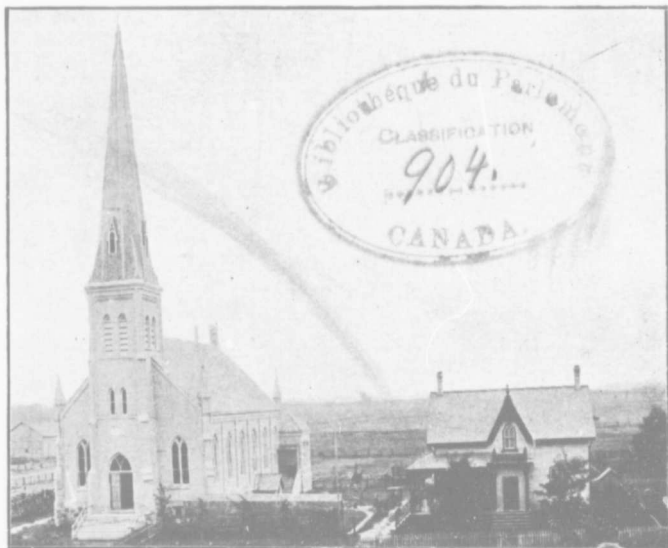


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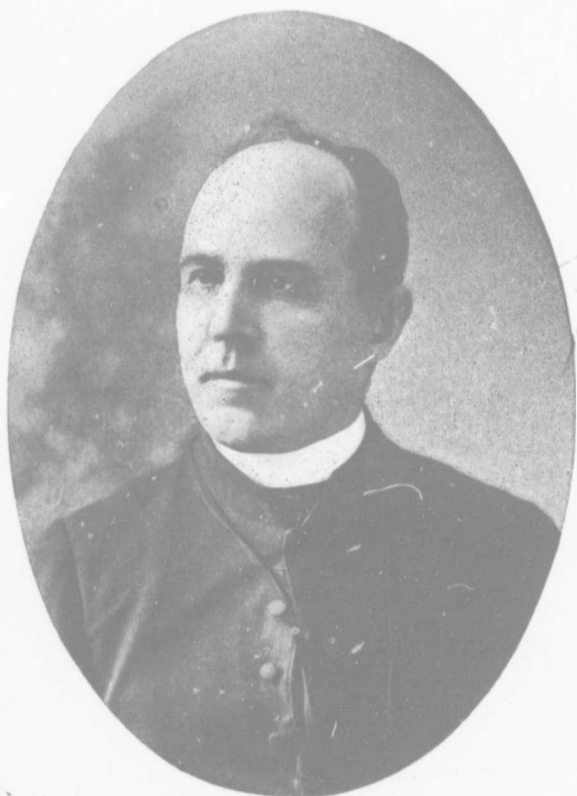


St. Mary's Parish

HESSON, ONTARIO.

1903.

GEO. RAINES, JOB PRINTER, LISTOWEL



THE VERY REVEREND WILLIAM KLOEPFER, C. R. D. D.,
PASTOR OF ST. MARY'S CHURCH, BERLIN.

This Work is Respectfully Dedicated to My
Dear Friend and Professor, Father William, in
Memory of his Silver Jubilee in the Priesthood.

J. J. GNAM,
December 8th, 1903. HESSON, ONTARIO.

PREFACE.

At the suggestion of the Right Reverend Bishop, coupled with the urgent request of those deeply interested, we give a brief history of St. Mary's Parish, Hesson, Ontario.

The illustrations, which meet the eye on every page, have been obtained with much labor and expense, while the subject-matter had to be entirely drawn from the memories of the past. Bearing these facts in mind, the reader will readily understand the herculean task of the writer.

The work was prepared, and the printer's proofs read to the people for correction and further information. This was repeated until the chaff was separated from the wheat, which leaves the work robbed of its original style. With this apology, we graciously beg the reader to be neither censorious nor hypercritical, but to drink in the facts, while his imagination may feast on the past.

THE AUTHOR.

