

F. EDWARD DAEMS

REV. F. EDWARD Daems, whose portrait is printed as a frontispiece to this volume, was born near Diest, Belgium, August 26, 1826. He came to America in September, 1851, and for a few months assisted Father Vanden Broek at Little Chute, Wis. In May, 1852, he came to Bay Settlement to take charge of the Holy Cross congregation of the Catholic Church. He thus became the first resident clergyman on the Door Peninsula. A small log church had been built there by one of his itinerant predecessors. In June of the same year he and his parishioners began the erection of a large church which was soon finished and served the congregation for almost eighty years.

In the summer of 1853, when the first company of agricultural immigrants arrived from Belgium to Wisconsin, he was instrumental in causing them to settle on vacant lands in the vicinity of Bay Settlement. These first pioneers were quickly followed by a multitude of others. It is estimated that during the next four or five years about fifteen thousand Belgians settled in the timbered region east and northeast of Bay Settlement. To all of these many countrymen Father Daems was for a time pastor, friend and adviser. There were no roads, but he traveled around on foot, holding divine service in their log cabins, baptizing their children and burying their dead. He was also their only

doctor, being familiar with many medical remedies and thus eased many a bed of pain.

These visits of the cheerful, energetic young priest were the great festival days of the humble pioneers. There were no newspapers in their cabins, and very seldom came a letter, but he told them of what was happening in all his farflung parish, fifty miles long and ten miles wide. In that parish practically all were Belgians, coming largely from the same province—Brabant—and the news he had to tell was therefore of great interest. Weddings and funerals, the news from the old country or of new arrivals were usually first heard of through him. As he had a strong penchant for the humorous, these narratives were usually highly entertaining. He could also tell of how the people of this or that neighborhood were talking of building a church, which news was a powerful stimulus for the settlers in another district to follow their example.

In time these churches were built and the Belgian settlement changed from one large parish with Father Daems as the only priest into more than a dozen smaller ones, most of which have their own priests. The following is a list of the congregations with their churches, the members of which are almost exclusively Belgians, into which the original Holy Cross parish was subdivided:

Holy Cross, Bay Settlement, Brown County.

St. Hubert's, Sugar Bush, Brown County.

St. Peter & St. Pauls, Green Bay, Brown County.

St. Joseph's, Champion, Kewaunee County.

St. Martins, Tonet, Kewaunee County.

St. Amand's, Walhain, Kewaunee County.

St. Louis', Dyckesville, Kewaunee County.

St. Odile's, Thiry Daems, Kewaunee County.

St. Peter's, Lincoln, Kewaunee County.

St. Huberts, Rosiere, Door and Kewaunee Counties.

St. Francis de Paul, Marchand, Door and Kewaunee Counties.

St. Michael's, Misiere, Door County.

St. Mary's, Fairland, Door County.

St. Francis', Brussels, Door County.

There is also the Chapel of the Holy Virgin at Champion, Kewaunee County, which does not represent a separate congregation.

Finally there are a large number of Belgians on the outskirts of the settlement who are members of nearby churches whose membership is mixed.

The fate and fortunes of these many thousand Belgians were largely affected by the guiding influence of Father Daems in persuading them to settle where they did. No doubt their early pioneer struggles were made lighter by dwelling together in one large community with so many ties to bind them together. They have reason to feel grateful to his memory for he found them an excellent region to dwell in, and he spared no toil to help them.

Father Daems died at Bay Settlement February 12, 1879. For many years previously he was Vicar General of the Green Bay Diocese.