

The Church in New Zealand

CATHOLICITY IN CANTERBURY: EARLY MISSIONARY EFFORTS.

Lyttelton

In 1871 Father Boibieux resided at Lyttelton. Akaroa was visited on the first Sunday of the month, and oftener when it was necessary. Father Boibieux was a pious and clever priest, who came from Auckland to Christchurch, in order to recover his strength which had been exhausted by the fatigues and privations which he had endured in his missions among the Maoris of the North Island. He gave all his attention to the spiritual wants of the Catholics, and the schools founded by Father Chataigner. In 1873, on the arrival of Mgr. Croke, he was recalled to Auckland, where he died three years later, on September 16, 1876. His work was continued by Father Francis del Monte, Fathers Donovan and Walsh, and afterwards by Father O'Connor.

The district was visited once by Mgr. Viard, in 1866; twice by Mgr. Moran during his administration, in 1872 and 1873; and about every two or three years by Mgr. Redwood.

Christchurch

In 1850 when the Marist Fathers had left Auckland in order to establish themselves in the diocese of Wellington, Father Seon was placed in charge of Port Cooper. This was at the beginning of the colonisation of Canterbury, and as Catholics there were too few in numbers to employ a priest, Father Seon had then to include it in his visits, sometimes as far as Lyttelton, sometimes into the Peninsula where the Catholics were more numerous. The priests were put up as visitors, and said Mass for the Catholic families who were settled on the Canterbury Plains. In December of 1879 Father Seon established himself definitely at Christchurch, and took up his abode in a house attached to the Royal Hotel, then owned by Catholics.

The material situation was not very brilliant. The missions possessed, it is true, three acres of land given by the Colonial Government, but this consisted of an almost inaccessible swamp. The deed was still

either sides were used for the priests; and a shed divided in two parts was used as refectory and kitchen; that was all. They were happy to take up their dwelling there. On Christmas Day, 1860, a congregation assembled composed of fifteen Catholics. Their number increased. In 1861 Father Seon left Christchurch to go to the Huitt, and was replaced by Father Chervier, who arrived from France. Those who see the Christchurch mission in its present state, cannot comprehend the difficulties of all kinds which accompanied its foundations. The first difficulty was the language. The missionaries could not speak English or spoke it very badly, therefore the Protestants whose delicate ears were offended by their barbarous speech said laughingly: "The Pope, who sent these priests here with the power to preach ought also to have given them the gift of languages." This gift had not been given to them, however, and in order to know the language the poor missionaries were obliged to study it every day.

Another difficulty was their poverty. With the money they received for the propagation of the faith, and the offerings of the faithful which did not amount to more than 16 francs a week, they were obliged to live frugally—dry bread and water in the morning, a little meat at mid-day and the remainder for dinner in the evening. This was their fare for several years.

In order to increase their resources Father Chataigner bought two acres of land and immediately began the work in the garden which combined utility with pleasure. A Protestant gave some trees; and soon cabbages, carrots, and potatoes grew to perfection in this virgin soil. These happy beginnings were not without their difficulties; heavy rains and floods swamped the garden; by and by the neighbors' animals ransacked it, and nothing less than traps could prevent their nocturnal visits.

When Father Chervier had time he visited the Peninsula and the neighborhood of Christchurch. Father Chataigner took charge of the township of Lyttelton, and they visited the south from time to time.

Father Chataigner had collected from the Protestants as well as from the Catholics. He laid the foundation of the church which was opened and solemnly blessed on May 29, 1864. This part of Christchurch was not more than 6 or 8 feet above sea level.

The church and the presbytery were unapproachable to pedestrians. Some may still remember the time when they could not even approach on horse-back or in a conveyance, and it was necessary to place stepping-stones along the way to make a path for those who came on foot.

During the great flood of 1863 the Fathers were so shut off by the water that no one could approach to bring them provisions or to prepare their meals. They lived on bread and cabbage stumps which they obtained by wading into the garden. This state of affairs was changed when the Government made footpaths and dug drains to carry away the water.

A parish school was constructed the same time as the church. When the buildings were erected, pupils, who had until then attended



FATHER CHATAIGNER, S.M.

At the census of 1882, the Catholic population was 1016, divided thus: Lyttelton, 516; Akaroa, 112; and 388 in the different bays of the Peninsula. In the district there were two good churches, two presbyteries, one school, one Hibernian Society, and several sodalities or confraternities.

What has become of the Maori Catholics? For the most part they are dead; some have left the country; others, annoyed at not having a priest who could speak their own language, have grown indifferent and frequent the Protestant churches of the neighborhood. There are not very many Maoris on the Peninsula—about 250—but it is a pity that they have been neglected thus; lack of priests is the cause of this.

withheld by a trustee who was unwilling to give it up. There was no house, no money to help the missionaries.

Father Chataigner, who was a resourceful man, began by forcing the faithless trustee to give the deeds of the property, and he compelled the contractor, who had cheated Father Seon in regard to the building, to fulfil the conditions of his contract; obtained from Mgr. Viard the sum of 3700 francs, and with the offering, which some benevolent people had made, he built and paid for the house which was to serve for the time being as presbytery and church. This house was not very comfortable; bare planks formed the frame-work; one large room served as church, two little rooms on

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