

WALES AND THE MARCHES



CATHOLIC HISTORY
SOCIETY

HISTORICAL PAPER
No 1

*PASTORAL LETTER
OF
BISHOP THOMAS
JOSEPH BROWN
[ENT 1866*

Copies of our publications may be obtained from the Catholic Truth Society
Bookshop, St. David's Cathedral Precinct, 38 Charles Street, Cardiff. CF10 2GE
Tel: 029 203 97174

Printed and published by the Wales and the Marches Catholic History Society
(Archdiocese of Cardiff Section)
Pastoral Resources Centre, 910 Newport Rd., Rumney, Cardiff CF3 4LL

Registered Charity No. 242380



Thomas Joseph, O.S.B.
BY THE GRACE OF GOD, AND THE FAVOUR OF
THE APOSTOLIC SEE, BISHOP OF NEWPORT
AND MENEVIA,
TO

OUR VERY REVEREND AND REVEREND BRETHREN, THE
CLERGY SECULAR AND REGULAR, OF THE UNITED DIOCESE
OF NEWPORT AND MENEVIA, AND TO OUR BELOVED CHILDREN
IN JESUS CHRIST, THE FAITHFUL LAITY OF THE SAID DIOCESE,

Health and Benediction..

Dearly Beloved.

“And they forgot His benefits, and His wonders that He had shown them.” Ps.
lxxvii. 11.

To the Soul which is truly repentant, the labours of penance are less repulsive than they are consoling; nor need we fear being thought to repeat too often, that the sincerity of your profession of sorrow for sin may be estimated by the earnestness with which you accept the great Lenten fast, also its suitable accompaniments of alms-giving and prayer.

Motives, moving to contrition and satisfaction, affect with varying *influence* different minds, or even the mind of the same individual; hence it becomes our duty to employ sometimes one sometimes another, of those considerations which ought to make men sensible of the enormity of their transgressions. In our Pastoral Letters, therefore, we have dwelt upon the terrible punishments of sin; on the bitter sufferings paid for its ransom; on the disinterested and boundless love, to which the sinner responds by insult and rebellion. But we do not recollect having formally put forth an appeal, most efficacious to men of generous hearts, derived from the special favours bestowed upon our beloved children in Christ, and the consequent grievous guilt of ingratitude — favours of the most exalted order—not diminished in value, but largely increased in their claims, by comprising families, relatives, friends, all of the household of the faith with whom they live. Consciousness of indifference to these ought to excite overwhelming sorrows, and to enforce requisite satisfaction by works of penance. We refer to the high order of graces, bestowed with such unlooked for abundance upon our diocese, long so destitute; Catholic teaching, ministry, Sacraments, and Sacrifice.

They may not be appreciated unless they are set before you with some detail, as there are but few whose acquaintance with the condition of this Diocese can go back to the period when the Principality, with the Counties of Monmouth and Hereford, was in 1840 erected into one of the new eight vicariates, comprising England and Wales, and when we were the first appointed to its spiritual administration. Of the Bishops charged with the new organization we alone survive.

Wales had ever been regarded as the most destitute portion of the Western District, to which, till then, it was attached; that District itself being by far the most needy of

any of the English vicariates. There are abundant evidences negative and positive, that the Catholic faith kept its hold upon the Welsh generally, during more than two hundred years after the separation of England from the Catholic Church; but amongst a scattered people, of whom the higher class had been more, readily and more early seduced from the creed of their ancestors, there was not that shelter for Missionary Clergy from spies and pursuivants, which England was able to afford; and thus Wales, deprived of legitimate pastors, but ever retaining its hostility to the Anglican Establishment, gradually became an open field for dissenting teachers, who found their way into Wales about the middle of the last century.*

In North Wales, Holywell, and in South Wales, Brecon, and the border town of Abergavenny, were long the only centres from which Missionary Priests issued at intervals, bearing in their wallets the material necessaries for divine service, and making their apostolical journeys, commonly on foot, throughout the Principality. At Talacre in North Wales, the Mostyn family retained their chaplain. As persecution relaxed, yet quite recently, a Priest was stationed at Bangor, and another at Wrexham.

