

THE ESTABLISHMENT AND HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN TARANAKI.

The provincial district of Taranaki is that part of New Zealand which is situated on the south-western position of the North Island. Its area is 2,137,000 acres and the chief town of the district is named New Plymouth. It is a very picturesque place, with a grand mountain snow-capped all the year round in the centre, the height of it being 8,270 feet above the sea, rising to a perfect cone from a base thirty miles in diameter. The soil is very fertile and capable of supporting a larger population than perhaps any other portion of New Zealand. It was originally settled by a colonising company started in the south-western part of England, and its pilgrim fathers accordingly came from Devonshire and Cornwall. Notwithstanding the Maoris were thickly spread over the country, the Catholic missions established at Auckland and Wellington at the time did not extend their ramifications to Taranaki, and therefore owing to the absence of a priest more than one Catholic family who came with the early settlers soon left for New South Wales for the sake of the religious education of their children. The Rev. Father Pezant was the first priest who visited the district, and he used to travel on foot between Wanganui and New Plymouth, through a very rough country, which, at that time, was only inhabited by the Natives. In 1856 a grant of a town section at the east end of New Plymouth was made by the Government to the Catholic mission, which was supplemented by a donation of four others adjoining it, by the late Mr. Richard Brown, a merchant in the place, who was treacherously shot by a surprise party of natives in 1860, the Maori who killed him being Tawatibi who had recently been in Mr. Brown's employ*. About the same year a Native disturbance took place and one or two companies of the 65th regiment were sent from Auckland to New Plymouth, and there being a number of Catholics amongst the men, a collection was made not only in Taranaki but also in Wellington and other places, and from the funds so obtained a small chapel was erected on the mission land in Courtenay street. It was a very small place, not more than twenty or thirty persons being able to be seated in it, and in this building a visiting priest used to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It was not until 1860 when the Maori rebellion broke out, and a large number of the British troops were stationed in New Plymouth, that a permanent priest was sent to attend to the spiritual wants of the men. Rev. Father Tressalet was the priest appointed for that duty. The soldiers' barracks were built on an eminence to the west of the town, and as the little chapel in Courtenay street was too far for the men to attend Mass regularly, an acre of ground was purchased in 1862 in Devon street west, a more central spot and on a fine elevated situation. So the chapel in Courtenay street was removed, the soldiers giving their labour gratuitously, who also enlarged the structure. In 1863 the Rev. Father Perteuis was sent to relieve Father Tressalet and he added to the church, for as the troops increased naturally the congregation got larger.

In 1865 the Rev. Father Rolland was the priest who took charge of the parish, and he attended to the spiritual wants of the Catholics between Patea and New Plymouth—the whole of which district was, at that time, unsettled, but detachments of soldiers were stationed at Patea Waiba (Hawera, at that time, was not in existence), Oponaki, Warea, Okato, as well as Bell Block, Waitara, and White Cliff. Between 1865 and 1868 there was a cessation of hostilities, but a large number of the troops was scattered all over the district. In February, 1868, Rev. Father Rolland purchased the section of land and house which now forms the Presbytery, and he was having plans prepared for the erection of a new church when some Natives near Waiba killed four military settlers, which caused hostilities between the two races to again commence. Father Rolland then had to devote his time between the men engaged at the front fighting and his parishioners in New Plymouth. He, however, arranged his time so as to be able to accompany the forces when an engagement was imminent, which called for the following encomium from a Protestant soldier (Major Von Tempiski), who was killed in an engagement with the Maoris on 21st August, 1868, on their way to attack the stronghold of the rebels at Te Ngutu-o-te-Manu (the beak of the bird): "On that grey and rainy morning," wrote Major Von Tempiski, "when the roaring waters of the Waingongora were muttering of flood and fury to come, when our 'three hundred' mustered silently in column on the parade ground, one man made his appearance, who at once drew all eyes upon him with silent wonder. His garb was most peculiar; scant but long skirts shrouded his nether garments, and an old waterproof sheet hung loosely over his shoulders. Weapons he had none, but there was a warlike cock in the position of his broad-brimmed old felt, and a self-confidence in the attitude in which he leaned on his walking stick, that said, 'Here stands a man without fear.' Who is it? Look underneath the flap of his clerical hat, and the frank, good-humoured, brave countenance of Father Rolland will meet you. There he was, lightly arrayed for much of which no one could say what the ending would be. With a good-humoured smile he answered my question as to 'what on earth brought him there.' He said that in holding evening service he had told his flock that he would accompany them on the morrow, and there he was! True, there stood 'a good Shepherd.' Through the rapid river, waist deep, along the weary forest track, across ominous looking clearings, where, at any moment a volley from an ambuscade could have swept our ranks, Father Rolland marched cheerfully and manfully, ever ready with a kind word, a playful sentence, to any man who passed him. And when at last in the clearings of Ngutu-o-te-Manu the storm of bullets burst upon us he did not wait in the rear for men to be brought to him, but ran with the rest of us forward against the enemy's position. As soon as any man dropped he was by his side; he did not ask 'are you a Catholic?' or 'are you a Protestant?' but kneeling prayed for his

* This Mr. Brown was in no way connected with the Major Brown of New Plymouth. Richard Brown was born in Dublin, and brought up and educated in that city by an uncle. Shortly after the settlement at New Plymouth had been formed, he went there and started as a merchant. He was a person of education and of polite manners, but singularly reticent as regards his antecedents and business transactions. It is supposed he was a Catholic.

