

From this place we returned the same day to Fermeuse, having again enjoyed the hospitality of Mr. Neill: we joined our little vessel and on the next day we proceeded on our voyage, but having got as far as Trepassey Bay, we got completely becalmed and enveloped in a dense fog, and therefore found it necessary to come to anchor under Cape Pine, the western entrance of the bay. This being a most dangerous shore, we took advantage of a light breeze that sprung up during the night, and got under weigh once more; but after a short time the wind died away, and we again got becalmed at the entrance of this bay, where the tide runs eight knots an hour.

The night was intensely dark, and we continued drifting for a considerable time, when we were alarmed by the cry of the seamen, "breakers astern", and immediately we could distinctly hear the sullen roar of the surge as it rushed against the rocks, and breaking, dashed its foam into the face of heaven, as if in anger at the interruption; and inevitable death seemed to threaten. We let go our kedge anchor; but the force of the tide and the violence of the swelling waves rendered it of little avail; yet was it not altogether useless, for by pulling upon the hauser we brought her head a little around, and then cutting away our anchor, a slight air of wind springing up at the same moment our vessel's side all but touched as she drifted along the ridge against which we had been running, and in this manner, at the expense of our anchor and cable, were we, by the interposition of Divine Mercy, saved from a fearful and instantaneous death.

I shall close for the present, my dear Sir, and as my delay here is likely to be for some days, it is more than probable I shall resume my narrative before I leave London; but, in the meantime, allow me to recommend myself to your pious prayers, that Heaven may endow me with the grace of constancy and divine service; and that, undismayed by the dangers, unsubdued by difficulties, I may in all things learn to rely upon Him who to the blind gave light, strength to the enfeebled, and on the clay-cold bones of the dead bestowed life and vigor.

Believe me, with sincere affection, your obliged and humble servant,

✠ Michael A. Fleming,
Catholic Bishop of Newfoundland, &c.

The Very Rev. Dr. Spratt, Carmelite Convent, Dublin.

LETTER IV

[*New-York Weekly Register and Catholic Diary*, October 1, 1836.]

Sablonniere Hotel,
London,
August 4, 1836.

Very Rev. and Very Dear Sir,—In my last I closed with a description of our dangerous adventure under Cape Pine, at the entrance of Trepassey Bay, where we most providentially escaped the greatest danger in which I had

ever been involved; but so rapid were the transitions from security to peril, and again to safety—circumstances that called for the most active exertions—that it would be difficult to analyse the operations of the mind during these few minutes; but on the instant in which we passed the reef of rocks a light and favorable breeze arose, and all united in pouring forth a tribute of thanksgiving for our preservation.

In stopping at Fermeuse and Renewes, to make my visitation, I had departed from my original intention. I had arranged originally to sail at once for the Bay of Despair, in order to meet the Indians, as I had promised; but when I found the time unfavourable I judged it more prudent to be discharging my duties on shore than beating uselessly against a head wind and particularly when I know that the Indian tribes are well acquainted with this circumstance, and would easily understand that my detention was not voluntary.

We now sailed again with a fair wind for our destination; but again, in a few hours, it altered; and after a fatiguing passage of nearly three days we arrived in the morning of the 27th of July at Burin, into which place I next put, and where I remained an entire week.

At Burin we enjoyed the comfortable fireside and cordial welcome of the companion of our voyage, the Rev. Mr. Berney;¹⁸ and as the entire population of the portion of the district which lies along the western shore of Placentia Bay is scattered over an immense number of Islands, we were obliged to defer the time of administering confirmation there to the following Sunday, the entire week being requisite to advertise the people and bring them together.

Burin is an island about three miles in length and lying north and south, and about half a mile from the mainland, and about it you find a large number of islands some of which are covered with woods and the population upon these is so thin and scattered that one friend cannot visit another but by boat. The island of Burin is for the most part a solid rock, scarcely affording anything like pasture and in some instances those who wish to enjoy the comfort of a garden at their home must bring soil from other places, and we used while there vegetables raised by our respected host in a garden so created.