In South Wales, the Brecon Mission, having been closed for about seventy years, after the incarceration of its Pastor the Rev. Wm. Lloyd, was re-opened near the middle of the last century and we found, besides, one Priest at Swansea, another at Cardiff and a third at Merthyr Tidvil, whose Missions had been formed a short time before our appointment. In all four Priests and four Missions.

In Monmouthshire there were five Missions—at Newport, Monmouth, Chepstow, Uske, and Abergavenny, also a chaplaincy maintained by the family at Llanarth. In Herefordshire a Mission existed in the county town, another had very recently been formed at Weobly, and the family at Courtfield supported its chaplain.

Thus, in what constitutes our present Diocese there were altogether eleven Missions and two chaplaincies, having the cure of souls attached to both.

In North Wales each Mission had a decent chapel two had school buildings, with dwelling-houses and a moderate income for the clergy; and the chaplaincy at Talacre was provided for in all requisite ways. But as North Wales has been withdrawn from our jurisdiction by the restoration of the Hierarchy, we will confine ourselves to our existing charge.

In South Wales, at not one of its four Missions was there a single chapel properly so called: no school building; no mission house, except at Brecon. The substitutes for chapels were, at Brecon an upper room of the dwellinghouse; at Swansea a hired room so badly ventilated that, at the Sunday afternoon service the atmosphere was almost insupportable, whilst the rickety floor required to be trodden cautiously at Cardiff, after the small room in a cottage rented by the Missioner was on Sundays crowded to the altar, the window frame connected with an open back yard was removed for the benefit of the remainder who gathered there. No better room could be obtained at Merthyr Tidvil than a loft over the public slaughter-house, reached by a ladder, with no ventilation except what was admitted through broken panes in the small windows, and through defective tiles, so that strong men used to

* See Mann's Census of Religious Worship, 1851

faint on nearly every Sunday, and there was not height enough over the altar for the Bishop to stand, wearing a mitre.

Hereford possessed a handsome church, good presbytery, and school room as now; Weobly had a small chapel and decent dwelling-house without a school and Courtfield devoted a portion of the family mansion to divine worship, but had no school.

Monmouthshire was the best provided. Newport possessed an excellent Church consecrated and solemnly opened soon after our Consecration, with a Presbytery, and the use of a Barn for a school. Abergavenny had a Chapel dwelling house and school-room. At Monmouth was a Chapel, a house, and over the Sacristy a small room used for a poor-school. Uske was provided with a small Chapel and dwelling-house, without a school—and Chepstow had a Chapel only.

The pecuniary resources of the Diocese were most scanty, So that great merit is due to the Clergy for their disinterested and hearty zeal. Swansea and Brecon, in Wales had certain allowances, so also had Chepstow, Monmouth, Abergavenny, Hereford, and Weobly; Llanarth and Courtfield being Chaplaincies. But Newport, Merthyr, Cardiff, and Uske, were dependent totally upon charity, and the efforts of their Congregations, none of which were then numerous, as some now are. Any one who called upon the zealous Father Carroll at Merthyr, must remember how, within the door of the poor workman's cottage which he rented, the entrance was almost blocked up by two or three sacks of meal or potatoes, which he retailed under market price for the benefit of the poor, yet eking out thereby his own maintenance.*

Those, too, who can go back in memory to the first years of our Vicariate, may recollect an appeal from us in the Catholic papers, to save the missioner at Cardiff from being forced to sell before it was fat, the pig on which he reckoned for rent of his humble residence—and some may have heard how the Bishop found him, on a Monday in bad health, and dependent for the coming week on the collection made the day preceding amongst his Congregation, the amount being two shillings and sixpence ! We had a sovereign to spare, which was added.

