

## EX GLANDE QUERCUS. BISHOP GRIFFITH AT THE CAPE: THE CATHOLIC BACKGROUND (1803-1837) AND THE FIRST FRONTIER 'VISITATION' OF 1838

The arrival in Cape Town on Easter Saturday, April 7th, 1838 of the Irish Dominican, Patrick Raymund Griffith, titular Bishop of Palaeopolis, to minister to the Catholic community as Vicar Apostolic of the Cape of Good Hope, marked the beginning of full ecclesiastical jurisdiction by the Catholic Church in any part of present-day South Africa.

Although the late Dr. W. E. Brown has examined the period of Bishop Griffith's arrival at the Cape and first expedition into the interior in some detail, the prologue contributed by his editor, Michael Derrick, admittedly provides no more than an outline of events during the earlier years of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> General histories, too, such as those by Sir George Cory, G. M. Theal and Professor Walker<sup>2</sup> referred to in this article, while devoting some attention to the establishment and early development of the Catholic Church, deal inadequately with certain questions. Too heavy an emphasis on the part of the Catholic church historians upon documentary sources of an ecclesiastical nature and the omission of such material by the lay historians have resulted in the incomplete or misleading treatment of such problems as the effects of the British Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 in South Africa, the general policy of the British Government with regard to the Catholic Church in the colonies and relations between the colonial government at the Cape and the Church at the time of Bishop Griffith's appointment.

It is my purpose here to bring a little more light to bear upon these points than has been shed by earlier writers, and to correct certain false impressions. My main object, however, is less the solution of specific problems than the correlation of the results of earlier research, the expansion of some of the material used by Dr. Brown and the presentation of certain observations from a hitherto unpublished source,<sup>3</sup> in order to examine from a fresh point of view a period of South African history when religious differences were the cause of greater friction than is the case today.

The Catholic faith had been excluded from the settlement at the Cape by the Dutch East India Company, so that the population there did not reflect the religious composition of the Netherlands, the country of origin of the majority of the settlers. The first British occupation from 1795 to 1803 saw no change in the existing position with regard to permitted

1. See *The Catholic Church in South Africa From its Origins to the Present Day*, p. xiv; pp. 6-36.
2. Cory, G. E., *The Rise of South Africa* (6 vols.); Theal, G. M., *History of South Africa from 1795 to 1872*, (5 vols.); Walker, E. A., *A History of Southern Africa* (3rd ed., with corrections).
3. *Interesting extracts taken from the Letters of the Rt. Revd. Doctor Griffith, . . . intended to give information . . . to advance the interests of Religion . . .* (Catholic Church Archives, Cape Town).

religious beliefs, but the brief period of control by the Batavian Republic between 1803 and 1806 witnessed the introduction of wide religious tolerance<sup>4</sup> and permission was granted to three Dutch priests of the Catholic Church, a Prefect Apostolic, Father Lansinck and Fathers Nelissen and Prinsen, to administer the Sacraments to the Catholic troops stationed at the Castle. Soon after the second British occupation of 1806, however, these priests were expelled on the orders of the Acting Governor, Major-General Sir David Baird.<sup>5</sup>

The Articles of Capitulation nevertheless expressly indicated that no change in the rights and privileges enjoyed under the former government was contemplated, and efforts were made to establish ecclesiastical authority by the Catholic Church in the appointment of the Benedictine, Dom Edward Bede Slater, Bishop of Ruspa, as Vicar Apostolic in 1818. Approval, however, was not forthcoming from the British government, and Bishop Slater's Vicariate was in consequence extended to include Mauritius, and, until 1829, Madagascar. The Bishop was not permitted to remain at the Cape longer than a few weeks, but was able to install Father Scully there as resident priest before leaving early in 1820 for Mauritius, where he and his successor as Vicar Apostolic, Dom William Placid Morris, continued to reside.<sup>6</sup> Bishop Slater was able to make contact with the local Catholic community during his brief visit and had seen the need for the extension of the spiritual ministrations of the Church to the Eastern frontier.<sup>7</sup>