Upon coming ashore I was most agreeably surprised to find that all my anticipations of the state of the Church and the parochial residence of the clergyman, &c., were surpassed. The bold position of the Church—its site being upon a very commanding height, rising almost precipitously from the shore—its neatly-finished Gothic windows, the tasteful manner in which it is painted—the simple and chaste style of the altar—the neatness around you at all sides—the handsome and light galleries—and then the sacred habiliments of the clergyman—all gratified me in the extreme, and found the most pleasing commentary upon the piety and zeal of that reverend gentleman.

The house is also a very neat and comfortable edifice, adjoining the

¹⁸ See note 15.

church, and with a handsome and well-laid out garden, which runs in front the full length of the house and church, forms an *ensemble* truly creditable to the taste and industry of the Rev. Mr. Berney, and presents to the contemplative observer the most convincing proof that the virtues of the pastor are well estimated by the congregation.

On Sunday, August the 2nd, the festival of the dedication of St. Mary of the Angels, a large congregation assembled, and after having celebrated mass, at which an excellent choir assisted, and exhorted those who were to be confirmed on the importance of the act they were about to perform, and the happy results that must follow to those who received so holy a sacrament with the proper dispositions, I administered confirmation to *ninety-four* persons who had been previously well prepared and instructed, and amongst whom were no fewer than *thirty-six* heads of families, converts to the Roman Catholic faith; and on the next day, Monday, I again administered that sacrament to twenty persons, who came from a great distance and had not been able to reach in time to be confirmed the day before, making the entire number at Burin one hundred and fifteen.

Burin is the last ecclesiastical district to the westward; it commences from Little Paradise in Placentia Bay and runs down southward to Cape Chapeau Rouge, which with Cape St. Mary's to the east forms the entrance to Placentia Bay, being there sixteen leagues and a half wide. From Cape Chapeau Rouge, it strikes to the westward as far as Cape Ray, and from Cape Ray runs again north even to the Belle Isle in the straits.

But what facility do we find in thus defining the limits of a district in Newfoundland; how easy to tell you that the northern district extends from the Grates to Cape John; but when you are told it includes the vast bays of Trinity, Bonavista, Gander Bay, Bay of Exploits, White Bay, and Bay of Notre Dame, comprehending a coast of probably twelve hundred miles in length, you may have some idea of the manner in which the duties are to be performed by the clergyman, particularly when you learn that in many harbours you will find no more than two families; in some only one, and a large number containing less than ten, and then the vast multitude of Islands similarly inhabited, for which the coast of Newfoundland is remarkable, you will perceive clearly that many, very many indeed, in those remote and isolated places must of necessity appear before the eternal throne of the Most High God, unaided by the saving graces communicated in the holy sacraments.

Oh! my heart bleeds at my inability to procure or maintain missionaries for my poor people thus circumstanced: I behold my poor flock wandering amid difficulties and perils; their poor souls in constant danger of being wrecked without a shepherd to pen them within the fold—a pilot to guide them to the haven of Redemption. When I reflect on the *multitudes* who are ushered into the world as if only to seek for baptism for the regeneration of their souls, but find not those around them capable of administering that solemn rite, when I think of an aged parent who is sinking into a grave, oppressed with the melancholy conviction that the sinful life of his children was mainly attributable to the baneful influence

of his evil example, and now, unsupported by the comforting instructions of the zealous missionary, that man descends into the grave the victim of despair—I cannot but feel that if those whom God endows with affluence, upon whom he showers his choicest earthly blessings, who see themselves surrounded by a fair, promising, and happy family, with abundant means to bestow upon them a hereditary competency; if such persons would only use a very small portion of those means which God has given them, surely not for themselves, but for the advantage of their fellow-man and the advancement of their own souls; if they would offer up a small portion of that wealth to secure a blessing on the remainder, in order to maintain a missionary on a coast where [though very many souls are crying aloud before Heaven for “help or they perish”]¹⁹ the poverty of the people is so very great that they could hardly afford to contribute any thing, this infant would be singing eternal alleluias to the Most High; this poor sinner would be comforted by instruction; he would be strengthened by the sacraments, and filled with confidence in Him who shed his Divine blood for sinners; and both would for ever unite in intercession for temporal blessings and scriptural bliss for those to whose charity they owed the attainment of their glorious immortality.