There was not a fund of the smallest amount at our disposal, and our condition was most disheartening. Even the imposing church at Newport, which we solemnly opened a few days after our Consecration became, where we looked for consolation, our heaviest pecuniary burden. Not a week had elapsed before we were overwhelmed by the wholly unsuspected intelligence, that we must instantly provide for almost the entire cost of the building, or it would be seized for monies borrowed towards its construction. The Llanarth and Clytha families came to our assistance, discharged jointly with us one-third of the debt, and made themselves securities for almost half the interest; and we have ever since had to pay the remainder.

** He died of the Irish fever, in the fatal year 1847, caught in the discharge of his heavy duties. A few days before he was noticed, by a Protestant gentleman, making his way on foot over a bleak mountain road to a sick call at a distance of several miles, in pelting rain, wearing a tattered coat, and his feet appearing through shoes and stockings. Being unable to get through a second Mass, on Sunday, two days before his decease, he threw himself upon a mattress in his clothes upon the ground floor, that he might be better able to administer to any who might be brought for the purpose.*

Truly had we been aware of what there was to be encountered, we could not have ventured upon our serious responsibility. But the S. Congregation of Propaganda, also ourselves, had been authorized to entertain confident hopes, which proved to be delusive; yet not until after we had accepted an obligation of submitting to Episcopal Consecration.

Divine Providence, however, which had inspired the Holy See to erect the Vicariate of Wales, inspired charitable hearts early to relieve its destitution. The Executor of Mrs. Eyre of Bath, just then deceased, assigned from her bequest to religious purposes, almost sufficient for the erection of St. David's Church at Cardiff, so soon as ground could be secured, which religious intolerance had made an almost insurmountable difficulty; also for other small Churches at Merthyr Tidvil, and Pontypool. For a church at Coedangred we are grateful to the late Mr. William Middelton. Towards the erection of a small church at Brecon, nearly the whole cost was contributed by Mr. Howard of Corby, out of a charitable legacy of Lady Throckmorton. At Carmarthen, a picturesque church was erected at the sole expense of a pious lady, yet living, whom we are not authorized to name, on ground purchased for the purpose by Mr. Herbert of Clytha; and for a handsome church at Abergavenny we are mainly indebted to a living Benefactress, who may prefer her name not appearing in this Pastoral Letter. But it would be affectation to withhold the name of Mr. Wegg Prosser, when we profess our gratitude for our beautiful, and, now greatly enlarged, Pro-Cathedral Church of St. Michael, near Hereford, where cathedral service is daily celebrated. We must be allowed also to express our obligation to Mr. Hutchins for the chapel at Rhymney, and other important services to that Mission — to Colonel Vaughan, who substituted for the family chapel at Courtfield, an excellent Mission Church—to Captain Illtyd Nicholl for the chapel at Bridgend—to the late Mr. McDonnell of Uske for his gift of land, and large pecuniary contribution, for the beautiful church in that town, just completed by the addition of a tower through the successful exertions of its Pastor amongst charitable friends, whose names and amount of respective subscriptions we are not at liberty to record—and to the late Mr. Phillipps of Longworth, for giving to Catholic worship, after restoring and decorating it with exquisite taste, a domestic church of the 14th century, which had never been used for Protestant worship.*

In Cardiff the zealous Fathers of Charity, having obtained ground at becoming distance from St. David's, erected thereon the spacious and imposing Church of St. Peter, but a heavy portion of debt yet burdens the Mission. Would that charity came to their relief were it only to reduce the amount of their obligation.

The exertions of our beloved Clergy, assistance from without the Diocese, collections amongst the poor, who commonly correspond with their zealous Pastors to the utmost of their small means, aided by such assistance as we could give, enabled a church to be raised at Swansea, which has received several enlargements through the energy of its present Rector, and is now a striking feature of the town and in the distant quarter where our poor Irish mostly reside, a large chapel is approaching completion, for which we are indebted chiefly to Prince Torlonia, at the solicitation of the Superior of the Ursulines of Jesus, whose convent is near it.

