APOSTLE IN AOTEAROA

A biography of Father
Jeremiah Joseph Purcell O'Reily OFM Cap.,
Wellington's first Catholic pastor

Owen O'Sullivan OFM Cap.

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To my Parents

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A booklet such as the present, written as it is about a man who had contacts in many parts of the world, necessarily involves considerable research. In the task of establishing the sources and of acquiring information about Father O'Reily I have been helped by many people.

It would be impossible to list all those who have contributed in some way to this booklet. There are some, however, who deserve special mention: -

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The author is neither a professional historian nor writer.

I hope inadequacies will not conceal, or detract from, the admirable goodness of the subject of this book.

Owen O'Sullivan OFM Cap.

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COVER: Boulcott Street, Wellington, 1843 – courtesy of Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

THE VOYAGE TO NEW ZEALAND

On Monday, 1 August 1842, the *Thomas Sparkes* sailed from England for New Zealand. (1) The voyage, which was to take exactly six months, was a new venture for the great majority of the passengers. They were setting sail for "the South Seas", the still largely unexplored islands of the South Pacific. Assuming that they were like many other groups at the time, they probably set sail with high hopes of starting a new life in the young and growing colony of New Zealand. For some these hopes were amply fulfilled. They found peace and prosperity as farmers or traders. However, there were others who were not so fortunate. Some were to die on the voyage, or later on in the Maori wars. Others ended their days in poverty, broken by the financial disasters which marked the early years of development. Some, too, were to return home, unable to adjust to the frequently recurring earthquakes.

One of those on board, the Hon. Henry Petre, was making his second journey. He had come to New Zealand in 1840, and, having made up his mind to settle, returned to England 'to find a wife.' His bride, Mary Ann Eleanor, who was only 16 years old at the time, was the author of a remarkable diary of her voyage to New Zealand.

Mrs. Petre records that 'Rev. Mr. O'Reilly, Catholic priest, preached and said prayers on deck' on Sunday, 7 August 1842. This entry in her diary recurs regularly,

week after week, for six months. The title of ‘Mr.’ was the usual title for a Catholic priest at the time, the currently used ‘Father’ being a later development. Occasionally Mrs. Petre referred to him as ‘Friar Mr. O’Reilly’ in acknowledgement of his being a member of the Capuchin Franciscan Order of friars. It appears that Fr. O’Reily celebrated Mass in a cabin for the Catholic members of the ship’s company, while also leading the whole assembly in a more general act of worship on deck.

To those who regard ecumenical relations as being only a recent development, it may come as a surprise to see a Catholic priest finding such ready acceptance among a congregation which would have been mostly non-Catholic. The explanation for this appears to lie largely in the character of the man in question. As his later life was to show clearly he had a breadth of vision and a greatness of heart to which any kind of exclusivism or narrow sectarianism would have been totally foreign. It must also be said that this attitude of mind was not formed at the expense of fidelity to doctrine, as his subsequent years were to show with equal clarity. To him, truth was no less important than charity.

Mrs. Petre notes on several occasions, ‘Mr. O’Reilly preached a very good sermon on deck.’ (2) This was also a sign of things to come, for, in his later years, his preaching was to bring many people to acceptance of the Catholic faith. On the voyage itself he made a number of converts.

There were days on the voyage when little of significance seemed to happen, when the monotony was broken only by one of the captain's regular outbursts of bad temper. Mrs. Petre records, 'the Captain is a terrible passionate fellow and the last few days has begun drinking to excess.' (3) A few days later we read, 'Captain making a row again.' (4) His fondness for drink led to a series of quarrels with various members of the ship's company. Mrs. Petre tells us that 'the Captain had a row with a passenger, who, contrary to orders, sang near his cabin.' (5) 'The Captain gave orders that there should be no more bread made although we had plenty of flour on board.' (6) Later on, there was a quarrel with Henry Petre about his horses. (7)

Perhaps his temper was aggravated by some of the articles in the *Sparkes Maritime Journal* which began publication on Wednesday, 7 September. Mrs. Petre has only one comment, 'It will soon lead to quarrels.' However annoying these incidents may have been to the captain they must at least have provided the passengers with something to talk about on their long journey down the west coast of Africa. Occasionally they saw flying fish, which were a great novelty for Europeans. From time to time whales were sighted. The *Thomas Sparkes* passed close to other ships and attempts were made to communicate news by loud hailer. However, these were usually unsuccessful owing to the speed of the ships.

There were moments of sadness, too, on the voyage. A child died a few weeks after the departure from England

and was buried at sea (8) in a ceremony conducted by Fr. O'Reily.

By the end of September good progress had been made and the ship was nearing Cape Town. However, it was not all smooth sailing. On Monday, 3 October, the ship hit Whale Rock, in Table Bay. The rudder was pushed up eighteen inches and water came gushing in. The Captain panicked and lost control of the situation. Fortunately, another sea-captain by the name of Ferron, who was a passenger on board, took command of the ship and organised pumping parties. He managed to free the ship from the rock, and, with every member of the ship bailing furiously, moved under full sail to Cape Town. The anxiety of those on board would not have been diminished if they had known that, shortly before, the prison ship, *Waterloo*, had broken from her moorings in Table Bay and foundered on the same rock with a loss of 200 lives.

Fr. O'Reily later gave a short account of this incident, 'Dangers of Cape, 3 Oct. 1842, in our voyage to N. Zealand, we touched a rock and this accident caused great excitement on board! But thanks to God we got safely into the Cape the following morning 4th Oct. Pumps at work all night. All the cargo had to be discharged and our ship the *Thomas Sparkes* had to remain repairing for 2 months.' This account was written by Fr. O'Reily on the fly-leaf of a book called *Voyages de Siam* published in Paris in 1686. It was written by French Jesuits who were ambassadors of the King of France to China and the Indies. The book was one of a

large collection of old volumes, including some *incunabula*, in Fr. O'Reily's possession.

While the ship was undergoing repairs, the passengers and crew had a chance to relax and to enjoy life ashore after more than two months at sea. Fr. O'Reily made the acquaintance of Dr. Griffiths, the Catholic bishop, and offered his services to him. Dr. Griffiths was engaged at the time in trying to build a proper church. With the small number of his congregation and with only one other priest in his company, Fr. O'Reily's offer of help must have been more than welcome. Mrs. Petre's diary records that on Sunday, 9 October, 'there were prayers at eleven. The bishop, Dr. Griffiths, officiated. Wretched little chapel, nothing but a few wooden forms, without anything to kneel upon.' On Sunday, 6 November, she notes, 'Prayers as usual. Bishop preached in the morning, Mr. O'Reily in the afternoon, a collection sermon for the Cathedral.' It appears that the bishop had recognised Fr. O'Reily's ability as a speaker. This was one of his talents which was to be much in demand in later years.

In a letter written to the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda – the Church's missionary organization – Dr. Griffiths wrote, on 6 May 1843, 'In my work in this area, apart from one priest living with me, I have had as a helper for two months Rev. P. F. O'Reilly [sic] of the Order of Capuchins who was travelling to New Zealand, and who stayed here for that time because of damage to his ship….' (9)

Meanwhile, repair work on the ship continued. On one occasion all were assembled to re-board her, but some last-minute hitches caused a delay of several more days. However, the passengers had plenty to occupy themselves. The Petres used to go hunting when the weather was favourable, having bought some mares in Cape Town. When cloud covered Table Mountain people used to say that 'it had its tablecloth on.' When the mountain was clear the weather was right for a hunting expedition. There was also some excitement when the British authorities discovered that Dutch farmers were smuggling Dutch deserters from the British army out of Cape Town in farm waggons with false bottoms. (10) This was clearly a sign of things to come.

At long last the repairs were complete. 'Mr. O' Reilly called all on board in a very uncomfortable state, sudden news in the evening of all being arranged, prepared for our departure next morning.' (11) After a delay of over nine weeks they set sail. As Fr. O'Reily noted, 'We sailed again on 8th Dec an auspicious day, *The Immaculate Conception*.' (12) This was a reference to the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a feast which had special prominence in the Franciscan tradition of the Capuchin Order to which Fr. O'Reily belonged.

Apart from some initial seasickness, together with a recurrence of the now-restored captain's heavy drinking and accompanying bad temper, there was little to record on the remainder of the voyage. Mrs. Petre, a thorough diarist, makes no mention of Australia, and the length of

time for this part of the journey, some eight weeks, contrasts favourably with the nine weeks taken from England to Cape Town. (13) There was a rising sense of anticipation on board as the ship drew near to New Zealand. Some passengers stayed up all night to catch sight of land. At four o'clock on the morning of Friday, 27 January 1843, land was sighted. It was D'Urville Island on the northern coast of the South Island. Two butterflies were caught and the news of this event was passed quickly around the ship. It seemed like a sign of welcome after so many weeks at sea. (14)

However, their joy was short-lived. A rising southerly signalled an approaching storm. The Cook Straits, between the North and South Islands of New Zealand can be rough enough even in mild weather, but in a strong southerly there can be few more treacherous stretches of sea anywhere. As the wind rose the anxiety of both passengers and crew increased. The ship was moving slowly but steadily towards "the Brothers", two deadly rocks that have sent many a ship since to the bottom. Anxiety mounted as the ships drew closer to the rocks but once again they were blessed with a narrow escape, and the rocks slipped past, leaving them in safety. It took two days to ride out the storm. When it was over, the snow-topped Kaikoura Mountains could be seen clearly. (15)

It must have been with a great sense of relief that the Thomas Sparkes rounded the heads and entered Wellington Harbour, known then as "Port Nicholson." A pilot was taken on board and they continued on the

last stage of a voyage that was just concluding its twenty-sixth week. Some distance ahead, a brigantine, the *Margaret*, was leaving the harbour on a voyage to Valparaiso via Manila. Unbelievable though it seems, in view of the size of Wellington Harbour, the two ships collided heavily. Mrs. Petre reported that 'the *Margaret*' suffered 'an immensity of damage.' (16) Fr. O'Reily says that 'we nearly sunk a Brigantine that afterwards went to South America.' (17) Perhaps somebody had been singing near the captain's cabin again!

The two ships sailed painfully into Wellington Harbour on Tuesday, 31 January 1843. The crew of the *Thomas Sparkes* promptly disembarked, got gloriously drunk, and, virtually to a man, were hauled off to the town's brand-new jail, where they rested, as guests of Her Majesty, for several weeks. The Petres' horses, *Aether* and *Riddlesworth*, were unloaded and a bystander on the quay-side remarked that they were as fat as if they had just come off an English farm. (18) The peacocks and pheasants which the Petres had brought with them survived the voyage and later went with them to *Herongate*, their home in the Hutt Valley.

Their first day in Wellington was cold, wet and windy, and the newcomers marvelled at the steepness of the hills. (19) Fr. O'Reily found lodgings with a Mrs. Kennedy in Cuba Street (20), and said his first public Mass in Wellington on Sunday, 5 February, at 11 a.m. he had made particular preparation for the occasion, having had his white hair cut off, and wearing a red wig which was to be called into service on special occasions in the

future! (21) The first follower of St. Francis to find a home in New Zealand had arrived.

HIS EARLY YEARS

Who was this young man who now found himself alone in a new country with the responsibility of caring for the spiritual needs of a growing community?

At the time of his arrival he was 37 years of age, having been born on 14 July 1805, and given the name of Jeremiah Purcell O'Reily. (1) His parents owned a trading business in the city of Cork in Ireland. They were quite well off financially, but, more importantly, they were determined that their son was to receive the best education that was available. The Church in Ireland at that time was only just beginning to recover from the Penal Laws. It was almost another quarter-century before Catholics would be given the vote or the right to stand for election. As a result of these laws, a Catholic education system had not been allowed to develop. Consequently, his parents decided to send Jeremiah to France for his education. It was to France that his sister also came for the same purpose.

In France, Jeremiah learned not only the French language but also a love for the country and its people. He acquired an understanding of French culture which was to last throughout his life and, providentially, help him in later years to work effectively with the French priests of the New Zealand mission. His education followed the traditional pattern of the time, with a strong emphasis on the study of the classics. It is clear that he was a keen student of languages as he was later to show

his proficiency in Latin, Greek and Italian. He maintained his interest in the Irish language also, to the benefit, subsequently, of the gold diggers of the West Coast.

His interests went beyond his classroom subjects to other activities as well. Music was one of his favourites, and, whenever possible, he would attend concerts, or musical evenings in private houses. (2) In sport, his particular interest lay in boxing and, although he was short and of relatively light build, he was able to look after himself well. This, too, came in useful later on! (3)

In 1814, when Jeremiah was only nine years of age, a Capuchin priest, Father Theobald Mathew, came to Cork city. He was destined to have a deep and lasting impact not only on his new home but on the whole of Ireland as well. Seeing the multitude of problems, especially in family life, which developed as a consequence of the abuse of drink, he resolved to do all in his power to bring people to change their attitudes and practices in regard to it. Volumes have been written on his work but a summary will give an indication of his success. It is provided by a non-Catholic author named Channing, 'In the moral point of view, the Ireland of the past has vanished; a new Ireland has started into life; five million of her population have taken the pledge of total abstinence; and instances of violation of this pledge are very, very rare… History records no revolution like this; it is the grand even of the present day. Father Mathew, the leader of this moral revolution, ranks far above the heroes and statesmen of all times.'

It would be difficult indeed to estimate the impact made by this one man. His fellow Capuchins showed their high regard for him by electing him to the office of Provincial, a position which he held for the record period of 29 years.

As a young man Jeremiah could not have failed to be impressed by such towering spiritual achievement. His own love for the Catholic faith, received through his parents, and strengthened through the schools of France, found a challenge in the immense vitality of this priest of his native city. Jeremiah applied to join the Capuchins. He was received as a novice in the friary of Frascati, outside Rome, on 5 September 1825, taking *Joseph* as his religious name. (4)

The Capuchins are a branch of the Order founded by Saint Francis of Assisi in 1209. The first Franciscan came to Ireland in 1224, just two years before the saint's death. Some three centuries later, in 1525, a reform movement within the Order gave rise to a distinct branch of the Franciscan family. These new friars came to be called Capuchins, from the Italian word *capuce*, meaning a hood, because of the long pointed hood on their religious habit. The first of these new friars came to Ireland in 1615 during a period of intense religious persecution. Despite this they continued to grow in numbers, so that, by 1733, they formed a separate province, or administrative unit, of the Order. Since the penal laws were still in force it remained necessary to train students for the priesthood outside of Ireland. Many of these went to Flanders and others to France. However,

in an agreement made with the Roman province of the Order, on 20 December 1825, Father Mathew arranged for students of the Irish Province to be trained in the house of studies at Frascati. (5) It was there that Jeremiah, now known as Fra Giuseppe, found home for the next two years.

Frascati was within easy reach of Rome. It is easy to imagine a young student spending his spare time in seeing the many sights of Rome, from the great church with its tomb of the apostle St Peter, to the Colosseum, red with the blood of martyrs. Later on he visited the famous Capuchin Barberini Chapel, with its weird decorations of human skulls. The old pagan temple, the Pantheon, the library and musea of the Vatican, the countless churches of all descriptions, these, too, would have occupied his interest. The year of his arrival, 1826, saw the arrival of a new Pope, Leo XII, ascend the throne of St. Peter. The excitement of a papal coronation would all have been new experiences for a young man in his twenties. In later years, when we see his devotion to the Church and to the papacy become explicit in his writings, we are probably witnessing an echo of this early part of his life.

Evidently his studies proceeded exceptionally well as we find that only two years after his reception into the Order he was ordained priest. A Dispensation from Pope Leo XII was necessary for this as he had not yet reached the canonical age of ordination. (6) He was till only 23 years old.

With the consent of Cardinal Micara, who was at that time the Minister General of the Capuchins, he left Italy. (7) Returning to France (8), he engaged in priestly work there until he was recalled to Ireland where he spent some years in Cork. (9) In 1833 we find him living in Dublin at 15 Manor Street. (10) In this city he took up the work which was to occupy so large a part of his life in Ireland, the temperance movement. This was still in its infancy and it took a great deal of prayer and work to build up the sustained effort which eventually brought about the reform of many lives, and the happiness of many homes.

During this time the young Fr. O'Reily still saw himself very much as a student. He used to walk down from the friary to the quays and browse through the bookshops. One of his favourite shops was run by an O'Gorman near the Four Courts. Although he had a keen eye for a bargain, regularly attending the auctions of second-hand books, he was prepared to pay a good deal of money if he felt he was on to something worthwhile. He bought an old edition of the letters of Seneca, and wrote in a margin, 'Cost a lot - £5.'

As a student of history he had plenty to interest him in his immediate surroundings. Only a few hundred yards distant from his friary was the old church of St. Michan, built in 1054 and famous for its mummified crusaders. Its other claim to fame lay in the fact that it was here that Handel's *Messiah* received its first public performance – to a barrage of ridicule and mockery. Across the river lay Christ Church, with its tomb of Strongbow, who earned

for himself an unenviable place in Irish history as the leader of the Norman invasion. Fr. O'Reily loved Dublin, calling it 'this magnificent city.' (11)

New responsibilities awaited him as Father Mathew, the provincial, appointed him Guardian of the friary in Church Street, on 4 January 1836. (12) He plunged into this new task with enthusiasm and began to look for a more suitable site for a new church which he hoped to build in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He found a satisfactory position in Upper Dominic Street, but for some reason was unable to proceed with the project. It may have been to encourage him, as he faced this setback that Father Mathew wrote to him on 16 March 1837, 'I am well aware of your ardent zeal in the cause of religion.' (13) Fr. O'Reily returned to his regular work and activities. Time passed quickly and soon preparations had to be made for a new provincial chapter to be held in Dublin.

