

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

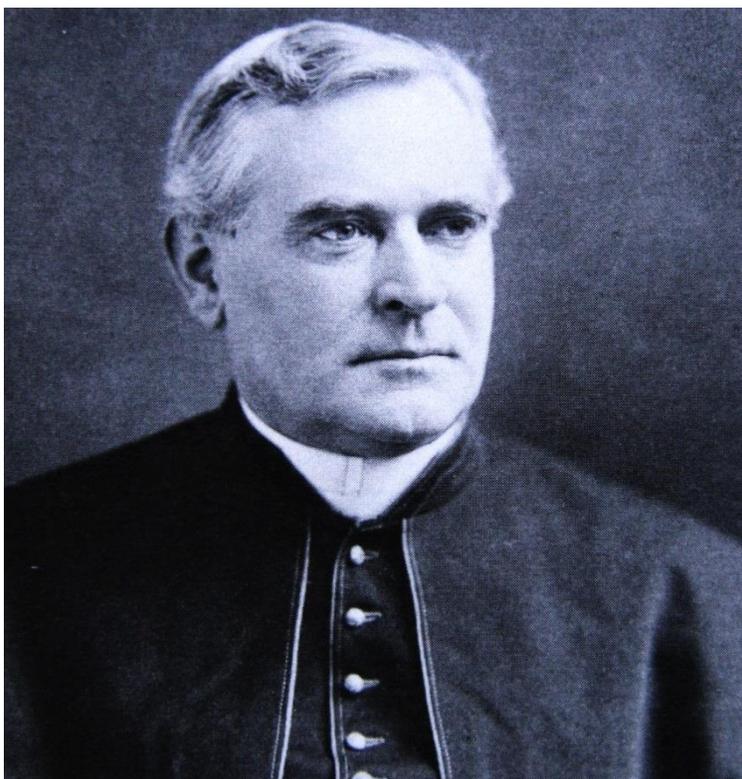
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AN ELOQUENT TRIBUTE TO MONSIGNOR CAPEL “A Great and a Simple Man Has Gone to His Reward”

By C.K. McClatchy, published in the The Bee and reprinted in the Catholic Herald,
October 28, 1911



Monsignor Thomas John Capel

Archivist's Introduction: Monsignor Thomas J Capel was born in England in 1836 and ordained a priest in the autumn of 1861 by Cardinal Wiseman of England. He was named a private chamberlain to Pius IX in 1868. After experiencing a conflict with Cardinal Manning, he sailed to the United States where he lectured and eventually moved to California where he took up residence in Arno, not far from Galt, and lived there during the last quarter of the 1800s. He spoke at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament and it was there that he died in October 1911. What follows is a tribute to Monsignor Capel by his longtime friend, C.K. McClatchy.

Simplicity is the handmaiden of greatness. And when a man whom the world deems great lacks in simplicity, there is a crack in the granite, a flaw in the diamond.

That which was mortal of one of the world's greatest—one of the world's simplest—went the way of all flesh yesterday. When Monsignor Thomas John Chapel breathed his last in this city, Earth saw the passing of one of her most brilliant, one of her worthiest, sons.

In the capitals of Europe, as well as in the great cities of this nation; in London equally as in Rome, the name of Thomas John Capel was one to conjure with. Easily the first of the brainy men who put on the armor of the Fisherman and went forth battling in the name of the Galilean, Thomas John Capel rose above the average crusader for the faith, an Anak among his fellows.

Gifted with an intellect surpassingly great, his tongue tipped with the divine fire, his brain, and his heart, and soul in his work, it is no wonder this Coriolanus of Catholicism fluttered the Volscians of Anglicanism in the very dove-cotes of their strongest temples.

All through clerical England today, the name, the works, the conversions accomplished by this marvelous proselyter are as household words. The intellect of London remembers him with rapt admiration.

Protestantism sorrows over the ablest and most resourceful, the most brilliant, and the most untiring, the most successful antagonist she ever encountered. While Catholicism treasures him in her heart of hearts, and yet as the Protestant lifts his hat, he does so in no perfunctory spirit. He dolls in the presence of the dead as though he were saluting a dear, departed friend.

