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Archbishop Patrick John Ryan: His Life and Times

AuthorHouse
Patrick Ryan (March 2010)
Hardcover $16.60 (357pp)
978-1-4389-9823-7

What author Patrick Ryan began as an encomium to his not-too-distant relative, the Archbishop Patrick John Ryan, developed not only into a well researched and readable history of the Archbishop but also a short history of Ireland, from 1831 to 1851, and the US, between 1851 and 1911. It enlightens the growth of the Roman Catholic Church in America and the social and political development of Ireland and the States during that period.

Archbishop Patrick John Ryan was born in Tipperary County, Ireland, in a modest farm family. Shortly after the great potato famine savaged the country, he migrated from Ireland to the US, arriving in St. Louis in 1852, where he completed his education for the priesthood and began his ministry. He was noted as an accomplished orator and displayed great charm and wit in his ability to convey the teachings of the Church to all people and to bridge the gap between the Catholic Church and the political community. While in St. Louis during the Civil War, Ryan managed to serve the needs of both those who were loyal to the Union as well as those who supported the Confederacy while not publicly becoming a partisan. In 1884 he was appointed Archbishop of Philadelphia, a position he held until his death in 1911.

Patrick Ryan, the author of *Archbishop Patrick John Ryan,* describes his relative as “a pragmatist.” The Archbishop was a liberal in promoting the role of the Catholic Church as a key player in American life but a conservative in the application of Church doctrine. He was an advocate for the interests of Native Americans and former slaves and he involved himself in resolving work disputes between laborers and their bosses.

The author has expended great effort in researching and presenting detailed background material on the various locations prominent in the life of the Archbishop. He devotes a goodly amount of space to explaining life in rural Ireland in the early part of the nineteenth century, describing the famine that saw nearly 800,000 Irishman die from hunger and disease between 1845 and 1851–nearly ten percent of the country’s population. In the later sections of the book, Ryan thoroughly describes the political and social setting in the US, first in the frontier town of St. Louis and then in Philadelphia and the eastern part of the country.

Archbishop Patrick John Ryan: His Life and Times will surely be of interest to his fellow church members; but it also has a wider audience with students of history of the US. (The author’s grandfather was a cousin to his subject.)

JOHN MICHAEL SENGER (January 25, 2011)

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