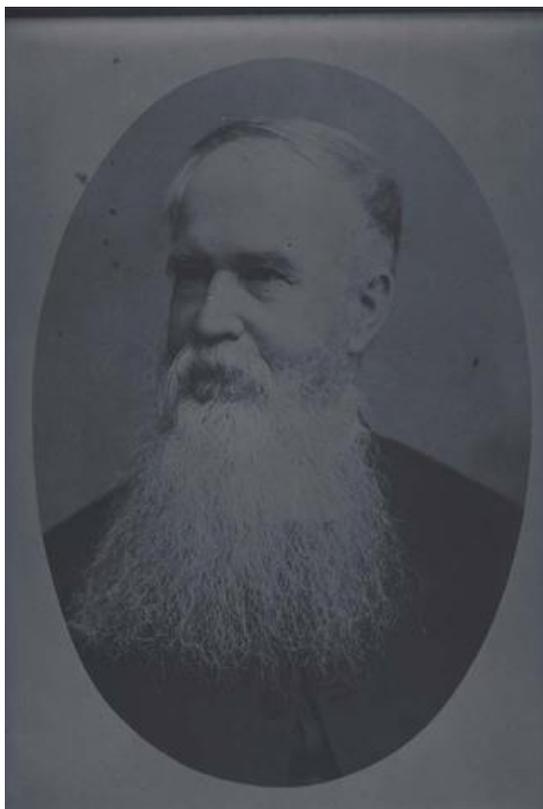


The Anglican Historical Society of New Zealand *Te Rōpu Hītori o te Hāhi Mīhinare ki Aotearoa*

Lonsdale Pritt (1822-1885)

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Lonsdale Pritt

Lonsdale Pritt was described by his obituarist as a man who exhibited a 'decided individuality' and, as this brief biographical sketch will show, his ministry had its difficulties, some at least of which must be attributed to his character. There can be no doubt however that Pritt always served the church to the best of his ability and made a significant contribution to both the Melanesian Mission and the Diocese of Auckland.

Pritt was born in England, a younger son of George Ashby Pritt, a Parliamentary lawyer of London and Liverpool. Educated at the Charterhouse and Trinity College, Cambridge, Pritt was an outstanding Latin and Greek scholar who graduated BA in 1844. He was ordained deacon in 1845, and priest in 1848. Pritt, moved

by reports of Bishop Selwyn's work in New Zealand, wrote to offer his services and enquired what special preparation might be helpful. Selwyn recommended teaching, and as a result Pritt took charge for almost two years of a small grammar school where he obtained practical experience and a reputation as a good, but severe, teacher.

In March 1859, Pritt arrived in New Zealand with Edmund Hobhouse, first bishop of the newly constituted Diocese of Nelson, to whom he acted as chaplain. Pritt shared rental lodgings with Edmund and his wife, Mary, who wrote that 'if Mr Pritt happens to cough in the night, one would think he was sitting at my bedside.'¹

Pritt had chosen to go to Nelson so that he could gain experience for a year or so by working closely with Hobhouse, but although he was energetic and conscientious, he remained in Nelson for less than a year, moving to Auckland early in 1860.

The exact cause of Pritt's move from Nelson is not known. He had become engaged to Mary Otterson, whose father had been a prominent member of the Roman Catholic community in Nelson until his death in 1854. According to Mary Hobhouse this engagement was suddenly broken off, 'under circumstances of some strange and painful nature', revealed to no-one except the Bishop, which resulted in Pritt's leaving suddenly and in distress for Auckland with, in her opinion, 'no idea of his ever returning.'²

In Auckland, Pritt joined the Melanesian Mission, first on trial and then as a member of the permanent staff. He taught at Kohimarama and

accompanied John Coleridge Patteson on his island voyages of 1861-1863, taking charge of the mission station and school at Mota.

In 1863, Pritt married **Mary Otterson** and the couple settled at St Andrew's College, Kohimarama (now Mission Bay). Pritt had proved himself to be an able teacher and a man of many practical skills, although earlier Mary Hobhouse had described 'poor Mr Pritt' as one 'to whom thinking was far easier than doing.'³ At St Andrew's, Pritt organised the school efficiently, taught the Melanesian scholars, and acted in a managerial and administrative capacity. Under his management the 'industrial' side of the mission became well-organised and self-contained as the Melanesians, trained by Pritt and his wife, did all the cooking, gardening, and dairy work as well as making their own clothes and doing most of the work in the printing office.

