

THE BENEDICTINES OF CALDEY

RECEPTION INTO THE CHURCH

In your last issue (writes Dom Bede Camm, O.S.B., in the *Universe*) I gave an account of events at Caldey up to Monday, March 3. On that day the Abbot of Maredsous, Dom Columba Marmion, arrived. He had come with extreme kindness from Belgium, at great inconvenience to himself, at our request, and he at once won the hearts of the community. He began to give them a retreat in preparation for their reception into the Church. They had already begun on Saturday, the Feast of St. David of Wales, a triduum to the Holy Ghost in preparation for this great event. On Monday and Tuesday I heard the confessions of the great majority of the community, and when on Tuesday night the Bishop of Menevia arrived with the Abbot of Downside and Abbot Avignon of the Breton Benedictines at Caermaria, it was arranged that the solemn ceremony should take place on the following day, Wednesday, March 5, which, by a happy coincidence, was the Feast of St. Aelfred, Patron Saint of the Abbot. Wednesday dawned bright and fair, though for the last two days a gale had been raging. The sunshine that flooded the island was reflected in the hearts of those who took part in this most moving ceremony. After the community had sung Terce, the Bishop vested and, with his assistants, entered the sanctuary. The Abbot knelt at a prie-dieu at the entrance to the choir. Before him was laid open a book of the Gospels. After the solemn singing of the 'Veni Creator' the whole community, kneeling round their Abbot, made simultaneously their profession of faith, and received from the Bishop absolution from censures. I think those who witnessed this ceremony will never forget it. It was certainly the most moving sight I have ever seen, and it was difficult to restrain one's tears. Those who needed conditional Baptism then received it from his Lordship in the sacristy, and, after completing their confessions and receiving absolution, they assembled once more in the choir to sing a solemn 'Te Deum' of thanksgiving. The Bishop then said the Mass and gave Holy Communion to the neophytes. It would be difficult to describe, or even imagine, the joy that filled the hearts of all of us that day. In the afternoon, by permission of the Bishop, the Abbot of Maredsous sang Pontifical Vespers, assisted by the writer and by the members of the community so lately become Catholic. It was certainly difficult to imagine that they were such recent converts, so beautifully were the chant and the ceremonies executed. The church is small, indeed, but it is in admirable taste, and the high altar is a most elaborate and beautiful piece of workmanship. It contains a painting of 'The Passing of St. Benedict,' executed by a well-known artist, who is a member of the community at St. Bride's, Milford Haven. The choir stalls, the side altars, images, and the ornaments of the church are at once artistic and refined. Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine a more perfect little church interior than that of this Abbey of St. Bernard of Caldey, now so happily brought into the unity of the Catholic Church. Before Compline the Bishop gave Pontifical Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, and this was also a function which it will be very difficult to forget. The Abbot of Downside completed the offices of the day by singing Compline. On Monday, March 10, the Bishop is to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation, and the first stage of this great work will be completed.

Reception at St. Bride's Abbey.

But his Lordship had yet other work to do, and another harvest to reap. On Thursday he and the Abbot of Downside proceeded to St. Bride's Abbey, Milford Haven, leaving the Abbot of Maredsous to continue his retreat at Caldey. The community of St. Bride's has been known to me for the last twenty-four years. It was then a very small body of nuns, established at Feltham, in Middlesex. Later on, they moved to Twickenham, and a few years later to West

Malling, to an old Benedictine Abbey, presented to them by the late Miss Boyd, herself afterwards a convert to the Catholic Faith. Two years ago the Abbess, Dame Mary Scholastica Ewart, found it necessary to leave Malling, which had become too small for the needs of the community, and to move to a large, old Georgian house, standing in extensive grounds on the borders of Pill Creek, at Milford Haven. This house, which is associated with the memory of Lord Nelson, though far from beautiful, is roomy and convenient, and its beautiful situation and wooded grounds make it very suitable for the needs of an enclosed community. The nuns have added a temporary church and a wing of cells. The community, which has been closely associated with Caldey for some years past, has for a long time been looking forward to the moment when they could make their submission to the Catholic Church. With two, or, at the most, three exceptions, they are united in heart and soul, and it is impossible to describe their joy at the thought that their long period of waiting is at last ended. As at Caldey, so here, we examined each member of the community separately, and satisfied ourselves that they were taking this step solely from conviction, and unmoved by any personal influences. The Abbess showed us a remarkable syllabus of instruction in Catholic doctrine and Church history, which had been given during the last twelve months to the nuns by a member of the community, herself a highly trained and most capable teacher.

It is feared that the conversion of the nuns at St. Bride's will involve them in considerable financial loss, but they are prepared for any sacrifice that God may ask of them in return for the priceless gift of faith.

The Abbot of Downside had to leave us, to our great regret, early on Friday morning, and the Bishop and myself spent that day in hearing the nuns' confessions. It is impossible to say a word of the extraordinary kindness that Bishop Mostyn has shown throughout this crisis. He has been a true father to both communities, and has completely won their hearts. The kindness of the Abbot of Downside in coming so far to give us the encouragement of his presence and the benefit of his monastic experience is also immensely appreciated. All of us, indeed, feel that we have been more than fortunate in those whom God has sent to our help.

On the evening of Friday, March 7, a little before six o'clock, the nuns, grouped round the Abbess in their choir, made their profession of faith, just as their brethren had done two days before at Caldey. It was the Feast of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus, and one could not but feel how strangely appropriate were the *sortes liturgicae* of the day: 'Redemisti nos Domine in sanguine tuo, ex omni tribu, et lingua, et populo, et natione; et fecisti nos Deo nostro regnum. Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo; in generationem et generationem annuntiabo veritatem tuam in ore meo.'

On the following morning, Saturday, March 8, the Bishop said Mass and gave the community their first Holy Communion, while I was privileged to say the Mass of thanksgiving, after which once more, with full hearts, we raised our *Te Deum Laudamus*. As I write, the Bishop returns to the Island for Sunday, intending to come back after a few days to administer Confirmation and receive into the Church one or two who were unable through sickness or other cause to be received with their sisters.

Those received at Caldey at present number twenty-two, and those at St. Bride's thirty-four, and it is hoped that there are others yet to come, besides several seculars. In any case, this event is, so far as I know, unprecedented in the history of the English Church. Catholics, while thanking God for the graces He has so abundantly poured out on these favored souls, will not fail to pray that they may persevere to the end in the faith which they have embraced so joyfully, and in their holy vocation of prayer and penance. It would be premature to discuss in detail the future of these communities. That rests in the hands of authority, but it may be said at least that the Bishop and Abbots, who have consulted together on this point, are

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