

THE REPORT.

Feb. 15. 1929.

My dear Fr. Provincial,

In Act Wednesday Bishop O'Riley
motored ~~to~~ ^{us} ~~to~~ ~~see~~ to see the places which he wishes
us to take over. As you are already aware, one of these places
is called Athlone (after the Earl of Athlone); previously, it used
to be known as ^{a more recently West London.} Milner. The other place is called Parow. He
is very anxious for us to start work in this latter place as soon
as possible. There is a little zinc church there already, a priest's
house, and a large orphanage with about 250 children (mainly
coloured) in it; a school as well, attended by about 500 ^{coloured} children.
The orphanage & school are managed by the Holy Cross Nuns
who have been eminently successful in this district. They own the
priest's house. But the Vicariate owns the little church and a
good portion of land adjoining. When one says 'land' one
means 'sand', because the Cape Flats is a huge district
extending for ^a scores of miles with nothing but sand and
wattle (a shrubby kind of tree brought from Australia & planted
by the Government in the Flats some years back), — sand and
wattle and dwellings here and there, and fairly good roads.
The Flats lie to the South East of Capetown; they are about 20 miles
long and about 16 miles broad. There would seem to be a great

future before them in the way of development, because, as was pointed out in the Cape Times of the 14th Feb. last, it is only along the Flats that the extension of Capetown can take place. At the present moment there is a good deal of building going on there in different places (notably at Athlone) and ground is very cheap. A Railway runs through the Flats, called the Cape Flats Railway, and there is also a Bus Service to different places. There is a very high percentage of coloured people in the Flats: that is the reason why the Bishop would like to see the whole district in charge of the Capuchins with a central convent in either Parow or Athlone.

[^{We} mentioned about the extension of Capetown a moment ago. In the last 29 years it has almost trebled its population. If it keeps on extending then there will be great possibilities in the Flats]

Parow is within ten minutes walk from a station called Elsie's River on the Capetown - Johannesburg Line. Athlone is a Railway Station on the Cape Flats Railway. There is no railway connection between Athlone and Parow. They are about 9 miles apart. The road is fairly good. Athlone is at present being served by the Salesian Fathers who have an Agricultural College a few miles away. Athlone is about 6 miles from Capetown, and Parow is about 10 miles also from the city.

We were both impressed by the great opening that there seems to be for spiritual work at Athlone. The little children, coloured and white, crowded around us when we arrived at the half-built

School, which is also used as a church, a little altar having been erected there. The B. Sacrament of course is not kept there, but while we were inspecting the half-built school-chapel, an old man came in to say his prayers, and the little children sat down in the few school-benches as if awaiting or expecting instruction. A couple of hundred children attend school there already, (it is only a few weeks working) and there are three teachers, one a Protestant! The Catholics of Athlone both coloured & white seem to have taken matters largely into their own hands; they formed a committee, sent around for subscriptions, and built largely by voluntary labour after hours the portion of the school-chapel that now stands. At present there is some disagreement amongst the Committee & things are at a stand still, with a debt of about £46 on the little structure. There is a very well-disposed Catholic in Athlone, a Mr. Murphy who came out to the Cape during the Boer War & settled there. He owns a good deal of ground & houses around the school. There is about 4 acres of Vicariate ground around the school. Mr. Murphy would give a beautiful little four-roomed house, which he has built quite near the school, to any priest of ours who would come to live in Athlone. He would give it for nothing, he says, ^{until we have built our convent.} Ed. Mrs. Murphy, who is coloured, but an excellent convert, would see to the ^{priest's} meals. The people do seem to want us badly at Athlone - there certainly is a hunger for a priest there. And in a short time ^{we} would we are sure make great strides of advancement. Unfortunately there is a 'Father Baker' in the place, a Protestant clergyman. He must surely have got many souls already.

But the Bishop is anxious for us to take up Parow first-

He is of opinion that that place would train us in for the work amongst the coloured people better. He says, here, we would have the orphans, & through the orphans we would be able in time to get at their relatives, & in some cases some of their parents - because, he says, they are not really orphans in some instances. There is a Father Houson at present stationed there, but the Bishop is not pleased with the way he is running the place & he intends changing him in the next few weeks, on the understanding that Fr. Canice would go to Parow to take up work there temporarily pending a decision from the Provincial & Definitor at home. Fr. Canice would then go to Parow on those conditions early in March. The Holy Cross Nuns look after the meals for the priest there, & everything is found.

We are enclosing some snapshots of Parow - they may be some help. There has been a large addition to the orphanage built since these photos were taken.

