

Sir James Marshall

THE LIFE OF SIR JAMES MARSHALL

Birth and Parentage

Born at Edinburgh, Scotland, 19th December, 1829, his father was a Presbyterian Minister at Talbooth church, the Eastern portion of St. Gile's Cathedral. His mother was a daughter of Rev. Leigh Richmond. James was the fifth of twelve children of whom six died before their father.

Accident - Loss of Right Arm

His ambition had been to enter the army and serve in India but at 16 years of age, a gun in the bow of a boat he was pulling ashore on Lundy Island accidentally went off and the whole charge passed through the upper part of his right arm which had to be amputated at the shoulder. However, he soon learned to write with the left hand and became so dexterous that people who met him hardly noticed his handicap.

Education and Anglican Ministry

Having had to abandon his desire to enter the army, he entered Exeter College, Oxford in 1847 and, after taking his degree, became a High Church Anglican Minister in 1852. His first curacy was in Trysull, a small village not far from Wolverhampton. In 1854, he was transferred to London as curate to Rev. M. Denton of St. Bartholomew's Church, Moor Lane in the parish of St. Gile's, Cripplegate, London.

Devout Minister

He was a very devout clergyman with personal love for Our Lord Jesus Christ and deep habits of prayer. His bright and joyous temperament, his warm affectionate heart, his tender sympathy for affliction of every kind and his firm and delicate handling of difficult personal problems that came before him caused him to be much appreciated, loved and highly respected.

Triumph over conflict - Conversion to the Catholic Faith

Marshall had long had a tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and considered the Protestants wrong in not praying to Our Lady and accepting her as Mother. He also considered himself totally committed to acceptance of Papal Supremacy.

Though an Anglican Minister, he used to seek interviews with the Catholic Priest, Edmund Vaughan at the Redemptorist Monastery, Clapham, London, Marshall became more and more convinced that he should become a Catholic. He found himself a highly respected Anglican Clergyman and knew that the loss of his arm was an insuperable obstacle to his ever becoming a Catholic Priest. He knew that as a Catholic layman, he would no longer be a teacher and guide but a neophyte, a learner whose opinion in matters spiritual theological or ecclesiastical would not only be of no weight, but suspected to have a heretical tinge. He continued to pray to the Blessed Virgin Mary and soon he resigned his curacy and wrote from his mother's house: "*I have gone through as much, almost more than mind and*

body can sustain, and the fierceness of the conflict is over, and I am already entering on the actual possession of that glorious inheritance of the children of God which I have already deeply enjoyed in the hope that I had it. God has enabled me to exercise an abstract faith in His Church, though it was always attended by an aching doubt that perhaps it was exercised in a wrong position and object.

It has proved so; but all doubts is now passing away and certainty taking its place I shall knock boldly at the gate, and that gate will be opened to me and I shall be safe with Jesus and Mary, Saints and Angels, in the Bosom of God. It is very hard for flesh and blood, but the worse is passed, I hope; but if not, so be it". (Written 11th November, 1857).

He was received into the Catholic Church on the Feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 21st November, 1857 by Father Coffin (later Bishop Coffin). With the Bishop, James remained to the last on terms of affectionate friendship.

From that day, not a shadow of doubt seemed to have ever darkened his mind.

Test of Faith

From the position of Anglican Clergyman highly respected, honoured, and loved by his people as a treasured teacher and guide, James Marshall soon found himself a Catholic Layman with no expectation of ever becoming a Catholic Priest, the closest he could attain being his work on the altar serving at Mass.

Doctor (later Cardinal) Manning kindly offered him the post of College. The living in daily intercourse with Priests, and the constant attendance at the altar where he would never offer the Holy Sacrifice, kept his position too painful before him. Such a situation could have overpowered many other people but James never regretted having embraced the Catholic Faith. He lived the Faith and his inner self was never ruffled, for he writes in a letter (1863): "*I am still at the school of Egbaston, and believe myself to be one of the happiest creatures on earth".*

Call to the Bar

The Franco-Prussian war swept away almost all the pupils of the school. Unable to become a Catholic Priest, he studied law and was called to the Bar at the Middle Temple in 1868. He practiced Law in Manchester where he helped to found the "Catholic Times".

Judicial Service

In 1873 he accepted an appointment in the British Colonial Service as Chief Magistrate and Judicial Assessor to the native chiefs in the Gold Coast. He arrived at Cape Coast then British Headquarters, in July, 1873 when the Ashanti-Fanti war going on vigorously.