"The first Law of History is to dread uttering falsehood; the next, not to fear stating the truth; lastly, that the historian's writings should be open to no suspicion of partiality or of animosity." — *Leo XIII.*

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HISTORY OF
ST. MARY'S PARISH, HESSON,
OF THE DIOCESE OF LONDON,
COUNTY OF PERTH, TOWNSHIP OF MORNINGTON.

— 1903. —



To write a brief history of St. Mary's Roman Catholic parish of Hesson, Ontario, is the work assigned to me—a stupendous work indeed! For were its history to be measured by the position occupied among the petty thrones of the important Diocese of London, my task would verily be light; but when looking over the names of those, who as shepherds served the Master's flock in Bethlehem of Mornington, we find the personages of many as mysterious as once was that of the Priest of Salem.

ORIGIN AND FIRST SETTLERS.

But as history is a record of past events, a collection of facts, we shall be satisfied to give the facts, such as handed down by tradition, to be recorded in the Diocesan archives.

Away back in the forties, in the days when Stratford had received its first Episcopal visit in the person of the Rt. Rev. Dr. Power, Bishop of Kingston; and when the Morning



GEORGE STEMMLER AND WIFE,

Who in the early fifties walked to Bloomingdale for supplies. When returning home, the latter fell and broke eleven out of her dozen crocks, after having carried them upon her head a distance of 28 miles.

Mrs. Stemmler still survives, and the crock is in daily use.

Sun failed to penetrate the Virgin forests of North Mornington and dry the tears of Mother-Earth, George Stemmler and Andrew Biesinger,

like another Sem of old, led their families from Rotenburg, Germany, far across the Atlantic and settled in the Low-Lands of North Mornington. There they lived alone, like Japheth of old at Joppa.

During those early days of the Church in North Mornington, the people were without a priest to serve to their spiritual wants, consequently the Pioneer-Fathers were both priest and king to those around them. Later on they formed a little colony made up of co-religionists from their native land. The "GEBET-STUND," or prayer hour, was now begun by Andrew Biesinger. On Sundays and holidays, during the Advent and Lenten seasons he would call the faithful to the little chapel annexed to their log-cabin school by the ringing of a little bell—an office which he held until his death—then going to the altar built by Joseph Veitenheimer, upon which was placed a crucifix with two lighted tapers, he knelt and prayed aloud. He began with the recital of the Rosary, that beautiful prayer which is so dear to the Christian heart. This was followed by the Litany or Stations of the Cross. The prayer-hour was brought to a close by the reading of the Epistle and Gospel which was preceded by and ended with a hymn, the chanters being George Stemmler and John Foerster who were assisted by the entire congregation.

Towards the close of the forties, the fathers of families made biennial visits to Hamilton,



ANDREW BIESINGER AND WIFE, WHO, IN 1847, SETTLED IN THE WILDS OF NORTH MORNINGTON.

a distance of fifty miles through thick untrodden forests. In the course of time, these visits were discontinued as Berlin, Galt, St. Agatha, and finally St. Clements became religious centres.

AFFILIATED TO ST. CLEMENTS.

In the year 1855, the Rev. Columban Messner was appointed the first Parish Priest of St. Clements. No sooner was St. Clements made a parish with a resident priest, when the faithful of North Mornington made it their religious centre. There they attended Mass every second Sunday. Thither they carried their children, a distance of fifteen miles over unbroken roads, to be baptized. It was there they received the nuptial blessing, approached the sacraments, and paid their pastoral dues.

The parish of St. Clements remained under Father Messner's administration until 1866, and it was during his first years that he visited the faithful of North Mornington, and which visits he continued three or four times a year until the close of his administration. Ten years of early missionary hardships were endured by this good priest, when he felt the need of rest. Believing that a change of climate was necessary to build up his shattered health, he departed for his home beyond the sea. Accompanied by John Heckler of St. Clements, he reached Rochester, August 1st, 1866. There his funds became exhausted, and finding himself penniless, the poor priest was forced to seek aid from St. Joseph's parish, whose members placed the receipts of a picnic at his disposal. But, alas! his health had now failed him. Even his dear companion must take his leave and return to

his home. The parting scene was a sad and trying one. The dying priest embraced his



THE REV. COLUMBAN MESSNER, O. C., WHO HAD
THE FIRST PASTORAL CHARGE OF THE MORN-
INGTON MISSION, 1855-1866.

friend, crying piteously not to leave him alone
in a strange land. Even in the distance, his

voice, calling him by name to come back, could be heard. He lingered under most trying circumstances until the 11th of January 1867, when he died at the age of thirty-six years, and was buried in St. Joseph's cemetery.