To come to another consideration in our report now: one which it is rather hard to explain. We were warned ^{privately} about the money side of the transaction ^{by friends} and we understand that in the case of some other religious who came out there was grave disappointment over the way that money matters went. Because, they were charged at present day valuation for ground which was bought very cheap by Bishop Rooney in days gone by. We questioned the Bishop about the financial side of the matter & he first said that there would be no liabilities on our part. He would give us whatever ground we wanted. Naturally one would think then that money would not enter into it at all. But we questioned him again to see if we understood aright, & then he said that "of course if we ^{in expectation} built on vicarial ground we should have to

pay the Vicariate for it. We told him that he would have to mention a figure, as facts of that kind would have to be put into the Report. We are awaiting the approximate figures from him.

In the meantime we mentioned the matter to Dr. Bolgan, the Adm. of the Pro-Cathedral. (He + Fr. Morris are consultants to the Bishop.) Bolgan told us not to pay any attention at all to it, that the Bishop will do ~~what~~ eventually what he (Bolgan) + Morris suggest to him to do. He said the Bishop would not let the Capuchins leave, now that he has got them, or let he (Bolgan) could assure us that we would get possession of whatever Vicariats found we wanted, free + for nothing. The Bishop we understand is in matters of finance largely in the hands of a lay advisor an attorney named O'Keilly. It seems to be his ^(O'Keilly's) object to avoid any overdraft in the Bank. At present there is no overdraft on the Vicariats.

Well-meaning friends who have experience have repeatedly advised us to go slow.

But there is no doubt about it: we have what we came out for at Athlone and at Parow, in plenty. We can reach the coloured people in both these places in great numbers. Of course there is a good number of whites in both places.

The question of coloured + white is most acute. The Jesuits (who by the way are leaving Claremont [to the Cape] shortly) thought to make no distinction at all between them, and the Redemptorists to some. But they both have had to modify the views. If there were a sharp distinction between white + coloured it would not be so bad, but there is dissension amongst the coloured as well, as to degrees of colouring. The solution of the question

Even from an Ecclesiastical point of view has yet to be found.

We should have mentioned that within one mile of Athlone there is a very modern village called Jamestown, with nice comfortable dwellings & workshops up to date. Here the 'better class' coloured people reside. There is no priest or Catholic Church here, ~~nor as far as we know, a church of any kind.~~ That would be a good place to work in also, in conjunction with Athlone.

We both went out by ourselves on the 14th Feb. to see ~~what~~ Athlone again and Jamestown which we hadn't seen the first time we visited the district. Jamestown is quite what we say & easily accessible by bus & train, but unfortunately we found there ~~was~~ is an 'Apostolic' Church, and a 'High' Church and we saw on the road a coloured minister of some sort trying to force a copy of the Bible into the hand of a poor native who was passing by.

At Athlone, as you are aware, a church has to be built with accomodation for at least 800, if we take over the place; and a little convent for at least two priests and a brother. The school has also to be completed and furnished. One priest would be sufficient at Parow for the present in the West, of course, if it's being taken over also. Therefore we would want at least three priests and a brother immediately.

About three miles from Parow there is at a place called Matroosfontein a little church built in the shape of a shamrock (!) with conical thatched roof. It is at present being served by a Fr. Kelly (who built it) ~~from~~ ^{to it} who comes from his own place (& church) at Philippi. The Bishop expresses a wish that the Capuchins should

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Take over the Shamrock Church also, but we are of opinion that it may safely be left out of consideration for the present. As it stands it does not seem to be creditable from an architectural point of view, and the 'priests' house' at the back of it (steadily approaching completion) is even more freakish still. There does not appear to be any great population around that portion of the Flats.

The priests at Athlone and the priest at Parow would not be isolated from each other. There is only a stretch of about 9 miles between these places as we mentioned, and they could easily be reached by means of a motor car. We are of opinion, and the priests we met are also, that Parow and Athlone could not be worked without a car. Old Fr. Kelly of Philippi has a good car which was presented to him, and as he is getting feeble and on in years, one of the priests is thinking of asking him if he would give the car to the Capuchin Fathers.

Everywhere we go we find that the 'High Church' and the 'Dutch Reformed' Church or the 'Apostolic' Church are there before us. There is one big outstanding fact that has all the time impressed itself on both of us, the terrible shortage of priests in the whole Vicariate, and very many lost opportunities of spreading the Faith or of even keeping the Faith in several instances.

