

ARCHDEACON BERESFORD

Wanted to be a Doctor; became Builder of 15 Churches

The ordination of the Ven. A.R. Beresford, Archdeacon of Launceston took place on the Festival of the Annunciation, March 20, 1877. He was raised to the priesthood on the Festival of the Purification, February 2, the following year. He was educated in his earlier years under the late Mr. Stephen Hughes, of New Town, and later on at the Hutchins and the old High School. In turn at each of these two schools he held a Junior mathematical mastership. Having matriculated in his school days at the Melbourne University, and while still in his teens he left Tasmania with the hope of entering the University as a medical student. He was not suffered long to gratify his ambition.

The late Dean Bromby, of St. David's Cathedral, Hobart, who had known him from his boyhood, persuaded him that his vocation was the priesthood and not medicine. He succumbed to the charmer, and took up his residence as the youngest of a group of four in old St. David's Deanery. Here he remained under the tutorship of the Dean until he had been priested in 1878. Next year he was sent to take charge of the parish of Bothwell, where he remained until 1903. Whilst here he raised money to build the present lovely parish church known as St. Michael and All Angels, a work which cost over £ 6,000. A pretty wooden church was also built at the Lower Marshes, which, in those days, was served from Bothwell. But the work which attracted him most was that which he called "The Lake's Mission." Viewed geographically the Bothwell parish was like a fan not quite distended to its full extent. Bothwell was the hub or handle, and the Lake district represented the semi-circle made by the fan. Some 25 miles, to the N.W. was Lake Echo, 10 or 15 miles east from that were the Nineteen Lagoons. Farther east the Great Lake, and then, in order, still bearing east, came Arthur's Lakes and Lakes Sorell and Crescent. All this vast' area was in Bothwell parish, but it had been woefully neglected in a spiritual sense.

Scattered all over this huge extent of country were sheep runs, and it was estimated that there were, very widely dispersed, 400 to 500 souls living separated by intervals. These were the shepherds and their families., No other clergyman or missionary had ever attempted to reach these people. The roads were few and bad, and only a good horseman, with some knowledge of the locality could ever face the forests, the mountains and plains. But the young rector of Bothwell, full of enthusiasm, a splendid horseman and a born bushman, faced and conquered these difficulties.

He travelled not less than a thousand miles a year in the Lake country alone, besides the ordinary work of his parish. It was done partly, on foot, but chiefly in the saddle, and only the best horses were of use, as the work was very strenuous. He knew and ministered, with few exceptions, to all living in those remote, but picturesque, outposts, and kept it up for close on eleven years. His practice was to visit every "shepherd's hut," as the tiny residences were called, and then to instruct the children and to set them tasks for his next visit. After that he held a short devotional service with all in the little abode, and then passed on to the next place. The gratitude of and the friendship' existing between all concerned was pathetic and touching, and a full reward for all the trouble taken. He declares that some of the finest characters he ever met were amongst those shepherds. Sometime, about the eleventh year at this work, and on the top of what the parish proper demanded, Bishop Montgomery deemed it wise to give him a change, but so pleased was the good Bishop with the work done that he conferred on him the title of canon.

Then he was sent to the parish of Forth and Leven, of which the chief town is Ulverstone, on the N.W. Coast. But, though different in character, it proved to be even a more onerous problem than Bothwell parish had been. The coastline of the new cure stretched from Leith Heads to the Bligh River, and from that back as far as human beings had penetrated and settled. There were from 15 to 20 centres where services should be held. The population was already big, and growing by leaps and bounds, as the Crown lands were selected and occupied. It was impossible to face such a work alone. Every educated man who could be persuaded to act as a lay reader, was pressed into service, but the need of trained help and of ordained men was imperative. That need led to the employment of two splendid colleagues, the Rev. Wilfrid Earle, not long out from the Old Country, and Mr. James Roper, a gifted young engineer, who later on, was ordained.

To make matters worse a debt of £1,000 stood over local church property. This tangled problem, as do well-nigh all such problems, yielded only slowly, step by step. The three men, obsessed by the one great moving force, kept to it, and before the fourth year of their occupancy had ended, they had built, or removed and enlarged, no less than ten churches, and when Bishop Montgomery called Canon Beresford to leave the Coast and its loyal and interesting

people to reside in Launceston it was found the total debts upon the whole parish, after all these extensions, was not above £450.