On 5 June 1839, Fr. O'Reily was appointed Guardian of the Friary in Kilkenny. (14) Before he left to take up this new appointment a surprise was in store for him. The people among whom he had worked for the previous three years wished to show him a sign of their appreciation. They present him with a silver monstrance eighteen inches tall. The centre part is surrounded by finely wrought figures of angels, and the base bears this inscription, '*Presented to the Rev. J. P. O'Reilly by his attached and sincere friends as a testimony of their high appreciation of the zeal and truly Christian spirit with which he discharged his clerical duties while guardian*

of Church St. Chapel, 1839.' Fr. O'Reily brought this monstrance with him to New Zealand. It is presently kept in Wellington. (15)

While in Kilkenny, Fr. O'Reily resumed his work in the temperance movement with increased vigour. He founded St. Mary's Total Abstinence Society on 1 November, the feast of All Saints, 1839, and had a medal struck as an emblem for the members of the Society. He also wrote to Pope Gregory XVI asking for a special blessing and indulgences for them. Pope Gregory referred the matter to the Prefect of Propaganda, Cardinal Fransoni, who, unfortunately, confused the matter with a separate issue in the same letter. This other issue was a request by the Vicar Apostolic of Glasgow to Fr. O'Reily to come and work in Scotland. The Cardinal stated in his reply, 'I have to notify you that both requests have to be made to this congregation by the Vicar Apostolic of Glasgow directly….' (16) This disappointment did not deter him and we find an issue of the *Kilkenny Journal* in 1840 describing the first anniversary celebration of the Society as 'one of the greatest, if not the greatest, festivals that has taken place since the commencement of the Temperance movement…. The Rev. J. P. O'Reily, Director of the Society, presided.' (17) When Father Mathew visited Kilkenny, on 16 January 1841, he found the names of 5650 members on the rolls of the Society. (18)

As in Dublin, so also in Kilkenny, he maintained his interest in reading. Shearman's bookshop was one of his favourites. Here he bought *The Wisdom of Angels*

concerning divine love and divine wisdom by one Baron Emmanuel Swedenborg. A note on the fly-leaf states, 'This extraordinary man's works were bought by me at Kilkenny City, 1840. J. P. O'Reily, R. C, Priest.'

In this note we can see that Fr. O'Reily dropped the second 'l' which was customary in his name. While in New Zealand he tried a variety of spellings, including O'Reiley, but he usually used 'O'Reily.' His handwriting was small but clear, although for special occasions, he used a large, elaborate style.

His interest in things historical would have found an outlet in visiting the small Dominican Priory, popularly known as 'the Black Abbey.' Here he could see the wooden statue of Saint Dominic, carved in the saint's lifetime, but disfigured by Cromwell's Roundheads. Not far away was another famous landmark known because of its Danish links as the Tholsel. On the banks of the Nore, a little distance from the town, stood the magnificent Kilkenny Castle, scene of the confederation of Irish leaders organised by the papal legate, Cardinal Rinuccinni, some three centuries earlier.

His apostolic activity was by no means confined to the temperance movement. A confrère of his in the Kilkenny community wrote of him that 'he was a man of remarkable apostolic zeal. His attention to the confessional was remarkable all through his missionary life.' (19) Another record of this time speaks of him as being 'very zealous as a confessor.' (20) It was about this time that he became interested in going to Scotland

where the bishops had made a special appeal for help. As we will see later, this hope did not come to a successful conclusion.

During his stay in Kilkenny his portrait was painted and the picture hung on the walls of the friary for many years, but it has now disappeared.

Fr. O'Reily's three-year appointment as Guardian was drawing to a close when he was confirmed as Lord Petre's request to Archbishop Murray of Dublin for a chaplain to the new settlement in Port Nicholson, New Zealand. He accepted the offer of this position. It is not known when exactly he left Kilkenny but the fact that his successor as Guardian, father Mulligan, did not take office until 26 October 1842, (21) suggests that he completed his term of office which would have finished on 4 June 1842.

On 5 June 1842, he was presented with a small gilt chalice by the members of his temperance society. It bore the inscription, '*Abste Society to Our Reveered and ever regreted President, the Revd J. J. P. O'Reily, as a token of their sincere esteem and affection for him, and as a Memorial to their undying Gratitude Towards him for the fostering care with which he watched over, and cherished his Beloved St. Mary's Society*.' (22) The chalice is kept in Saint Mary of the Angels Presbytery in Wellington.

WHY NEW ZEALAND?

Fr. O'Reily's coming to New Zealand was unusual in some respects. The Catholic Church had entrusted its missionary work in Oceania to the newly Society of Mary. All of the priests working in New Zealand in the 1840's were Marists. It seems a little strange then that an individual member of another Order should be sent to work in this new territory. In addition, Fr. O'Reily, as a Capuchin, would normally live a community life with other friars. To have sent him as the founder of a new community would not have been unusual, but it was unusual to have sent him alone. The Church had had more than its share of trouble from wandering friars in the Middle Ages to want to renew the experience.

There are various explanations for his coming, all of which are capable of being reconciled. Fr. O'Reily himself gives us an indication. In a letter to the *Australasian Chronicle*, dated 2 April 1843, he writes, 'I came here in the ship with Mr. Petre, on the application of Most Rev. Dr. Murray, Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, to take charge of what Catholics might be here. I was delighted to find some of my poor countrymen from Erin's most distant shores, and it cheered me to let them see, if I could do nothing else, the solicitude of the Church in their regard. They are, in truth, like the Jews, scattered everywhere; but not like that historic nation, to parcel out in fragments, broken and disconnected, the gem of truth, but to offer it whole and without flaw in the vast bosom of the Catholic Church. The poor people

have no chapel here as yet, nor have they means of providing one. Up to the present we have been saying Mass in a room adjoining a public house; we are lately removed to an old store on the beach. Might I ask a favour of you to announce your willingness to receive the subscriptions of any of our good neighbours of Sydney who might without injury to their local charities confer a mite on us. Having given the temperance pledge to some thousands of my dear countrymen in Ireland, it may be that I may be known to some stray sheep in Sydney.' (1)

Later on, in a letter written on 8 September 1857, to Cardinal Barnabo, Prefect of Propaganda, he stated, 'I voluntarily came out here with the advice and at the request of the late Venerable Father Mathew. I came to stay seven years….' (2) The priest referred to here was Fr. Theobald Mathew who had been Provincial of the Irish Capuchins for many years.

What seems likely is that Lord Petre wished to have a Catholic priest for the new settlement in Wellington. He himself was a member of an old family of English Catholics. One of his ancestors, the fourth Baron, was martyred in the Tower of London in 1684. The ninth Baron had been a leader of the movement for Catholic Emancipation until his death in 1801. Most of the Catholics in Wellington at that time were of English origin by contrast with Auckland where they were mostly Irish who had first come to Australia, and later moved to New Zealand. Lord Petre's preference would probably have been for an English priest but owing to

the great scarcity of priests in England at the time it was highly unlikely that he would ever get one. The Marist missionaries in New Zealand were French, and it is possible that some of the English settlers in Wellington would not have responded as warmly to a French priest as to one who was English or Irish. The memory of the Napoleonic wars was still very fresh at the time, as can be seen from the names of the towns and provinces in the Wellington region – Marlborough, Blenheim, Nelson, Picton. In later years, too, the Colonial Office let it be known in Rome that it would rather see English-speaking bishops than French ones appointed in New Zealand. (3) It is now known that Edward Vavasour negotiated with Archbishop Murray of Dublin for a Catholic priest for the settlement. (4) The Archbishop, in turn, seems to have made an approach to Father Mathew who apparently asked for a volunteer. This mode of procedure was quite common at the time.

For several years prior to his coming to New Zealand Fr. O'Reily had been eager to go abroad on missionary work. He had been in contact with Bishop Andrew Scott, Vicar Apostolic of Glasgow, with the idea of engaging in work in Scotland. The bishops there had been overwhelmed by an influx of Irish Catholic immigrants in 1839-40, and they had sent a priest, Fr. Peter Forbes, to Ireland to ask for priests. It was probably in response to this appeal that Fr. O'Reily offered his services to the Vicar Apostolic of Glasgow. On 7 March 1840, Fr. O'Reily wrote in Italian to Cardinal Fransoni, Prefect of Propaganda, for permission to go to work in Scotland. He gave as his reason the formal appeal made to him by

the Vicar Apostolic. In the same letter he asked for a blessing for his Temperance Society. The Cardinal replied on 6 June 1840, 'I have to notify you that both requests have to be made directly to this congregation by the Vicar Apostolic of Glasgow directly, and he should outline the reasons for the suitability of both favours…' (5) This reply was not very encouraging and the matter seems to have rested there.

Whatever may have been the reason for the failure of the Scottish venture, it is clear that preparations for his voyage to New Zealand had been well made. Mr. Edward Vavasour wrote to the Secretary of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in Paris that 'Mr. Petre… has recently brought to Wellington an Irish priest, and Lord Petre and I are willing to guarantee his upkeep should there be no subscriptions from the Catholics in that town.' This letter was written from Wellington on 28 August 1843. (6)

Archbishop Redwood, the first New Zealander to be ordained to the priesthood and the first Archbishop of Wellington, writes in his *Reminiscences of early days in New Zealand* that Fr. O'Reily, 'with leave and approval from his superiors, had come from Dublin as a chaplain to Lord Petre.' (7)

From Fr. O'Reily's letter to Propaganda in 1857 it is clear that he had expected to come to New Zealand for only seven years. A temporary appointment such as this would have been more understandable than a permanent one for a friar living away from his community. When

his seven years expired in 1850 he felt obliged to stay since there was no one to take his place. In addition, he had been appointed Vicar General of the diocese in the same year. It seems clear that his personal preference was to return to Ireland. In the same letter he wrote with some emphasis, 'I came to stay seven years. I have doubled that time, and I know no law, save that of not leaving the dear faithful neglected, which indeed was the cause of my doubling my stay, by which I am bound to remain. I never made any such promise.' (8)

THE CHURCH IN NEW ZEALAND

It says something about Europe's knowledge of New Zealand that in the early part of the last century the whole of Australasia and the South Pacific was grouped by the Church into the Apostolic Prefecture of Réunion. This island, known at that time as Bourbon, is in the Indian Ocean, about 400 miles east of Madagascar. It was established in 1829 as the base of the Apostolic Prefecture of the South Seas, under the care of a French priest, Henri de Solages. He never visited any of these islands, but, shortly before his death in 1832, the Congregation of Propaganda divided the Pacific for missionary purposes into two vicariates, east and west. The western part, under de Solages, included New Zealand, Fiji, Samoa and the Cook, Phoenix, and Tokelau Islands. In 1834, Australia, known then as New Holland, had John Polding, a Benedictine from Downside, as its first bishop.

To a considerable extent the credit for the interest of the Holy See in the area goes to a remarkable Irishman, Peter Dillon, who, at the age of 23, began to travel the South Pacific as a trader. He was in Tonga in 1809 and during the next 20 years acquired an intimate knowledge of the islands of the South Pacific, learning many of their languages. He had earned considerable respect and influence among island chiefs. In Fiji, he had been given an island which he hoped to use as a base for missionary work. Bishop Ullathorne OSB wrote from Sydney to the Congregation for the Propagation for the Faith in 1835,

that two Maoris had arrived in Australia ‘under the care of an Irish sailor, having been sent by their tribal chiefs to be instructed in the faith.’

However, it was not only in the Pacific that he had won influence. On his last voyage, in 1828, he found on Vanikoro, one of the islands of the Santa Cruz group, a sword belonging to La Perouse, a French explorer who had been shipwrecked there in 1788. He wrote about this in a book called *Narrative of the Successful Result of a Voyage in the South Seas*. In gratitude the French government made him a chevalier of the Legion of Honour with the title of Count, gave him an annual grant of 4,000 francs and appointed him consul to the South Seas.

During his voyages, Dillon saw the progress being made by the other Christian churches and he dearly longed to bring some Catholic missionaries to them. ‘Never,’ he wrote, ‘has the moment been more propitious and at the same time never has it been more urgently necessary to found Catholic missions in those countries.’ He wrote to the Rector of the Irish College in Rome, who put him in touch with Fr. de Solages to whom he wrote on 7 September 1829. He had already brought other Christian missionaries. It was he who brought Samuel Marsden, the first Christian missionary, to New Zealand, on the *Active* at Christmas 1814.

While in France in 1831 he enlisted the support of the Minister of Marine, Prince de Polignai, in a scheme for missionary work in the South Pacific. The minister made

a ship available to Fr. de Solages, who died, however, in the following year. On 23 December 1835, the Holy See entrusted the Vicariate of Western Oceania to the Society of Mary with Bishop Jean Baptiste Pompallier, a former French cavalry officer, as Vicar Apostolic.

Much of the early groundwork for the development of the Church in New Zealand was laid by the initiative of laypeople, a pattern which was to continue for many years. One such example was the family of Thomas and Mary Poynton. Thomas Poynton was born in Kilkenny, Ireland, and moved to Sydney in 1822. In 1828, he crossed the Tasman to Hokianga on the north-west coast of the North Island where he started a business as a storekeeper and saw-miller. At this time there were only two priests in Australia and none in New Zealand. When John Bede Polding O.S.B. was appointed bishop of New Holland (Australia), Thomas Poynton crossed the Tasman in a whale-boat to ask for priests for New Zealand. Bishop Polding had none to give him and had to be content with sending some devotional books to the faithful of New Zealand. The strength of the Poyntons' faith may be gauged from the fact that Mary Ponyton twice crossed the Tasman on the 1,400 mile journey to Sydney to have her children baptized by a Catholic priest.

The patient prayer and effort of the Poyntons was rewarded on 10 January 1838, when Bishop Jean Baptiste François Pompallier arrived at Hokianga. The Poyntons made their house available to him, and the principal room was converted into a chapel. On

Saturday, 13 January 1838, the first Mass of the new mission was celebrated on the soil of New Zealand.

The Poyntons had already bought ten acres of land for the use of the Church. By a sad twist of fate, some of this land set aside as a cemetery was used only ten days after the arrival of Pompallier when the Poyntons' only son died.

In Wellington, a similar development had taken place. Dr. John Patrick Fitzgerald, a native of Monaghan, Ireland, arrived on the second immigrant ship, the *Oriental*, on 31 January 1840, as the ship's surgeon. He was a pioneer of the Church in the newly founded settlement of Port Nicholson. Although only 21 years of age at the time, he soon emerged as a leader of the local community. He organised Christian doctrine classes, and led groups of the faithful in prayer each Sunday. In a speech in London in 1874, one of the early Catholic pioneers, Sir Charles Clifford, spoke of the early days of the faith in Wellington. 'In 1842,' he said, 'there was as yet no resident priest there. The Catholics were very numerous and they agreed to assemble at my house on Sundays and holidays in order as much as possible to sanctify these days.' (1) When Bishop Pompallier came to Wellington on his first visit on 24 December 1840, he found Dr. Fitzgerald, whom he spoke of as 'a pious and well informed catechist' leading groups of people in prayer. He confirmed and encouraged him in his good work. Dr. Fitzgerald continued at this task for a further two years until the arrival of Fr. O'Reily in January 1843.

While it is true that much solid work of preparation was done by Irish lay Catholics, the lion's share of the credit for the foundation of the Church in New Zealand must undoubtedly go to the French missionaries of the Society of Mary. Foremost among these was Bishop Jean Baptiste Pompallier. Born in Lyons in 1801, he was consecrated titular bishop of Maronea, and appointed Vicar Apostolic of Western Oceania on 10 June 1836. On 24 December of the same year he set sail from Le Havre for Valparaiso with a group of seven missionaries. These were all members of the Society of Mary of which Pompallier was a member, though he never took vows in it. Some of these missionaries took up posts in the islands of Wallis and Futuna. One of those who went to Futuna was a future martyr, St. Peter Chanel. In 1842 there was a fresh division of ecclesiastical jurisdiction and New Zealand became a separate, independent unit. In 1845, Bishop Viard was appointed coadjutor to Bishop Pompallier, and in 1848, New Zealand was divided along the 39th parallel into the two dioceses of Auckland and Wellington. The new diocese of Wellington, of which Bishop Viard was Apostolic Administrator, included the whole of the South Island and the southern half of the North Island.

THE SITUATION IN PORT NICHOLSON

The early part of New Zealand European history is centred in the northern half of the North Island, where the first white settlements began. It was only later on that new colonies came to be established at the southern end of the island, at Port Nicholson, now known as Wellington. The first ship-load of immigrants arrived at Petone from Gravesend on 20 September 1839. There was a steady flow of new arrivals, so that, by 1841, the settlement had a population of about 2,500. By 1843, it was nearly 4,000.

The new settlers moved to Thorndon Flat, an area very close to the centre of Wellington city. Some had been blatantly deceived in regard to their new home. While in England they had bought sections of land for settlement, only to discover on arrival that the areas of land which had been shown on the map as flat were in fact on the slopes of steep hillsides which were impossible to graze or cultivate.