Father Columban Messner was, therefore, the first priest who attended the Mornington mission. He made regular visitations and said Mass in a house which still stands, and which was occupied, until quite recently, by Mrs. Joseph Vollmer. Early in the forties a missionary band of German Jesuit fathers was stationed at St. Agatha. It was from that noble band of self-sacrificing men that Father Schneider went forth on foot to labor in the Huron tract. It was from St. Agatha that Father Rupert Ebner, S. J., walked to say Mass in the log hut of John Nauer for the faithful of North Mornington. This he did in 1849, and then again in 1853. It was from St. Agatha too, that Father Caveng, another Jesuit father, came to Mornington in 1848. He was the first priest who visited this district.

There is a tradition among the veteran pioneers that this good missionary father fell into the hands of ruffians and who miraculously made good his escape, but this tradition does not seem to be well founded.

NAME AND ORIGIN

During the first few years the settlement was without a name, and the question, "What shall we call it?" arose among the colonists.



THE REV. EDWARD GLOWACKI, C. R., SECOND
PASTOR OF ST. MARY'S PARISH, 1866-1870.

Some contended to have it named "HABENICHTS," because its inhabitants were in the throes of poverty. Finally, the name "Bethlehem," was suggested by John Mack, the first school teacher. The idea arose from its Scriptural bearing—being the most neglected and

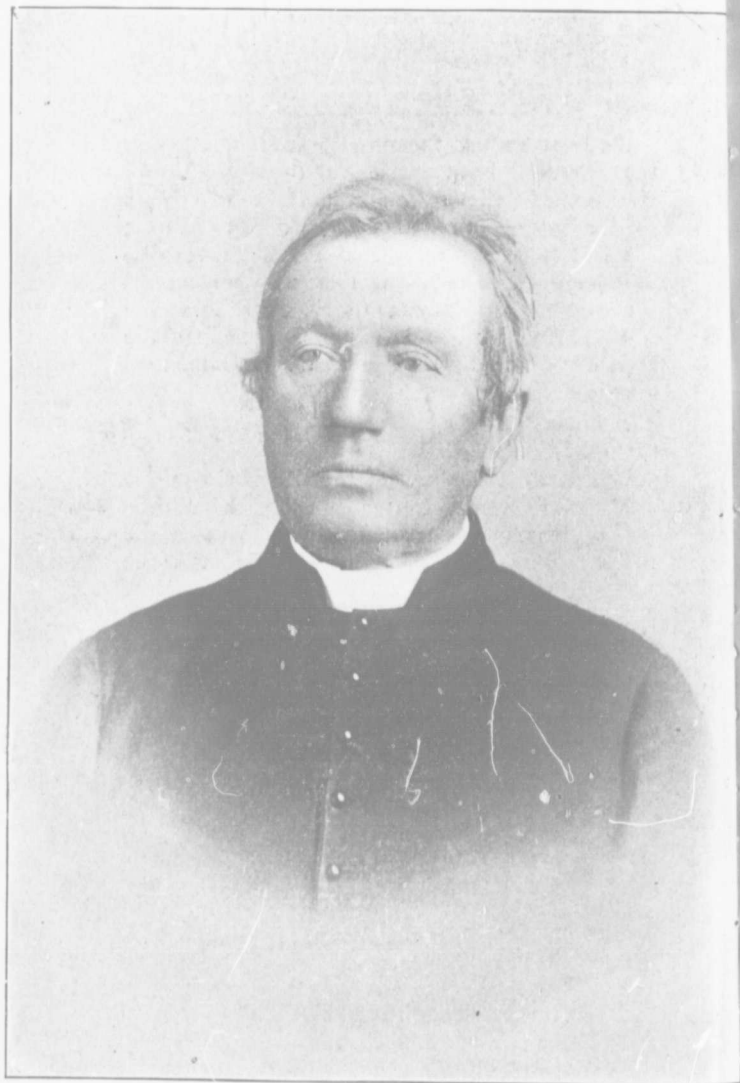
the least among the principalities of London Diocese, and out of which nothing good could come. In the course of time it was called Mornington, the name of the township; whilst at a still later period it was changed to Hesson by a local member who succeeded in procuring a daily mail service for the people of North Mornington, when he changed the name of the Post-Office to his own name—Hesson.

