

BISHOP CLEARY ON VISITATION

TO THE EXTREME NORTH.

A RECORD TRIP.

(From an occasional correspondent.)

RAWENE, February 3.

The Right Rev. Dr. Cleary, Bishop of Auckland, has arrived on the Hokianga, and is now busy visiting the various white and Native settlements on the big river and its tributaries. His Lordship, accompanied by Father Bruning and our local clergy, came to the Hokianga by way of Whangape and Matihetihe, at both of which places he made his visitation and confirmed many candidates of the Native race. The Bishop and Father Bruning reached Whangape after a remarkable and in some respects record, motor journey to Te Pahi, and other places in the extreme North.

The Ahipara Sands Conquered.

One of the greatest bugbears of the motorist in the North is, beyond a doubt, the bad rise and long down-slope of soft, deep sand that, at Ahipara, have hitherto barred the motorist from what would otherwise be his elysium—namely, the sixty miles of broad, smooth, hard beach that, at low tide, extends from Ahipara to Scott's Point. As a motor-racing track, there is nothing to approach it in New Zealand, perhaps in Australasia; and it would seem to rival in many respects the far-famed beach of Florida, on which some of the world's speed records have been made. Unfortunately, it is extremely difficult of access. Till Bishop Cleary's arrival, only one motor car had been upon the beach. It was owned by Mr. Bull, and had to be pulled by a team for several miles over soft sand by the track to the beach from Waipapakauri, some twenty miles north of Ahipara. Mr. Bull preferred this toilsome trip to the trouble of crossing the shorter soft sand to the hard beach at Ahipara. Many motors reached the sand near Ahipara, but none had even attempted to cross it either on their own or other power.

The Bishop, accompanied by Father Bruning, reached the Ahipara sandhill, from his record trip to the northern gumfields, on January 29. They left the car at the land side of the rise and went up the sandhill in search of a suitable place by which to essay a descent to the famous hard beach. The sandy cutting up the rise could have been negotiated on power, but (the Bishop thought) would have necessitated the laying down of some rolls of cocoa-matting which he carried. To the right of the road cutting is an extremely steep and pretty rough hill, requiring great power and good nerve, but (his Lordship thought) negotiable by his big car in a small fraction of the time required to get over the soft, deep sand in the much easier grade of the cutting. On the westerly or down slope three courses lay open, and the Bishop decided to take the most rugged and (to the non-motoring mind) most risky and impracticable-looking of these for a rush on his car's own power to the hard floor of the magnificent Western Beach.

The Fight With the Sand.

Six short bits of strong chain were strapped on to each driving wheel of the car. Meantime, practically the whole Maori population of the Native village near where the car stood gathered together and sat close by watching the process. They are all non-Catholics. Father Bruning informed your correspondent that, in their comments among themselves, they were quite agreed that 'the pakeha (white man) will never do it.' As soon as the chains were adjusted, the Bishop drove the car, alone, not up the sandy cutting, as the Maoris had expected, but across the track and around a number of stumps at the foot of the steep slope to the right of the sandy cutting. Then, with exhaust open and the engine barking like a Maxim gun, he charged up the rough and terrible looking slope at a tremendous pace, amidst the applause of the Maoris, bent away to the

right to the highest point of the hill, and still going fiercely, swung sharply around to the left and tore down the slope through the deep, soft sand, throwing it up in a cloud. He thus disappeared from the Natives, who, in the meantime, were running in a crowd up the hill as fast as their legs could carry them to see the further fate of this wholly unexpected exhibition. Meantime, instead of taking the customary or straight downhill soft track to the hard beach, the Bishop had turned to the left, back to get a good rush, and charged a very steep and lumpy sandhill covered in good part with mesembryanthemum. The car was going over this ground like a boat over a choppy sea when the panting Natives next caught sight of it. Then it stopped on the downward slope, close to, and high above, a long stretch of deep shifting sand. One driving wheel had side-slipped into a 'pocket' of very soft sand. The Bishop was immediately out, and, with a spade, removed the 'hump' in front of the wheel. A bag or corner of matting was inserted near the wheel to give it a sure grip; and three or four Maoris put their hands to the car to help the start. This, however, was quite unnecessary, as the car was on the lower slope and started on quite a small application of power. Then came a particularly steep, though short slope—almost a direct drop—into deep drifted sand, and the car ploughed two deep furrows, extending for some fifty yards or so to within about twenty feet of the hard, firm beach. Then it stopped for about two minutes, owing (it was soon afterwards discovered) to both brakes binding pretty hard, on account of their operating rods being caught on a hump of the last slope. They spat sparks during the rush down-hill. In quick time the car was on the hard sand, and, after a spin down the beach, it was headed for the soft sand again as soon as the white settlement of Ahipara was reached, and was brought to a stand near the seabank and close to Mrs. Reid's house, far above the reach of the very high tides then prevailing. It was the first car on the Ahipara beach. During their stay in Ahipara his Lordship and Father Bruning were hospitably entertained by the Reid family. The car was visited by many people, and the delighted white children of the settlement, and some Native children as well, were entertained by the Bishop with fast drives up and down the magnificent beach.

To the Extreme North.

Part of Thursday, January 21, was occupied in adjusting the binding brakes. On the following afternoon, when the high tide was sufficiently fallen, the two travellers set out on a beach trip of sixty miles, followed by a river-bed and steep hill-track, to Te Pahi, in the extreme North of New Zealand. The little party set out in driving rain, and against a gale from the north. Twice in quick succession they had to stop on account of broken porcelain in sparking-plugs; but, taught by their beach experience on the Houhora trip, as soon as the car was stopped, four pieces of board, each about a foot wide and eighteen inches long, were placed in front of the wheels, which were then driven on to these wooden footholds. Had this, or some such provision, not been made, the wheels would have quietly and steadily settled down in the sand. Then away again, against the driving rain, at a strong pace along a sixty-mile stretch of firm sand, with scarcely a wrinkle on its smooth, hard surface, and over some half-dozen streams that spread out in fan-shape till they were hardly an inch deep in any one place, and made little or no difference in the rapid rate of travel. This is the greatest beach for ambergris, and for the large and succulent shell-fish, the tohera, much beloved of the Maoris. At intervals, in the driving rain, the travellers came across parties of Natives, and even an occasional European, digging up the big white shells and filling them into sacks. One party of three Maoris, suddenly seeing the motor car a few hundred yards off—the first, presumably, that had ever met their vision—suddenly dropped everything, and ran away, as if for dear life, to the shelter of the sandhills that extend from sea to sea in melancholy array in part of that region. Even the seabirds were taken unawares by the un-