During 1865, seventeen acres were developed by Pritt and the Melanesians, and a community of seventy-seven people was kept well-supplied with milk, potatoes and other vegetables, while surplus butter was sold. Mrs Pritt trained the Melanesian girls and women, of whom there were always a few, in the domestic skills of sewing, cooking, washing and ironing. In 1865, a large classroom and verandah were added to the Pritt's house and about a dozen scholars spent the winter there instead of returning to their homes. The following year 27 students stayed. All in all, the Pritts made a considerable contribution to the organisation and development of St Andrew's, and were described as a couple who 'never spared themselves any trouble but did their best for the benefit of the school.'⁴

It therefore seems surprising that when the Melanesian Mission moved to Norfolk Island in 1867 the Pritts remained in New Zealand. For a long time, the reasons for their leaving the mission remained confidential but it is now known that while Patteson valued Mrs Pritt and

her contribution highly, and while he wrote in his letters of praise of Pritt's managerial and administrative skills, he had difficulties with Pritt's personality. In 1865 he confided to one of his sisters that Pritt 'is a very queer tempered man - most useful, but I fear unable to run in a team with other horses.' A year later he wrote that Pritt's 'great qualifications' were neutralised' by his 'strangeness, moroseness and violence of temper.'⁵ Pritt had long had difficulty working with other Europeans in the mission, and in 1863 Patteson had dispensed with the services of a Mr Kerr as he and Pritt, both prickly characters lacking in both tact and mutuality, had proved unable to work together. In 1866, while on his annual island voyage, Patteson learned for the first time that in spite of his skill as a teacher, Pritt was having a disastrous effect on the mission. Many former scholars refused to return to Kohimarama on account of the violence of Mr Pritt's temper, his angry manner, his striking them, and parents asked Patteson to forbid Pritt to beat their boys.⁶

After returning to New Zealand, Patteson told Pritt he must go, and the latter 'fully admitted that his irritable sometimes ungovernable temper was doing harm', attributing some of it to 'disease', although it is not clear to what this might refer.⁷

A place was found for Pritt by Bishop Selwyn in his diocese, his former colleagues loyally keeping quiet about the real reasons for his departure which was generally attributed to ill health.

The Pritts moved to the Waikato where they lived at Hopuhopu, near the Rev'd B Y Ashwell's mission station at Taupiri. Pritt worked chiefly in Ngaruawahia, Hamilton and Cambridge and was made Archdeacon of Waikato by Bishop Cowie in 1871. In 1872 Mary, his wife, died aged only thirty, and later the same year Pritt was appointed by Cowie as vicar of St Mark's, Remuera. He was also in charge of St Andrew's Epsom, and on two Sundays a month held

services at Ellerslie. From 1875 he served on the St John's College Board of Governors to which he was appointed by the Bishop of Melanesia, and also served many years on the Diocesan Standing Committee.

In July 1876, Pritt was married by Bishop Cowie, in the bishop's private chapel, to **Charlotte Alice Margaret Williams**, youngest daughter of George Williams of Auckland. Together they had several children, his first marriage having been childless.

Pritt took up his duties at St Mark's at a time of considerable growth and during his incumbency it became a large and important parish. He was considerably assisted by his second wife, who like his first was an able and willing partner. Charlotte, much younger than Pritt, took a great interest in parochial matters, organizing, with the ladies of the parish, social functions and two

large bazaars which raised money for building projects. St Mark's had a large Sunday School packed with children and Pritt's valuable and extensive library was housed in a building specially erected by him at the back of the vicarage.

In April 1885 Pritt resigned owing to ill health which this time was all too real. Suffering from asthma and other disorders he could only sleep sitting up in his chair and then only for a few minutes at a time. He was granted a life pension but lived only a few months, dying, aged 66, on 31 October. After a large funeral conducted by the Bishop and attended by most of the Diocesan clergy and many parishioners, Lonsdale Pritt was buried in St Mark's Churchyard. Mrs Pritt continued to live and work in the parish for many years and after dying in 1936 was laid to rest beside her husband.

Endnotes:

¹ Shirley Tunnicliff, ed., *The Selected Letters of Mary Hobhouse* (Wellington, 1992), 25.

² *Ibid.*, 48 – 49.

³ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴ *Melanesian Mission Report, 1867*, 53.

⁵ Quoted in R.M. Ross, *Melanesians at Mission Bay: A History of the Melanesian Mission in Auckland* (Wellington 1983), 44.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.