Despite these setbacks the settlement got off to a quick start. The first newspaper appeared on 18 April 1840. It printed some of the local humour: 'Why is Port Nicholson like a nursery?' 'Because it contains an infant colony, and is full of squalls.' (1) On 4 August 1842, Michael Murphy, the Police Magistrate, declared Wellington a borough. (2) A postal service was organised and began operating on 4 June 1840. (3) A town library was begun on 2 May 1844, (4) and, as we

have seen, the town had quite early provided itself with a jail. The settlers obviously had a realistic set of priorities! The first Catholic immigrants to Wellington arrived on board the *Aurora* in January 1840. (5) By 1844, the Catholic population of this new settlement of Port Nicholson was about 250. (6) As mentioned before, the Catholics had met regularly for prayer under the leadership of Dr. Fitzgerald, and, some time later, in the home of Charles Clifford. There was a choir, too, which met under the direction of Mrs. Sharp, widow of Wellington's first harbour master. (7)

Land had already been sought for a church and school on Hinau Hill near where the present St. Mary of the Angels' Church stands. Three acres had been acquired near Mount Street for a cemetery, while there was also a place for another cemetery at Saint Mary Street.

Bishop Pompallier had an active concern for this new group of the faithful. He sailed for Wellington in the mission schooner, the *Sancta Maria*, and arrived on 24 December 1840. On the following day, he celebrated Mass in the house of Michael Murphy, the Police Magistrate. (8) The bishop and his companion, Fr. Pezant S. M., were kept busy for several days in hearing confessions, baptizing children, and solemnizing marriages. Pompallier was the first bishop of any Church in New Zealand, and his arrival made quite an impression on the Protestant population. The *Gazette* noted, 'The Catholic Bishop performed Mass yesterday. This is the first occasion upon which this imposing service has been celebrated in Port Nicholson.' (9) The

New Zealand Company gave a donation towards the construction of a new church, as also did many of the Protestant population of the town. Bishop Pompallier describes it, 'The representative of the English Society was present; he also gave a handsome subscription and made a gift of a piece of land for the establishment of a Catholic mission. All the best Protestant society in this town showed great civility and kindness to the Catholic Bishop.' (10)

The Catholic population of Wellington hoped that this visit by the bishop would lead to the appointment of a resident priest. But this hope was not yet realised as the bishop simply did not have sufficient men available. However, some further help came on 2 April 1842, when Fathers Forest, Grange and Reignier arrived in Wellington on their way to Auckland. They stayed a number of days, once again bringing the sacraments to the people who had for so long been deprived of them. These priests could stay only as long as their ship remained in Wellington, and they then had to sail with it to their destination.

The arrival of these three priests from France did contribute to a move by Bishop Pompallier to send help to Wellington as he had promised. On 1 August 1842, the *Eleanor* left Auckland for Wellington carrying on board Fr. Michael Borjon S. M. and Bro. Déodat S. M. They had been transferred from the mission at Maketu in the Bay of Islands. Fr. Borjon thus had the honour of being the first priest appointed to take up duty in Wellington. It is rather an extraordinary coincidence that

it was on this same day, 1 August 1842, that Fr. O'Reily left England for Wellington. Fr. Borjon had enough money to pay only a deposit on his fare while the remainder would be paid by the Catholics of Wellington on his arrival. To the great disappointment of the Catholic people of the town, Fr. Borjon never arrived. The *Eleanor* was not seen again after leaving Auckland. Many weeks later some wreckage from a ship was washed up on the shores of the East Cape. It is believed that this was the wreckage of the *Eleanor*. Once again the hopes of the faithful were dashed, but, in retrospect, we can see that they did not have long to wait. There were only five months to go until the arrival of Fr. O'Reily, Wellington's first resident priest.

O'REILY IN WELLINGTON

When Fr. O'Reily set foot ashore on that cold and wet 31 January 1843, his first thoughts must have been directed towards finding a place to celebrate Mass for the people of the town. His personal accommodation had been provided for in lodgings with a Mrs. Kennedy in Cuba Street. Baron von Alzdorf, a German immigrant, owned a hotel at the corner of the present Woodward Street and Lambton Quay. He made a room available, and here, at 11 a.m., 5 February, Fr. O'Reily celebrated Mass for a congregation of about one hundred. (1)

It was obvious, however, that some more permanent arrangement would have to be made. A store on the beach was used as a church on Sunday, 19 March. (2) The beach at that time came to where the eastern side of Lambton Quay is at present and it is thought that the store was near Barrett's Hotel. Mrs. Petre had been working hard at making a new altar cover and completed it on the previous morning. (3) The choir continued to sing Vespers at three in the afternoon and for some time at least Dr. Fitzgerald continued with his catechism class. (4) Some time later Mrs. Petre remarked on the presence of a large number of Maoris at Mass and said that they were 'behaving so well.' One worshipper noticed that they were fascinated by the word 'Alleluia' which they sang with great gusto, pronouncing it 'Hararooyah,' with a very emphatic 'yah,' accompanied by stamping of feet!

Fr. O'Reily himself gives some information about the number of Catholics in Wellington. In the *Blue Book* returns he gives a synopsis, dated 5 July 1843, stating, 'The Catholics of this district and its immediate neighbourhood are from two hundred and upwards considerably when adult children are included.'(5) Elsewhere he states that of the 200 Catholics in Port Nicholson, 150 are 'generally attending.' (7) The name of the parish is given as St. Mary's. (8)

In addition to the work of providing a suitable centre for the celebration of Mass, Fr. O'Reily was busy with other priestly work as well. In July of 1843, he recorded twelve baptisms, four marriages and one funeral. (9) There must have been a substantial amount of work in getting to know the town and its people, in visiting the sick of the parish and in hearing confessions.

It was obvious to all that the store on the beach, which Fr. O'Reily describes as 'old,' (10) could not be anything more than a temporary Mass centre. Again the leaders of the lay community took the initiative and called a meeting which set up an organisation known as 'the Catholic Committee.' The first meeting, held on 9 February, in Barrett's Hotel, was presided over by the Hon. Henry Petre. Those attending included Fr. O'Reily, Dr. Fitzgerald and his brother Thomas, Charles Clifford, Baron von Alzdorf, William Vavasour, and Messrs. MacCarthy, Rowland, Davis, Richard Barry and Thomas McHugh. Some of these men were to achieve fame later in life. Charles Clifford, later knighted, became the first Speaker of the New Zealand House of Representatives.

A second meeting set up a sub-committee composed of Henry Petre and William Vavasour, with Charles Clifford as secretary. It was to act as a board of trustees to look after the financial affairs of the new mission. The Catholic Committee held five meetings in the following seven weeks. They arranged promptly for the store on the beach, and almost immediately afterwards began to look for something more permanent. By February 1844, when Bishop Pompallier arrived to administer confirmation, the new church was ready on Hinau Hill, now known as Boulcott Street. The bishop blessed the church, naming it the *Church of the Nativity of Our Lord*, probably because the first Mass in Wellington had been celebrated on Christmas Day. He records that there were about 250 Catholics there, apart from Maoris.

The church building had been bought in July 1843 from an old bachelor and renovated for use as a chapel. A sketch by Brees of 'The Catholic Chapel, Wellington,' shows it to be a small wooden building, probably not more than 50 feet by 20, situated at the top of a small rise, surrounded by dense bush. A small stream, the *Waikoukou*, flows to the right of the scene. The picture has a pastoral appearance showing a number of goats and hens in the foreground, while seven men, described as being 'in priestly attire,' and the second of whom appears to be wearing a white mitre, walk in procession down towards the stream. It is hard to believe the change in the scene since the sketch was drawn. The bush-clad hills in the background are now shorn of their growth, and the skyline is dominated by tall office blocks where the gods of industry and commerce are enshrined. The

hinau trees which gave the hill its name and where wood pigeons used to come to enjoy berries have now gone completely and have given way to power poles and parking meters. *Sic transit gloria mundi!*

Fr. O'Reily's arrival in Wellington came as a surprise to Bishop Pompallier in Auckland, as the arrangements had been made independently of him. Father Forest, writing to the founder of the Society of Mary, Father Colin, from the Bay of Islands on 26 March 1843, notes, 'An Irish or English priest has arrived in Nicholson and has written to Bishop Pompallier to ask him for faculties.' (11) This was a reference to the episcopal authorisation to exercise the priestly ministry. Bishop Pompallier gave him these faculties and appointed him pastor of Port Nicholson. (12)

One of the pressing problems of the new mission was the matter of financing a church and a school, as well as planning for the new settlements in the Hutt Valley, Nelson and Akaroa. Fr. Petitjean wrote to a M. Palaisson on 15 August 1850 that, 'At the Hutt River, some distance from Wellington, a missionary has laid the foundations of a church and school. The same effort, and without doubt the same success has been met with at Nelson, and at Akaroa on the Bank's Peninsula.' (13) The only other missionary in the area at the time was Fr. Comte who was based in Otaki and who was concerned primarily with the Maori mission.

Fr. O'Reily displayed some truly remarkable ability in his fund-raising efforts and in attempting to get every

possible form of assistance for the new mission. One example of this takes us back a little in our story. When the *Thomas Sparkes* was in collision with the *Margaret* in Wellington Harbour on the day of Fr. O'Reily's arrival, considerable damage was sustained by the *Margaret*. It had to put into port for repairs. While it was there, Fr. O'Reily established that it had been on a voyage to Valparaiso via Manila. He took the opportunity to write to the Archbishop of Manila for funds for the new mission. He describes it himself, 'With few mishaps till arriving in the Port, we had nearly sunk a Brigantine that afterwards went to South America, and took a letter from me, in which I sought for some help from the Bishop of Manila, and he most kindly and Christian like – Heaven be his reward – sent me his own handsome donation and that of his clergy. In my letter I stated that it should be applied for building a clergyman's home and Church, it only accomplished the first, and a remarkable site which was purchased for the Church which may God speedily enable us to raise to His Honour and Glory!'(14) Further correspondence continued and we find the Archbishop replying to Fr. O'Reily on 2 November 1844, explaining that he had sent the money – 2,000 francs – by a bank order which would go through London. (15)

It seems that Fr. O'Reily had friends in Ireland who were interested in his work. This is suggested by the fact that a notice appeared in the *Gazette* for June and July 1843 informing him that there were letters for him at the Post Office in Auckland. An article in *The Kilkenny Journal* of 24 April 1844 speaks more specifically.

Under the heading *New Zealand*, we read, 'The last mail brings interesting intelligence from this distant mission. Letters under date 28th November last from Wellington Port Nicholson [*sic*] arrived here on the 13th instant per Portsmouth. There are full of wants for the Catholic Mission there under the zealous and very intelligent Capuchin Father, the Very Rev. J. P. O'Reily. He feels consoled under the great pressure of his cares and necessities with the conviction that a number of his friends in Ireland will cooperate with a very humble but ardent friend of the Mission, Miss Eliza Dowd, in raising a sum of a few hundred pounds for the expenses of the Church, for vestments, beads, crosses, prayer-books, catechisms, an organ, sacred music, and other articles necessary for Divine Worship and for the promotion of practical piety and religion. "I hope", says this good Father, "under the blessing of God and the charity of our well-beloved countrymen that you will enable us to realise the sum of £500 to keep this poor Mission, and to give me means of having a catechist to assist me in my humble but glorious exertions for the faith of Christ. I recommend you to our venerable hierarchy and clergy. Nothing but sheer necessity compels me to set you thus begging though that state has been illustrated by Him who became poor to enrich us." He then gives in mournful detail an account of all the articles they require in these distant lands, which he fondly expects will soon be procured by the zeal and energy of the faithful lovers of the cross, concluding by saying, "I leave to your own recollection any other little matters which you may think may usefully embellish the House of God. You may

perceive the gist of my commission will, I hope, tend to that effect.'"

Fr. O'Reily was also in receipt of an annual grant of 70 francs from the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. (16) The Petre and Clifford families had promised to maintain him if the contributions of the people of the mission in Wellington were inadequate. (17) His collection for the first five months in the settlement came to only £2-2-6, (18) so it was obvious that something more would be needed. The Petres and Cliffords were faithful to their promise and gave him an annual sum of £175. (19) Bishop Pompallier, too, was no less generous. While on his pastoral visitation of Wellington in 1844 he deposited £101 in the Bank of Australia for Fr. O'Reily. A little later on, he lodged £50-10-0 in an account in the same bank in Sydney for him. This sum of £50-10-0 appears to have been an annual grant as it recurs at the same time in the following year. In May 1844, Bishop Pompallier sent Fr. O'Reily £15 for a church at Nelson, £5 for a school there, and £5 for a school teacher. In February 1845, he gave him £5 for a church at Pitone [*sic*]. (20)

Although these various grants were certainly most generous it is clear that Fr. O'Reily did not personally profit from them. This is evident, as well see later, from what his friends were to say of his generosity towards others, his own abstemiousness, especially in his presbytery, and the fact that, by 1850, a sum of 15,000 francs had been accumulated for a second church in the town. (21)

Mrs. Petre has an interesting note in her diary which reveals something of Fr. O'Reily's attitude to Maoris. On Sunday, 19 March, the day the store on the beach was first used for Mass, she recalls, 'Mr. O'Reily dined with us he is so much afraid of the natives that he hurried home directly after dinner not to be out late.' He had reason to be afraid. Only two days later there was a gunfight near Pipitea in which one Maori killed another. (22) On 9 May, a group of settlers moving out to Porirua, a distance of some eight miles, was attacked. Their goods were taken and they were told that they would be killed if they returned. (23) A little later the news reached the town of the massacre of a group of settlers at Wairau in the South Island. This arose out of a dispute over land. Subsequent investigation showed that the Maoris had been wronged, but it was understandable that this knowledge did not do much to reduce the fears of the white population. A Major Richmond arrived from Sydney on 1 July 1843, with 53 soldiers. (24) A battery with two 18-pounders was erected on Clay Point, a distance of only 100 yards from the church on Hinau Hill. (25) The two great chiefs, Te Rauparaha, who was known as the Maori Napoleon, and Te Rangihaeata, began to speak in threatening terms. Te Rauparaha told Sir Everard Home that Victoria might be queen of England but he was king of New Zealand. (26) The reaction of the settlers was to decide on a show of strength. They held a military parade of volunteers dressed up in improvised uniforms. It can't have been very impressive as one Maori was heard to remark that the *pakehas* were fit only to stay at home and eat loaves. (27) They would soon be 'cut up like cabbage'. (28)

On 11 November, more troops from Sydney arrived in Nelson, (29) which seems to have been the first port of call for trans-Tasman traffic. Mrs. Petre, too, was unimpressed. 'They seem to think', she said, 'that public meetings will preserve us.'(30) The most candid assessment was also provided by her, 'No one knows what will be done. The natives can always find shelter in the bush, and no number of soldiers can root them out.'(31) She did hope, however, that the *North Star* would send up a few rockets to convince the Maoris of *taipo* (the devil). (32)

The truth of the situation is that the Maoris could probably have driven out the settlers if they had chosen to do so. At this point, however, it was reported that Te Rauparaha, who had made his headquarters on Kapiti Island, was seriously ill. Mrs. Petre expressed the opinion (the hope, perhaps) that 'he would not outlive the flask of rum beside him.' However, he lived to empty many another, but, for the moment, the storm had passed. Even a parade of about 100 Maoris in Wellington on 9 December 'fully armed with long tomahawks and muskets, and with their bodies painted' (33) failed to arouse much attention.

The prospects for the future were not bright. Halley's comet was seen on 4 March 1843, (34) and was interpreted by the Maoris as being a sign of war. (35) When they saw it, 'they commenced howling very pathetically.'(36) To Mrs. Petre, it was 'very awful'. (37) The Maoris' reasoning may have been wrong, but their conclusion was right. War did lie ahead, but, for the

moment, the new settlement had a chance to continue its growth in peace.

Fr. O'Reily seems to have found courage, as he later visited Kapiti Island with Bishop Pompallier and spent some time there in an unsuccessful attempt to bring Te Rauparaha to Christianity. (38) He may perhaps have recalled a similar, also unsuccessful, attempt by his patron, Saint Francis, to convert the Sultan Melek el Kamel during the Crusades.

Life in Wellington in those days may have been hard or easy but it was certainly never dull, though it was perhaps a little dangerous. On 9 November 1844, a fire destroyed a large block of houses extending over an area of more than an acre. (39) On 26 February of the same year two lawyers shot out their differences in a duel. (40) One of them, a Mr. Brewer, was killed. There were canoe races in the harbour although there were risks for those who fell into the water. A soldier named Johnny Balmor was eaten by a shark. (41) In November there were horse races along the mud flats in Evans' Bay. Mrs. Petre tells us about one such on 1 June 1843, (42) with only two horses in it. Both fell. However, there were advantages also. The rates on agricultural land were three-pence an acre. (43)

Travel, too, posed its problems, as we gather from this description of a relatively short trip by one Tyrone Power. 'I set out this morning on horseback for Wellington (from Paramata) over the most execrable road that ever was seen; a day's steeple-chasing would

not have given one so much trouble, or more risk of falls. Within the first two miles I nearly lost my horse in a quicksand and had to dismount to pull him out; for ten miles farther there was scarcely any footing; and it was a succession of plunges, jumping, slipping, stumbling and falling among interlaced roots, fallen trees, deep holes, bogs, streams and gullies. Several times I pulled up, believing it was impossible for a quadruped to get over some of the places. The last few miles are by a narrow and broken path at the edge of a precipice with a mountain stream leaping and brawling at the bottom.' (44) On his way he met a soldier from an artillery unit, 'the most travel-worn object one can imagine, his clothes in tatters and caked in mud from head to foot. The bush costume of the officers in New Zealand consists of a blue serge suit, coarse trousers, hobnail boots and a cabbage leaf hat or cap.' (45)

There was a pathetic side to life, too, when we read that, in April 1855, only two months after an earthquake had badly damaged most houses in Wellington, the citizens subscribed £63 to the British Government because 'the present Russian war [in the Crimea] in which our soldiers are engaged is one in which they are serving the ultimate peace of the whole world.' (46) It was another war to end all war.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Once the task of providing a church was behind him, Fr. O'Reily set about the work of visiting his people and encouraging them in their loyalty to the faith. In order to provide them with some further instruction and to develop their life of prayer he began the task of compiling a book of Christian doctrine and prayer. On the Feast of All Saints, 1 November 1844, he published his work. (1) It is described as *An Abridgement of Christian Doctrine complied by the Catholic Pastor*. On the last page of the book, Fr. O'Reily, calling it 'St. Mary's Catechism,' described it as containing 'a few doctrinal and moral tractates.' 'It is now,' he said, 'humbly and most respectfully offered to the kind and indulgent perusal of the citizens of Port Nicholson, but more especially to our beloved brethren of the congregation of St. Mary's by their devoted friend and humble servant, the Catholic Pastor.'

