while the great majority remained ; the Germans, determined on settling down, betook themselves with some of the Irish to the higher grounds, the "Knobs," for instance, while the French, who came first following in the steps of the missionaries, scattered about, some going back into Kentucky, others, through love for their kind, bent their steps toward Vincennes, and yet a few remained and are now represented in the population.

Of course there are no records to prove these statements ; not even were records made or kept when

these Catholics began to be visited by the French missionaries, and by Bishop Flaget and Father Abel as late as 1829. The writer called on Father Stremler, pastor of the oldest congregation here, the Church of the Assumption, "Floyd Knobs," for some data of the early Catholics, but there were none to be had. Not even could information as to the date of the building of the old log church be learned. Many other things which ought to be known could not be obtained even if knowable.

One thing is certain, however, that among the early settlers in both Floyd and Clark counties there were many Catholics. The great body of the descendants of these remain good, practical members of the Church, while a few are careless, or as a plain-spoken Irishman puts it, "as not much."

It is an old and true saying that what is easily obtained is not appreciated. This is verified in the case in point. The old Catholic settlers, most of the time without church or priest, preserved their faith and the blessed memories of happy childhood spent in its practice, while some few of their descendants with both priest and church within easy reach have suffered shipwreck of the faith. Was it in punishment of this neglect that there was a "Bloody Monday" over the river in Louisville within the memory of many? Or are the more recent Catholic backsliders to be accounted for through fear of a second "Bloody Monday" on this side of the Ohio?*

If there have been a few fall-aways among Catholics in this part of the state, it must be remembered that there have been bad Catholics in every age. Over against such misfortune tower high in loyalty to the faith and in large growth the flourishing congregations that form the subject of these pages. They are

*The writer has studiously avoided making any reference to the Know-nothing outrages perpetrated upon Catholics in the Falls Cities during the year 1844-5, as the few surviving participants in the disgraceful abuse of men, for conscience sake, are now heartily ashamed of it, as are also the descendants of all of them.

the work of God for the salvation of the people, and serve as beacon lights to direct the straying sheep to the true fold.

“ ST. MARY’S OF THE KNOBS.”

The first organization of Catholics in this district into anything like a parish was begun at “ Floyd Knobs/” in Floyd county, Indiana. Those who in earlier years gathered in twos and threes along the river began to assemble in greater numbers at the “ Knobs,” and in this way a settlement and sort of congregation began to be formed.

Perhaps before Father Abel’s time, 1820, mass was said on the “ Knobs ” in the log cabins of the faithful who settled there. It is known, however, that Father Abel did say mass for the people there in 1820, and subsequent to that time the much talked of “old log church ” was built.

In 1829, when Bishop Flaget was making his sixth round of visitation he said mass in the “ old log church” on the “Knobs,” where were settled about eleven Catholic families. At intervals these were ministered to by Father Abel and others until the arrival of Father Louis Neyron, in 1837. He built the present brick church, St. Mary’s of the “ Knobs,” in 1837. It is in a good state of preservation and is sufficiently large to accommodate the 130 families which comprise the congregation.

Father Neyron was succeeded by Father Bessonies in 1854; he in turn gave place to Father Wm. Doyle in 1858, who was the first resident pastor. In 1861 Father L. Gueguen took charge. He was succeeded by Rev. G. Ginnsz in 1864, who remained until 1873, when the present pastor, Rev. James Stremler, took charge. He built the present parsonage.