As a Judicial Assessor, he was brought into direct contact with the chiefs of Cape Coast and his courtesy and fairness has so won them that even though fresh troops were constantly coming from England, Marshall was found to be the only leader the chiefs and their people would follow even to the battlefield as they regarded him as a veteran general who had lost his arm in battle.

The services of Marshall were acknowledged by letter and Official minutes of the Commander-in-chief, and in addition, he received by special dispatch from the Queen, the Ashanti Medal Procurator and Precentor (Leader of music and choir) and for about 3 years, he was with the Oblates of St. Charles, Bayswater, London. His musical knowledge enabled him to direct the choir and his love for children made him very much liked in the school which has since grown into St. Charles

His Concern about Lack of Catholic Mission in the Gold Coast

Marshall's most serious difficulty and concern was the complete lack of Church, Priest or Mission by the Catholic Church in the Gold Coast.

For a man of his sympathetic temperament, to be cut off from all external means of grace, and access to a Priest and with the prospect of dying without the Holy Sacrament, was a severe trial, a privation which he felt keenly. Even in the midst of the excitement of war, his Catholic heart grieved bitterly over the spiritual darkness of the land in which his lot was cast.

By frequent letters, he pictured to Priests, Catholic laymen and societies in Europe the deplorable state of the religion in the country (Gold Coast) Here is a glimpse of one of his letters;

"The Methodist gave them the Bible and taught them to read of polygamy, concubinage, and other things in the Old Testament, which suited them exactly, coupled with bellowing hymns about salvation, free and without labour or trouble, which gave everything a sanctimonious finish, and created a miserable imitation of Christianity which I often thought made the poor heathen worse than he was before."

After some time, Marshall's appeal was responded by a Catholic Priest, Rev. Fr. A. Wallace, and an Englishman, who volunteered to accompany the troops. He remained at Cape Coast for some little time; as his Society was not responsible for the spiritual administration of that part of

Africa; so very soon he was recalled by his Superiors. Marshall was baffled at the recall of Father Wallace. In his own words, Marshall wrote:

"I wondered more and more why there was no Catholic Mission on the Gold Coast. I have continued to wonder, and I do so still. Men and money have been lavished on parts of Africa which swallow both in terrible quantities, but this part where Missionaries are welcomed, protected and assisted, was then left without any Mission at all."

Puisne Judge in Lagos

At the end of the Ashanti War, in March, 1874, a regular judicial system was established for the unified settlement of the Gold Coast and Lagos with a Supreme Court at Accra, but in June, 1874. Marshall left Cape Coast for home on six month's sick leave.

At the end of his leave, he was promoted Puisne Judge and transferred to Lagos arriving there on 5th January, 1875 and soon made acquaintance with the Lagos Catholic Church which had already been established there for some ten years by the Society of African Missions (SMA whose headquarters was at Lyons, France).

Action in Lagos

In Lyons, France, Father Augustine Planque, SMA Superior- General had, as far back as 1870, taken strong interest in the Gold Coast and had requested the Sacred College of the Propagation of the Faith (Propaganda Fide) to entrust the Gold Coast to the SMA.

In 1875, while in Lagos, James Marshall added his efforts to those initiated by Father Planque and inspired the SMA Missionaries in Lagos with a new interest in the Gold Coast, often showing indignation at the "neglect and abandonment of the Gold Coast by the Catholic Church. From Lagos, he wrote repeatedly to the British and European Press, especially to the Editor of the "Tablet" in London (1877) both for funds for the struggling Mission in Lagos and about the lack of Catholic teaching in the Gold Coast.

He also played an important role in the progress of the Mission in Lagos by helping to get the Irish to send Priests as English teachers in the Catholic School.

He played an important role in the preparatory work that led to the establishment of the Catholic Church at Asaba, Southern Nigeria, even though the actual establishment occurred in 1888, long after his retirement.

Marriage and Family

He was promoted Senior Puisne Judge and preceded on leave in mid 1877. He got married on 25th October, 1877 and returned to Lagos early 1878. With his wife Alice (youngest daughter of Mr. C.G. Young of County Lincoln) Marshall had a son (Bernard) and a daughter (Mary)

As Chief Justice of the Gold Coast Colony& Arrival of SMA Priests at Elmina

In 1879, he was transferred on promotion back from Lagos to Accra as Chief Justice of the Gold Coast (Ghana). The same year, as a result of many years of the joint endeavour of Marshall and SMA, Propaganda Fide, on the approval of His Holiness Pope Leo XIII, officially assigned SMA to take charge of the Gold Coast as a Prefecture Apostolic and, on 18th May, 1880 two French nationals, Priest of the SMA, Fathers Augustine Moreau and Eugene Murat, arrived at Elmina having been transferred from SMA Mission in the Island of St. Helene (Part of SMA's South Africa Mission).

