

# THE CHURCH IN NEW ZEALAND

## MEMOIRS OF THE EARLY DAYS

(Contributed.)

### Preface.

With the fast fleeting years, the old residents of the Colony are passing away from the scene of their struggles, hardships, anxieties patiently borne, hopes long deferred, and in many instances never realised. So that a wealth of valuable historic information may not be lost for all time, and that those who now remain may be afforded an opportunity to 'tell the tale' for the benefit of future generations, is the mission of this modest publication. Those of the Faith will, it is hoped, profit by the lessons to be learnt; proving how steadfastly the pioneers of settlement in this young Colony clung to the religion of their forefathers and to the ties that bound them to the dear old land, despite much adversity and many disappointments.

Although by oceans divided, the old land and the new were one in heart, and one in mind, to preserve and spread the Faith with confidence, contentment, and apostolic zeal. Such high motives, also, characterized the lives of our valiant pioneers.

### Introduction.

Sixty-six years have elapsed since the true light of Christianity was shed upon these most favored Isles of the Southern Seas, known as the British Colony of New Zealand. To ensure this brief introductory sketch being as accurate and comprehensive as possible, it is necessary to consult whatever historical documents there are available. In this connection, therefore, perhaps the most trustworthy records are those contained in what is known as the 'Early History of the Catholic Church in Oceania'—compiled from records left by Bishop Pompallier—giving in detail the trials, labors, and privations of this, the first, most saintly and zealous missionary; and published under the direction of one of his successors to the See of Auckland, the late Right Rev. Dr. Luck, O.S.B., in 1888, on the occasion of the Church attaining its jubilee. Another valuable work of reference is 'The History of the Church in Australasia,' compiled and published by his Eminence Cardinal Moran, Archbishop of Sydney, and from the pages of which may be derived much trustworthy information.

It was early in the year 1838 that the Right Rev. Jean Baptiste Francois Pompallier, who had been appointed Vicar Apostolic of Western Oceania by our Holy Father Pope Gregory XVI. of venerable memory, after a long and weary ocean voyage, reached the then little known shores of New Zealand. The Bishop, accompanied by one priest, the Rev. Father Servant, and two religious Brothers of the then infant Society of Mary, landed at Hokianga in the north of the most northern island, composing the group, and a few days afterwards (Saturday, January 13) celebrated his first Mass in New Zealand at the house of Mr. Thomas Poynton, an Irish Catholic. This, so far as is known, was absolutely the first time that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass had been offered up in the country on shore, because it is open to conjecture, that possibly, although most improbably, a priest of the Church may have been among the ship's company of one or other of the exploring vessels which, in more remote times visited the coast, in which event no doubt Mass would be celebrated whilst the vessel lay in the offing. After getting matters fairly established at the first landing place (Hokianga), missions were opened among the Natives at various other settlements in the most northern part of the Colony, an undertaking rendered possible by the arrival at intervals of more priests.

In July, 1840, a French corvette, 'L'Aube,' arrived at the Bay of Islands, at which place one of the missions, as before mentioned, was in progress, bringing two priests and two catechists of the Society of Mary; also funds for the propagation of the Faith under the Vicariate-Apostolic. The commander of the vessel, Captain Lavaud, came to New Zealand under instructions from his Government to establish a French Colony at Akaroa, a fine harbor in the South Island, and also to annex the country as a French possession. The first part of his duty was duly accomplished, but in the latter his plans were frustrated by the fact that, suspecting his intention, British officials anticipated him by a few days, and hoisting their flag in the south proclaimed the group British territory. Only a short

time ago, the last surviving original French settler, Mr. Lelievre, died at Akaroa. Some of the descendants of the pioneer band still remain there, others are scattered in various directions.

Captain Lavaud, kindly offering to convey in his vessel to Banks Peninsula some priests to minister to the new settlers, Bishop Pompallier sent two, Fathers Comte and Pesant and Brother Florentin, the Bishop himself following, accompanied by Father Tripe, in September, 1840, in a small schooner which he had purchased, and named the 'Santa Maria.' These events marked the beginning of the Catholic mission in the south and larger island of New Zealand. A little later on, the 'Santa Maria' set sail still further south to Otago, conveying the Bishop and Fathers Comte and Pesant, Father Tripe being left in charge at Akaroa. After establishing a mission at what is now the city of Dunedin, a return was made to Akaroa, where Father Comte was left with Father Tripe. The course of the 'Santa Maria' was again shaped northward, and on Christmas Eve, 1840, the little vessel arrived at Port Nicholson, now the city of Wellington and capital of the Colony. Here the intrepid missionaries found a population of nearly four thousand Europeans, among whom were some hundreds of Irish Catholics, members of British regiments which had just arrived, and intending colonists. Mass was celebrated next day (Feast of the Nativity). After a stay of some little time in Wellington, ministering to the people and establishing the mission for Europeans and Natives alike, a return was made to Akaroa. Here the Bishop rested for a while, and busied himself in writing a catechism in the Maori language for the use of the missionaries generally. With Fathers Comte and Pesant travel was renewed, this time round the Peninsula to Port Cooper—now the important commercial town of Lyttelton—which was reached in three days. They were received here by the Maoris most cordially, and here also Father Comte was left with instructions to remain a fortnight and return overland to Akaroa. Thus was established the Church in the South Island.

Once more the 'Santa Maria' sailed northward, and after calls had been made at various previously established missions, on the east coast of the island, a course was shaped for the Bay of Waitemata, and a mission planted at what is now the city of Auckland. This mission was dedicated to St. Patrick. On the site given for a church to the Bishop by the Government officials, St. Patrick's Cathedral now stands.

About this time a devastating war broke out and continued for several years, which had the effect to a great extent of interfering with the hitherto most successful missionary enterprise, and nullifying much of the good work accomplished for the spiritual welfare of the Natives. Never disheartened, however, the devoted Bishop and priests labored on and contended not only against the ravages of war, but against infinitely worse foes, which even to this day attack the Church with relentless persistency—ignorant prejudice, bigotry, studied misrepresentation, and the basest slanders. These were the trials and tribulations encountered and endured. The Church survived them all and even prospered, and yearly shows greater signs of progress and prosperity.

When reading the records of the voyage made up and down the then little known and at all times dangerous and treacherous coast by the early missionaries in their frail craft, one naturally marvels at their escape from shipwreck and death. The coast was then practically uncharted; land marks were undefined by day, with no lights for guidance at night. Surely and unmistakably a watchful Providence guided their every movement, always guarding and ever protecting them. How often in our present day do we notice great ocean liners equipped with all modern inventions cast upon the rocks and shoals with which the coast is studded, notwithstanding the knowledge possessed of existing dangers, correct charts, properly defined routes, tide currents, weather forecasts, numerous lights, and in fact everything possible to ensure perfect security.

In 1843 the Rev. Father O'Riley, a Capuchin, arrived in Wellington as private chaplain to an English gentleman, the Hon. Mr. Petre, and for the time, and for many years after, this priest ministered to the Catholics of the place. In 1846 the Rev. Father Viard, S.M., who had some time previously been appointed Vicar-General by Bishop Pompallier, was consecrated his coadjutor, and in the same year Bishop Pompallier, after spending ten years in the Colony, took his departure on a visit to Europe, Monsignor Viard assuming episcopal charge meanwhile. At the period above mentioned the whole of the Colony was one immense diocese. In 1848 New Zealand was divided into two dioceses, Auckland and Wellington, Bishop Pompallier retaining Auckland, and was thus its first Bishop.

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