

early missionaries who labored here were Frenchmen. This may seem strange when we consider that the colonies are peopled almost exclusively with English-speaking communities, but it must be remembered that when the missionaries were originally sent there were few Europeans here, and that the missionary work was principally confined to the native races. The late Bishop Viard, of the diocese of Wellington, was the first Catholic Bishop who had charge of this island. He was for many years a missionary among other of the Polynesian Islands, where he accomplished great and good work among the natives and carried the light and truth to many otherwise unfortunate races. From these other islands he was consecrated Bishop of the diocese of Wellington, which then extended, it might be said, over the whole of New Zealand except Auckland. He was already old when he was sent here, but was a man little likely to be forgotten by those who once met him. Tall and straight, with a mild eye and kindly smile, he was beloved by all who came in contact with him. He was of a most amiable disposition and had a reputation for saintliness and goodness which made his name one revered alike by Catholic and non-Catholic. He is referred to not because he was much in the south, but because he was the spiritual head of the diocese whence the first missionary set his foot in Otago.

The Otago settlement, which, I have stated, commenced in 1847, soon developed, and colonists began to flow in, but for the reasons before stated very few other than Presbyterians appeared. However, one by one, persons of other denominations managed to get here. In the year 1849 a census showed only seven Catholics out of a population of 745. By the year 1850 there may have been from thirty to forty Catholics throughout Otago. These soon found it necessary, in order to look after their own political rights, to band together along with others against their powerful rivals the Presbyterians. This "little enemy" struggled hard for a long time against the system of exclusive settlement, but as their numbers were small they did not at first have much success. It may be asked what this has to do with religious matters, but it had afterwards an important influence upon the settlement both as regards the nationality and religions of the immigrants. Early in 1851 my father, who then lived on a bush section in the North-east Valley, wrote to Bishop Viard informing him that there were a few Catholics scattered throughout Otago and that an occasional visit of a priest would, if one could be sent, be very acceptable. In those days a journey from Wellington or even Port Cooper (Lyttelton) was no easy matter. If you could get a schooner coming down you might possibly manage the journey in a week or ten days if you did not have too severe a wind against you, but if there didn't happen to be a schooner about to sail from Port Cooper you would have to make the journey overland, or perhaps have to wait three months for the next boat. It will, therefore, not be greatly wondered at that the first response to the request made

to Bishop Viard was the arrival of a priest about six or eight months after the sending of the letter.

One morning a very active little man about 5ft 6in in height presented an appearance at my father's house and announced himself as Father T. A. T. Seon from Wellington. He possessed a meek but earnest face and grey hair. He was dressed in a somewhat old and shabby-looking cassock, a broad clerical hat and a pair of boots showing signs of wear. He had come down from Akaroa to Port Chalmers by schooner, and had just walked up from there through the hush. He received a glad welcome and stayed all day and that night.

Until this time, so far as I am aware, no priest had ever visited the site of Dunedin, although earlier visits had been made, I believe, to the whaling settlement at Waikouaiti and Taiaaroa Heads, where possibly Mass had been said. The next morning 'neath the bark roof of that humble slab cottage the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was first offered up in Dunedin, and the infant Catholic Church of Otago first saw the light.

The scene must have been an impressive one. It was spring; the valley and surrounding hills as far as the eye could reach were clothed with a rich mantle of virgin forest, while here and there the beautiful white clematis, emblem of purity, raised its head above the surrounding mass of green. The glorious kowhai with its wealth of golden blossoms dotted the creek side, while the wild jasmine filled the air with its rich perfume. The glint of the spring sun was just creeping into the valley and tipping the dew-covered leaves and blossoms with diamonds. The rich mellow voice of the tui blended harmoniously with the shriller notes of the bell-bird as they made their orisons to the new-born day.

The very air without was redolent with hope, while within, with heads bowed down in thankfulness, the small congregation welcomed as the sweet message of hope to the young settlement the holy words of consecration. Father Seon arrived on a Friday; on Saturday, by all possible means, information of his arrival was sent to all Catholics in and around Dunedin, and arrangements were made to have the use of the brewery belonging to Mr. Coleman Burke (after whom Burkes was afterwards named) as the only place available for Mass to be celebrated publicly on the Sunday following. This building was situated in what is now Princes Street South, and until lately still standing and occupied by Mr. Muir, the basket-maker. The casks had to be rolled out and the place made as suitable as possible for the holy purpose for which it was required, and from that time for some years served as a church.

The news of the arrival of a priest soon spread among the members of the "Kirk," and more than one curious result was produced. In the first place Dr. Burns deemed it necessary on the Sunday to warn his congregation to beware of the "wolf in sheep's clothing" who had come among them lest the infant settlement should be led to forget its original character and high mission.

Father Seon was jocularly informed that Dr. Burns had been good enough to announce his arrival. It is related that upon hearing this the meek old priest called upon the Doctor, and with grateful sincerity thanked him for making the fact of his arrival public and so assisting him in letting the scattered Catholics know. It is not recorded what Dr. Burns immediately thought about the matter, but it is said that shortly after their interview the Doctor and Father Seon were seen walking down Princes Street engaged in amiable and friendly conversation, much to the scandal of the "unco guid." After staying a fortnight in Otago, during which he visited all the Catholics within accessible distance of Dunedin, including visits to the Heads, Waikouaiti, and the Taieri, Father Seon again departed for the north, and a considerable time elapsed before another visit was paid. During these visits he baptised a number of children, heard confessions, and gave Holy Communion.

(To be concluded.)



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