Father Scully remained at the Cape until 1824; his successor, Father Wagenaar from the Netherlands, visited the frontier districts, while Father Rishton, who came out to join him, remained in charge in Cape Town. Father Rishton, in fact, showed a marked reluctance to serve on the Eastern frontier, for when it was proposed that he transfer to Grahams-town, he begged leave to decline, saying that "not three times the Government allowance would induce him to consent to such residence".<sup>8</sup> A Spanish Dominican who was forced to remain at the Cape for some time in 1836 through ill-health, while on his way to the Far East, served the Cape Town community to the best of his ability, but was so hampered by

4. See Dreyer, A. (ed.), *Boustowwe vir die Geskiedenis van die Nederduits-Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika*, III, pp. 8-9: IA, No. 3, Preamble to the Church Order.
5. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 6; Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 137 and p. 144; Welch, S. R., *Portuguese and Dutch in South Africa 1641-1806*, p. 788. The Vicar Apostolic for London, the Rev. Dr. Douglass, received a letter on August 16th, 1806 from the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda, Rome, asking him to intercede with the British government for the retention of Catholic clergy at the Cape. [Theal, G. M. (ed.), *Records of the Cape Colony*, XXIII, p. 337: Bishop Poynter to Hay, London, October 27th, 1825].
6. Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.
7. C.O. 120: No. 1, Slater to Somerset, Cape Town, Jan. 1st, 1820.
8. C.O. 303: Memorial of Oct. 30th, 1827 to Bourke. (See also *ibid.*, Memorial of Oct. 11th, 1827). His reasons are not clear. The Albany Catholics had petitioned the Governor for assistance earlier in the year. (Theal, *R.C.C.*, XXX, pp. 27-35: Bourke to Bathurst, with Enclosures, Cape Town, Jan. 9th, 1827).

his imperfect English that the British authorities would not pay him the full government salary.<sup>9</sup>

Despite Baird's high-handed action in expelling the Catholic priests permitted to carry out their ecclesiastical functions at the Castle under the Batavian Republic, the policy of the British authorities was, as in other colonies, to make provision for the clergy of different religious bodies, particularly when Britain assumed political control previously exercised by another nation. Where, as in Lower Canada, for example, the British government agreed "not to meddle with the religious establishments . . . found in existence there," the rights of the Catholic Church were recognized as "a part of the original contract by which (Britain) held the province".<sup>10</sup> A similar situation applied in the colony of the Cape of Good Hope, where, under the terms of the capitulation, the British government guaranteed the freedom of religion enjoyed under the rule of the Batavian Republic.<sup>11</sup>

Religious tolerance and government assistance<sup>12</sup> to Catholics in the colonies were not paralleled in the British Isles before the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829,<sup>13</sup> and neither before nor after that date did the Catholic clergy in Britain receive the financial help afforded fellow-priests in many colonial territories, a circumstance which prompted the diarist, Greville, to press for the state payment of the Irish Catholic clergy in his anonymous publication on Anglo-Irish relations.<sup>14</sup> The significance of Catholic Emancipation was that it removed most of the civil disabilities under which Catholics had hitherto laboured, disabilities which caused, at the Cape, the supersession of the Colonial Secretary, Colonel Christopher Bird, as a result of the denunciations of the Orangeman, William Parker, who projected into the colonial sphere the intense feelings of bitterness existing in Britain, and particularly in Ireland, between Catholics and Protestants in the early nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> It is worthy of note that the Commission of Enquiry which undertook to investigate Parker's allegations stated in 1825 that "there is no part of His Majesty's Dominions in which the influence of Catholicism is so

9. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 10n. and p. 23.

10. (Greville, C. C. F.), *Past and Present Policy of England towards Ireland*, p. 261. For further details on colonial ecclesiastical policy, with a passing reference to the Cape (p. 260n.), see *ibid.*, pp. 259-271. The information is based upon W. E. Gladstone's *The State in its Relations with the Church*, first published in 1838 and subsequently revised. A 4th ed., possibly used by Greville, appeared in 1841.