'last words,' Thrice noble conduct, in a century of utilitarian tendencies. What Catholic on that expedition could have felt fear when he saw Father Rolland by his side, smiling at death, a living personation, a fulfilment of many a text preached? What Catholic could have but felt proud of being a Catholic on that day on Father Rolland's account?"

On peace being restored, Father Rolland gave his attention to matters at the New Plymouth end of the district and procured land at Koru, about ten miles from town, where he erected a house as a monastery for men. At one time he had twelve novices there, some of whom were employed in cultivating the land, whilst others were engaged in instructing boys, who were sent from various parts of the Colony to be educated. With a view of collecting subscriptions and getting help to carry out his project, he obtained permission from his Lordship Dr. Viard, the Bishop of Wellington, to go on a three months' mission to the West Coast of the South Island, visiting Greymouth, Hokitika, and other settlements on the goldfields. The Rev. Father Binsfield temporarily filled his place whilst away, and was present at the demonstration held on the departure of the last Imperial regiment (18th Royal Irish) from New Plymouth. He remained here from November, 1869, till March, 1870, when Father Rolland returned to resume his duties in the parish. In May of the same year the Rev. Father Lampilla arrived, enabling Father Rolland to go on another mission to the goldfields, to collect subscriptions for the Koru Monastery. Whilst he was away on one of these missions, his Lordship, Bishop Viard died (June 3, 1873), and the various priests had to remain in the places they happened to be in at the time. The Rev. Father Lampilla, being at New Plymouth, remained in charge of the parish, and at once commenced to build the present chapel, which was completed about the middle of 1874. His Lordship, Right Rev. Dr. Redwood, Bishop of Wellington, arrived in the Colony on November 26, 1874, and made a pastoral visit throughout the district the next year, arriving at New Plymouth on September 20, 1875. The following morning he blessed the chapel.

A settlement having been formed at a place inland about 14 miles to the south of New Plymouth, called Inglewood, a church was erected there, and opened by Rev. Father Lampilla on January 15, 1878, he was assisted by Rev. Father Perteuis, who was the first parish priest of Hawera, which was then springing into existence as a town.

At the beginning of 1879 the Rev. Father Berkler relieved Father Lampilla, who was becoming aged and infirm. This priest remained twelve months, and during his administration the presbytery, which had got into a very dilapidated condition, was repaired, the school-room renovated, a large bell purchased and christened on Christmas Day, 1879, by the Rev. Father Rolland (who was on a visit to the district), and who was assisted by the Rev. Father Berkler and the Rev. Father Adclar. A debt was incurred during the year of £500, which existed at the time of the Rev. Father Berkler's departure. For eight months there was no parish priest, the Rev. Father Grogan, who was stationed at Hawera, visiting New Plymouth monthly.

On October 10, 1880, the Rev. Father Chastagnon took charge of the parish, who remained till November 10, 1884. During the four years Father Chastagnon was parish priest he reduced the debt by one half; he had the large bell erected on a strong scaffolding; the chapel was lined and ceiled with timber, and painted; and the altar newly carpeted and furnished. In 1884 Rev. Father Chastagnon induced the Order des Religieuses de Notre Dame des Missions to erect a convent in New Plymouth, and a handsome three-storied building, costing over £3000, was placed on the chapel grounds, the land of which was made over to the Sisters. He also built a chapel at Stratford and another at Ookura, besides doing other good work in the parish.

On November 10, 1884, Father Chastagnon took his departure for Ashburton, where he had been appointed parish priest, and the Rev. Father Cassidy took his place, and is the popular pastor here at the present time. During the two and a half years he has been in New Plymouth he has succeeded in clearing the remainder of the debt on the church property. He has enlarged the sitting accommodation in the church, and put additional rooms to the presbytery. The church at Inglewood he had to rebuild, owing to the timber of which the structure was erected having rotted away. I have not said a word as to the *personnel* of the various priests who have been here during the last thirty years; they have all been loved and respected, and it would be invidious to praise one more than the other. I have intimately known nearly the whole of them and can say that their zeal and assiduity in the performance of their sacred calling has made them esteemed by the Protestants in the place; whilst those who, owing to the absence of the clergy, may have become lukewarm in their faith have been galvanised from nominal Catholics into practical ones. The Catholic community is on the increase in New Plymouth, and in a few years it will be found that they will form far from the insignificant portion of the district they have in the past.

W. H. J. SEFFERN.

"ROUGH ON ITCH."—"Rough on Itch" cures skin humor eruptions, ringworm, tetter, salt rheum, frosted feet, chilblains, itchy ivy poison, barber's itch.

Leo Hartman, the Nihilist, has turned up soap-peddler in New York.

Two thousand men recently approached Holy Communion at the close of a recent retreat given especially for men at College Church, St. Louis.

The restoration of the cloister of St. John Lateran at Rome, one of the gems of mediæval architecture, is being proceeded with under the direction of the celebrated architect, Count Francesco Vespignani, by order of his Holiness. It was the work of an architect and mosaicist named Vassalletto, who flourished about the middle of the 13th century.

The vote of Rhode Island was three-quarters against woman suffrage. In Kansas, where women are entitled to vote at municipal elections, more than four-fifths of the women refused to go to the polls at the last elections. Of those voting the majority were coloured women and the wives of ignorant whites.