The book was more than a mere anthology of prayers, hymns and devotional exercises. It contained simply summaries of basic Catholic doctrines, questions and answers about the sacraments, short lives of some of the great saints of the Church, and an index of scriptural themes. It also contained a selection of psalms for use at Vespers, and instructions on serving Mass.

The book was printed by Edward Roe at the *Gazette* office in manners Street. The print and general lay out of the text is very well done, and its 184 pages are easy to

read and pleasant in appearance. However, the matter of printing the book was to lead to a conflict with Bishop Pompallier. Fr. Comte S.M., who was stationed at Otaki, wrote to Father Forest S. M. about the matter of 22 June 1845. 'Father O'Reily is no ordinary man, neither in talents nor in the gifts he has developed. He is a very refined person and a man of great prudence. He has composed a small work, or rather a compilation of different prayers, and at the end he placed the Douay catechism, which is approved by so many bishops. He spoke of his work to the Bishop when he came to Wellington, and the Bishop asked him to come and have it printed on his press. The book was printed here and Father O'Reily sent a copy to the Bishop, who replied that he did not wish the book to circulate and that if he had already distributed some copies to have them withdrawn. Father O'Reily who had done nothing else save compile some work based on Catholic authors, was rather surprised.' (2)

The reason why Fr. O'Reily had the book printed in Wellington rather than on the mission press in the Bay of Islands is not clear, but it is possible that it may have been because of a difference in the quality of print. The book as printed contains 184 pages of small type. On the larger mission press it might well have run to a much greater size, and he may have wished to avoid this. Whatever the explanation it seems fair to say that the bishop's reaction was indeed surprising. Fr. O'Reily may have drawn some consolation in the matter from a letter from his Provincial in Ireland, Fr. Theobald Mathew, wrote to him from Cork on 14 November 1845. 'Your

admirable catechism, I have read with great edification, and I consider it perfect of its kind. It is one of the best abridgments of the Gospel I have met with, and must produce infinite benefits.' (3)

It is probable that one of Fr. O'Reily's main concerns in compiling the catechism was to provide for Catholics a book which would set out a concise statement of Catholic doctrine and practices. It was an age of theological controversy and he himself was soon to become involved in this. He may have felt it necessary to provide a reasonable comprehensive outline of Catholic doctrine which would provide a basis for discussion with non-Catholics. He had clearly an ability to establish a relationship of confidence with non-Catholics and the evidence of this was to grow as the years went on. His efforts in this field produced very far-reaching results.

As Mrs. Petre made clear in her diary, Fr. O'Reily seems to have won a ready acceptance among the passengers on board the *Thomas Sparkes*. He led the public prayers for the whole ship's company. Bishop Pompallier confirms the success of Fr. O'Reily's work in his book, *The Early History of the Catholic Church in Oceania*. Referring to a visit to Port Nicholson in February 1844, he writes, 'There were several conversions of Protestant families.' (4) A little later on, Father Forest S. M. wrote from Auckland to Father Colin, the founder and Superior General of the Society of Mary, 'There is here in Nicholson an Irish priest called Father O'Reily. He is a very learned man, and undeniably more learned than any of us. He makes

himself loved, and you might say adored, even by Protestants. He makes many conversions.' (5) Perhaps the greatest tribute of all to his work in this field came from Bishop Viard who wrote, 'Our congregation after a few years' existence counts almost as many Protestants converted as original Catholics.' (6)

It became clear to Fr. O'Reily after only a short time in Wellington that, if the Church was to develop, a proper Catholic education should be provided for the children of the settlement. In the *Blue Book* returns for 1843, Fr. O'Reily replied to a letter from the Colonial Office, 'We have as yet no schools of our own for our children but allow them to receive their secular Education in the Schools of the town. But reserve to ourselves their religious instruction.' (7) It seems clear from this that Fr. O'Reily was in favour of a Catholic school system from the beginning of his work in Wellington. However, not everyone agreed with this policy. The Hon, Henry Petre, his benefactor, was in favour of maintaining as a permanent policy the practice of sending children to civil schools, with religious instruction at home or in the church. However, Fr. O'Reily won acceptance for his point of view and was supported in this by Bishop Pompallier. This decision was an important one as it represented a commitment for the future, and a definite stand on a significant matter of policy. Bishop Pompallier showed his approval by buying land in Boulcott Street for a new school. The land, about 1½ acres, was bought from Richard Baker on 31 October 1845, and cost £50. (8) The title deed gives an interesting sidelight on New Zealand place-names.

Wellington is described as being in 'the Province of New Ulster.' The three islands of New Zealand, the North Island, the South Island and Stewart Island, were named respectively after three Irish provinces – Ulster, Munster and Leinster, a custom which, as one author put it, 'has fortunately passed long ago into the limbo of oblivion.' (9)

For the moment the available funds did not extend to building a separate school, so the sanctuary was curtained off and the main body of the church was used as a school during the week. Soldiers from the 65th Regiment, many of whom were Irish, used to come at weekends, under a Capt. O'Connell and prepare the church for Mass on Sundays. (10) The fact that the school was cared for in this way gives some assurance that standards of maintenance were at least at an acceptable level. The same could not be said for all schools. An inspector sent this report about a school in the Hutt. 'The building is very small… no fireplace; school room badly arranged; books and apparatus very deficient; no black board or small maps; teacher lately resigned, school in an unsatisfactory condition; registers fairly kept; no time-table.' (11)

Although the school was intended primarily for Catholic children it was Fr. O'Reily's policy to open it to non-Catholics as well. He inserted the following advertisement in *The Spectator* of 4 December 1847 under the heading "Classical and Elementary English School." 'The Rev. J. J. P. O'Reily, having secured Mr. Fryer's well-attested experience and skill in teaching,

wishes in consequence respectfully to inform the Catholic inhabitants of Port Nicholson, that school will be opened in St. Mary's Chapel on Monday morning 6th when all information requited shall be given to parents who may honour the school with their patronage.'

'Should any of our beloved dissentient brethren please to entrust their children to our care, and wish them to be partakers in these religious exercises, which occasionally will take place; and which Lord Bacon says should be a spice informing and shedding a flavour over secular knowledge, yet however truly desirable, still on this religious head shall the wishes of such parents and children be faithfully adhered to.'

Commenting on this advertisement, George McMorran, authors of *Some Schools and Schoolmasters of early Wellington*, wrote, 'O'Reily was… a lovable, manly man, and the general opinion was that any religion the reverend father might instil was a thing to be desired.' (12)

Fr. O'Reily himself took a hand in teaching, and gave classes in French. He had learned this language during his studies in France, and had spoken it with Mrs. Petre on board the *Thomas Sparkes*. (13) Later on in life he translated some prayer books from French and was invited to teach French at other Wellington schools. (14) The school opened as planned on 6 December 1847 with about forty boys, including some non-Catholics in attendance. (15)

The teacher, James Fryer, had already had experience in other schools in the city. (16) He was known to the boys as 'old Fryer' and he used to reward their successes in their lessons by sending them out to but fresh supplies of snuff, which he took in class. (17) However, 'old Fryer' died in 1856, and was replaced by Robert Huntley who seems to have been a man of new ideas and great initiative. He used to take the boys on camping trips, give them swimming lessons, and go for long country walks, explaining as they went about plants and trees. This approach, which was new at the time, was certainly popular with the boys. (18) The school continued until 17 June 1876, when it was replaced by one run by the Marist Brothers. This was situated in Boulcott Street, near Plimmers Steps.

Most schools at the time were run privately, in many cases by Church bodies. In 1847, the Governor, Sir George Grey, published an Ordinance which provided for public aid to private schools. This would certainly have been a considerable help. However, the going wasn't all smooth. On Monday, 16 October 1848, less than a year after it was opened, the school was severely damaged in a violent earthquake which shook the city. (19) The Colonial Hospital was destroyed and there were scarcely any properties left undamaged. The walls of Fr. O'Reily's presbytery were cracked, the gable end collapsed and the chimney fell in. (20) The quakes continued intermittently until the 25th. The Lieutenant Governor set aside Friday the 20th as a day of 'public fast, prayer and humiliation' to petition for relief. In response to this call Fr. O'Reily said Mass at 10.30 on

the 20th and then got to work organising relief for the people who had lost their homes. (21) He is mentioned in official records of the time as having been prominent in organising assistance. It was noted favourably that he undertook relief work for others before setting about the task of repairing his own home. (22)

In the early part of his stay in Wellington, Fr. O'Reily had boarded with a Mrs. Kennedy in Cuba Street. He had asked for funds from the Archbishop of Manila for the purpose of building a presbytery, and this was granted. The Archbishop had sent him 2,000 francs. Land was available, as, prior to Fr. O'Reily's coming to Wellington, the Catholics of the city had bought three acres of ground around the present Mount Street. In a small hollow on the side of the hill, on what is now McKenzie Terrace, a small cottage was erected. It was described as being well built, with walls of thick clay. Not far away were the houses of the Presbyterian and Methodist ministers. Because of this, the road was named Clerical Road, though, by the 1880's, it was known as Graveyard Road because of its proximity to the cemetery. Fr. O'Reily moved into the presbytery in 1846 and shortly afterwards began work in laying out a garden. He had a keen interest in gardening, and won many prizes for his vegetables and fruit at horticultural shows. Gooseberries were a particular favourite of his. Like most people in the area he kept a number of goats which he used to milk. The *manuka* bushes which grew plentifully on the hillside were useful for lighting fires and there was a limitless supply of firewood within easy reach. The hill was covered with trees in the area where

Victoria University now stands. He arranged a water supply for himself by nailing two boards together so as to form a V. One end he set in the stream which flowed down the hillside, across the Terrace, down Ghuznee Street and into Cuba Street while the other end he directed into a barrel outside his back door. He looked after his house by himself and cooked his own meals. The interior of the house was described as being 'spotlessly clean.' (23)

For the next thirty years this was to be his home. He daily climbed up the steep incline from his church to the presbytery. Even today the first part of this climb up Church Street has 195 steps. In 1876, a new presbytery was built in Boulcott Street, but Fr. O'Reily declined to live in it. He is quoted as saying that 'It's much too grand for the likes of me.' Instead he moved to a room adapted from the now replaced church and schoolroom. His former presbytery was occupied by a caretaker, Mathew Wilkinson. His successor in turn was a Patrick Kelly, whose family lived in the house until the turn of the century when it fell into disrepair and collapsed.

Despite his intense preoccupation with the task of providing the necessary buildings for the growth of the Church, despite the time-consuming work of compiling *Saint Mary's Catechism*, Fr. O'Reily found time to accompany Bishop Pompallier on a missionary trip to the South Island in 1844. The bishop has left us a brief account of this journey. 'I sought the assistance of Fr. O'Reily to visit Akaroa, the hills of Port Cooper, the English colonists at Nelson, and the native island of

Kapiti, in the Cook Strait. On all these visits the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and marriage were conferred. There were several conversions of Protestant families, and we were filled with the consolations of the Lord. I took Fr. O'Reily back to Port Nicholson, from whence I started alone on my return to the Bay of Islands.' (24)

Although Bishop Pompallier did not realise it at the time this visit was to have a lasting impact on the life of the Church in New Zealand. On 9 May 1844, Fr. O'Reily celebrated his first Mass in Waimea (25), in the home of Henry Redwood, an immigrant who had arrived in 1842. The Redwoods were both converts, and were outstanding for their devotion to the Faith. When Mass was available in Nelson, they thought nothing of riding the ten miles there. However, it was only on very rare occasions that a priest called and so the Redwoods considered moving to Tasmania as they had heard that there were sufficient priests there. (26) However, this situation was now changed, as Henry Redwood's son, Francis, describes, 'In this first visit, Father O'Reily, whom we venerated almost as an Angel from heaven, came up to Waimea West, and an appropriate room in our house became the hallowed place of the Holy Sacrifice. All the family except those too young gladly availed themselves of the long denied opportunity to go to their duty, and to all of us it was a day of real joy. Bishop Pompallier did not visit the Waimea… Father O'Reily – God bless him – was most faithful and self-sacrificing to visit us once a year; on that occasion he crossed Cook Strait and came to us in an open whale

boat. Thus we had Mass and the Sacraments if seldom, at all events regularly, and that was no small grace.'(27) The young Francis, only five or six years of age at the time of this visit, was later to become the first New Zealand priest, and the first Archbishop of Wellington.

A few days later, on Sunday, 12 May, Bishop Pompallier celebrated Mass in Nelson. He preached in Maori, and Fr. O'Reily in English. It was probably at this time that Fr. O'Reily began some of the preliminary work of building a church in this settlement. Here again we find evidence of his cordial relations with Protestants in the fact that the church which he built was contributed to by Protestants as well as Catholics. It was built behind the town jail, at a cost of £43 (28), on land given by the New Zealand Company. (29) Fr. O'Reily continued to serve Nelson and the surrounding district until the arrival of Fr. Garin S. M. in 1850.

‘HE WHO DESIRES TO BE A BISHOP…’

On 20 June 1848, the Holy See made its first division of dioceses in New Zealand. Bishop Pompallier, who had been given the title of Vicar Apostolic of Western Oceania, became bishop of Auckland. Bishop Viard, who had been coadjutor to Pompallier since 1845, became Apostolic Administrator of Wellington. The dividing line between the two dioceses was the 39th parallel, roughly from Waitara to Wairoa. That meant that about half the North Island and the whole of the South Island formed one diocese. However, it was clear that, as the population grew and more priests became available, it would be necessary to make some further subdivision. A diocese of some 75,000 square miles was certainly more than one bishop could be expected to administer effectively.

The division of dioceses was discussed at quite an early stage in the life of the new mission, and Fr. O’Reily took an active interest in the matter. We have a copy of a letter he wrote to Cardinal Fransoni, Prefect of Propaganda, on 8 September 1857. ‘I beg to inform your Eminence that I have not seen the Bishop of Maronea [Pompallier] for the last 12 or 13 years since I made a tour with him through the Island, and when, on my return to my present address, Port Nicholson, which is a thousand miles from where His Lordship is placed, His Lordship then on taking his departure after consulting with me informed me that he was about to write to Rome with a view to my nomination as Bishop to a portion of

the Island, the South – I never heard a word more on that affair up to this hour.' (1) The tour that Fr. O'Reily referred to here was the visit in 1844 to Nelson, Akaroa, Port Cooper and Kapiti. This took place before the quarrel developed about the publication of *St. Mary's Catechism*. Whether this quarrel had a bearing on Pompallier's attitude to Fr. O'Reily's becoming a bishop is not at all clear. However, it is clear that if Bishop Pompallier was content to let the matter rest, Fr. O'Reilly was not. On 9 August 1846 he wrote to Cardinal Fransoni, 'I have been working here for some years for the Irish and English Catholics who are in this distant land. Our Bishop, Doctor Pompallier had the goodness to recommend me to be Bishop of a portion of this great island. I regard myself as unworthy of this great office, and, leaving the affair in the hands of the Lord, I propose rather to seek permission of your most illustrious Lordship to go to Europe to collect alms from the faithful, since we have here neither church nor school, and it is impossible to find the means for these in an infant colony. If then I have permission of your most illustrious Eminence, I shall make the journey to Europe for this holy purpose. Since I have here with me a French priest who speaks English, I can do it without inconvenience. There are many things besides which I should like to say about the state of this mission…' (2) The French priest referred to here would have been Father Comte who came to Otaki in 1845.

Fr. O'Reily reinforced this point in another letter written on 22 December of the same year, 'Our Excellent Bishop Doctor Pompallier left here some time ago for

Europe. The holy Prelate had written that I might receive the office of bishop of part of this island but again I say sincerely that I am not worthy of this great honour. But I shall explain all these things better if permission is given to me either by Your Eminence or by the Holy See.'(3) There is plenty of room for speculation as to the significance of these letters, but the matter would appear to have been resolved, for the moment at least, by the appointment of Bishop Viard in 1848. Fr. O'Reily did not get permission to go to Rome.