11. See Dreyer, *Boustowwe*, III, p. 75; II, no. 1, Akte van Waarborg . . . Jan. 10th, 1806.

12. C.O. 142: Nos. 2 and 5, Petitions of the Cape Town congregation for government assistance, Jan. 3rd and 9th, 1821.

13. See Thomson, D., *England in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 58-62.

14. (Greville), *op. cit.*, pp. 256-257. Other countries in Europe were more generous to religious minorities. (*Ibid.*, pp. 231-255).

15. Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26; (Greville), *op. cit.*, pp. 93-181. See Bird on Parker's "trumpet of discord". (Theal, *R.C.C.*, XXXIII, p. 413: Observations . . . Sept. 1st, 1827). Parker spoke of his "accurate knowledge of the practices of the Popish Priesthood in Ireland". (*Ibid.*, XXX, pp. 40-41: Parker to Bathurst, Passage West, Ireland, Jan. 11th, 1827).

unlikely to prevail . . . as . . . the Cape of Good Hope",<sup>16</sup> at once a reflection of the religious controversy raging in Britain at the time, of the insignificant numbers of Catholics at the Cape and of the exaggerated nature of Parker's complaints.<sup>17</sup> If Britain was unwilling to see Papal authority in the person of a resident Vicar Apostolic extended over the Cape of Good Hope in the 1820's, and it should be remembered that not until 1832 did Britain take steps to have a purely unofficial representative to the Vatican in Rome, the government had no objection to the appointment of a priest at the Cape, or to the disbursement of an official stipend, long before the Emancipation Act.<sup>18</sup>

In the absence of any immediate higher authority, the priests at the Cape had no small difficulty in contending with the pretensions of a lay body claiming jurisdiction over finances and the administration of ecclesiastical property. These churchwardens, holding an office quite foreign to the usual organization of the Catholic Church,<sup>19</sup> had nevertheless obtained their power as a result of Bishop Slater's decision to make such appointments, doubtless dictated in part by his desire to create a body of responsible lay opinion to support Father Scully, and justified as the result of a movement born of eighteenth century theism to leave to the priest only the liturgical duties of his office.<sup>20</sup> The churchwardens claimed custody of the chapel in Harrington Street, Cape Town, whose foundation stone was laid in 1822, but their unwillingness to undertake its effective repair, coupled with the poor materials of which it was constructed, led to the destruction of the building in the heavy rains of 1837.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the land on which the chapel had been erected was mortgaged, and Father Scully had found the necessary security from among his parishioners, thus sowing the seeds of discord which led to bitter quarrels and lawsuits. Small wonder that, of the death of the Rev. Thomas Rishton in England soon after his return in 1835, broken in health, Bishop Griffith was later to write: ". . . he died . . . , a victim of lay interference in spiritual matters."<sup>22</sup>

16. Theal, *R.C.C.*, XXII, p. 41: Commissioners to Bathurst, Cape Town, June 17th, 1825.
17. See Booyens, B., *Kerk en Staat, 1795-1843*, Archives Year Book . . . 28th Year, II, 1965, pp. 91-92; Cory, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 306-312; Theal, *History*, I, pp. 354-355.
18. Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10; pp. 27-28; (Greville), *op. cit.*, pp. 323-324. See also Muller, C. F. J., *Die Britse Owerheid en die Groot Trek*, 2nd ed., p. 45n. and Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 165. On the application of the Act in the Colony, see Eybers, G. W. (ed.), *Select Constitutional Documents illustrating South African History*, pp. 29-30: Ordinance 21 of Jan. 13th, 1830. The stipend to the Catholic Bishops was paid until 1903. (Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 9n). On British relations with the Vatican, see Randall, A., *The Holy See and Diplomacy*, II: British Diplomatic Relations with the Holy See, *The Tablet*, CCXX, No. 6569, April 16th, 1966, pp. 443-444.
19. Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24. Cf. Sullivan, J. F., *The Externals of the Catholic Church*, p. 17, where the question of lay control is not mentioned in connection with a priest's duties.
20. Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-25.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 7; pp. 24-25.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 23. (Quotes Report of April 18th, 1841 to the Oeuvre de la propagation de la foi).