SECOND PERIOD, FROM 1866-1881.

With the close of the Rev. Columban Messner's administration in 1866, the faithful of Bethlehem were left a year without the spiritual service of a priest. Towards the close of 1866, or early in 1867, the Rev. Edward Glowacki, C. R., was appointed pastor of St. Clements with the charge of the Bethlehem mission. In 1870, the administration was for a short time transferred to the care of the late Father Elena, D. D. V. G. He was succeeded by the Rev. Francis Breitkopf, C. R., as parish priest of St. Clements in 1871. His administration continued until 1881, a period of ten years, during which time he attended the Bethlehem mission, and during which, the latter made noteworthy progress.

ORIGIN OF THE PRESENT SEPARATE SCHOOL.

The first school in Hesson dates back to 1859, or perhaps still earlier. It was a public



THE VERY REVEREND FATHER ELENA, D. D. V. G., WHO HAD TEMPORARY
CHARGE OF ST. MARY'S PARISH, 1870-1871.

school made up of Catholic rate-payers, taught by John Mack, a private non-Catholic gentleman, in a log-cabin opposite the present Parochial residence. During the first years of Father Breitkopf's charge of the mission, the feasibility of a Separate school was brought into consideration. The time to begin was considered opportune, and five trustees were elected: they were George Stemmler, Andrew Biesinger, Peter John Foerster, Anthony Haid, and Peter Riitz. These five gentlemen met with great opposition, but they stood faithful to the sacred cause entrusted to them, and it was only after a long and most difficult struggle that they accomplished the work. Thus it is to the untiring efforts of these noble pioneer gentlemen that we owe the blessing of our present Separate school.

In 1867 the present school grounds were purchased from Michael Kuhn at a cost of fifty dollars. The grounds contained one acre, and a log house had previously been built on them. This was turned into a school. To this the people built a small Sanctuary where the attending priest said Mass. The mission then contained about twenty families. In the course of a few years the mission increased rapidly, and the old log school-house was replaced by the present one. At the request of Father Breitkopf, the old school-house was torn down and the Sanctuary — which they held sacred — was carefully burned so that not a vestige was left

to fall into the hands of desecrators, a striking example of faith and zeal to those who would come after them.



THE REV. FRANCIS BREITKOPF, C. R., WHO BUILT
THE SEPARATE SCHOOL AND PURCHASED THE
FIRST BELL. 1871-1881.

In 1871, Father Breitkopf succeeded
in procuring a bell at a cost of eighty dol-

lars, the collecting of which amount was largely due to the efforts of Joseph Veitenheimer. The bell now occupies the present church tower and continues to do its work as of old, by calling the faithful to prayer. During all this time the Irish families living on the town line made Macton their religious headquarters. They assisted in building the first frame church erected there, and when the present fine brick structure replaced the old frame building, some of them contributed as high as one hundred dollars towards its erection.

THIRD PERIOD 1881-1894.