However, the appointment of further bishops became quite a live issue again in later years as is clear from Fr. O'Reily's letter of 1857, quoted above. Other people were interested in the matter. The Italian Franciscan Ottavio Barsanti, who was stationed in Auckland, wrote to Fr. Raffaele da Pontevecchio, Minister General of the Franciscans, on 6 June 1863. In the course of this letter he referred to Fr. O'Reily. 'He is an enemy of Pompallier, and, at the beginning of his mission here he had a quarrel with him. He likes to stay in Wellington, where he is very much loved and esteemed. He is everything in that diocese (*è il tutto di quelle diocesi*) while Bishop Viard is bishop only in name but it is really Father O'Reily. He has the office of Vicar General. The Bishop spoke to us of him with great praise.'(4) Barsanti's description of Fr. O'Reily as 'an enemy of Pompallier' seems rash in view of the fact that he never actually met Fr. O'Reily, and had been in the country only three years. At least it is very hard to believe that he did meet him, considering that for years he led the Roman authorities on a wild goose chase in the mistaken

belief that Fr. O'Reily was a member of his own Order. (5) What seems more likely is that he picked up some gossip which had its origin in the difference about *Saint Mary's Catechism*. The emotional character of his judgments may be gauged from some of the statements in his book, *The Protestants among the Savages of New Zealand*, published in Turin in 1868.

There was a difference of opinion among Marists as to the desirability of Fr. O'Reily's being appointed to a diocese. Father Forest S. M. wrote to Father Colin, the founder of the Society of Mary, on 18 November 1845. In the course of the letter he praised Fr. O'Reily for his pastoral qualities, and added, 'If Rome judged it suitable to make him Bishop he could bring to his assistance priests of his own country and of his own congregation, and gradually he could get hold of New Zealand, and we could go elsewhere.'(6) For similar reasons, father Cummins S. M. drew the opposite conclusion. Father Joly wrote from Sydney to the Superior General of the Society of Mary on 6 October 1871, and referred to a letter he had had from Fr. Cummins. 'I received a letter from Fr. Cummins in New Zealand…. At present he is subject to another fear that this burden [the mitre] is going to be imposed on someone else…. Moreover he foresees also that Father O'Reily wishes to establish Irish Franciscans there….He thinks also that Father O'Reily, not having been able to have himself appointed as coadjutor, is getting the way ready to have one of these Franciscans nominated – one of those he is going to get to come – and they will be masters not only in the city but also in the whole diocese.' (7) This fear of an

invasion of friars from Ireland is not substantiated by the total absence of any reference in the Irish Capuchin archives to the sending of friars to New Zealand. The appointment of Fr. O'Reily to the New Zealand mission was nothing more than a solution to an immediate problem and not a matter which implied any commitment on the part of the Order as a whole. In fact it was not until 1958 that any new friars came. In the course of the same letter Father Cummins wrote about difficulties in the siting of a new church in Wellington and commented, 'as usual Msgr. Viard just lets things go.'

What conclusions, if any, can be drawn from this? Was Fr. O'Reily an ambitious man who wanted to be made bishop? Was he a strong, active man who felt frustrated at the rate of progress under Bishop Viard? Did he in fact try or wish to dislodge the Marists and have them replaced by Capuchins from Ireland? A question which may be easier to answer is whether or not he was qualified to be a bishop at all.

He was a man of mature years, 37 years of age at the time of his arrival in New Zealand. His training in France and Italy had made him, in the words of Father Forest, 'a very learned man, and undeniably more learned than any of us.' He had had experiences of leadership in the different communities of which he had been Guardian in Ireland. As a writer he stood alone in the new mission. His relations with Protestants were excellent and the Colonial Office had already hinted that it would like to see Irish or English rather than French

bishops. An Irish bishop well versed in French and in the affairs of France, as Fr. O'Reily was, would have been a useful bridge between the predominantly French clergy and Irish people who formed the Catholic community in New Zealand. To a man of his linguistic ability – he spoke Italian, French and Irish, and read freely in Latin and Greek – the task of leaning Maori would not have presented a great difficulty. More important perhaps, he had won a place for himself as the pioneer of the Church in Wellington, and had won the respect and affection of the people. Bishop Viard had appointed him Vicar General in 1850 and spoke of him in glowing terms, 'He had befriended without effort the entire population. And how could he not be the friend of all, he who never grieved anyone? He is for clergy and people an example of the sweetness, humility, charity and resignation of our Divine Saviour as were – in a manner more perfect no doubt – Francis de sales and Vincent de Paul.'(8) He spoke of him as 'a bond which links a French clergy to the English nation.' To Fr. Barsanti who had written asking that Fr. O'Reily be sent to Auckland, the Bishop replied, 'In asking me for the Very Rev. Fr. O'Reily, you are unaware that he is parish priest of Te Aro parish, and without a curate; that he is chaplain of the garrison, the prison and the hospital. I must add that this pious and wise ecclesiastic preaches every Sunday at vespers at the Cathedral since the foundation of this diocese. For you will know that Father O'Reily was already the apostle of Wellington, of Nelson and of the neighbouring towns before our arrival. In all special ceremonies he is always ready to assist us. His sermons attract a great number of Protestants. To take Father O'Reily from Wellington

would alienate the hearts of Catholics and Protestants against the Bishop and his French clergy.'(9)

It seems reasonable to conclude from this that Fr. O'Reily had the qualities of a bishop. His love for the Church, his dedication to work and his strength of character are attested to by his life and the testimony of those who knew him. It is probably fair to say also that he did want to be bishop. If the appointment of a third bishop had been considered at the time it seems likely that he would have been among the foremost candidates for the office.

THEOLOGICAL TROUBLES

At the end of 1845, Bishop Pompallier left New Zealand to visit Rome. In his absence, Bishop Viard carried on the work of administration. Before he left New Zealand, Bishop Pompallier had laid the foundation stone of the cathedral in Auckland. Work was completed early in 1848. On 18 March, an advertisement appeared in the Auckland newspaper, *New Zealander*, under the heading 'Saint Patrick's Catholic Church.' It read, 'The Catholics of Auckland are respectfully informed that the consecration to Worship of the Almighty of the above Church will take place on Sunday (tomorrow) 19th inst. At a quarter past eight in the morning by the Right Reverend Dr. Viard, Catholic Bishop, and Clergy. The Consecration sermon will be preached by the Rev. Joseph J. P. O'Reily, of Port Nicholson.'

The new church, described in the *Southern Cross* as 'one of the most handsome and substantial of our public edifices,' was duly consecrated. An account of the ceremony and the sermon was published in the *New Zealander*. It had been written by Fr. O'Reily who had arrived some days previously from Wellington. The editor noted, however, that 'more is contained in that communication than a mere description of the ceremony, that there are opinions expressed in it, or as good as expressed, for which we hold ourselves in no way responsible.' He was obviously expecting trouble and he didn't have long to wait. A week later a letter written by someone who signed himself 'A Protestant' took up the

cudgels. The author referred to the consecration of 'the Roman Church' and objected to Fr. O'Reily's statement that, on the occasion of the consecration, 'the old and venerable rites of primitive Christianity were, it may be for the first time, introduced on this desert shore.' He asked whether Fr. O'Reily was suggesting that this was the first occasion on which there had been any Christian worship in New Zealand, and went on to challenge what he regarded as the unscriptural nature of the whole ceremony. In a reply on 1 April, Fr. O'Reily made it clear that his reference was solely to the rite of consecration of Churches and not to all Christian worship. He then made a detailed reply to 'A Protestant's' objections to the use of candles and incense.

Within a matter of days, another Protestant, who singed himself *Laicus,* had joined in the fray. However, his approach was more personal than theological. He referred to Fr. O'Reily as being 'connected by office with a system of error,' and dragged up the familiar quotation from Revelation that Rome was 'the Mystery of iniquity and the Mother of abominations.' St. John, the author of Revelation, was referring to pagan Rome, but *Laicus* obviously felt that it was an apt description of 'the Church of Rome.' For good measure, he threw in a reference to the Popes as 'Masters of Iniquity.' He objected to Fr. O'Reily's quotations from the Fathers of the Church as 'fleeing to the folios of the Fathers.' He dismissed these, saying, 'we should hardly go to them for sound wisdom and discrete judgment.'

Hot on the heels of this came another blast from 'A Protestant' who spread the argument wider to include a general objection against the Mass, the doctrine of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the use of relics ('old rags and bones') and Fr. O'Reily's claim that the Catholic Church was the one true Church of Christ. He may have taken his cue from *Laicus* because he, too, applied the text of Revelation to the Catholic Church, 'the Mother of Harlots.' His conclusion was that the rites of Catholicism 'seem to be a mixture of paganism and judaism [*sic*].'

Up to this point most of the fire was coming from 'A Protestant' and *Laicus*. However, on 12 April, the paper published a long letter from Fr. O'Reily. To his credit, he did not attack either of the two men personally, although he was probably writing with tongue in cheek when he said that 'the intervention of Sunday, may, it is trusted, give rise to more hallowed feeling in ireful bosoms.' He went on to reply to the objections one by one, even quoting Luther in support of his arguments. He had also discovered that 'A Protestant' was a Methodist minister and he replied to his objection that the Catholic Church had a policy of persecuting non-Catholics, by saying that people who lived in glass-houses shouldn't throw stones. Nevertheless his tone was conciliatory and he asked that 'as sincere Christians let us mutually give and ask pardon for our sins against Charity, that divine virtue, which should cause us to see in every human being the image of God and a brother.'

By now, *Laicus* had withdrawn from the battle but it still raged on for several more weeks. The months of March, April and May went by while each week brought fresh objections and replies. To a present-day reader what is perhaps most surprising is that the newspaper published such lengthy correspondence. The letters were often half a page of very small newsprint and the two debaters were given every facility. We forget, of course, that the newspapers were the only large-scale means of communication in those times and that in a new settlement with very little else by way of cultural activity, these debates were followed by the public with keen interest. They were read for their entertainment value as much as anything else and debaters were expected to amuse as well as instruct. This they did but in ways which perhaps were unintentional. 'A Protestant's' last letter is followed by an advertisement for a young bull lost at Mount Albert, and the exciting news that a consignment of very superior ladies' BOOTS with patent fronts had just arrived! Another notice proclaimed that a constant supply of Sydney Butter was always to be had.

The theological level of the debate was advanced and the two opponents were evenly matched. It must be said, however, that 'A Protestant' added spice at the expense of charity and of truth by digging up some of the more disreputable stories about the Popes such as that Pope Marcellinus authorised sacrifice to idols and that Pope Sylvester was guilty of necromancy. Neither did he forget the all-time favourite of anti-Catholic polemicists – the mythical Popess Joan and her baby. If this type of

attack had been omitted, it is possible that a more constructive discussion might have developed. Unfortunately, that must remain one of the many ifs and buts of history.

It was not very long before fresh controversy erupted. An unsigned article called 'Scripture Exposition' appeared in the pages of *The New Zealand Evangelist*. (1) It attacked the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation and argued that it had no scriptural basis. In a letter from 'St. Mary's, Hinau Hill', dated 6 September 1849, Fr. O'Reily took up the challenge. He quoted liberally from scripture, the Fathers of the Church and contemporary theologians, including several non-Catholic ones. His reply, which runs to more than 4,000 words, is an excellent statement of Catholic Eucharistic doctrine. It is entirely free of any personal attacks and confines itself strictly to the matter in hand. In another article published in the November issue of *The Evangelist*, the author, still anonymous, ignored most of the points made in the reply and then proceeded to refute an argument which Fr. O'Reily had not used. In this context, Fr. O'Reily was at a distinct disadvantage in that *The Evangelist* refused, contrary to accepted practice, to publish his replies. This forced him to publish them privately at considerable expense in the offices of *The Wellington Independent*. However, one of the proprietors of the *Independent* took up his case and pointed out the injustice of the situation. The editors of *The Evangelist* conceded the point and published the next reply from Fr. O'Reily. The controversy continued for several months and a reader can only be impressed by the level of scholarship on

both sides. Fortunately, the discussion was free of the personal invective of the letters of 'A Protestant' in the Auckland controversy, although *The Evangelist*, in other issues, regaled its readers with some scurrilous anti-Catholic verse (2), and stories in the 'Maria Monk' category.

Subsequently, Fr. O'Reily published all his replies in one volume, in a book called *Ex Horto Ecclesiae*. It was sub-titled '*Enchiridion against Articles Nos. 15, 17, 18 etc. of the New Zealand Evangelist on the Most Holy Eucharist*,' and was published on the Feast of St. Thomas Aquinas, 7 March 1850. In a note at the end, he included an appeal for funds for 'St. Mary's Catholic Church dedicated to the Most Holy Trinity under the patronage of the Ever Blessed Virgin.' He refers to the dilapidated state of the existing church. It had been badly damaged in the earthquake of 1848, and he pointed out that the way was now clear for a new building as the New Zealand Company, through the intervention of Mr. Fox, had given a subscription to inaugurate the fund. In the course of the appeal, Fr. O'Reily referred to the cathedrals of Europe and shows by his comments that he was familiar with many of their features. He went on to invite 'our beloved dissenting brethren' to contribute to the appeal, and concluded by asking for continued support for the school.

It is not immediately clear whether this appeal was directed to rebuilding the existing church, which seemed to have no longer been called 'the Church of the Nativity' as Bishop Pompallier had originally named it,

but now St. Mary's, or to building a new church in Thorndon. However, it is more likely that it was directed towards this latter cause as the new church there was opened the following year, with the name of St. Mary's. For some considerable time the two Catholic churches in Wellington were called Saint Mary's, and the confusion to which this has given rise is accentuated by the fact that both of them met the same fate – of being accidentally destroyed by fire.

The church of which Fr. O'Reily was pastor remained with many additions and renovations until it was finally replaced in 1874. It was often known simply as 'Father O'Reily's Chapel' and it was only later on that it came to be called by its present Franciscan title of 'Saint Mary of the Angels.'

The appeal for funds was evidently very successful. By August of 1850, 15,000 francs was available and the way was clear for work to proceed. The new Cathedral of St. Mary's was consecrated by Bishop Viard on 7 December 1851. Following their usual arrangement, Bishop Viard preached in Maori and Fr. O'Reily in English. The diocese of Wellington was now firmly on its feet. It had its own bishop and cathedral. In a phrase that Fr. O'Reily was fond of using, 'It had risen from infancy to vigorous manhood.'

PASTORAL WORK

Very little of the information available about Fr. O'Reily comes from the man himself. He wrote very little about himself, and, as far as know, he did not keep a diary. We have to rely almost entirely on the reports of others.

One feature of his pastoral work which receives repeated mention is his preaching. It appears that when Bishop Viard and Fr. O'Reily travelled together, which they did on many occasions, they had an arrangement by which the bishop preached in Maori and Fr. O'Reily in English. Fr. O'Reily himself referred to the matter, 'This was necessary because his lordship had little acquaintance with the English language, which is the language of the people.'(1) Bishop Viard had been a missionary in the Pacific Islands before coming to New Zealand and had acquired a knowledge of several island languages. Because of their similarity to Maori it was relatively easy for him to learn this language, and, in fact, he spoke it quite fluently. The partnership of both men seems to have been a satisfactory arrangement. In addition, Fr. O'Reily preached in Irish, especially while on visits to the West Coast. He wrote, 'I had to preach the Gospel continuously to a great number of my compatriots. They were very pleased to hear a priest of their own country and language.' (2)

He was described as having 'a beautiful speaking voice, with clear and correct diction.' (3) However, there

must also have been a great deal of solid content as well. Bishop Viard wrote, 'Father O'Reily had delighted the people everywhere by his sermons' (4), and added that they 'attract a great number of Protestants.' (5) In 1855, he preached a special *triduum* in honour of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, which had been defined by Pope Pius IX in the previous year. Seven hundred people attended, of whom three hundred were Protestants. (6)

His work as a confessor was equally in demand. Bishop Viard wrote, 'he has heard confessions day and night, and, always pleasant, he seems to be unaware of fatigue.' (7) While in Arrowtown, in central Otago, people came as much as 60 miles for confession. In a rare personal note, Fr. O'Reily remarked, 'my confessional was much frequented.' (8)

One of his regular duties in Wellington was to visit the jail. It was situated not very far from the presbytery at the corner of The Terrace and Abel Smith Street. It was among the first public buildings in Wellington. The prisoners were employed in public works and used to be led in chains to the site on which the museum was later erected. In a tribute to Fr. O'Reily later on in life it was said, 'Your constant attendance upon our gaols has not been fruitless.' (9) Time and time again on his visits to the jail he could see clearly how many people found themselves in trouble owing to problems with drink. This stimulated him to become involved more deeply than before in the temperance movement.

To many people today, the temperance movement, which perhaps should more properly be called the abstinence movement, since many of its supporters rejected the use of drink altogether, seems little more than a relic of puritanism. While it would be true to say that some of the temperance advocates were puritanical and regarded drink as evil in itself that would certainly not be true of them all. It would be equally appropriate to point out that while society today has largely abandoned the temperance movement it is not at all clear what approach it has adopted to the problems associated with the use of alcohol. The temperance may not have been the best solution to the problem but, before we ridicule it or reject it as outdated, we should ask, in the light of current statistics on alcoholism, whether we, in our time, have provided anything better.

As we have seen already, Fr. O'Reily was involved in this work before he came to New Zealand.