The work at St. John's, Launceston, ran over the next ten years, and was totally different from the rural or mission work. The physical strain was less, but the mental powers were exercised to their utmost limit. Yet, in time, this new sphere of labour bore fruit to be proud of. First, to deal with the material side of things came the building of St. John's Mission-house and its fine hall in Canning-street. Canon Kelly, who had preceded Canon Beresford, had started a big and important work amongst the very poor and neglected in that locality. It was placed under the late Sister Charlotte Shoobridge, who was not only a trained and ordained deaconess, but a clever, astute, and intensely devoted woman whose equal, for that especial work, it would be difficult to find. At the time it was housed in an old public-house reeking with stale fumes of beer. In such a home it was not likely to develop, and it became imperative to make better provision. That need led to the building of St. John's Mission-house and its big hall. The chapel's foundations were put in also, but it has never been completed. Financially it must have cost not less than £6,000 and at the time, proved to be a very heavy strain. A debt of some £800 had come from the building of St. Aidan's Church, and pressed upon St. John's, which eventually paid it.

Later came a far heavier call. It was to rebuild the parish church of St. John's, which proved too small to accommodate all who asked for sittings. (Those were the days when sittings were let.) It was faced, and has thus far been about half completed. Those best qualified to judge the new St. John's declare that, when finished, it will be one of the finest churches in the Commonwealth. The cost of the present part, now in use, ran into £18,500. When completed it will become the cathedral of the North, but it will need quite as much again to finance it. When Canon Beresford left this great work, to assume that of Archdeacon, about £8,000 was, still unpaid. When the call to the Archdeaconry came, and the Canon was to be merged into the Archdeacon, he dreamt of a rest, as he was unattached and had no responsibilities, such as he had had to face earlier as a rector, but it was not to be.

It was a time of serious depression in business and trade centres all over Australia. Those are periods which always seriously affect the income of the churches. There were shortages reported at headquarters in Hobart and consequent on the depression, overdrafts were staring the Church in the face. Bishop Mercer summoned a meeting of his financiers, and asked for suggestions to tide over the crisis. Many were offered, but he chose the Archdeacon's as most practicable. Briefly outlined, it was to canvass the diocese to raise £10,000 as an endowment to help what it called the "general church fund," but it included more than that. The first charge upon all sums collected was to be the liquidation of the existing over-drafts. It was no light matter to be called upon, in the name of the diocese, to undertake such a work, but it had to be faced and the Archdeacon of Launceston was chosen to do the work, and to carry his own scheme into effect.

It was not a restful occupation. Every one of the 75 parishes had to be visited and, practically, a house-to-house visitation made, and it took all his energies for several years. But the £10,000 was got, and all the overdrafts, which in the aggregate meant half as much again, were liquidated. After that the Archdeacon "was permitted to retire on the quiet rural parish of Hagley, where he now is, and from which place, rich in its lovely, historical church, and the memories of its great founder, the late Sir Richard Dry, he administers his archdeaconry and parish; but it is no sinecure.

Perhaps some mention ought to be made of the interest the Archdeacon took in what was called in its day, the Volunteer movement. He became closely associated with it as far back as 1884, when appointed to the Bothwell parish. Later, when the movement had won the approbation and assistance of the Commonwealth, he became chaplain to the artillery, with the rank of captain, and eventually was senior chaplain of all the forces in Tasmania, with the rank of major. He was due for promotion as lieutenant-colonel, and was promised that further distinction, but by some oversight it was overlooked and not gazetted. When the Great War broke out, he was anxious to have gone to the front as a chaplain, but had just passed the age of qualification and had to stay behind.

Queried as to the number of churches he had been instrumental in building, he replied about 15. As to the amount of money he had raised, he said, "for church buildings about £25,000, and for endowments and diocesan purposes about an equal sum."

Tho Archdeacon closed his chat with these words: "As I glance back over the 50 years which have elapsed since I was ordained, I feel I might have done more than I have done, and, perhaps, have done it better; but my life, though it

has been a strenuous one, has been a very happy one, and God has blessed my labours. If I were again young, and were called once more to make a choice of a vocation, I should at once select what, in the long, long ago, that saintly and gifted man, Dean Bromby, had; chosen for me - Holy Orders."

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