Thus James Marshall, having given himself to championing the establishment of a Catholic Mission in the Gold Coast, had his dream fulfilled. Though resident at Accra at the time, he gave the pioneer priests every encouragement and assistance including personal visits, in the early stages of their work.

Retirement and Honours

In 1882, Justice James Marshall retired on grounds of ill health after having worked for 9 years in the Gold Coast and Lagos.

Honours

(1) For his leadership role in the Ashanti War in the Gold Coast in 1873, he received by special dispatch from the Queen, the Ashanti Medal, on 31st December, 1874.

(2) On 29th June, 1882, on his retirement, he was knighted by the Queen with the honour of the Knighthood, C.M.G. (Companion of the Order of St, Michael and St George)

(3) In recognition of his efforts in the evangelization of West Africa, Pope Leo XIII conferred on him the title K.C.S.G. (Knight Commander of St. Gregory the Great), on 11th June, 1889.

Death

Sir James Marshall died on 9th August, 1889 in London, at the age of 60 years and was buried at St Mary Magdalene Parish, Mortlake, and London.

The Requiem Mass took place at St. Joseph's, Roehampton on Wednesday, 14th August, 1889 and the interment followed at St. Mary Magdalene's, Mortlake, London, Canon, Brownlow Officiating.

May his soul rest in the Perfect Peace of the Lord.

Discovery of the tomb of Sir James Marshall

Following the decision of the Council of the International Alliance of Catholic Knights to hold its 7th meeting at Erskine, Scotland, the Standing Committee of the Supreme Council of the Knights of Marshall on the 31st May 1985, made contact by means of a letter to the Supreme Knight of the Knights of St.

Columba, Worthy Bro. Walter Downey, in the United Kingdom. The letter sought the assistance of the Supreme Knight of the Knights of St. Columba, in tracing (1) any descendants of Sir James Marshall (Since he was born in Edinburgh) and (2) the final resting place of Sir James Marshall.

The Supreme Knight of the Knights of St. Columba, lost no time in contacting the Editor of the 'Tablet', Copies of a letter dated 20th September, 1985, from the Editor of the 'Tablet', were given to the Supreme Knight, Worthy Bro. George Habib and Bro. Dr. E.S.K. Kwaw, Deputy Supreme Knight, who were in Erskine to attend the 1985 International Alliance of Catholic Knights meeting. The letter stated among others, "I enclose photocopies from the Tablet, with an appreciation of Sir James Marshall, and an account of his funeral. From this you will see that the interment was at St. Mary Magdalene, Mortlake. I have spoken to Father Leahy, the Parish Priest, who tells me that they still have a Graveyard there, but that it might be difficult to identify the grave. Anyone wishing to visit the Church should preferably get in touch first."

Armed with this information, the Deputy Supreme Knight after the International Alliance of Catholic Knights' Council meeting proceeded to London in search of the Tomb of Sir James Marshall.

On 16th of October, 1985, the Deputy Supreme Knight having made an initial appointment with Very Rev. Fr. Leahy, proceeded by underground train, then by Bus and finally on foot to the Church of St. Mary Magdalene, where he was warmly received by the Parish Priest.

After initial introductions and enquiries about the reason behind the search, Rev. Fr. Leahy took the essential documents and together with the Deputy Supreme Knight, went to the old graveyard (just behind the church) overgrown with weeds, in search of the Tomb, it was 11.30 a.m. After an Extensive search, Rev. Fr. Leahy exclaimed, 'I have found it!' It was 12 noon (Angelus) exactly.

The 'discovery' was a great event (and the joy was beyond description). It marked the end of what appeared for 96 years to be a legend. It is true that the Tomb of Sir James Marshall has been located at Mary Magdalene Church yard, Mortlake, London. It is now history.

The Knights of Marshall will forever be indebted to Worthy Bro. Walter Downey, the Supreme Knight of the Knights of St. Columba, Bro. Frank Scally, Supreme Secretary and the entire membership of the Knights of St. Columba, for the marvelous part they played in bringing into reality what too many people seemed beyond reach.