His interest in the temperance movement would certainly have been sustained after his arrival in New Zealand. The problems of alcoholism and drunkenness were very widespread and all of the Churches were involved in the task. Fr. O'Reily worked with Sir William Fox, a lawyer who had come to Wellington in 1842, and whom he had met on many occasions at the Petres' home. Sir William, who was twice Premier, was a life-long advocate of the temperance movement, and he and Fr. O'Reily often spoke together on the subject. Sir William may have had a domestic impetus to his interest, as Mrs. Petre records, on one occasion, that 'Henry had

to escort Mrs. Fox home after ‘a very musical evening.’ Fr. O’Reily’s interest in the movement was life-long. A note in his hand-writing, dated 29 August 1871, states, ‘Pledge by John Murray, Rox-bor’, for six months.’ Later on a newspaper referred to what it called his ‘most successful appeal to the people in the cause of temperance.’ (10)

His work for the sick of the town was fully appreciated, as can be seen from the testimonials of those who paid tribute to him in 1867 prior to his departure for Europe. Here again he worked for all people without regard to their religious beliefs. In the early 1860s there was a serious epidemic of typhus in the town. Fatalities were numerous, especially among the young. One family, the MacDonalds, who had come from Scotland, lost all of their seven children. When Fr. O’Reily heard of this he made a special point of visiting them to console them in their grief. Evidently he made a deep impression on them because they subsequently became Catholics. During the epidemic, Fr. O’Reily devoted much of his time to visiting those who were alone and had no one to care for them. He would bring them food or a bowl of soup and many a sick person who might have spent long hours of loneliness and hunger found comfort in his visits.

As Bishop Viard had written in his letter to Father Barsanti, Fr. O’Reily was chaplain to the garrison, as well as to the prison and the hospital. The 65th regiment, known as the Royal Bengal Tigers, comprising some 800 officers and men, were stationed in the town. Some of

these men were Catholics. They helped prepare the church for Mass each Sunday.

In 1863-4 and 1868-69, fighting broke out between the Maoris and Government troops. It was at its worst in the Waikato, the King country, and, most of all, in Taranaki where the Government stationed 9,000 troops, including the 65th Regiment. The Maoris proved to be both skilful and brave fighters and the Government's losses were heavy. The casualty lists of the 65th show many Irish names, and it is reasonable to suppose that a good number of those would have been known to Fr. O'Reily. His attitude towards the war itself is not known, but, whatever it may have been, he would certainly have felt a sense of sorrow and loss at the news of the death of so many of his friends. He had baptized their children, as is shown in the parish records at St. Mary's, and had enjoyed close relations with many of its officers. In 1867, when a presentation was being made to him, the names of several officers were listed, including that of General Chute, the regiment's commander.

Throughout his work, whether in the hospital, the jail, the garrison or the parish, Fr. O'Reily enjoyed extremely good relations with the Protestant community. There seems to have been a general desire on the part of the settlers – conscious of their pioneering role – to get away from the bitterness and sterility of relations between the Churches in Europe. They were aware of the fact that they were establishing relations which would determine for a long time to come the mutual attitude of the Churches. In many respects there was a degree of

cooperation in day-to-day affairs which has not been reached today. This positive approach was an appreciable step forward despite the fact that there were some very negative and unhelpful attitudes as well. It may not be too much of a generalization to say that the greatest cooperation was achieved among lay people while it was from the clergy that the greatest resistance to change came. While no one could ask them to compromise on issues of doctrine, it would not have been unreasonable to ask that they leave aside some of the bitterness and ill-will that existed, and the evidence of which is not hard to find.

Fr. O'Reily found himself in this mixed situation and had no hesitation in deciding which way his own feelings lay. From the time of his arrival in Wellington he had been received warmly by the Protestant community. They had contributed to the building of the church in Nelson, and he counted many of them as his personal friends. Where a doctrinal issue was in question he stated Catholic doctrine clearly and openly, but always with charity, including those cases where charity was not reciprocated. He was careful to avoid the political controversies of the time. As the Fenian movement grew in Ireland, it began to have repercussions in New Zealand. Relations between Irish and English, between Catholic and Protestant, became more difficult in the 60's and 70s. This was compounded by the growth in the 70s of the Orange Order, first established in New Zealand in the 1840s. Some Irish priests on the West Coast made political statements about Fenianism, and were removed from their positions

by Bishop Viard. Richard Davis, in a study called, *The Irish Catholic Question and New Zealand Society*, gives a very well documented account of these controversies. It is significant that Fr. O'Reily, who was not afraid of controversy, is not mentioned once in the entire matter. He kept himself clear of political issues.

A glance at Fr. O'Reily's library showed that he was a keen student of theology. He read very widely among the Fathers of the Church and the history of the Reformation. He made a special point of keeping up to date on areas of doctrinal difference between Protestants and Catholics and did not hesitate to affirm his belief that the Catholic Church was the one true Church of Christ. The notes he wrote in the margins of these books give clear evidence of his proficiency in theological matters. On the opening of a book by John Henry Newman, he has a note, 'Now a Catholic, thanks be to God.' He rejoiced over Newman's conversion, as also that of the celebrated Frederick W. Faber, a priest of the Oratory.

A simple incident provided the occasion for a lasting friendship between Fr. O'Reily and an elder of the Presbyterian Church. One wet, windy Sunday evening, not very long after his arrival in Wellington, Fr. O'Reily was returning to his presbytery. A sudden gust of wind blew out his lantern, and, in the darkness, he bumped into a young couple. Apologies led to introductions and Fr. O'Reily found himself invited to their home. Thomas Wilmor McKenzie was an elder at Saint John's Church in Willis Street. He had recently arrived from Scotland

with his young bride, who made Fr. O'Reily a hot drink of blackberry cordial while Thomas repaired his lantern. From that night onwards the two men were firm friends and regular visitor to each other's homes. On Sunday evenings in winter they would talk by the fireside. The subject of discussion was nearly always theological and the debate went on into the small hours. In summer the pattern varied a little. Thomas would say, 'Father, I'll see you home.' Together they would slowly climb The Terrace. At Mount Street, the priest would say, 'Thomas, you've no lantern. I'll take you to the corner, or, like as not, you'll fall into the stream.' At the junction with Ghuznee Street the performance would start all over again. One moonlight night, to Mrs. McKenzie's great amusement, she counted them walking up and down The Terrace fourteen times!

As Fr. O'Reily was returning home one evening Thomas McKenzie mentioned that Saint John's Church would be without a minister the following Sunday. Fr. O'Reily straightaway offered to take the service. Mr. McKenzie asked the other elders if they agreed, and, obtaining their consent, Fr. O'Reily conducted the service. In no way at all did he diverge from the usual Presbyterian service, and afterwards many thanks were rendered to him. (11) This may well have been the only occasion in New Zealand's history on which this happened. The McKenzie family returned the compliment by regularly sending their two daughters to sing in the choir in Fr. O'Reily's church. A relative of the McKenzie family, Mrs. Anastasia Coughlan, was an

Irishwoman from Kilkenny. She and Fr. O'Reily used to converse in Irish to the amusement of the McKenzies.

A rather back-handed compliment to the relations between Catholics and Protestants in Wellington at this time was paid by one A. R. Butler, a member of the Religious Tract Society. In her book, *Glimpses of Maori Land*, she expressed her anxious concern that 'One can't help feeling that the spirit of tolerance is somewhat carried to excess when one finds Protestants patronizing the Roman Catholic bazaar. One admires their love more than their wisdom, their heart more than their head.' (12) If Fr. O'Reily had read it, he probably would have said, 'Poor Annie! What an excess you're worried about! I hope we have more of it.'

A similar comment was made by F. W. Petre, the son of the Hon. Henry Petre. 'When you consider the manner in which Father O'Reily was always received with friendship and respect by all members of the community, it was not only a recognition of his many sterling qualities, but it showed a distinct movement from the general opinion of those days when people had not quite got over the spirit of the anti-Catholic Penal Statutes, which forty years before were in full force.' (13)

O'REILY THE FRANCISCAN

Fr. O'Reily has left little in writing about himself. Despite this handicap we can gather quite a good deal of understanding of the kind of person he was from another source – his books. He was an avid collector and reader of books and his range of interests was broad. Some three hundred books of his original library remain today.

As one might expect, religious and theological works predominate, but what comes as a surprise is the great age of some of these books. He had several from the earliest days of printing. One of these is a collection of the sermons of Saint Bonaventure, published at Ulm in Germany in 1481. It was only 40 years earlier that Johannes Gutenberg had first used movable type in nearby Strasburg. This book, a large volume in half-inch thick wooden covers, bound by metal clips, was bought by Fr. O'Reily from a bookseller named O'Gorman near the Four Courts in Dublin. Another early volume in his possession was a commentary on the Psalms by none other than Torquemada, one of the leaders of the Spanish Inquisition. This book, printed in 1482, has a hand-written index. The third early volume was St. Bernard's *Modus Bene Vivendi*, printed in Venice in 1492.

In addition to these very early works he had a good collection of books from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. He wrote notes and comments in their margins. His comment on a history of philosophy was 'What a history of the handicap of the human mind!' In a volume

referred to already, the *Voyages de Siam*, he underlined and added exclamation marks to a passage where the Jesuits told about going down the Malay Peninsula to re-supply with gin and tobacco! His comment on this – *For the greater glory of God* – was a dig at their motto. He had a number of works by Saint Alphonsus Liguori but obviously the saint's writings did not appeal to him, as the pages are mostly uncut after the first forty or fifty.

Many of these books he brought with him from Ireland. On Vol. II of a three-volume edition of the works of Fénélon, a note in his handwriting reads, 'Bought by Very Rev. J. J. P. O'Reily many years back in Sackville St., Dublin, while Superior of Church St. Chapel in the same magnificent city.' Another was a second-hand copy of Milton's *Paradise Regained* which had been won as a prize by a student called Owen Saunders at Trinity College, Dublin, in 1788.

History was clearly one of his great interests. He had a thirteen volume history of England, together with histories of Spain and the papacy. All of these have extensive notes.

In addition to these earlier works he received regular supplies of current books and periodicals by both Protestant and Catholic authors. He valued especially the *Dublin Review* for its assessment of new publications. He referred in his notes to the English *Tablet* and the French newspaper, *Le Monde*.

His greatest interest was in the field of theology, especially in the papal primacy, and in issues of controversy between Protestant and Catholic theology. To foster his knowledge in these fields he maintained a constant study of sacred scripture. He had a Greek New Testament with a Latin commentary to which he added notes in Greek. On another Bible in an Anglican edition, he noted, 'The veneration in which Beza [Calvin's right-hand man] was held by King James' translators of the Anglican version gave to those translations a sectarian character and introduced many inaccuracies.' In a commentary by St. Thomas on the letters of St. Paul, printed at Lyons in 1689, he has the following note, 'V. Rev. J. J. P. O'Reily bought at Rome when out there in 1867 from New Zealand, and abode there until a short time before the dissolution of the Ecumenical Council called by His Holiness Pius 9th in which Council the Infallibility of the Pope in decisions of Faith and morals was defined as an article of Faith though objected to by a fraction of the Church who were spared by the… prudence of Holy Church. May the Angelic Doctor [Saint Thomas] pray for me, and obtain from our dearest Saviour light and grace that I may know how to work… for the conversion and regeneration of our race. Amen. So be it in peace. J. J. P. O'Reily A. M. 21 Feb.1876.' (The letters "A. M." which he and several other priests used frequently represent Apostolic Missionary.)

If the range and number of his books gives the impression that his interest in theology was purely academic this is corrected by his notes and comments. One habit he had was of writing simple prayers in the

margins of his books on prayer and spirituality. In a copy of the autobiography of Saint Teresa, he has the note, 'Dear St. Teresa, pray for me a sinner.' Later on in the same book Saint Teresa wrote of the presence of Christ in prayer and stated that she had often made use of comparisons to illustrate a point to someone in conversation. His comment, written in the margin, was, 'Dear St. Teresa, why not give us a few of them?' In a book of Psalms, he wrote, 'Dear Jesus, of whom David sang, have mercy on me when I am gone, and grant me thy peace.' These simple aspirations, of which there are literally hundreds in his books, show a spirit of simple, trusting prayer which was in the Franciscan tradition.

Occasionally, too, he decorated these books with a Franciscan symbol, the *Tau*. This is a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, which is written in the Roman alphabet like a capital T. Saint Francis used it as a signature because of its similarity to the cross. Fr. O'Reily used it from time to time, occasionally with additions to make it like F, for Francis.

One particularly trait was his devotion to the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady. This devotion has been fostered by the Franciscan Order since its foundation. When the dogma was solemnly defined by Pope Pius IX in 1854 Fr. O'Reily found himself again involved in controversy, this time with the Rev. Samuel Ironside, a Methodist missionary. Again, Fr. O'Reily came to the defence of Catholic doctrine, relying heavily on the weight of tradition in favour of this teaching.

When a severe earthquake shook Wellington on 22 January 1855, causing extensive damage and some loss of life, Bishop Viard issued a pastoral letter calling for prayers for relief. The initial earthquake, which had lifted the Te Aro area about eight feet, was followed by many others which lasted the entire year. On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, 8 December, Fr. O'Reily, at Bishop Viard's request, began three days of public devotions in the cathedral. These were attended by a large number of Protestants. At the conclusion, Bishop Viard consecrated the city of Wellington to Our Lady with the particular request that human life be spared. This act of consecration has been repeated annually in Wellington churches ever since for the same intention. From that day till this, despite many earthquakes that have struck the city, there has been no loss of life in Wellington.

A small but significant feature of his devotion to Our Lady is the fact that his notepaper had a large picture of Our Lady in the traditional style of the Immaculate Conception as a letterhead.

It was Thomas à Kempis who coined the phrase that 'The habit does not make the monk.' It would also be true to say that the genuineness of Fr. O'Reily's Franciscan qualities lies less in external details than in the more important inner dispositions of his mind and heart. His loyalty to the Church, his generosity to the poor, his spirit of service, his devotion to Our Lady – all of these are clear both from the testimony of others and from the explicit evidence which has come down to us. It

is these qualities, together with his sincere attachment to the Capuchin Order – an attachment which remained firm despite nearly forty years of virtually complete isolation from other friars – which mark him off as a true friar and son of Saint Francis.

TRAVELLING WITH VIARD

When Bishop Viard arrived in Wellington in May 1850 he was given an enthusiastic welcome by the people of the town. The welcoming ceremony was organised by Fr. O'Reily who knew the bishop from the time of the consecration of St. Patrick's in Auckland in 1848. The two men were friends from the beginning. Having been educated in France, Fr. O'Reily spoke French and maintained a knowledge of the language all his life. He arranged a meeting for Bishop Viard with the Governor, Sir George Grey, who had arrived from Auckland. This took place on 9 November 1850.

Bishop Viard's high esteem for Fr. O'Reily is clear from the many letters in which he referred to his good qualities. In the year of his arrival he appointed him Vicar General of the diocese. In this capacity the two men travelled together to the furthermost parts of the diocese on their pastoral visitation.

On 5 October 1864, Bishop Viard and Fr. O'Reily arrived in Lyttleton, just a few miles from Christchurch, to begin a journey which would take them to the most distant parts of the diocese, some 600 miles from Wellington. After a stay of a few days, they sailed for Port Chalmers, near Dunedin, where the bishop celebrated Mass on 9 October. Following their usual practice, Fr. O'Reily preached at the bishop's Mass. On the 19th they arrived in Bluff and then continued on to Invercargill where the bishop blessed and opened a new

church on Sunday 23rd. From there they moved on to Riverton and Kingston. Despite the intensity of their travel, with many baptisms, confessions and marriages at every stop, they took some time off on the 29th to go for a trip on Lake Wakatipu. During the trip on the lake a sudden gust of wind blew the bishop's skull cap into the water. However, all was not lost. A hardy Mainlander dived in and got it for him!

From Queenstown, where the bishop opened a church, they moved on to Arrowtown and from there to Cromwell. It would be interesting to know how Fr. O'Reily felt on his arrival in a town nearing the name of the man who, more than any other, is associated with the repression of the Catholic Faith in Ireland. They spent six days in the town before moving on to Clyde where another church was blessed on 13 November. The blessing ceremony was no sooner over than they moved on to Alexandra where another church was dedicated on the same day. It is not surprising that, following this hectic schedule, they decided to spend a few days in the town. However, here as elsewhere, they found their time occupied ceaselessly in the administration of the sacraments. Bishop Viard noted, 'Father O'Reily… has everywhere delighted the people by his sermons… and is no less indefatigable than our young missionaries. He has heard confessions day and night, and, always pleasant, he seems to be unaware of fatigue.' (1)

On 18 November they began the 120-mile coach journey from Alexandra to Dunedin. Bishop Viard described it, 'The traveller is rarely seated upright;

almost always he leans on one side…. If there is neither arm nor leg, nor axle nor wheel broken, the journey is fortunate.' Arriving in Dunedin the following evening, the party was warmly welcomed by the townspeople, including many Protestants, some of whom were at the bishop's Mass the following day. On Wednesday, 23 November, they set off for Tuapeka. Along the way they stopped at Tokomairiro where they were met by a William Poppelwell who had written to Fr. O'Reily the previous year asking for a priest for the district. Unable to meet this request, Fr. O'Reily had sent him £31 to help in the construction of a small chapel. Bishop Viard confirmed all of the Poppelwell family and then went to celebrate Mass at Sunwick Station. From there they moved on to Waitahuna, to Tuapeka, and then to Lawrence where the bishop blessed the new church of St. Gabriel on 27 November. They returned to Dunedin by coach two days later.

A problem which had been on the bishop's mind during the journey was the hard fact that he was running out of money. When one considers that a coach trip from Wellington to Paekakariki, a distance of only 25 miles, cost 15 shillings (2) (the equivalent of a labourer's wages for two days) the cost of this journey of some fifteen hundred miles by land and sea may be imagined. In fact, it came to about £300. However, at Lawrence, some gold miners came to his rescue and presented him with bags of gold. Several Protestants came forward also and presented him with some gold ingots. Gold had been found just a few years before, and the whole of Otago was caught up in a mining fever. Two American miners

took out 87 lb. of gold between them in one period of six weeks. The value of gold exports from New Zealand has been estimated at 50 billion dollars. (3)

Leaving Dunedin on 30 November, the party arrived in Christchurch the following evening. On Sunday, 11 December, the Bishop blessed the new Church of the Blessed Sacrament, which was built on a site of two acres previously bought by Fr. O'Reily. (4) Two days later, with Fr. O'Reily, he arrived back in Wellington. It must have been an exhausting journey in the travel condition of those times. However, Bishop Viard was understandably very pleased with the visitation. The people had responded to his visits with the greatest enthusiasm, and, most importantly of all, everywhere there had been a renewal of the sacramental life of the faithful. For that result, the time and effort were well spent.

