

'Diviner' or 'Water Witch,' This Priest Is It

"Being called a 'diviner' is not too bad, but to be tabbed a 'water witch' is positively embarrassing," So says Columban Father Eugene Ryan who, regardless of title, has proven his ability to find water with a forked stick.

A wiry, intense man of 41, Father Ryan is a native of Dublin, Ireland. During a stop-over at the Columban Fathers' headquarters near Omaha, Neb., he discussed his unique talent with a soft brogue undiminished after 14 years as a Columban missionary in Korea.

"Wells have been turning up under my feet for six years now," Father Ryan said, "ever since a French priest passing through our diocese showed me how to use the forked stick. If you have the knack, any kind of V-shaped branch will do," Father assured, "contrary to old wives' tales, it doesn't have to be willow or peach."

To demonstrate, the Columban priest snapped a yard-long forked limb off a nearby bush. He gripped the arms of the rod with his knuckles toward the ground and set out across a field, displaying the head-

down concentration of a professional golfer pondering his next shot.

As he paced, the rod began to vibrate and a steady downward pull developed, overcoming the priest's clenched-fist efforts to keep it straight. Finally the branch tipped downward and remained rigidly bent until Father Ryan walked on. He turned back over the spot and the rod twitched, then nose-dived again.

It turned out Father Ryan was right when he declared, "There's water here." He was standing over a buried water main!

Another Columban missionary in Korea, Father Charles O'Rourke of Council Bluffs, Ia., verified Father Ryan's water-divining talent.

"Five years ago the well in one of my mission villages dried up," the Iowan recalled. "I'd heard about Father Ryan, and the people were desperate, so we brought him down. He silenced the scoffers by finding what is still the only source of water in the town. Matter of fact there are now five pumps on the well," Father

O'Rourke added, "and we are sharing our supply with several other villages."

Father Ryan is at a loss to explain "the power," as awestruck Korean villagers refer to his water-locating ability. "That old French priest only said some people have it and others don't. I seem to have it, but can't begin to explain why or how."

During a nationwide drought last year, the missionary's "power" was matched against a university team dispatched to Kwangju area by South Korea's President.

"We crossed paths in a dried-up little village near the southern coast," Father mused. "There were four of them, armed with hydrometers and

all sorts of scientific equipment. I felt positively shabby with only a weather-beaten forked stick," he said.

"I tried to defer to the experts," Father Ryan explained, "but the villagers would have none of it. So I began searching the area, with every man, woman and child who lived there trailing along after me. The four university men came, too, plainly amused at the Pied Piper spectacle the villagers and I created."

"Then the rod dipped down," Father said, "and the yammering of the crowd ceased abruptly. I tested the spot from several angles, both to confirm the find and to gauge the approximate depth by the tilt of the branch. A little sigh from the crowd followed the

rod every time it bent downward. Finally, I told them to dig there, about 90 feet down."

The little priest rubbed his forehead as he recalled the university team's reaction. "They got awfully excited; said they had checked that whole area and found nothing but solid rock. Their leader, a full professor of geology, insisted that to dig there would be a waste of time and energy."

"Those poor parched vil-

lagers had nothing to lose so they started digging anyway," Father said. "Praise God, they hit an artesian well at 80 feet; it's still producing about 20,000 gallons of water a day."

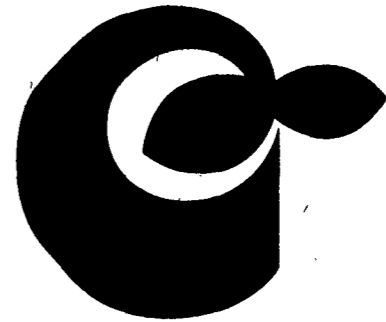
"Unhappily, I can't repeat what the professor said when we hit water," Father Ryan said, a smile tracing across his face, "or what some of the villagers said to him. But I can state that I made some conversions that day—both as a priest and as a water-witch!"



Columban Father Eugene Ryan and forked stick.

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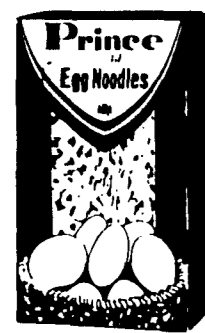
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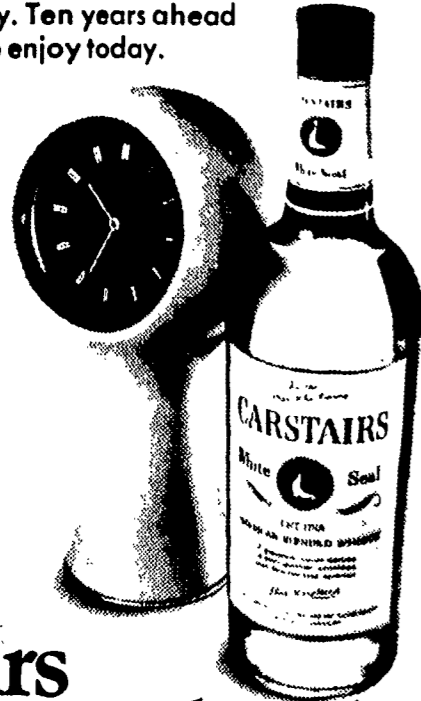


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