

THE FIRST SOUTH AFRICAN BISHOP

A curious discovery was made by the present writer, in perusing a collection of documents relating to the early Portuguese discoveries in South Africa (says the *Catholic Magazine for South Africa*). Amongst these documents was a letter from Pope Leo X., dated May 3, 1518, to King Manuel of Portugal, in which the Pope grants the King's petition, by appointing as Bishop the son of the Bantu Chief of the Congo. If we take South Africa to mean all Africa south of the Equator, we may say that the first South African Bishop was a native African.

The Pope's letter is so interesting that a free translation will not be out of place:—

'We have seen what your Majesty has written about the promotion to the episcopate of Henry, the illustrious son of King John of the Congo. Although what you ask of us and of this Holy See is one of those things most difficult to grant, yet having considered the reasons alleged by you in your letters, and having heard your representative's account of the candidate himself and of your own zeal and energy on behalf of the Catholic Faith; and considering finally that with great difficulty we have prevailed upon our Venerable Brethren to come round to our opinion, that the promotion will conduce much to the spread of the Faith in view of the integrity and learning of the new Bishop, we hope that he may bring many others to the true Faith; and this both by word and deed; but we think it right and useful that you shall provide him with some learned theologians and canonists as assistants, so that his knowledge may be increased and strengthened, both for his own sake and for the profit of others; and we hope that both your Majesty and his own father will provide him with a sufficient income, so that he may be able to live as becomes his episcopal dignity.'

Thus this son of a Congo chief was made first Vicar-Apostolic of the Congo and titular Bishop of Utica. But he had been educated in Portugal, where he lived several years, and in Portugal he died shortly after his consecration.

The object that the Portuguese king had in view, in pressing for this appointment, was to commend the Catholic religion to this new race through men of their own race. We have certainly not progressed in this respect for the customs and habits of the black races. Most men of white race would think the letters of King Manuel, to his representatives, absurd in their scrupulous regard for the feelings of Bantu kings and chiefs. The Portuguese king sends his ambassadors to them, as new allies in the Faith, and he seriously and gravely instructs them in the responsibilities of Catholic princes.

It is instructive to find a great European sovereign telling a Congo potentate, on the very eve of the Reformation, how he ought to behave with regard to the Pope. In 1512, when Henry VIII. of England was still a devout Catholic, we find Dom Manuel of Portugal issuing detailed instructions to his envoy to the Congo, Simon da Silveira. We translate, with some regard for English idiom, that part of these instructions which relates to the Pope:—

'To the King of the Congo you shall say, that we have informed the Holy Father of his conversion to the Christian Faith; and since he is a powerful king, you shall say that he must observe the usages that we Christian kings and princes observe—he must, as we all do, send a profession of his obedience to his Holiness, as the Vicar of Jesus Christ, in the Church of St. Peter; which is the head of the whole Christian religion. And since our Lord has given him the light of Divine Grace and brought him among the elect, we beg him to do his duty in this matter, and to send this profession of obedience to the Pope through his cousin Dom Pedro, who is here and who is well acquainted with our customs. With Dom Pedro he will send twelve persons, noblemen and carefully instructed, and with them six servants to see to their comfort; and we shall send them from here to Rome,

to make their obeisance to the Holy Father; and we shall order all that is required for the journey, which is 500 leagues from our kingdom to Rome; and we shall send them by land or by sea as they may wish. And they will receive the honor due to the ambassador of a great king like himself, which will be increased by the love that we bear him. And we shall also send Dom Amrrique (Henry) his son, who, thanks to our Lord, is well instructed in matters of faith, and you may also say that he knows Latin well, and that he will deliver the discourse to the Holy Father in Latin. And you shall say that both his cousin, Dom Pedro, and his son will make for him the Stations in Rome, wherein great indulgences are to be obtained. And with the help of our Lord, we trust that from this embassy the said Dom Amrrique, his son, will return nominated by the Holy Father chief prelate of the Congo Church; and so his son will be, in spirituals, the chief man of the kingdom, above all the archbishops and bishops that may be there.'

From this it will appear that Pope Leo X. hesitated for six years to grant the request of the King of Portugal; and that the hope, expressed in the last lines of the above letter, that the black prince and priest would return from Rome with the nomination of bishop, was not fulfilled at once. It was fulfilled later, with the conditions already mentioned; but his Lordship, Dom Amrrique of the Congo, did not live to take possession of his ecclesiastical province. Nor, as far as we know, had he any successor.

But the glimpse that we get of this black priest, perorating before the Holy Father in Latin, and later pontificating in the churches of Portugal, gives us an idea of the little that we know of the history of our missions in those days. When the veil is thus lifted for a moment from the events of the sixteenth century in South Africa, we are led to infer the rich store of information that awaits the competent investigator. The great libraries of Europe, notably those of Rome and Lisbon, and the archives of the older religious Orders, must contain much material hidden for centuries. Is there no one sufficiently interested in South Africa to bring them to light? Those of us here, who might be willing and able to make these researches, have not the opportunity. And this is one of the drawbacks of being six thousand miles from Europe.

Invercargill

(From our own correspondent.)

The St. Mary's Tennis Club have had their courts extended and top-dressed. It is expected that the opening day will take place towards the end of the present month.

On Rosary Sunday the usual procession took place in the convent grounds, and a feature of the ceremony was the large number of men present; in fact the whole procession was the largest for some years. The Rev. Father Woods recited the Rosary, and the convent children and the Children of Mary sang the incidental music.

The Hibernian Band members gave their first promenade concert, since they obtained their new instruments, on Sunday afternoon at Rugby Park. There was a good attendance of the public, and the band played several pleasing selections with their new instruments, which, by the way, cost over £600. At present the bandmen are practising assiduously in view of the contest which is to be held here next month.

The Empress of Germany, in the early days of this year, presented an ebony crucifix to the Augustinian nuns of the Convent of St. Elizabeth, Antongasse, Cologne. At the foot a silver plaque bears the following inscription: 'Presented by her Majesty Augusta Victoria, Empress and Queen, to the Convent of St. Elizabeth, Antongasse 7, Cologne, on the 12th January, 1912, the six hundredth anniversary of its erection.'