On the eve of Bishop Griffith's appointment, therefore, the Catholic community in Cape Town found itself without priest or church, and it is not surprising that efforts were made at government and ecclesiastical levels to obtain a pastor for the flock there. Not only did Lord Glenelg, Secretary of State for War and Colonies, on the advice of the British authorities in Cape Town, seek the assistance of the Catholic Church, but the Apostolic Missioner, John Brady, who called at the Cape on his way from Mauritius to Rome, also acted upon the urgent pleas of the Cape Town congregation, and actively campaigned for the appointment of a spiritual guide.<sup>23</sup>

The result was the revival of the separate Vicariate of the Cape of Good Hope and the appointment of Bishop Griffith as Vicar Apostolic, or, in the language of a now well disposed British government, "chaplain to the Roman Catholic community", receiving the stipend of £200 per annum previously enjoyed by the resident priest.<sup>24</sup> Consecrated as titular Bishop of Palaeopolis in Dublin on August 24th, 1837,<sup>25</sup> he enjoyed the support of John Brady in raising funds to further the work of the Catholic Church in its endeavour "to enlighten the benighted wanderer in those pagan regions" and "to recall to Christianity the strayed sheep".<sup>26</sup> Accompanied by his sister and younger brother, and two priests, a fellow Dominican, Father Corcoran and a Franciscan, Father Burke, Bishop Griffith left Plymouth early in 1838 for the Cape.<sup>27</sup>

From the journal kept by Bishop Griffith from January, 1838 until February, 1839, referred to in the late Dr. Brown's invaluable study of Catholic Church history in South Africa, and from the extracts from letters written by the Bishop to a correspondent in Ireland, we have an excellent account of his early impressions of the Cape Vicariate.<sup>28</sup> The Bishop stayed in Cape Town only long enough to establish regular Sunday Mass, and to make contacts with local officials and the Catholic congregation, among them the invaluable Colonel Bird, then living in retirement. The problem of those who "called themselves churchwardens"<sup>29</sup> who met him on his arrival, he left until the following year, when he was able to effect full control over the laity, purchase land for the construction of a cathedral and establish a school, popular with Protestants and Catholics alike.<sup>30</sup>

Bishop Griffith's immediate purpose was to visit his extensive Vicariate and to acquaint himself at first hand with general conditions and the needs of the scattered Catholic community. He accordingly left Father Corcoran

23. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 28; pp. 8-9.

25. See Macnamara, P. and Brady, J., *A Sermon preached . . . at the Consecration . . . in the R.C. Church of St. Andrew . . . , together with an important letter . . .*, n.p., 1837.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

27. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

28. The Vicariate also included the island of St. Helena (*Ibid.*, p. 8).

29. *Interesting extracts*, Cape Town, April 23rd, 1838.

30. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 25; pp. 31-34; *Interesting extracts*, Cape Town, Feb. 7th, 1839.

in Cape Town with his brother and sister, and set off by sea for Port Elizabeth in June, 1838 with Father Burke, whom he left in charge at Grahamstown. His route lay from Port Elizabeth to Uitenhage, thence via Grahamstown, Bathurst, Port Francis, Fort Beaufort and Somerset East to Graaff-Reinet. From Graaff-Reinet he travelled to Beaufort West on his way back to Cape Town, which he reached in September of the same year. This 'Visitation', although the informal nature of the expedition is not really in keeping with this official description of it, brought Bishop Griffith into contact with a frontier farming community, and even more closely with the officials responsible for local administration. Many parts of the interior he visited were predominantly Dutch in language, and it is of interest to recall that the expedition took place not long after the Great Trek had begun. One of the many reasons which have been assigned to the exodus has been the dissatisfaction of the rural population over religious matters. Was Catholicism considered a serious threat in local Cape communities, chiefly Calvinist in religious outlook?