* To Mr. Phillipps this Diocese owes the large and beautiful Convent at Bartestree with its charitable community, devoted to the salvation of fallen and endangered females.

An esteemed church exists at Pembroke Dock—a spacious chapel at Brynmawr, another at Aberavon large school-chapels at Merthyr Tidvil, and Tredegar also school-chapels at Ebbw Vale, Treforest, Abersychan, and Llanelly; the last being the fruit chiefly of the zealous efforts of the late Mrs. Arengo Cross. Preparations are being made for considerable enlargement of the chapel at Monmouth—at Aberdare, a capacious school-chapel will, it is hoped, be commenced shortly—and at Ross we have building ground.

Thus, by a wonderful blessing of God, South Wales in which we found only four Missions, with four Priests who had no other convenience for public worship than wretched hired apartments, or small rooms in cottages, there are now twelve churches or chapels, with nineteen Missioners, several of whom labour at distant Stations. In Monmouthshire, of the five Missions existing in 1840, three have new churches, opened since the commencement of the Vicariate; six churches or chapels have been erected in other localities and for five Priests it has at this time eighteen, some of whom attend remote Stations. Herefordshire has added two Missions, to its original three, exclusive of the Chaplaincy at Rotherwas, also of another at Broxwood blessed by numerous conversions; in lieu of three Priests it has now seven labouring in the vineyard, besides five who are resident Members of the Cathedral Chapter; and it possesses three new churches. Of the Clergy who welcomed our entrance upon the Vicariate of Wales, all have been called to the recompense of their disinterested labours, except the Venerable Father Fisher, for so many years the Chaplain of Llanarth, and the Rev. Father Millea, who had to struggle against the difficulties of the early Cardiff Mission. A few of the faithful laity can recall to memory the establishment of the Welsh District, and thank God for the results of their co-operation.

We possessed only two funds for the education of Ecclesiastical Students; and it was not until four years since that we dared make an appeal to our heavily-burdened poor Missions, for further aid. Therefore, it would have been absolutely impossible to provide Clergy for even considerably below the half of our increased and increasing Congregations, and we should have had, and should still have, thousands of poor Catholic labourers craving the bread of spiritual life, yet with no one to break it to them, were it not for the timely assistance received from Religious Orders. This should never be forgotten by Clergy or Laity. First came to our aid, in urgent necessity, the Fathers of Charity; next the Benedictines; then the Capuchin Fathers and now the Order of Mount Carmel. The Mission at Hereford had long been under the faithful superintendance of the Society of Jesus which shortly before our appointment erected there a beautiful Temple, with excellent Presbytery, and school-room but, to our great regret, they withdrew from us their valued services, in order to concentrate their strength elsewhere. Attached to St. Michael's Priory, near Hereford, we have teen able to raise a small Seminary for young aspirants to the Priesthood, and a fund has been recently bequeathed by a charitable Benefactor, for the education there of one student, providing for about half the small pension. The payments for advanced students in other Colleges exhaust our limited resources, even aided by the usual contributions from the Diocese which, until last year, barely sufficed for one.

We must continue our history of graces and mercies from God. In the whole of South Wales there was not a single school-room fit for its purpose, nor indeed do we recollect that there existed one poor-school. Now, mainly through the exertions of the Fathers of Charity, Cardiff alone has three, two of which are superintended by Sisters of Providence—Swansea has two, one of which, for boys, girls, and infants, is under the care of Ursulines of Jesus, who will speedily have charge of another large school, connected with the nearly completed chapel—Dowlais has two well-conducted schools—and there are five at other Missions. Efforts are being made to erect a school-house at Carmarthen, on ground provided by Mr. Herbert of Clytha. In the English Counties there was one good school-room at Hereford the use of a barn for a school at Newport and a small room for like purpose over the Sacristy at Monmouth; elsewhere none. Now, there are three good school-rooms at Newport, that for boys well taught by a Brother of Charity, one for girls, and another for infants, conducted by Sisters of Providence—a capital school-house at Pontypool, now under Sisters of Mercy, some of whom go three times a day about two miles from Pontypool to superintend day and night classes in the school-chapel at Abersychan—and thirteen others in various Missions, not including Monmouth. The school of Clytha we owe to that family—that at Bridgend to Captain Illyd Nicholl. At Bullingham, the zeal of the Rotherwas family has introduced Sisters of Charity who conduct a school of boys, and another of girls. At Broxwood Court it is proposed to erect a school-house shortly for the children, now taught in a cottage.