With regard to the Native Location Question, there are at present two Native Locations, one at Langa, the other at Ndabeni. This latter is shortly to be done away with. The Government seem to be only experimenting, and the Location at Langa may in a few years meet the fate of Ndabeni. Therefore in view of the uncertainty prevailing

in the line of Native Locations, and also in view of the unhappiness and unrest of the coloured people staying ~~there~~ⁱⁿ the Locations (they are continually coming and going from them) we think it advisable that ~~the~~ ~~Native~~ work in the Native Locations should not be considered at least for the present.

The habit can easily be worn around Athlone and Parow but the material must be of the lightest kind.

It might be a good idea to get plans of a typically Franciscan Church & Convent from an Irish Architect for use at Athlone (& later at Parow) if we are going to build. They use a brick here largely, and also large blocks of some composite resembling cement or stone. We would be certain of getting voluntary labour in abundance in the event of building at Athlone, and even the poor coloured people are very generous with their 'tikkies' (three-penny bits) they are more generous than the whites.

We should have mentioned that portions of the flats are even at present only being surveyed by Government Engineers, who for this purpose make use of a Round Tower (!) constructed by Fr. Kelly at Philippi near his Church there. The Round Tower commands a view of the flats for miles around & is most useful to the Surveyors.

In a further interview which we had with the Bishop regarding the financial side of the mission, things were more satisfactory. He said that in the case of the Redemptionists at Heathfield what happened was that the Vicariate retained the ownership of the ground, but that he gave them the full use of it, free of rent for all time. Rates and Taxes leave

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to be paid by them. Should they ever leave the Vicariate they would be compensated for the buildings they have constructed. (He also told us that in the case of nuns who hold the use of property belonging to the Vicariate, that he objected to the cutting down of trees. Not, of course, that he objected (he said) to the clearance or cutting down of trees necessary for a building.) He would give us the use of grounds belonging to the Vicariate, on conditions similar to those of the Redemptionists, that is the full use of grounds, no rent, or rates or taxes to be paid by us. Or he would be prepared to hand us over the complete proprietorship of the Vicariate grounds necessary for us on the stipulation that in the event of our leaving them or giving them up they ~~would~~ the proprietorship would immediately revert to the Vicariate. The cost of transfer which in this country is high (amounting sometimes to £150 or £200) would be saved by his giving us a sealed signed document to the effect that such & such grounds though in his name are our bona fide property. He has done this in one instance. But this would not be a civilly legal document, or he pointed out that in the event of the Vicariate becoming bankrupt our grounds & buildings would be seized. He is therefore ready ~~for~~ and willing for any of three things (1) to give us the full use of Vicariate grounds or compensate us for any buildings in the case of your leaving, (2) to hand us over the full proprietorship free, with sealed signed document to that effect thus avoiding the cost of legal transfer, or (3) to give us the full proprietorship free in a civilly legal way, we bearing the expenses of legal transfer.

The Bishop wishes us to state that he is sorry that he has

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not time to write to the Provincial to express his thanks for sending us over, or his pleasure at having us, as well as his gratitude for the copy of Fr. Gauthier's volumes on the Capuchins. He says that he will write personally to the Provincial at the earliest opportunity.

There is nothing further for us to add to this Report which has already, maybe, stretched to undue length. We thought it best to make it as clear as possible and to give all the information & details which might guide the Provincial & Definitor to a right decision.

If there is any question to be asked, or any point to be elucidated we shall be only too happy to do what we can in getting the information necessary.

We hope to leave a reply as soon as possible.

With kind regards & wishes

We remain, Dear Fr. Provincial

Your obedient subjects in J.C., & S.P.,

J. Canice O.F.C.

J. Edward. D. S. T. C.

P.S.

Perhaps it would be as well to send out with your reply the canonical form of invitation to be used by the Bishops in asking us to take over the foundation.

J.C.

J.E.

PHONE
CENT. 4086

ST. MARY'S,
CAPE TOWN.

P.P.S.

The Bishop says that there may be a mortgage bond on the properties at Parow & Athlone. If there is, it is not considerable. And if the properties were taken over by us he says the bond would also have to be taken over. If such bonds exist, further information regarding them will follow.

H. F. E.

Again later, the Bishop has just rung us up before the posting of this, & speaking from the office of his financial advisor Gerald O'Reilly, he says that Mr. O'Reilly thinks that there is no bond at all on either of the properties at Parow or Athlone. He ^{the Bishop} says we may take it that they are both freehold, & that if there were a mortgage bond on either of them, Mr. Morris or Mr. O'Reilly would certainly know of it & would have mentioned the matter to the Bishop.

H. F. E.