Dr. W. Robertson, the Dutch Reformed Church minister at Swellendam, writing to Fairbairn in March, 1836, had remarked that some among the farming community there attributed the prevailing unrest to a fear of Catholicism.<sup>31</sup> Bishop Griffith himself, in 1839, mentioned the "Dutchmen who left the Colony in a pet because Antichrist (among other reasons) was come hither in the shape of a Popish Bishop . . ." <sup>32</sup> By 1842, we find the Tulbagh Church Council of the Dutch Reformed Church bringing the question of the extension of Catholicism at the Cape to the attention of Synod, which decided, while rejecting the Tulbagh motion, that ministers should warn their congregations about the wider spread of the Catholic religion and give them instruction in the main points of difference between Catholicism and Protestantism.<sup>33</sup> The Anglican Bishop Gray commented, on his Visitation of 1850 into the interior, upon "the strong feelings of antipathy against the Romanists" entertained by the Dutch settlers who were, he asserted, "so credulous and ignorant, that they would fall easy victims to that Church's teaching, were it not for their wholesome fear of it". He added that the recent arrival of Catholic priests "had added to their alarm".<sup>34</sup>

It is difficult to determine to what extent the actual presence of Catholics, and after 1838, of an active hierarchy, heightened that antagonism to Catholicism which had its roots in Reformation history. The 'Roman spectre' could always be invoked from the Protestant pulpit as a means of recalling congregations to a due sense of the spiritual values they had come to cherish. Furthermore, there was a tendency to see in any form of innovation, or of ecclesiastical autocracy, a movement in the direction

31. Dreyer, A. (ed.), *Die Kaapse Kerk en die Groot Trek*, p. 6: I, Appendix A, Robertson to Fairbairn, Swellendam, March 13th, 1836.

32. *Interesting extracts*, Grahamstown, Aug. 15th, 1839.

33. N.G.K.A., Tulbagh 1/5: Church Council Minutes, 1840-1891, July 3rd, 1842; *Hand. Zev. Eer. Verg.*, p. 230: 1842 Synod, 15th Session, Nov. 17th, 1842.

34. Gray, R., *Journals of Two Visitations in 1848 and 1850*, II, p. 16.

of papal dominion.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, it is evident that Catholicism had been gaining in strength at the Cape since 1820. Parker's denunciations had indicated that some Catholics held office under the government before Emancipation. These included Bird and other officials, among them Major Jones and Captain Trappes, whom the Colonial Secretary had been accused of encouraging as part of some nefarious Catholic plot,<sup>36</sup> while the conversion of Bird's wife to Catholicism was the subject of a censure case in the Dutch Reformed Church congregation in Cape Town.<sup>37</sup> After Bishop Griffith's arrival, Catholic missionary activity was greatly increased and by 1842 there were missions at Grahamstown, Port Elizabeth, Uitenhage and George, while in 1847, under Bishop Devereux, a Vicariate of the Eastern Cape was established.<sup>38</sup>

However, there is little indication that the Catholic priests and Bishop Griffith himself in the early days at the Cape were widely engaged in the work of the conversion of Protestants. The main task was to minister to the active Catholics and to reclaim for the faith those who had lapsed in their adherence to their religion, together with the conversion of their families to ensure the unity of Catholic marriage. Bishop Griffith gives a total Catholic population in 1839 of 700, which by influx, return to the Sacraments and natural increase, to a much greater extent than by conversion, had grown to 2,500 by 1841.<sup>39</sup> The total for 1842,<sup>40</sup> quoted by the Vicar Apostolic for London, of 1,300, including 500 soldiers, seems a little high in comparison, although Bishop Griffith may be omitting the military in his 1839 figure. The regiments stationed at Cape Town and on the frontier contained many Irishmen; Bishop Griffith speaks of the large number of Catholics among the men of the 75th Regiment at Fort Beaufort, long deprived of the ministrations of a priest.<sup>41</sup> In addition, there had been, since the first British settlers had arrived at the Cape, a considerable influx of Irish, many of whom were Catholics.<sup>42</sup> If the record of one party is to be believed, even more might have come, had it not been for the hostility of the Irish priests at the place of embarkation,

35. See Spoelstra, B., *Die „Doppers” in Suid-Afrika 1760-1899*, p. 74; p. 86.

36. Theal, *R.C.C.*, XXII, pp. 41-43: Commissioners to Bathurst, Cape Town, June 17th, 1825.

37. Dreyer, *Boustowwe*, III, pp. 374-377: IV, No. 10(a)-(f). Bird's wife was the daughter of Wilhelm Buisinné, a former Political Commissioner for ecclesiastical affairs.