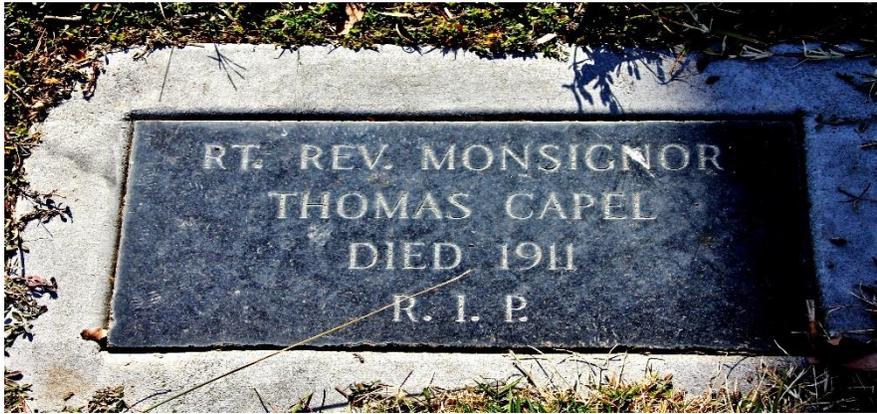
For Thomas John Capel was the most generous of fighters, the most chivalrous of foes. In the very heat of debate, he aimed never to say a word that would hurt the feelings of any. During half a century and more of life crowned to the brim with battles of intellect, he never uttered a harsh or unseemly word, put forth an abusive epithet, or used satire with an unkindly touch. In fact, "His wit in the combat, as gentle as bright, ne'er carried a heart-stain away on its blade."

Endowed with the gift of tongues, speaking the English language with a purity and a clarity as delightful as it is rare—he wove into his addresses the greatness of the intellect and the simplicity of the man.

One would look in vain through his published works for pompous sentiments. One could listen to his conversation by the hour and scarcely detect a big word. A master of English, he used it as a tool to do the most finished work—and he accomplished it with a rare touch, an exquisite polish, and with the most charming simplicity. Genius admired him; a child could understand him.

He loved children with a surpassing love. And they returned that love with a wealth of devotion. The rare and exquisite simplicity of the man was never shown more delightfully than in his conversations and romps with children—and he loved to romp with them. He seemed to have a touch of the Savior about him when he was with the little ones—the Christy spirit appeared to pervade him.

They knew their friend, and confided their little troubles to him more trustingly sometimes than to their own parents. And he would console them, and soothe them, and talk gently to them, and laugh with them over all their childish woes until they were in Fairland with their Prince Charming.



Tombstone of Monsignor Capel, Saint Joseph Cemetery, Sacramento

Not in the Magnificent Brompton Oratory in London, where all Protestantism acknowledged a conquering foe, did Monsignor Capel display his real greatness so much as when, surrounded by a handful of little ones, he opened his heart to them, and simplified the wondrous treasures of his intellect to their understanding.

Those who have known Monsignor T.J. Capel only within the past few years, when suffering and sickness and heart worries laid their heavy hand upon him, can have but a faint conception of the greatness of the man in his prime.

Worn out with work, he preached when he should have been resting. His tottering feet were compelled in their labors by an indomitable will and invincible courage when he was scarcely able to walk. He spurred himself Sunday after Sunday to talk to his "dear children," when he was absolutely unfit for the task.

And yet even then would flash out here and there some of the old fire of the world's greatest theological polemic.



Photo from the Web

C.K (Carlos Kelly) McClatchy

Now and then, the wearied form of age would take on once more the spirit and the energy of the Chevalier Bayard of Catholicism.

But it has been known for some time that the valiant knight was failing fast; that the generous heart and the loving soul would not much longer be stretched upon the torturing rack of this world.

And so Death came to him softly and kindly, closing his eyes affectionately and printing upon his fevered brow the kiss of the eternal morning.