

BISHOP CLEARY ON VISITATION

GETTING FURTHER NORTH.

AN INTERESTING TRIP.

Awanui, January 27.

Last week his Lordship Bishop Cleary passed through Awanui after the first Catholic episcopal visitation of the Waiharara and Houhora gum-fields. An added interest was given to his visit to those remote parts of his diocese by the fact that it was the first occasion on which a motor car had ever reached those places, while a motor trip to Houhora was, on practically all hands, pronounced to be an utter impossibility.

The Waiharara Gum-fields.

The Bishop was again accompanied by Father Bruning, the pastor of this vast northern area. After two Masses at Awanui on January 14, his Lordship preached and administered the Sacrament of Confirmation to several persons, and then set out by motor to Waipapakauri, where he visited some Catholics. Here the clay roads ended, and the region of shifting sands and rough and hilly sand-tracks began. To meet the new conditions, six heavy chains were attached to the driving wheels of the big Cadillac car, which then tore up the steep tracks at a fast pace. Tracts of deep, soft sand were encountered at short distances apart all the way from there to Houhora and back. In other places the middle of the track was deeply scored and cross-hatched by winter torrents, or cut away by the wind-driven sand acting as a sand-blast, which cut both soft sandstone rock and black earth into all sorts of fantastic shapes. Some of the roughest going was across the great Waiharara swamps, where the now dried ground was lumpy and bumpy to a degree, sometimes also peppered with stumps, while in some places the track was partly grown across by ti-tree. A good pace was, however, generally maintained, although it was far from being a pleasure jaunt.

On the way the Bishop and Father Bruning visited various Catholic families. They also crossed the swamp on foot, through rushes and ti-tree, and over water-logged ground all peck-marked with diggers' shallow excavations, to converse with diggers at work winning kauri gum from sinkings flooded knee-deep. On the Waiharara fields the Bishop was the guest of Mr and Mrs Pausina, and he made their home his headquarters for several trips around, as far north as Kaimaumau. The sight and sound of the car brought diggers out of their sinkings and their families out of their iron or twelve-sack huts to see the first motor that ever arrived on these northern fields. The huts, especially those of the Croation and Dalmatian diggers, are pictures of neatness, and as clean as the homes of Holland, where the women are reputed to wash everything every day—except the water. In the case of the Austrian diggers' huts (two or three reared, according to the size of the family) there are a good stove, neat bits of furniture made by the proprietors, Catholic religious pictures and emblems are frequently seen on the walls, which are nicely papered, while the floors are covered with carpet and linoleum. The name 'Austrian' is, as a rule, resented by those sturdy and thrifty settlers: they maintain a fierce resentment against the Austrian Emperor and the Austrian Imperial Government; in this war their sympathies are strongly with the British-French-Russian allies; and they regard as a bitter trial the fate of their countrymen who, having returned home before this great struggle, were obliged to take up arms to fight for a cause which they loathe.

On January 15 the Bishop gave an instruction suited to the capacities of the children, catechised them, and also preached to a considerable adult congregation. Confirmation was administered at the close of the second Mass. A number of the children were, during the Bishop's stay, treated to a motor drive over the sandy, hilly roads.

To Houhora: An Ugly Trip.

On January 16 the Bishop and Father Bruning left for Kaimaumau and Houhora. At Kaimaumau they were treated with great consideration and hospitality by Mr Hagger and his family. Mr Hagger, who is a well educated and highly interesting man, accompanied the visitors to guide them over the difficult two miles to the soft sand-banks on the long beach which is at present the only 'road' to Houhora. The way led down a steep sandy track to the short Kaimaumau beach, then along the beach through some deep mud, next through the trackless ti-tree which afforded the best means of crossing a stream with a deep muddy bed, then up some natural sandstone 'steps,' and through rushes, ti-tree, and dried swamp to the sand-banks on the second beach. A charge by the motor up the sand left the driving-wheels stuck fast in the soft sand. The car was backed down on its own power; some rough knobs of sand were levelled, two pieces of cocoa matting were stretched up the soft slope; the powerful car was rushed at it by the Bishop at great speed; it flew up in splendid style and down the rough, bumpy soft sand at the other side, and the wheels fast ploughed their way through the long slope right to the hard sand by the edge of the receding tide.

As the Bishop dashed up over the soft sand and down the other side, he received round after round of ringing cheers from a body of people who were on two large motor boats at anchor quite close to the beach where he crossed. One of the boats was from Houhora, the other from Kaimaumau; and the occupants were keenly interested in the locally much-debated issue as to whether it was possible to get a motor car over the soft sandy rise to the hard beach.

A very rapid run was made by the Bishop over the smooth, hard sand near the water for the 16 miles or so to the next great obstacle, the Motutangi River, with the steep sandy bluff beyond it. This was explored by his Lordship and Mr Pausina (who had gone on ahead during the morning to 'spy out the land' for the visitors); and the Bishop decided that, with a moderate amount of spade-work, this dangerous bluff could be surely surmounted. In the meantime, however, he decided to follow around the beach to the confluence of the Motutangi River with the sea at the Houhora Heads. Contrary to all descriptions and expectations, it was found quite feasible to cross the river there at low water. The car was accordingly driven over. In an instant a number of Maoris were all over it, in a state of great excitement at the first coming of a self-propelled land vehicle in the district. A way inland was soon made with spades, a bit of sea-bank being cut away, and two pieces of cocoa matting stretched up the steep ascent. With a great impetus gained on the firm, shelly beach below, the car stormed up the sharp slope between two lines of intensely interested whites and natives. Then, under the kindly guidance of Mr Smith, the Bishop drove over a steep slope, through some trackless ti tree, and so on to the sandy and rocky road to Houhora. The muddy bed of the Rio River was safely crossed, and, after calling on some Catholics on the way, the occupants of the car swung at a fine rate, through the soft sand, into Houhora. A cricket match between two district teams was in progress at the time, and the contestants and practically the entire local population were soon around the first motor car to arrive in that part of New Zealand.

On the Houhora Gum-fields.

During their stay at Houhora, the visitors were the guests of Mr Evans, a hotelkeeper and extensive and progressive local farmer. The morning after their arrival was Sunday, January 17. Masses were celebrated in the Houhora and Waihopo halls, the Bishop preaching in both places. On his way to Waihopo and back he loaded his car with all the children that could be packed into it, and drove them at as good a pace as the deep sand and the rugged slopes would permit, to the intense delight of the youngsters, none of whom had ever seen a motor car before. After the late Mass at Waihopo, the Bishop and Father Bruning were the