Of dwelling-houses belonging to missions, there was one only in South Wales—in Monmouthshire there were four—in Herefordshire two, exclusive of those at chaplaincies. We have now twenty-three buildings, either newly-erected or purchased; the old dwellings at Brecon and Abergavenny are replaced by useful Presbyteries; and elsewhere the clergy occupy decent rented houses, or apartments. To the Late Mr. Middleton is due the mission house at Coedangred; to the late Mr. Phillipps of Longworth the Presbytery of this Mission; to the Llanarth family chiefly that of Newport; and to Captain Illyd Nicholl, in great part, the mission-house at Bridgend.

Whence came the resources for these results, within the last twenty-five years? We have recorded our obligations for material edifices to the most munificent of our benefactors; and we have given well-deserved credit to the efforts of our beloved clergy and their congregations. Yet these set forth, by no means, all we owe to God and have expended for the material progress witnessed in a district, which one of our bishops likened, for its necessities, to the condition of the Church in heathen lands, and where Catholics of the middle class were few, those of landed or funded property far more scarce.

When we sometimes heard that means had been bestowed by princely charity upon other portions of our one Church, for increasing the glory of God and for the greater benefit of souls, we have always rejoiced, although we were not otherwise sharers therein. Indeed, by far the largest sum placed by an individual at our free disposal, was £4,000, the gift of Miss Anne Higgins, long since deceased, which we instantly invested for the permanent benefit of this portion of the Church; and we entreat our successors to show their unflinching gratitude by prayers and sacrifices. Almost the earliest of our benefactors, and exclusive of Miss Higgins, the largest contributors were, the Association for the Propagation of the Faith, which has acquired thereby a

special title to co-operation at every mission of this Diocese; and St. David's Society, organised with such disinterested zeal, in the last years of his life, by the Rev. Joseph Rathbone, Missionary at Newport, in the Isle of Wight, aided by Mr. Hensler, of Bristol, and the late Mr. Thomas Barnewall. For the members of this Society and contributors to it, we and our successors owe the oblation of the Adorable Sacrifice, once in every quarter of the year. Others, personal friends and strangers, came to our assistance; who now, almost all, have been transferred to that eternal life, wherein upon good deeds is bestowed a superabundant recompense. For all these we offer twice in each month the Sacrifice of the Altar, and the like for the benefactors of St. Michael's, which we have taken measures to perpetuate.

Thus circumstanced, it was a duty we have ever acted upon, to observe the closest economy in our domestic and personal expenditure, and to make the aid which charity bestowed upon our extensive and destitute Vicariate and Diocese, of the greatest possible avail. Some may censure us, because we have not erected classical edifices, which would secure admiration from judges of architecture: but we are confident of the approval of the great majority, for employing our scanty means in multiplying useful edifices, combining the utmost space and convenience with just so much architectural character, as may show them to be for religious purposes; and where it was impossible to erect separate buildings for poor-schools, which are almost as important as chapels, in making the same building serve both purposes, by means of a wooden partition shutting in a school-room under the gallery, which can easily be withdrawn on Sundays. This idea we submitted to the Holy Father, and received his warm approval. Whatever else we might do, to burden any of our poor Missions with a heavy debt would bring ruin upon it. Therefore the assurance will afford satisfaction to our benefactors that, where debts do exist, in small or poor Missions, we ourselves are the only creditors, or nearly so.