In 1881, the Rev. John Joseph Gehl was appointed successor to Father Breitkopf, and to his charge fell the spiritual care of the Mornington mission. He visited the mission about every seventh Sunday and occasionally on week-days. His charge came to an unexpected close in 1883, when the Rev. John Heitman was sent by the Rt. Rev. John Walsh, D. D., Bishop of London, to Listowel, with instructions to take charge of the Mornington mission. The newly appointed priest was introduced into the parish by "Holy" Mark on a Sunday, and it so happened that the people had the services of two priests on that day. This was the first hint given that the mission belonged to the Diocese of London. Father Gehl relinquished his charge, and Father Heitman became parish priest with his residence at

Listowel. Through some misrepresentation made to the Bishop, the poor priest was sent



THE REV. JOHN HEITMAN, THE FIRST PASTOR
APPOINTED BY THE BISHOP OF LONDON, WHEN
LISTOWEL WAS ANNEXED TO ST. MARY'S
PARISH. 1883-1890.

to Listowel under the impression that a fair congregation existed there, and this with the

Mornington mission would afford him a decent living. But alas! when he reached Listowel he found things quite contrary. The families were few and poor, so that after living there three months, he was unable to pay his house-rent, and driven by poverty, he left Listowel, and took up his abode in the Mornington parish. He lived in the home of Joseph Haid from December until the following spring. From there he moved into Jacob Knobloch's house, now occupied by Joseph Mittelholtz. He next moved into Joseph Linseman's house, now occupied by Joseph Moser. During this constant migration, Father Heitman succeeded in purchasing a site for a future church and residence. A difficulty arose as to where the site should be purchased. Those in the Western portion proposed the elevation on Joseph Haid's farm,—the owner consenting to donate two acres. Those in the Eastern portion contending for the present site. The latter prevailed, and the present two acres were purchased from Walter Gohl at a cost of one hundred and twenty dollars, with the condition, that he be excluded from those who were to pay for it, and for the erection of the proposed Priest's house. In 1886 the present Parochial residence was built at a cost of one thousand dollars.

During Father Heitman's administration, which continued six and a half years, the congregation numbered about thirty families. The Sunday offerings varied from twelve cents to two

dollars. In 1885 his Easter offering brought him two dollars, whilst the Christmas one netted ten dollars. The Diocesan regulations regarding tithes were introduced, but, as the number of families was small and of needy circumstances, the poor priest was left on an income so meagre, that he was actually unable to meet the expenses of a most frugal life. Frequently his house was without the necessary



VERY REV. E. B. KILROY, D. D., WHO HAD CHARGE
OF THE LISTOWEL MISSION IN 1881, AND
AGAIN IN THE YEAR 1889.

provisions for life, in which circumstances he would share the charity of a neighbor. These were hard times for both pastor and people, little known to the present generation. In the seventh year of his administration, Father Heitman was called to Cincinnati to attend the funeral of his father. On his homeward journey, he contracted a cold which

proved fatal three months after his return. Personally, Father Heitman was a man of culture, possessed of a rare intellectual ability, a physical giant, who found it easier to give than to solicit a livelihood from those who were likewise in want. In the spring of 1890 Father Heitman died in the bloom of manhood, after having received the last rites of the Church from Father Brennen of St. Marys. Word of his death was sent to his relatives in Cincinnati, and by some misunderstanding of the message returned, his body was expressed to Cincinnati, but delayed at Stratford station. This became known to Dr. Kilroy who took charge of the dead Priest's body and buried it in the Stratford cemetery. His relatives, arriving too late for the burial, erected a neat monument over his lonely grave. Thus, like his Master whom he had faithfully served, he received a stranger's tomb after a life of hardship and self-sacrifice in the missions of North Mornington.

FATHER GEHL'S SECOND ADMINISTRATION, 1890-1894.

After the death of Father Heitman, Father Gehl was again given charge of the vacant mission, which he now called Mornington.

