

FATHER PAT

A HERO OF
THE FAR WEST.

BY

MRS JEROME MERCIER.

Author of "Our Mother Church."

He that loseth his life for
My sake shall find it.

(S. Matt. x. 39.)



THE REV. HENRY IRWIN, B.A.
("Father Pat")

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A HERO OF THE FAR WEST

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MRS JEROME MERCIER

AUTHOR OF
"OUR MOTHER CHURCH," ETC.

WITH A PREFACE

BY

THE RIGHT REVEREND JOHN DART, D.D.
BISHOP OF NEW WESTMINSTER AND KOOTENAY

"He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."—S. MATT. X. 39.

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To all
WHO HONOUR THE MEMORY OF
HENRY IRWIN
I DEDICATE
THIS SIMPLE SKETCH
OF HIS MOST NOBLE LIFE

NOTICE

THIS year, 1909, is the Jubilee Year of the Church of England in British Columbia. For on S. Matthias' Day, February the twenty-fourth, 1859, the good Bishop Hills was consecrated to the oversight of that vast province, now divided into four dioceses (Columbia, Caledonia, New Westminster, and Kootenay,—the two last as yet under one Bishop). It seems a fitting time, therefore, to put forth a short record of the brave life of one who was a hero to his flock,—a Father Dolling of the West,—the Reverend Henry Irwin, known far and wide in British Columbia as "Father Pat." The memoir has been compiled, with the aid of many kind friends, at the request of the Bishop of New Westminster and Kootenay, and after a visit to the places where the memory of Father Pat is still beloved and cherished.

ANNE MERCIER.

KEMERTON, *February* 1909.

PREFACE

THE life of a missionary priest in Canada amongst settlers is not often an eventful one. It generally presents a record of hard, monotonous work like that of a poor priest in a scattered agricultural parish in England. There are, however, some points of difference. The Canadian priest must cover much longer distances both walking and riding, and he must be more frequently away from home. He should, therefore, be decidedly hardy and athletic. Again, he has to deal with a greater variety of people than can be found in an old-world parish. Besides those born in the Dominion, immigrants from Britain, Scandinavia, Italy, and the States, some ignorant, others well educated, will all be met with in his travels. If these men have reason to believe that the missionary is a true and sympathetic man, they will attend his services and be inclined to follow his lead. Cecil's remark applies to British Columbia even more forcibly than it does to England: "Men look to a man out of the pulpit, to see what he is worth in it."

It was because Henry Irwin always showed himself to be unselfish, sympathetic, and anxious to help others to the very utmost of his power, that he won his great influence amongst the pioneers of British Columbia and that his name and memory are held by them in affection and respect. Stories showing his character are often told, *e.g.* how he went to a man who had been injured by an accident, and drew him in a sledge over the snow several miles to his home; how he would carry the consolations of religion in stormy weather up the mountains to sick miners, in spite of the opposition (not confined to words) of the thoughtless and godless in the vicinity. Manners and customs have become more polished in British Columbia than they were in early

days. A dialogue like the following would scarcely be possible now during service, even in the newest and roughest camps. A minister is interrupted in a prayer for a person by a miner with all gravity, and with no intentional irreverence. "Hold up, parson, I don't pray for that fellow." "Why not?" "Because the papers say so and so about him." "Well, but the papers don't always speak the truth, do they?" "Not by a long chalk," was the reply. "And if all these stories were true, he would need our prayers all the more, wouldn't he?" "Well, I guess you are right, parson; fire away."

Soon after I arrived in British Columbia, in 1895, Henry Irwin wrote to me from his living in the north of Ireland, offering his services to the diocese.

Rossland was then rising into notice as a mining camp, and Irwin, who had been missionary at Golden, and afterwards chaplain to Bishop Sillitoe, seemed, from the reports that reached me, to be just the man for the place. Accordingly he was sent there, and the result answered my expectations. Very soon a spacious frame building was erected for a church, with rooms in the basement to serve as a lodging for the priest and a club for the men in the neighbourhood. But I do not remember ever finding Irwin in his own rooms. They were always giving shelter to poor people who had been reduced to want, whilst he himself had a shake-down in some friendly bachelor's "shack." Nor was he unmindful of the wider interests of the Church, as he showed by taking a prominent part in the measures that led to the erection of Kootenay into a separate Diocese. When Rossland became more civilized and comparatively rich, Irwin left it to take up pioneer work in the neighbouring boundary country. Here he remained until his health imperatively demanded rest and change. We were all hoping he would return to us in renewed health and strength after a short visit to his friends in Ireland; but God saw fit to order it otherwise. *Beatus mortuus.*

JOHN, NEW WESTMINSTER AND KOOTENAY.