The necessity of increasing so largely our Missions and Mission edifices, has arisen from the large influx of Irish labourers to the mineral works and docks of South Wales and Monmouthshire, since the creation of the Vicariate. In several localities there are hundreds still dependent upon occasional visits from the nearest Priest. At Ebbw Vale the Catholics number 750, and are attended by one of the clergy at Tredegar, who has to walk over a wild country three miles. Maesteg contains about 500 poor Catholics, for whom Mass is said in a hired room on three Sundays of each month by the Missionary at Bridgend, who has to return above eight miles for a second Mass at his own Mission. Repeated efforts to obtain ground there for a school-chapel have been unsuccessful. Many will wish to know to what extent conversions have taken place amongst the Welsh? In most, or all of our Missions in South Wales some enter the Church from time to time: but there is not that return we hoped for, from the increase of Clergy, and the improvement in our places of divine worship. Not even the substitution for English of Welsh hymns and prayers, through the zeal of the Society of Jesus, at St. Beuno's College, in North Wales, have produced a considerable and lasting effect. Many reasons may be alleged, for which we have not space here; therefore we offer one remark only, that the history of the Church affords hardly an instance of the general apostasy of a race, which does not entail spiritual blindness on many successive generations.

The struggles of a new vicariate and diocese are soon forgotten when their necessities have been largely relieved; and so rarely is it given to one who presided over such original desolation as we found, himself to record comparative prosperity, that we have deemed these details not unacceptable to our faithful children in Christ, at the not remote close of our prolonged administration. We commenced by remarking that a subject is not out of place in a Lenten Pastoral, which moves to contrition and penitential satisfactions, where there may have been neglect of unlooked for, and special blessings - to further applications of alms which have been so fruit-bearing—to grateful acknowledgement of mercies—and to a return of active love.

Confiding that these sentiments will warrant a relaxation of the strict observance of Lent, and by virtue of special faculties from the Holy See, we grant the following Dispensations.

DISPENSATIONS FOR LENT, 1866.

1. Flesh Meat is allowed on all Sundays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, except Thursday and Saturday in Holy Week, and Ember Saturday: on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, at the dinner only of those who are bound to fast, and at the discretion of those who are not so bound. On Sundays flesh meat may be eaten, at discretion, by all.
2. Eggs and cheese are allowed every day, Except Ash Wednesday and Good Friday; on week days at dinner only. Eggs and cheese, when allowed at dinner, may be used at other hours of the day by those who are not obliged to fast.
3. Dripping and lard are allowed at dinner and collation on all days except Good Friday. On days whereon Flesh Meat is allowed, Fish may not be eaten at the same meal.

The Grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the Charity of God, and the Communication of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. *Amen.*

+ THOMAS JOSEPH, O.S.B.
Bishop of Newport and Menevia.

Interested in Catholic History ?

Wales and the Marches Catholic History Society has been formed to help all those who are interested in the history of the Catholic Church in Wales and Herefordshire, particularly after the Reformation. Among the titles already published are :-

- No.1 The Life and Times of Bishop Thomas Joseph Brown (1798 - 1880)
- No. 2. A Short History of St. David's Cathedral, Cardiff
- No. 3. The Catholic Church in Cardiff - First Annual Report 1879.
- No. 4. The Old Catholic Families -The Vaughans of Courtfield.
- No. 5. John Cuthbert Hedley OSB- The Last Bishop of Newport.
- No. 6. Religious Houses in Herefordshire - Before and After The Reformation.
- No. 7. To commemorate the centenary of the death of John Patrick, the Third Marquess of Bute - Catholic Cardiff and Two Marquesses of Bute. (Nov. 2000)

Further information on the Society and its Journal, "The Old Faith" can be obtained from:-

The Secretary, WAM Catholic History Society, P.R.C., 910 Newport Rd., Rumney Cardiff CF3 4LL Tel 029 2036 0044.