During this second charge he made monthly visits to the mission. The Rt. Rev. Denis O'Connor, D. D., Bishop of London, was the

first Bishop who visited Mornington in the autumn of 1891. With his visitation began



THE REV. JOHN JOSEPH GEHL, WHO HAD CHARGE OF
ST. MARY'S PARISH FROM 1881-1883, THEN
AGAIN, FROM 1890-1894.

the erection of the present church. A subscription list was opened in his presence,

headed by John Foerster, with one hundred dollars. The subscription on that day amounted to thirteen hundred dollars, including one hundred dollars signed by the Bishop. Previous to this time the parish lines were defined as comprising the townships of Mornington and Wallace, and a part of Elma, the latter never being definitely defined. In the same fall of 1891 preparations for building were made, and in the following spring, all the material was on the ground. The work was rapidly pushed to completion during the summer of 1892 under the supervision of Brother Alexander and George Stemmler. Too much praise cannot be given to the untiring efforts and zeal of Father Gehl, who sacrificed his time and exhausted his energy to accomplish this noble work. He succeeded in collecting about one thousand two hundred dollars outside of the mission. In the fall of the same year, the present handsome church was completed and solemnly blessed by the Rt. Rev. Bishop O'Connor, when Father Gehl expressed his pleasure in announcing that the church was free from debt, notwithstanding that it had cost five thousand dollars. The church then contained but one altar, which was presented by George Stemmler. The painted windows on each side of the altar were donated by Mrs. Joseph Vollmer, and Father Gehl. Early in the following year the interior of the church was frescoed at a cost of four hundred dollars. On July seventeenth, 1894, Father

Gehl ended a most brilliant career as Pastor of Hesson. To him, therefore, do the good people of St. Mary's parish, owe a debt of eternal gratitude, and their magnificent church will stand a lasting monument in testimony of his zeal and labor in their behalf.



THE MOST REV. DENIS O'CONNOR, D. D., WHO WAS
THE FIRST BISHOP WHO VISITED ST. MARY'S
PARISH, AND LAID THE CORNER-STONE OF
ST. MARY'S CHURCH, ON MAY 24TH, 1892

FOURTH PERIOD 1894-1901.

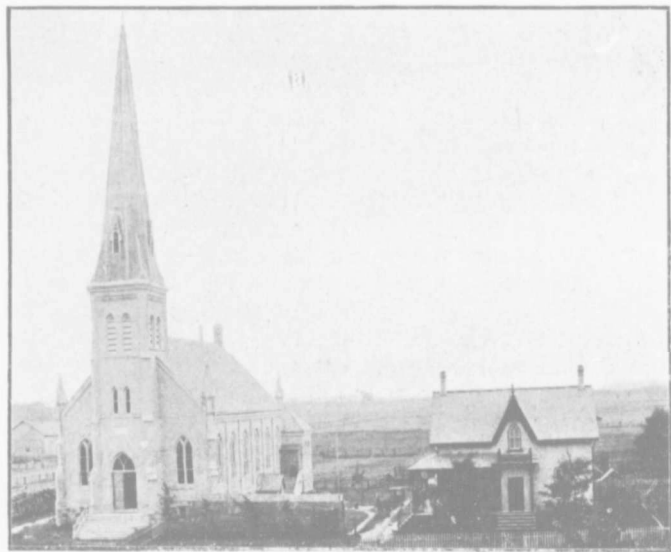
In the month of July, 1894, the Rev.
John Joseph Gnam was appointed successor to
Father Gehl, and second resident Pastor of

the Mornington mission, now known as Hesson. During his regime, the grounds were improved ; commodious sheds erected ; a stable built ; the house renovated ; the church was furnished with altars, pulpit, statuary, vestments, flowers and lights. As a crowning work to these efforts, a shrine to our Lady of Perpetual Help is now being erected in the church, under which title the latter was dedicated. The Separate school was also remodeled at a great expense. Spiritually, there were societies organized ; leagues and confraternities established, and singing and catechetical schools inaugurated. Complete in every detail, and free from debt, St. Mary's parish is a model in every respect. Six years ago Hesson was considered the most insignificant and backward mission of the diocese. To-day, having passed through a state of evolution—from Bethlehem of old, to Mornington, and from the latter to Hesson, and finally to "Mornington Place"—though still among the smallest in size, it nevertheless, compares favorably, in many points, with the larger parishes of London Diocese.