The following year, 1865, did not involve any extensive travel, but Fr. O'Reily, at Bishop Viard's request, translated some prayers and devotions to St. Joseph. Originally written in French, they were now published under the title *Meditations and Prayers in honour of Saint Joseph*. Bishop Viard was a man who always had a fervent devotion to Saint Joseph and it must have pleased him to see these prayers now made available in English.

All of this was only a respite, as, in the following year, the two men sailed for a visitation of the West Coast. (5) Arriving in Hokitika on 12 May 1866, the bishop blessed

the Church of Saint Mary the following day, while Fr. O'Reily preached in Irish and English. Hokitika was at the time a booming gold mining town. Founded only in October 1864, it had a population of 50,000 when Bishop Viard and Fr. O'Reily arrived less than two years later. Fr. O'Reily would have found plenty of scope for his temperance work there: the town had 103 licensed hotels.

On 16 May, they left Hokitika for Okarito on board the *Bruce*. Having spent Pentecost Sunday in the town they returned to Ross where the bishop opened a new church. While there, it is likely that Fr. O'Reily would have been fully occupied with sacramental work. A substantial number of those on the West Coast were Irish, many of whom had come through Australia. The bishop and his Vicar General did not return to Nelson until July. Later in that month they went to Blenheim where the bishop blessed the new Church of Saint Mary. This was followed shortly afterwards by another such ceremony at St. Joseph's Church in Picton.

This pattern was repeated in the following year, 1867, this time with a visitation of the northern parts of the diocese. On 8 January they sailed for New Plymouth on board the *Airedale*. Following the usual practice at the time they went first to Nelson and then north to the capital of Taranaki where they spent ten days. They then returned to Wellington on 1 February, spending four fays in Wanganui on the way.

One need which became apparent to both men in the course of their visitation for the previous three years was for an increased number of priests to work in these areas. In a letter to Father Favre on 2 September 1866, Bishop Viard wrote of his concern, 'Everywhere I have been loudly begged for priests. Four last stations have only five priests for so many spiritual needs…. Our generous missionaries are overwhelmed under the work.' (6) He cited the example of Hokitika, a town which for all its size and problems had only one priest. It became increasingly obvious that a concentrated effort would have to be made to find more priests in Europe. The missionaries themselves had many times asked Bishop Viard to find new helpers for them.

The problem was easy to define. Solutions did not come so readily. After a delay of some weeks at the conclusion of the visitation of New Plymouth and Wanganui it was decided that Fr. O'Reily would go to Europe to try and find new help.

RETURN TO EUROPE

Saturday, 21 April 1867, saw a large gathering of people in the *Athenaeum,* one of Wellington's many halls. The purpose of the meeting was to farewell Fr. O'Reily on his departure for Europe. It was presided over by Dr. Featherston, the Provincial Superintendent, who read a formal address which bore 480 signatures, including those of the Governor, past and present Prime Minister, judges, members of the legislatures, both national and provincial, several Anglican bishops and the leaders of other Christian churches.

Dr. Featherston then went on to speak of his own personal knowledge of Fr. O'Reily, 'I remember well that in going on my daily rounds I used to meet you on some mission of charity. I used to find you, perhaps, in some humble abode, administering not merely spiritual consolation, but also supplying, from your own slender resources, to the temporal needs of the occupants. I well remember that, no matter what the distance might be you had to travel, no matter how tempestuous the weather, how dark the night, the summons to the bedside of the sick and suffering was always promptly responded to by you. You may perchance forget what joy and gladness your presence always brought, and what blessings wrung from grateful hearts were showered upon your head. I remember, as though it were but yesterday, when I took your place at the bedside, how the sick person would tell of the benefits they had received at your hand, of your goodness, and your worth, of your welcome smile and

hearty "God bless you." The name "Father O'Reilly" has long been in this settlement a household word in all places where poverty and distress have existed. During my 14 years administration of the government of this province, I have not lost sight of you, of your secret, silent benevolence; and I am glad of this opportunity of letting you know that your constant attendance upon our gaols and hospitals has not been fruitless.' (1)

Later on in his speech Dr. Featherston referred to the purpose of Fr. O'Reily's journey. 'We are not surprised to learn that you are about to undertake a long journey to Europe not for any private purpose, but for the accomplishment of the great object upon which your heart has been set for so many years – to raise funds to replace the chapel in which you have for so long performed your administration by a better building.' To help him in this work the Superintendent made him a present of the community's subscription – 176 sovereigns.

It is not clear whether Fr. O'Reily intended returning to New Zealand or not. There is at least a hint that it would be a final departure. The formal address referred simply to the fact that 'you are about to leave this colony.' Dr. Featherston, in his concluding remarks, expressed the hope of the community 'that you may be enabled to return here and resume your duties, and you will, should you be permitted to return, receive as hearty a reception as any man ever did.'

For his part, Fr. O'Reily was noncommittal. 'Should I succeed in my mission to Europe and return to this part of the world, there is no place where I should better like to pass the few years which may yet be permitted me to live than New Zealand.' It may well be that he was considering retiring to Europe. He had been separated from his fellow-friars for nearly a quarter of a century and he may felt the desire to spend his last years in a friary. His health had begun to give him trouble, too, and he began to develop a bronchial complaint. This had its origin in the many wettings he received in the course of his pastoral visits. One such incident has been recorded: he was called one evening to visit a sick person in Newtown, which was then a low-lying, swampy area. In the darkness he lost his way, and next morning was found by a milkman, up to his waist in the swamp, calmly saying his rosary.

Bishop Viard had given a hint about a possible retirement several years previously in a report to Propaganda in which he referred to Fr. O'Reily's 'age, his many works which are above his strength, his semi-isolation, all in the end will oblige him to retire and find rest, and he thinks that he can find that only in his own country.' (2)

Fr. O'Reily sailed for England on board the *Commodore* on 23 April. Little is known of his voyage or arrival in England, except that, by 20 September, he was in Dublin. This was exactly 150 days after leaving Wellington, which was a little faster than average. Here he met Dr. J. A. Gould, the Augustinian Archbishop of

Melbourne, who was visiting Ireland, also in the hope of finding more priests. It is most likely that Fr. O'Reily would have spent some time in Ireland visiting friends and relatives and making enquiries of bishops about the possibility of finding some new men for his diocese. Unfortunately, there are no records of any of this in the archives of the Irish dioceses in which he served or in those of the Capuchins.

He went to Kilkenny, to visit the friary where he had been Guardian. While in the city he met Father Patrick Francis Moran, a priest of the diocese of Ossory who was later to become Archbishop of Sydney and a Cardinal. Cardinal Moran later wrote of this event, 'I had the pleasure of meeting in Kilkenny the venerable Capuchin, Father O'Reily, who was one of the first priests who laboured among you.' (3)

Fr. O'Reily had been instructed by Bishop Viard to go to Lyons to the headquarters of the Society of Mary, and also to report to the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda. He had a sister in Paris whom he visited early in 1868. While there he bought a large silver chalice which is presently in the care of the Capuchin Friars in Wellington. It is quite possible that, while in Lyons, he made an approach to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith for funds for the church building project. The speed with which the project went ahead on his return indicates that some fairly substantial funds must have been raised.

In his task of finding more priests he met with some success, but also received an unexpected setback. Bishop Viard explains, in a letter to Father Favre S. M., 'Before leaving France for New Zealand, Father O'Reily offered us two priests. You refused them, promising me that after the ordination on Trinity Sunday you would send me three priests of our Society. If now, in spite of your desires and efforts, you cannot, because of other great needs elsewhere, fulfil your promise… I beg of you to seek priests outside the Society…. Several Marist Fathers blame me for not having brought secular priests with me, since the Society could not provide any, at least for a long time. They tell me that I ought to prefer the glory of God and the salvation of souls to the honour of the Society.' (4)

Viard himself left for Rome on 8 June 1868. His purpose was to report to the Holy See on the state of Wellington diocese, and also to find a coadjutor bishop for the diocese. He hoped to find either an Irishman or an Englishman, but the matter took longer than expected. Cardinal Cullen, Archbishop of Dublin, a man of immense influence in Rome, had a decisive voice in the appointment of bishops in the English-speaking world, and he was taking his time with the matter. Viard met Fr. O'Reily at the Capuchin Friary in the Piazza Barberini in Rome. It was at this time that Pope Pius IX called the first Vatican Council. This necessitated a further lengthening of Bishop Viard's stay in Rome. In the light of their close association over a long period it is likely that he asked Fr. O'Reily to remain in Rome with him. There was not very much Fr. O'Reily could do about

finding more priests as the matter seems to have been taken out of his hands. He remained in Rome for the duration of the Council but did not take part in its proceedings. However, he did not allow time to rest idly on his hands. He applied for an appointment as chaplain in the Papal Army. Cardinal Barnabo, Prefect of Propaganda, wrote to Monsignor Tizzani, head chaplain of the Papal Army, on 28 August 1869. 'Father O'Reylley [*sic*], a Capuchin, Vicar General of the diocese of Wellington… wishes to be introduced to you in order to petition for the office of chaplain of the Zouaves during his absence from Rome. For the time being I content myself with pointing out that this Capuchin Father is a knowledgeable man, a man of much zeal, and most apt for the office he would have to carry out.' (5)

The papal forces at this time were an extraordinarily motley collection of nationalities. The guards in the Vatican itself were Swiss, while the main bulk of the army was recruited either in the Papal States or in France. They were under the command of General Kanzler, a German, and had recently been strengthened by the launching of three new battleships – from the Clyde, of all places! The Zouaves were originally recruited in Algeria, although, by this time, most of them were French or Belgian. They had been in action just a few months previously. As Garibaldi tightened his control on the North and South of Italy, the main obstacle to his complete domination of the country lay in the Papal States which extended across the centre of the peninsula. In November 1867 he struck. The two armies

met outside of Rome at Mentana. The Zouaves bore the brunt of the fighting. The issue was already decided in favour of the Papal Army when French reinforcements arrived, forcing Garibaldi to retreat with heavy losses. The significance of the battle is that it gave Pope Pius a breathing space of three years which enabled him to hold the General Council free of external pressure. (6)

The pace of events in 1870 was fast. On 18 July the decree on papal infallibility was passed by the Fathers of the Council. On the following day, France declared war on Prussia. On 4 August, the French Emperor, Napoleon III, removed his garrison from the Papal States, which now had an army of 13,000. The pope wished to make it clear that he did not give his consent to the occupation of his territory. At the same time he wished to avoid bloodshed, so he ordered that there should be only token resistance. By 20 September, Rome was being bombarded. General Kanzler arranged an armistice with the Piedmontese General Cadorna, and that night the Papal Zouaves slept under the Bernini colonnade in the Piazza of Saint Peter. (7)

The Council had been suspended by Pope Pius in the early days of the Franco-Prussian war, so there was nothing further to detain the bishops. Viard and Fr. O'Reily returned to Britain, and, on 3 December 1870, they left Gravesend on board the *England*, arriving in Wellington on the feast of St. Joseph, Sunday, 19 March 1871. In many ways it was the end of an era. Just a little more than a year later, on Sunday afternoon, 2 June

1872, Bishop Viard succumbed to a lingering illness and passed away.

PROPERTY AND POVERTY

Fr. O'Reily was several years older than the late bishop, and it may well be that Viard's death served as a reminder to him, if he needed one, of his declining health, and the need to prepare for death.

As a friar, a member of the Capuchin Order, Fr. O'Reily had taken the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. By his vow of poverty he had renounced all ownership of personal property. From the moment he took this vow, whatever property he might acquire would belong by right to the Provincial of the Irish Province of the Order.

The circumstances in which Fr. O'Reily found himself from the time of his arrival in New Zealand had made the observance of this vow extremely difficult. This problem weighed heavily on his mind, particularly as he realized that it was time for him to make a will for the disposition of what he had acquired, in particular the substantial library he had built up over the years. He wrote to the Congregation of Propaganda in Rome to ask for a dispensation so that he could legally have possessions and make a will. The Congregation replied that he should write to the Minister General of the Capuchins. (1)

On 19 November 1872, he wrote the following letter to the Minister General, Fr. Giles of Cortona, 'Beloved Father, since 1843, that I have been on this mission, I

have been suffering great uneasiness of conscience. For, during this long period, I have been compelled to live quite as a secular priest, no superior, no convent, nothing of the sort, the particular vows of the Order are impracticable, and I therefore pray you, most Rev. Father, to loose me from them. I have been aiding my dear Sister in Paris, these many years, and I fear from the Convulsions in France, that, more than ever, shall she need a helping hand at present. I have a valuable library which I shall leave to the Order, if any of its members come to the Colony, by having an understanding with the Bishop. I hope also to have a claim on the Church here, to which I have very largely contributed and which I shall do my best to bring to the Order. I shall await with a holy desire to be loosed from the particular vows of the Institute of dear St. Francis owing to the exceptional circumstances in which Providence has placed me.'(2) He signed himself Joseph J. P. O'Reily, Joseph being the name he took when he joined the Order in 1826. The "Convulsions in France" to which he referred were the overthrow of the monarchy, and the revolution in Paris which followed France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870.

In a reply, dated 24 February 1873, Fr. Giles, writing in Latin, refused the application and added that, regarding precepts of the *Rule of Saint Francis*, missionaries were to observe what was compatible with their state. If Fr. O'Reily wished to leave his library or anything else to the Order he should communicate about this to the Guardian of the friary in Cork. If he wished to make a will, either in favour of the Order or to give some

help to his sister, he should send him (Fr. Giles) a petition which he would present to the Holy See. (3)

If Fr. O'Reily felt frustrated at being referred from the Holy See to the General of the Order, and from him back to the Holy See, he showed no sign of it. In a subsequent letter to the General, dated 4 July 1873, he speaks of reading his letter of 24 February 'with pleasure.' However, he obviously felt that it was not practical to take up the General's suggestion that he make arrangements for the library with the Guardian of the friary in Cork. 'Regarding the library, on reflecting at a distance of 16,000 miles, expenses and so forth, and the greater need of furnishing a new mission with resources in books, so easily and cheaply procured in Europe, but so dear and difficult here, so that with your most Rev. Paternity's leave I shall consecrate them to the use of the mission.' (4) As a way of making his intentions clear he wrote notes to this effect on the front pages of many of his books. For example, on a book of sermons of St. Bonaventure, he has the following note, 'From the books of Rev. J. J. P. O'Reily. For the use of the clergy of the Holy Catholic Church at Port Nicholson, if God wills it.' On another he wrote, 'For the use of my Holy Mother the Catholic Church.'

The problem of the dispensation from the vow of poverty remained. He probably realized that his first letter to the General had been ambiguous in that he had asked for a dispensation from his vows whereas in fact he wanted to have a dispensation from only one vow, that of poverty. In his second letter he made the point

more clearly. ‘I am well aware that the holy state of chastity and obedience, are to be inviolably preserved with God’s grace, but there are numerous examples of religious being freed from the vow of poverty…. I always felt extremely unhappy at an obligation that was so difficult of fulfilment in the countries where Providence cast me.’(5) He concluded his letter by asking the General if he had an agent in London to whom he could send a donation for the Order.

Fr. Giles presented the petition to the Holy See, which gave it a favourable hearing. (6) On 18 December 1873, Fr. Giles sent a rescript for Fr. O’Reily to Bishop Moran of Dunedin, who was the administrator of Wellington diocese following the death of Bishop Viard. (7) Bishop Moran acknowledged this in a letter dated 17 February 1874. (8) This left Fr. O’Reily with a free hand to make arrangements for the disposal of his property.

‘I HAVE FOUGHT THE GOOD FIGHT…’

It would have been understandable if Fr. O’Reily, after thirty years of service in the parish of Te Aro, and now almost seventy years old, decided to spend his remaining years in quiet relaxation. What he actually did was to embark on a programme of activity which would have left many a younger man exhausted.

His priority was to replace the church which Bishop Pompallier had opened in 1844. It had been extended on several occasions, and been used as a classroom, and had suffered major damage in the earthquakes of 1848 and 1855. Indeed, one of the purposes of his visit to Europe was to raise funds for a new building. First of all, a decision had to be made about a site. Fr. O’Reily’s personal preference was to find a new one as the existing site was not entirely satisfactory. It was on the side of a steep hill and had little open space around it. He owned some land in the city but it was too near St. Mary’s Cathedral. Reluctantly, a site adjoining the original church had to be used.

Fr. O’Reily commissioned an architect, Mr Clayton, to draw up a plan for a church which would accommodate about 450 people, but he instructed him to design it in such a way that it could be extended in later years without taking from its appearance. This was in fact done in 1892. The interior was to be simple and unadorned, because of the shortage of money, but the same guiding principle was to be kept in mind in this

matter also; as money became available, the church could be decorated according to a pre-arranged plan.