38. McCann, O., *Our Beginnings. The Church at the Cape in the Early Days*, p. 9. On Uitenhage, see C.O. 501: No. 72, Griffith to Napier, Cape Town, Dec. 3rd, 1841.

39. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 34. Figures based on records in the Dominican Archives, Dublin. The conversion figures for 1839 and 1841 are 20 and 38 respectively.

40. Theal, *R.C.C.*, XXIII, p. 186: Bourke to Hay, London, Sept. 30th, 1825, with Memo. of Bishop Poynter, Aug. 24th, 1825.

41. *Interesting extracts*, Port Elizabeth, July 5th, 1838; *Journal*, p. 106v: Fort Beaufort, Aug. 8th, 1838.

42. See Theal, *R.C.C.*, XXIV, pp. 115-116: Somerset to Bathurst, Cape of Good Hope, Dec. 11th, 1825, and Memorial of R.C. congregations, Oct. 31st, 1825.

whereby many would-be emigrants were induced to return to their homes.<sup>43</sup> These two groups, the soldiers and the settlers, formed the main field of Bishop Griffith's pastoral labours, and although Father Devereux was later to seek out settlers with evidently Flemish names as possible converts, Bishop Griffith did not appear to consider the view that a surname common to a predominantly Catholic region of Europe represented a Catholic ancestry in the not too distant past, and a challenge to proselytizing zeal. His journal mentions many cases of Catholics who had married Protestant wives. At Uitenhage, the Deputy-Sheriff, Auctioneer and Apothecary, Brehm, was "a Brabanter and Catholic", married to a Dutch woman and with his son in Cape Town under a Protestant clergyman.<sup>44</sup> Another, at Graaff-Reinet, had a Lutheran wife and a Calvinist daughter,<sup>45</sup> while he was told that a Catholic with a Dutch wife, living in Somerset East, was determined to bring up his family as his wife wished, feeling justified in this course in the absence of a priest. As a result of this spiritual isolation, many of the Catholics went to the "Conventicle or meeting house". The Bishop commented despairingly, "Faith has fled".<sup>46</sup> Other encounters indicate that some Protestant wives were, however, willing to become Catholics, and that husbands were sometimes anxious to return to their Church with a religiously united family.<sup>47</sup>

The problem of those living with non-European women was on several occasions brought to his notice, as at Beaufort West, where he was told by an Irish Catholic named MacMahon, from near Limerick, that he and two other Catholics "were living in sin with black women".<sup>48</sup> He was unable to persuade one of the three concubines to have her children baptized, but he succeeded in baptizing MacMahon's elderly mistress, and in gaining the promise of the pair to separate.<sup>49</sup> Bishop Griffith was critical of the Dutch Reformed Church minister at Beaufort who, he said, would only marry Free Blacks and liberated slaves when compelled to do so by the Magistrate, and then without baptism, which they "desire . . . most anxiously". From his Catholic standpoint he could not see any point in "the Presbyterian Colonist parson . . ." wanting ". . . men and women of sixty years old to go to school and learn psalm singing (the only religion they appear . . . to be taught) and reading . . ." and adds that "some younger ones" have been "at it these ten years to no

43. *Ibid.*, XXXIII, p. 479: Ingram to Wilmot Horton, London, Oct. 5th, 1827. The Church was, of course, averse to emigration where spiritual guidance might not be available.

44. *Journal*, p. 100: Uitenhage, July 8th, 1838. Cf. the meeting of the French Protestant missionary, Lemue, with the Catholic wife of an Englishman living on the frontier. (*Journal des Missions Évangéliques*, 5th Year, 1830, p. 342: Extract from diary of April 3rd, 1830).

45. *Journal*, p. 112: Graaff-Reinet, Aug. 22nd, 1838.

46. *Interesting extracts*, Port Elizabeth, July 5th, 1838.