To-day, St. Mary's parish comprises the townships of Mornington, Wallace, and a portion of Elma. Wallace is the township notoriously famous as the home of the "Wallace Lambs" in which no Catholic was allowed to take up his abode, and none has ventured to do so even to the present day. The town of Listowel has but one Catholic resident, and

Palmerston, to the extreme north, contains a few, who, owing to proximity, are attended from Drayton.

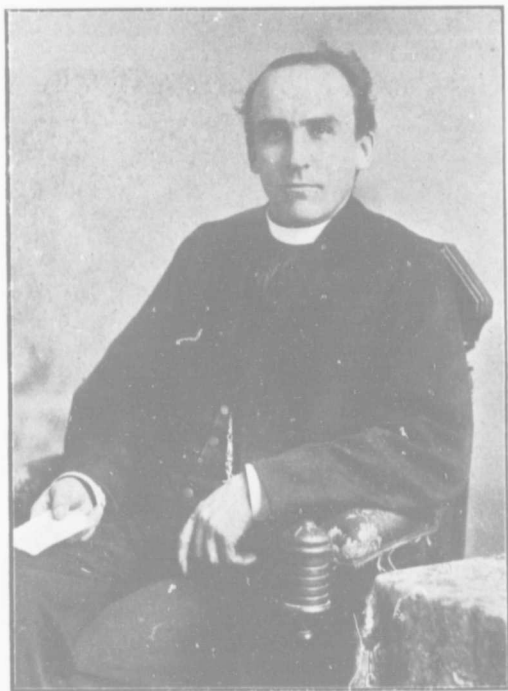
The village of Hesson is situated on the corner of the thirteenth concession of Mornington and of the Northern Gravel road, and



ST. MARY'S CHURCH AND RECTORY IN 1900.

is about twelve miles from the town of Listowel, and seven and a half miles from Newton, the nearest railway station. It contains fifteen neat dwellings, constructed principally of white

brick, with an approximate population of fifty souls. Including two churches, and two schools, the village has a first class hotel con-



THE REV. JOHN JOSEPH GNAM, WHO IS NOW REIGN-
ING GLORIOUSLY IN THE PARISH OF HIS FORE-
FATHERS IN THE FAITH 1894-?

ducted by John Meyer, a general store by
Louis Kieffer, and a blacksmith shop by Jacob

Gatschene. A furniture factory has recently been erected by contractor Joseph Helm, which is operated during the winter months. Owing to the many years of faithful and active service, Walter Gohl is looked upon as the "Village Father" whose words are heard and esteemed by all.



THE RIGHT REV. FERGUS PATRICK M'EVAY, D. D.,
WHO CONSECRATED ST. MARY'S CHIMES AND
LECTURED TO A LARGE AUDIENCE, ON
DECEMBER 16TH, 1902.

To-day, there are about sixty families in St. Mary's parish, two thirds of these are of German parentage and the remainder of

Irish descent.

The present incumbent, Father Gnam, has recently celebrated the eighth anniversary of his pastoral charge of St. Mary's parish, and as a mark of the material and spiritual progress made during his administration, and of the very happy relations which always existed between Pastor and people, the latter decided to place a set of chimes in the church tower. Most significant of this enterprise, was the fact, that the entire cost was raised within the limits of a few weeks. The Bells have been purchased from the famous Meneely bell foundry of West Troy. They bear the names of their respective sponsors and were consecrated in the presence of a large number of clergy and laity, by the Rt. Rev. F. P. McEvay, D. D., Bishop of London, on the sixteenth of December, 1902. On the following day, they were placed in position under the supervision of Anthony Kraemer, from which date, they began their mission, calling the faithful to prayer.

Thus we have reached the end of our task. Beginning with the first settlers in 1847, we have given a brief, but what we believe to be a complete and trustworthy record of all the facts collected in connection with our subject. We hope that this information of the past may be of interest to the reader, and prompt him to a higher appreciation of the age in which he lives. In conclusion, we pray

that the sweet tones of St. Mary's chimes, ringing down throughout future ages, may awaken some unborn historian to pen the future history of St. Mary's parish, Hesson.



AUTHOR OF THE "TWENTIETH CENTURY OCTOPUS"
AT THE AGE OF TWELVE.

