

**FRANCISCAN MISSIONS
AMONG THE COLLIERS
AND IRONWORKERS OF
MONMOUTHSHIRE**

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Franciscan Missions Among the Colliers and Ironworkers of Monmouthshire by Various

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Colliers and Ironworkers of W^{est} Monmouthshire.

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COLLIERS AND IRONWORKERS
OF MONMOUTHSHIRE.

"To the poor the Gospel is preached."—*Sr. LUKE vii. 22.*



LONDON:
BURNS AND OATES, 17, PORTMAN STREET,
AND 63, PATERNOSTER ROW.
1876.

TO HIS EMINENCE

HENRY EDWARD,

Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster,

*Whose heart, like that of St. Francis, overflows with zeal
for the salvation of souls, and love of the poor
of Jesus Christ,*

*this record of Franciscan labours in a remote district of
his Province is, with his kind permission, very
respectfully dedicated.*

Christmas, 1875.

PREFACE.

FROM time to time, as incidents relating to these missions have been described to friends, some of whom were interested in the work itself, and others in those who are concerned in it, it has been said, "Why do you not publish an account of the missions from the beginning? It would be as interesting as the annals of the Propagation of the Faith, and more so, because, nearer home." Now and again, during the last fifteen years, events have been noted down as they occurred, and, when the pressure of work permitted, or a pause in it has been rendered necessary by illness, a few pages have been written; and at last the time has come when those whose counsels have never been disobeyed

impose upon me the task of putting the materials together, to form some record of the works of the Capuchin Fathers in this remote district, which, it is hoped, may interest others, as well as those dear friends who are sure to judge kindly of all that relates to it. The writer of these pages deems it the greatest earthly privilege to have been in any degree connected with such a work, and by this means to have realised even in the glare and glitter of the nineteenth century those ages of faith when St. Francis went forth from his father's house, to outward seeming an outcast and a beggar, but to the eyes of Angels clad in the glory of those first Apostles, who set out to conquer the world for God, "*nihil habentes, sed omnia possidentes.*"

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Colliers and Ironworkers of Monmouthshire.

CHAPTER I.

THE WORK BEGUN.

"When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, did you want anything? But they said, Nothing."—S. LUKE xxii. 35.

IN May, 1860, at the request of the Bishop of Newport and Menevia, the Superior of the Capuchin Monastery at Pantasaph, in North Wales, sent one of his fathers to take charge of the Mission of Pontypool, in Monmouthshire. Poor as St. Francis, or as those first Evangelists whom St. Francis desired his sons to imitate, he went forth without purse or scrip to begin his work. As railway companies, however, do not appreciate the virtue of poverty, he was obliged to borrow money for his journey, and so his mission was begun, not only in absolute poverty, but with a small debt.

The good father found his new flock even poorer than he had anticipated, and their poverty in temporal matters exceeded by their ignorance and destitution in things spiritual.

Scattered in groups here and there over the hills, and huddled together in the meanest and dirtiest corners of a mean and dirty-looking town, the Irish were everywhere regarded as the offscouring of the people—the most degraded where all were low enough—the most drunken of the drunkards—the filthiest where all were dirty. They were employed in the hardest and worst-paid work, and subjected to every species of annoyance and insult on account of their faith—dim and flickering as its light had become in their poor worn-out hearts; and Irish-like they acted up thoroughly to the character imputed to them.

In the whole district given into the charge of the fathers, comprising at that time about twelve square miles, there was no Catholic church or chapel save the one small church at Pontypool;* no school; no appliances of any kind for working a mission, even on the smallest scale, still less for doing what Father Elzear had also been sent to do—establishing a community.

The one secular priest formerly in charge of the mission had resigned his post because he found it impos-

* This church was built during the time that Mr. Woollett, the first resident priest at Pontypool, had charge of the mission, the bishop of the diocese contributing largely towards the cost of the erection. Mr. Woollett, after a few years' indefatigable labour in endeavouring to minister, single-handed, to the spiritual needs of this large district, was compelled on account of his broken health to resign his charge. He never fully recovered the health and strength he had so overtaxed in his missionary duties among the Monmouthshire hills, though he lived some years afterwards. He has now gone to receive the reward of his devoted labours.