In that very northern district, if I had it in my power to have two additional clergymen, one to place in Trinity Bay and another in Fortune Harbour, which I described in my letters of last year, these, with the clergyman at present in Silting Harbour, and the Rev. N. Devereux,²⁰ in King’s Cove, in Bonavista Bay, I would hope that the poor people in that quarter would be attended to; but then a vast majority of the people of Trinity Bay are Protestants, and the few Catholics far apart and poor, so that the clergyman allocated here, as also in Fortune Harbour, should be supported by a stipend raised elsewhere.

But what shall I say of the poor creatures on the southern and western shores of the island? If you look at a good map of Newfoundland you will perceive that the southern shore, as it runs nearly due west, presents a voyage of about one hundred leagues to the coaster, but when you take into consideration that in that space there are no fewer than forty-six bays, and even in the smallest of these bays there are several harbours, and a great number of uninhabited creeks, and coves, you will easily understand that in saying there is in that portion of the district a coast of fifteen hundred miles in length, I am by no means guilty of exaggeration, and the islands along this coast are literally innumerable.

The clergyman of Burin can seldom go further west than Cape Chapeau Rouge, except that at very distant periods, perhaps once a year, he goes as far as Lamelin and Laun, about seven leagues beyond the Cape. He is situated in the most populous place, and the population of the western

¹⁹ Brackets are printed in text.

²⁰ The Rev. Nicholas Devereux, whom Bishop Scallan had brought to Newfoundland with him in 1816. Advanced to the priesthood by Bishop Scallan in the same year, he thereby became the first priest to be ordained in Newfoundland. After ministering at various places on the island, he died at King’s Cove in 1845 (Howley, *op. cit.*, 243).

coast of Placentia Bay give him abundant occupation, while their poverty is sure to preserve him from that tepidity in sacred things which the accumulation of wealth is often too apt to engender.

How I should desire to be able to give you even a distant idea of the want of clergymen in this immense tract of country! And then the western shore, up to Belle Isle, comprehending a space of some hundreds of miles, not taking into consideration the innumerable bays, harbours, creeks, and coves! The people here are born and grow up, and become the parents of large families, and descend into the grave at an advanced age, without, in many instances, having ever seen a Catholic clergyman; and yet are these poor people attached to the Catholic faith—the faith of their fathers. Of this I met a remarkable instance when in Bay Despair, and shall even anticipate my narrative to relate it.

One morning at Galtaus, in Long Island, at one of the entrances to Bay Despair, while preparing to assist the clergyman to administer the sacrament of baptism, an old man and woman came in to me, bringing their daughter and her husband, and three or four grandchildren; they had come down from a cove in Hermitage Bay, and, in order to do so they had to throw up their fishery for the time. I baptized the children as desired, and received an Englishman, who had them, into the Church, who had long been anxious for the opportunity; and when I had done, judge of my surprise to hear the old man ask me to marry his daughter to her husband. After inquiring the particulars of their connexion, and learning that, as I find is the usual mode in those places where a clergyman could never be met, they had plighted their troth to each other, in the presence of their parents and friends, and had lived faithful to their vows. The Rev. Mr. Berney married them, and when done, the poor old couple prayed that the same grace might be extended to themselves, and thus I had the satisfaction of seeing administered sacraments, within one hour, to three generations in the same family.

In fact, this and the western coast would require four clergymen, at least, to do the people anything like justice but on the coast of Labradore, commencing at St. John's River, in the Gulph of St. Laurence, and running to an indefinite extent north-westerly and including the territory of the Esquimaux Indians, a shore hundreds of miles in length, a clergyman or two here to visit the harbours during the summer season would do a world of good, and attract numbers to the fold of the Lord.

But I have already been led by my subject beyond the limits of a letter, and shall therefore defer to my next the observations I intended to make upon the character of the missionaries we require, and the nature of the duties they would have to fulfil.

Believe me, my dear Sir, your faithful servant in Christ,

✠ MICHAEL A. FLEMING,
Catholic Bishop of Newfoundland.

The Very Rev. Dr. John Spratt, Dublin

[Letters V, VI and VII will appear in the following issue]