47. *Journal*, p. 116: Beaufort (West), Sept. 1st, 1838; p. 97: Port Elizabeth, July 7th, 1838.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 115: Beaufort (West), Aug. 30th, 1838; Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 115v and p. 116ff: Beaufort (West), Aug. 31st and Sept. 1st, 1838; Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.



effect".<sup>50</sup> Bishop Griffith was also entertained at Beaufort West by Mr. Meintjies, the Civil Commissioner, married, so he was given to understand, to a daughter of Andries Stockenstrom. Although he did not meet Mrs. Meintjies, he reported that she was a "perfect Black". He did meet the two daughters, however, one of whom, he says, was white and "the other tawny (rather mulatto, real African)".<sup>51</sup>

It would appear that Bishop Griffith was at ease in the company of the officials with whom he came into contact socially;<sup>52</sup> he also had opportunities of meeting ministers of the Anglican Church. At Port Elizabeth, he encountered the Rev. Owen, "a Church Missionary — not a Methodist", just returned from Port Natal, and the Rev. McClelland, the Church of England chaplain, who complained bitterly of the insufficient government salary he received to support a wife and nine children, and whose church had been built by subscription, with no government assistance.<sup>53</sup>

This circumstance may have struck a responsive chord, for there is reason to suggest that, even at this period, Bishop Griffith was dissatisfied with government's attitude towards ecclesiastical affairs, at least so far as his own Church was concerned. This was, of course, the age of a growing desire for the loosening of governmental controls and the institution of representative bodies. Already, the Dutch Reformed Church had seen the restoration of Synodal rights, and the withdrawal of Political Commissioners from local church councils. A greater measure of political freedom would follow in 1843. Elective Boards of Commissioners were being set up to control municipal affairs, while voices had been raised in favour of Eastern Province autonomy and representative government for the whole Colony. Neither can Bishop Griffith have been unaware of the struggle for Catholic Emancipation in Britain, or of the illiberal disfranchisement measures and suppression of the Catholic Association which were the political fruits of the granting of religious freedom in Ireland. State control by any British government was unlikely to be strongly endorsed by an Irish Catholic Bishop, at least in his private papers. Already in 1838 Bishop Griffith was writing, "I am sick of the inequality and injustice of this *liberal* Government", while on his return to Cape Town he speaks

50. *Ibid.*, p. 115v. and p. 116: Beaufort (West), Aug. 31st and Sept. 1st, 1838. The Bishop had no opportunity to discuss religious matters with Dutch Reformed Church ministers. See also Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 116: Beaufort (West), Sept. 1st, 1838. Brown has drawn attention to the fact that, apart from meeting Meintjies and his daughters, Bishop Griffith heard the story of the Stockenstrom background and link with the Meintjies at second-hand. (*Op. cit.*, pp. 19-20n.). I have not been able to look more closely into this interesting point; racial intermarriage was evidently a matter for gossip, Stockenstrom was unpopular with many on the frontier and many slanders were repeated about him. (See Galbraith, J. S., *Reluctant Empire. British Policy on the South African Frontier 1834-1854*, p. 134, p. 138 and pp. 147-148).
52. Note his obvious appreciation of Commandant Evatt, a "fine old Irishman from Carlow" who professed to be a free-thinker, favourably disposed to all sects. (*Journal*, p. 98; Port Elizabeth, July 7th, 1838).
53. *Ibid.*, p. 97: Port Elizabeth, July 7th, 1838.

of "a vile administration", "a contemptible Cabal" with a "silly and ignorant policy", desiring to keep the "Church in thraldom". He wished fervently that "we were totally independant(sic) of them".<sup>54</sup>

Bishop Griffith noted the widespread opposition among colonists to the activities of the London Missionary Society, and its influence upon government. Early on his expedition, he listened to the views of "... a Bore, the Surgeon of this Uitenhage District, a Dr. Fairbridge, who talked, as does every one here against the London Missionary Society".<sup>55</sup> If he found the conversation uninspiring, he evidently came to accept the view expressed, for he spoke later of the possibility of allying with the colonists against the government, as the missionaries had done against the settlers.<sup>56</sup> He concluded, somewhat optimistically perhaps, that the Protestant clergy were so violently opposed to "the Methodists and dissenters" that they would make "common cause even with Popery in their struggle with them". The Wesleyans, in fact, he dismissed as insufficient in their approach to the native population, teaching the coloured peoples psalms but no religion.<sup>57</sup>

