

The Church in New Zealand

AUCKLAND DIOCESE: SOME OLD-TIME RECORDS.

A Typical Early Marist Missionary

As showing the truly wonderful endurance of the early Marist Missionary Fathers in the face of privations and hardships, apart from the dangers to life and limb so often encountered as to become almost their daily experience, we quote the following relating to Father Petitjean, and the conditions he endured, we may reasonably assume, were the common lot of his devoted confreres:—From New Zealand Father Petitjean writes to his family in 1841 thus: "My sister asks me what sufferings I have endured in these far-away missions. Is it proper that I who have just entered on missionary work should speak of sufferings? However, if this interests you, here are some details concerning my usual food: I do not mean to mention them as privations. My food is sometimes pork, sometimes potatoes; I vary one by the other; for dessert a few grains of corn cooked in water: and that is all. Lately, I met a Protestant gentleman, who took pleasure in enumerating in the greatest detail, his articles of diet, and added 'You have all these too, haven't you?' I replied to him very simply: No, I have very little rice; I don't eat bread; I have only enough wine for Mass; I have given up tea and

his feet. Often after a day's journey, the Missionary would knock at the door of a cabin which he found to be destitute of inhabitants: in such cases he easily found a sleeping place, but no means of appeasing his hunger."

At that time, and for many years afterwards, those zealous pastors (the Marist Missionaries) were obliged to find their way as best they could about a country still in the primeval state of nature. To the amazement of the Maoris, they would emerge from the unknown carrying the whole of their worldly possessions (including the requisites for offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass) strapped to their shoulders. The following extract from an article "The Story of the Church in Otago and Southland, 1840-1920," written for the *Tablet* on the occasion of the consecration of Right Rev. Dr. Whyte, as third Bishop of Dunedin, may prove of interest in the present connection. "During these years (probably the late 'forties and early 'fifties) a considerable native population inhabited paha along the coast of Otago about Waikouaiti, and among them the priest would spend a few days. The home of Michael Leahy, a son of Erin, married to a native woman, was ever the hospitable haven for the Missionary worn out with the toils of travel, privation, and exposure: and here he would rest and "refit" preparatory to resuming his journeying elsewhere, and meanwhile instruct the Maoris and administer to their spiritual needs. A lady



VIEW OF RUSSELL, BAY OF ISLANDS (KORORAREKA OF THE MAORI, AND SCENE OF HONI HEKE'S EXPLOITS)

The historic residence of Bishop Pompallier stands behind the trees to the extreme right of this picture.

drink nothing but water: If I had something better I would keep it most carefully, in case I should receive the visit of some great chief or some stranger!" My trips into the midst of these tribes produce no change whatever in my daily habits. I live, like the natives, on potatoes. If they have any fish, they share it with me. These people live very poorly, for they sell the labor of their brows to Europeans to procure clothing. The ground serves as both chair and table; little baskets or large leaves, take the place of plates."

We extract the following from another record. "The frequent journeys they (the Missionaries) were forced to make in a country destitute of roads was another source of hardship. They had to travel over paths that sometimes led through swamps, sometimes were steep and narrow and almost always covered over with undergrowth. Oftentimes they lost their way, being unable to distinguish the windings of the path. Father Petitjean narrates how once losing his path, he had to climb up walls of rock. Underneath him lay the ocean, into which one false step would have sent him headlong. He climbed up courageously however, struggling with the brushwood and tormented by thirst, not knowing whether or not he would find his path again. In his distress he began to sing the hymn, "I place my confidence, Mary, in your protection"; and just at that moment he saw the road he was to follow at

now resident in Dunedin, a daughter of Michael Leahy, related to the present writer how her mother remembered to her dying day the prayers taught her by the priest by whom she was married. This lady, despite her many disadvantages, has staunchly kept the faith. As a child, together with her brother, she well remembers accompanying the priests for some distance on their departure to point out the way along bush tracks known only to the Maoris, no such modern conveniences as roads of any description existing until many years afterwards. She distinctly recollects Fathers Séon and Petitjean, known among the Maoris as Father Joseph (Hohepa), and Father John (Honi)—also Father Moreau who came later—in their old-time wanderings, and often marvelled (as did the natives generally) how they found their way about, and through forest-fastnesses; an easy matter, however, for the Maoris themselves, who are naturally gifted with a shrewd sense of location. They were well enough instructed to realise that Divine Providence guided and protected the priests.

Although to a great extent the settled portion of the Otago province has been denuded of its forests, the well-trod Maori tracks through the bush may still be clearly defined in the now open country. A recent writer made a study of these old-time pathways, tracing them in all directions but invariably leading from one pah or camping ground to another and always with a certain objective. The results of this writer's investigations provided most interesting reading.

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