The firm of Scoullar and Archibald won the tender for the construction of the church as a cost of £1,500. An interesting point to note in the light of today's building practices is that the church was completed on time and for precisely the price tendered. A newspaper of the day gives the following description, 'Mr. Clayton's design possesses many excellent points, the chief of which is the compactness and neatness of the building, which is cruciformed, with a tower and spire rising from the intersection of the nave and the transept. The style adopted is the early English combined with the Gothic… the building embraces all the features of a cathedral.'(1) Like the very great majority of buildings at the time, it was built of wood as much because of the scarcity of good quality stone as because of the danger of earthquakes.

The same newspaper, the *Wellington Independent*, gives an account of the blessing of the church, which took place on 27 April 1874. 'The ceremony of blessing… of the new Roman Catholic Church, Te Aro, took place yesterday morning in the presence of a congregation numbering between 450 and 500 persons, very many of whom not being members of the Church, were attracted by the nature of the ceremony, while others attended as a mark of respect to the Venerable Father O'Reily whose charitable activities and Christian life are perhaps as well known to the whole community as they are to the particular denomination to which he

belongs…. The ceremony was commenced at 10.30 by the Rev. Father O'Reily… assisted by the Rev. Father Cummins as deacon, and the Rev. Father Goutenoire as sub-deacon.'(2) Father Cummins preached the sermon and urged the people to contribute generously to the reduction of the debt which was about £500. The collection amounted to £84, so only a little over £400 remained to be paid off. (3)

The church was named Saint Mary of the Angels, after the church in Assisi which was so dear to St. Francis, and following the Franciscan custom of giving this name to the first new foundation in a country. Unfortunately, it had a short span of life, as it was destroyed by fire in 1918, to be replaced by the present church.

Now that the church had been completed the next task to be taken in hand was the school. On 4 April 1873, Fr. O'Reily gave land in Boulcott Street to the Sisters of Mercy for a school and convent. (4) He then wrote to Archbishop Gould of Melbourne, asking for some sisters to teach in the school. Two sisters arrived in July and one in August. (5) However, as events turned out, the sisters found it more satisfactory to move to Dixon Street, a few hundred yards away. Here, in 1874, they opened a school for girls. Their place in Boulcott Street was taken in June 1876 by the Marist Brothers who opened their first New Zealand foundation there.

For quite a number of years the people of his parish had urged Fr. O'Reily to build a new presbytery. He was still living in the mud-walled cabin beside the cemetery

in Mount Street. Apart from the discomfort of the building itself, there was the added difficulty that the location involved a hard climb up a slippery clay slope – not an easy task for a man approaching seventy to accomplish each day.

In November 1874, Bishop Redwood, recently consecrated as Bishop of Wellington arrived with Fr. Kearney, an Irish Marist, who was appointed to be Fr. O'Reily's assistant in St. Mary's. The new bishop was the Francis Redwood who, at the age of five, had attended Fr. O'Reily's Mass at his parents' home at Waimea. He encouraged the idea of building a new presbytery and entrusted the task to Fr. Kearney. However, when the task was completed, Fr. O'Reily insisted that it was much too good for him. His only concession to old age was to move into a room off the old chapel. Here he could be near the church and save himself the daily climb up the hill.

In the years which followed, Fr. O'Reily's health continued to decline. In 1878, he retired as parish priest although he continued to live in the old chapel room, and continued in his pastoral work. His last entry in the parish records was for a baptism in September 1878. His place as parish priest was taken by an Irish Marist, Fr. Kerrigan, as Fr. Kearney had returned to Ireland.

During these last years of his life Fr. O'Reily spent most of his time in prayer in the new church of Saint Mary of the Angels. He found it increasingly difficult to walk and was helped from his room to the church by the

children who attended his Mass. (6) The *Evening Post* of 22 July 1880 describes it: 'Although very feeble, the good old priest continued to be able to get about until a few months ago. His venerable appearance as he plodded his way through the streets at once impressed a stranger with respect…. Gradually his powers failed him, although he retained his mental faculties to the last.' He was confined to bed for a few days although he did not get a great deal of rest owing to the numbers of people who called to see him. He remarked that he didn't know he had so many friends until he became frail. (7)

As he grew steadily weaker he was given the last rites of the Church. On Tuesday, 20 July, he lost his power of speech, and, on the following day, he passed away quietly at about four o'clock in the afternoon.

The funeral took place on the following Sunday, 25 July. A Requiem Mass was celebrated at 11 a.m. by Fr. Yardin S. M., and the sermon was given by Fr. McNamara who preached on Saint Paul's famous text in 2 Timothy 4:7, 'I have fought the good fight and have finished the course; I have kept the faith.'

Annie Butler, the lady who was worried because there was too much tolerance in the city, gives an interesting sidelight on the occasion. 'The Roman Catholics have a very firm foothold here. One of their number, a good old priest, beloved by all parties, died about the time of our arrival, and after lying in state for a time he was carried out to the little Catholic cemetery. The whole town

turned out to see the procession which followed. It was worthy of France or Italy.' (8)

The funeral procession began at about 2.30 in the afternoon. It went via Boulcott Street, Willis Street, Lambton Quay, Bowen Street, The Terrace, and finally Mount Street. It was led by a cross-bearer who was followed by 450 children from the schools of the Marist Brothers and the Sisters of Mercy. Behind them came about thirty members of the Hibernian Society and then the combined members of three brass bands under the direction of Salvatore Cimino. Then came the coffin, accompanied by Frs. Yardin, Sauzau, Halbwachs, Coffey, McNamara and Kerrigan. Behind came a procession of the townspeople on foot. Their number was estimated at between seven and eight thousand. It took the funeral procession twelve minutes to pass a given point. It arrived in the cemetery at ten past four. The concluding prayers were given an added touch by the schoolchildren placing wreaths on the coffin, which bore the inscription, 'The life of Father O'Reily was at an end but his memory lives on.' The *Evening Post* wrote of him, 'Father O'Reily's life was indeed a living sermon to his flock. His charity was unbounded, and the call of sickness was never made to him in vain. In fact he gave away nearly all his means, living a most abstemious life himself, in order that he might relieve the wants of his less fortunate brethren, no matter to what creed they belonged; and there is no doubt that his health was greatly injured by the privations and exposure to the weather he endured on his visits of mercy.'(9)

On 2 July 1883, a public meeting attended by Catholic and non-Catholic alike, decided to erect a monument in his honour. The meeting was addressed by the former Governor, Sir George Grey, 'Gentlemen, put up your monument; it will decay and fall to pieces – that will go – but the good he has done will not pass away. His efforts will always remain, and let us, while we live, recount to others how good, how prudent, how wise he was, and endeavour, if possible, to encourage all others to follow the good example he has set us.' The monument, a Celtic cross some ten feet in height and cut from granite, was executed by the Dunedin firm of Monro and Company. It bore an inscription in Latin of which the following is a translation: 'In memory of Very Rev. Jeremiah Purcell O'Reily, priest of the Order of Saint Francis, who was the first pastor of Wellington. A learned, pious and wise man, he exercised the sacred ministry in this city for thirty-seven years. Finally, broken by toil and nearly 80 years old, he died in the Lord on 21 July 1880. This monument was erected with great love by his friends.'

In recent years, Wellington City Council has given his name to one of the city streets – O'Reily Avenue – alongside the church in which he had served the people of Wellington since 1843.

REFERENCES

Certain abbreviations are used in these references. The key is as follows: -
ACDA: Archives of the Catholic Diocese of Auckland.
ACPF: Archives of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.
AGOFM: Archives of the Generalate of the Order of Friars Minor.
ASM: Archives of the Society of Mary.
APFP: Archives of the Propagation of the Faith (Paris).

The Voyage to New Zealand

1. The *Diary* of the Hon. Mrs. Henry Petre (an MS in the Alexander Turnbull Library); entry of the same date.
2. For example, 21 August 1842.
3. *Ibid*., 1 September.
4. *Ibid*., 19 September.
5. *Ibid*., 16 September.
6. *Ibid*., 20 September.
7. *Ibid*., 29 January 1843.
8. *Ibid*., 5 September 1842.
9. ACPF Congress. Afric. Is. Oc. Aust. Capo B. Sza, III, 167.
10. Mrs. Petre's *Diary*, 2 December 1842.
11. *Ibid*., 6 December.
12. *Voyages de Siam*, inside front page.
13. London to Cape Town is 6,000 miles; Cape Town to Wellington is 7,500 miles.
14. Mrs Petre's *Diary*, 27 January 1843.

15. *Ibid*., 28 January.
16. *Ibid*., 31 January.
17. In the note referred to above (n.12) in *Voyages de Siam*.
18. Mrs. Petre's *Diary*, 2 February 1843.
19. *Ibid*., 1 and 4 February 1843.
20. Mary O'Driscoll, *The Story of the Faith in Wellington Central*, 1959, p.11.
21. Mrs. Petre's *Diary*, 5 February 1843.

His Early Years

1. Note in O'Reily's handwriting on the book, *Commentary of the Letters of Saint Paul*, in the O'Reily Collection, St. Patrick's College, Wellington.
2. Information from Dorothy McKenzie, grand-daughter of Thomas Wilmor McKenzie, elder of Saint John's Presbyterian Church, Wellington.
3. *Ibid*.
4. From notes in the Irish Capuchin Archives, Dublin.
5. *Bullarium O. F. M. Cap*., IX, p.400.
6. Letter of Fr. O'Reily to the Minister General of the Capuchins, 4 July 1873, in the Irish Capuchin Archives, Dublin.
7. *Ibid*.
8. MS in the archives of the Capuchin Friary (Holy Trinity), Cork.
9. *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, Wellington, 1940.
10. *Dublin Post Office Directory*, 1834.
11. Note of his in Vol. II of *Oeuvres de Fénélon*, Paris, 1835, in the O'Reily Collection.

12. MS in the archives of the Capuchin Friary (Holy Trinity), Cork.
13. From Irish Capuchin Archives, Dublin.
14. *Ibid*.
15. In Saint Mary's Convent, Guilford Terrace, Wellington.
16. Reply of 6 June 1840 in ACPF, LDB, 323, 519v.
17. Issue of Wednesday, 4 April 1840.
18. Fr. Augustine, *Footprints of Father Mathew*, Dublin, 1947, pp.126-7.
19. Eileen Duggan, "Jeremiah John Purcell O'Reily OFM Cap", *The Capuchin Annual*, 1959, p.153.
20. From the Irish Capuchin Archives, Dublin.
21. *Ibid.*
22. The oddities of spelling are as on the chalice.

Why New Zealand?

1. Cited by Cardinal Moran, *A History of the Catholic Church in Australasia*, (no date), pp.924-5.
2. ACPF, Congress. Oc. 1546r-1546v.
3. Letter of Fr. Thomas Grant, Rector of the English College in Rome to Msgr. Brunelli, Secretary of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, 28 January 1847, cited by Lillian Keys, *Philip Viard: Bishop of Wellington*, Christchurch, 1968, Appendix C, p.238.
4. Original letter in the archives of Dublin archdiocese, Murray correspondence, letter dated 21 May 1842.
5. ACPF, LDB, 323, 519v.
6. APFP, I, 11 Maristes.
7. Redwood, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

8. ACPF Congress. Oc. 15465-1546v.

The Church in New Zealand

1. Cited by Cardinal Moran, *A History of the Catholic Church in Australasia*, (no date), p.924.

The Situation in Port Nicholson

1. Cited by T. M. Hocken, *Early History of New Zealand*, Wellington, 1914, p.46.
2. *New Zealand Mail*, special issue of 12 June 1907.
3. Howard Robinson, *A History of the Post Office in New Zealand*, Wellington, 1964, p.30.
4. *New Zealand Mail*, special issue of 12 June 1907.
5. Marist Fathers *Yearbook for 1927*.
6. "Our first Bishop's Wooden Cathedral," *The Marist Messenger*, October 1971, p.29.
7. Mary O'Driscoll, *The Story of the Faith in Wellington Central*, 1959, p.31.
8. *Ibid*. Cf. *The Book of the Congress*, Wellington, 1941, p. 93.
9. *Gazette*, No.37, p.351.
10. Cited in "The Pride of Wellington: John Patrick Fitzgerald, Catechist, *The Marist Messenger*, February 1940, p.58.

O'Reily in Wellington

1. Letter of Charles Clifford to his father, 22 February 1843, in APFP, I, 11 Maristes.
2. *Diary* of Mrs. Henry Petre, entry of the same date.

3. *Ibid*., 18 March 1843.
4. *Ibid*., 12 February.
5. *Ibid*., 7 May.
6. *Blue Book Returns*, (1843), I A 1, 43/1641.
7. *Ibid*., I A 12, 5, pp.120-1.
8. *Ibid.*, I A 1, 43/1641.
9. *Ibid*.
10. In his letter to the *Australasian Chronicle*, 2 April 1843, cited in Cardinal Moran, *A History of the Catholic Church in Australasia*, (no date), p.924.
11. ASM, Z 208.
12. Letter to Father Épalle from Nelson, 3 May 1844, in ASM, O oc, 1518.
13. Cited in *Annales des Missions d'Océanie*, Lyons, p.215.
14. Written inside the front page of *Voyages de Siam*.
15. Letter in ACDA, Pom 28 – 9/1. No further information is available about this contact with Manila as all records in the archdiocese were destroyed in the Japanese retreat from the city in 1945.
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19. *Ibid.*
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27. *Ibid.*
28. *Diary* of Mrs. Henry Petre, 1 June 1843.
29. *Ibid*., 11 November 1843.
30. Eileen Duggan *op. cit.*, p. 156.
31. *Diary* of Mrs. Henry Petre, 27 June 1843.
32. Eileen Duggan *op. cit.*, p. 156.
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35. *Ibid*., 8 March.
36. R. A. Sheerin, *Early History of New Zealand*, Auckland, 1890, p.638.
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41. A Hope-Blake, *Sixty Years in New Zealand*, London, 1919, pp. 112-114.
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44. *Ibid*., p.21
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'He who desires to be a Bishop…'

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7. ASM, OP 458.
8. *Ibid*.
9. Cited in Lillian Keys, *Philip Viard: Bishop of Wellington*, Christchurch, 1968, pp.170-1.

Theological Troubles

1. *The New Zealand Evangelist*, Vol. II, No.15, (September 1849), pp. 80-83.
2. *Ibid*., Vol. II, No.16, pp.132-4.

Pastoral Work

1. Letter of the Prefect of Propaganda of 7 November 1867 in ACPF, SOCG, 966, 834R-834V.
2. *Ibid*.
3. Information from Dorothy McKenzie.
4. Lillian Keys, *Philip Viard: Bishop of Wellington*, Christchurch, 1968, p.190.
5. *Ibid*., pp.170-1.
6. *Ibid*., p.108.
7. *Ibid*., p.190.
8. Letter to Propaganda as in Note 1 above.
9. Report in the *Wellington Independent*, 16 May 1867, p.6, cols. 7 and 8.
10. *New Zealand Times*, 13 August 1880, p.7, cols. 1 and 2.
11. Information from Dorothy McKenzie.
12. Ann. R. Butler, *op. cit.*, London, 1886, p.77.
13. Cited in J. J. Wilson, *The Church in New Zealand*, Dunedin, 1910, p.145.

Travelling with Viard

1. In this chapter I have drawn extensively on Lillian Keys' work, *Philip Viard: Bishop of Wellington*, Christchurch, 1968, p.183-191.
2. Arthur Carman, *Tawa Flat and the Old Porirua Road*, p.150.
3. Cf. Keith Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand*, London, 1969, p.107.
4. J. J. Wilson, *The Church in New Zealand*, Dunedin, 1910, p.77.
5. Lillian Keys, *op. cit.*, pp.198-203.

6. *Ibid*., p.200.

Return to Europe

1. This quotation and others relating to the farewell presentation are from the *Wellington Independent*, 16 May 1867, p.6, cols.7 and 8.
2. Quoted by Msgr. Capalti, Secretary of Propaganda, in a letter to Fr. Raffaele da Pontevechhio, of 24 February 1863; in AGOFM, XII 320, 166r-166v.
3. Letter of Cardinal Moran to J. J. Wilson, 15 June 1910, cited in J. J. Wilson, *The Church in New Zealand*, Dunedin, 1926, Vol. II, p.12.
4. Cited in Lillian Keys, *op. cit.*, p.225.
5. ACPF, LDB, 362, 911r-911v.
6. E. E. Y. Hales, *Pio Nono*, London, 1956, p.295.
7. E. E. Y. Hales, *The Catholic Church in the Modern World*, London, 1958, pp.152-3.

Property and Poverty

1. ACPF, Congress, Oc. X, 381r-382v.
2. From material in the Irish Capuchin Archives, Dublin.
3. *Ibid*.
4. *Ibid*.
5. Letter of 4 July 1873, in the Irish Capuchin Archives, Dublin.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid*.
8. *Ibid*.

1. Wellington Independent, 26 February 1874, "Te Aro Catholic Chapel."
2. *Ibid*., 28 April 1874.
3. Information from an unpublished essay.
4. *Ibid*.
5. Eileen Duggan, *The Centenary of the Sisters of Mercy 1861-1961*, Wellington, 1961, p.15.
6. V. P. Burke, S. M., "The past lives again in the books of the O'Reily collection," *Marist Messenger*, September 1966, p.33.
7. Information from Dorothy McKenzie.
8. Ann Butler, *Glimpses of Maori Land*, London, 1886, p.77.
9. Reports of his funeral in the *Evening Post*, 22 July 1880, p.2, col.6, and 26 July 1880, p.2, col.8, and in the *New Zealand Times*, 13 August 1880, p.7, cols. 1 and 2.