The Hottentots did not impress him. They were, he said, "the greatest apes of Europeans in dress and Psalm singing and the most thoughtless", while he found that the Bushmen were locally regarded as a "mere remove from the Baboon — the connecting link between Beast and Man".<sup>58</sup>

The language barrier, as well as the religious, prevented Bishop Griffith from having close contacts with many Dutch-speaking inhabitants. Dr. Brown has called attention to the rapidity with which the Irish on the northern frontier were learning to speak the Dutch patois of the country;<sup>59</sup> Bishop Griffith, too, met an Englishman in the Graaff-Reinet area who had almost forgotten his native language, and "speaks English curiously".<sup>60</sup> Later, he was advised not to travel from Graaff-Reinet to Beaufort alone, because of the impossibility of doing so with no knowledge of Dutch.<sup>61</sup> His impressions of the Dutch-speaking inhabitants were not flattering to them, but the fact that he was a Catholic and his inability to communicate with them in their own language must be borne in mind, as must the circumstances that this was his first visit to the interior,

54. *Interesting extracts*, Port Elizabeth, July 5th, 1838, and Cape Town, Feb. 7th, 1839. Cr. Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28; p. 30, for a favourable view of relations between government and the Catholic Church at this time. On the spirit of the age at the Cape, see Walker, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-166; pp. 234-238. On Ireland, David Tomson says, "... conservative fears were strong enough . . . to prompt the government to take away with one hand a lot they had given with the other." (*Europe since Napoleon*, rev. ed., p. 154).

55. *Journal*, p. 96: Port Elizabeth, July 7th, 1838.

56. *Interesting extracts*, Cape Town, Feb. 7th, 1839.

57. *Ibid.*, Port Elizabeth, July 5th, 1838; *Journal*, p. 100v: Port Elizabeth, July 8th, 1838.

58. *Journal*, p. 100v: Port Elizabeth, July 8th, 1838.

59. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

60. *Journal*, p. 111: En route for Graaff-Reinet, Aug. 20th, 1838.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 112: Graaff-Reinet, Aug. 22nd, 1838.

made within a short time of his arrival at the Cape. At Graaff-Reinet he said of the Dutch community that they "receive you without any appearance of welcome: tis a chill, indifferent sort of greeting, "sang froid" indeed.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, he paid credit to their hospitality, although he considered them "cold, uncouth and dirty".<sup>63</sup>

After a tiring journey of over 1,000 miles by land, Bishop Griffith returned to Cape Town in September, 1838 to undertake the task of providing for a scattered flock whose problems he now appreciated the better, and to deal with the immediate problems of the Cape Town congregation. This expedition was but the first of several 'Visitations' which culminated in the establishment of the Eastern Cape Vicariate under Bishop Devereux in 1847.

The steady growth of the Catholic Church in South Africa owes much to the efforts of the first resident Vicar Apostolic who worked untiringly for almost twenty-five years in the Colony until stricken with paralysis in the year before his death in 1862.<sup>64</sup>

His early impressions were modified in many directions by the experience of later years, but his writings add something to our understanding of an eventful period as seen through the eyes of an Irish Catholic Bishop, and illustrate some of the cross-currents, religious and political, of those years. The picture which emerges from the diary and letters is of a man dedicated to his task, irascible at times, not yet fully acquainted with the problems facing him, the Catholic Church and the country of his future labours, but full of determination and energy to ensure that the acorn planted by Bishop Slater in 1820 would grow into the flourishing oak of later years. He was, as was said of him shortly after his death: ". . . an excellent bishop, of tolerant spirit, who endeavoured to make those within the pale of his Church do their duty as Christians . . ." <sup>65</sup>

M. Boucher.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 113v: Graaff-Reinet, Aug. 27th, 1838.

63. *Interesting extracts*, Beaufort (West), Sept. 3rd, 1838. At Somerset East, Bishop Griffith noticed dissension between the Dutch Reformed Church minister and his flock. (*Journal*, p. 108: Somerset (East), Aug. 18th, 1838).

64. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 33. (Quotes letter in 'Cape Argus' of Dec. 15th, 1863).