

NEW ZEALAND FREETHOUGHT FEDERAL UNION.

FIRST MEETING OF COUNCIL, 1884.

A Conference of delegates from the various Freethought Associations of New Zealand was held in the City Council Chambers, Dunedin, on the 10th, 11th, and 12th of March.

Delegates from the following Associations were present:—Dunedin, Auckland, Wellington, Wanganui, Nelson, Picton, and Woodville. The Conference held two sittings daily, and a great deal of important business was transacted. It is a noteworthy point that the meetings were held in the Chambers of the City Council—probably the first time in the history of the world when a body of Freethinkers have been allowed the gratuitous use of a State building.

The principal business transacted by the Conference was the formation of a New Zealand Freethought Federal Union; the framing of rules, and the appointment of office-bearers for the proper government of such Union; and the discussion and passing of resolutions in connection with Freethought.

The following is a *resume* of the business transacted:—

NEW ZEALAND FREETHOUGHT FEDERAL UNION.

President—Robert Stout, Esq. (Dunedin); Vice-President, John Ballance, Esq. (Wanganui); Hon. Secretary and Treasurer, T. Cheyne Farnie, Esq., M.A. (Dunedin).

CONSTITUTION.

1. For the purposes of mutual support, the Freethought Associations of New Zealand do hereby form themselves into a Federal Union.

2. The affairs of the Union shall be managed by a Council, which shall be called "The Council of the New Zealand Freethought Federal Union."

3. The Council shall consist of a President, Vice-President, Honorary Vice-Presidents, Secretary and Treasurer, and delegates from each Freethought Association of New Zealand.

4. Each Association belonging to the Union has the right of electing an Honorary Vice-President of the Council and two delegates, to represent such Association in the Council.

POWERS OF COUNCIL.

5. The Council shall have the power—

- (1) Of electing annually a President, a Vice-President, a Secretary, and Treasurer.
- (2) Of determining the time and place of each annual meeting.
- (3) Of deciding the amount to be contributed by each Association for carrying on the business of the Union.
- (4) Of taking such steps as it may consider necessary to advance the cause of freethought, and to give effect to the objects of the Union.

OBJECTS OF UNION.

6. The objects of the Union shall be—

- (1) To render assistance to any Association or to any individuals whose religious or social freedom is imperilled or infringed.
- (2) To watch the course of legislation in New Zealand with the view of preventing the passing of any laws detrimental to individual liberty.
- (3) To take action in any direction necessary for the support and dissemination of the principles of freethought.

RESOLUTIONS PASSED BY THE COUNCIL.

(a.) The Council would urge on the Freethought Associations of New Zealand the need of being incorporated, and of obtaining an Act of Parliament allowing voluntary associations some easy method of securing incorporation.

(b.) The Council of the New Zealand Freethought Federal Union begs to tender its sincere thanks to Sir George Grey, K.C.B., and to those members of the

House of Representatives who supported his Bill, for their efforts to abolish oaths, and hopes that during the forthcoming session of Parliament the "Oaths Abolition Bill" will be introduced and enacted.

(c.) In the opinion of this meeting of freethinkers in conference it is unwise, unjust, and unconstitutional to create in New Zealand what are termed crimes against religion; and this meeting protests against the passing of the clauses in the proposed "criminal code," which purport to create such crimes.

(b.) This meeting of the freethinkers of New Zealand in conference assembled desires to express its sympathy with Mr Charles Bradlaugh, member of Parliament for Northampton, England, in the arduous struggle against bigotry and injustice in which he has been for the past four years engaged; and it hopes that ere long he may be completely triumphant, thus achieving a victory for freedom of conscience which will be hailed with delight by Freethinkers in all parts of the world.

(e.) This public meeting is specially desirous of holding out the hand of fellowship to all lovers of freedom in New Zealand, and hails with satisfaction the commencement of organisation in behalf of freethought.

(f.) In the opinion of this meeting it is unjust to attempt to charge licence fees for meetings of freethinkers, whether such meetings be social or literary; and so long as the churches are exempt from rates, freethought halls should be placed in the same position.

(g.) The next meeting of the Council of the New Zealand Freethought Federal Union shall be held at Wellington during Easter week, 1885.

(h.) The Freethought Associations shall be asked to contribute sixpence (6d) per member per annum to the funds of the Federal Union.

(i.) The Council is of opinion that if the Associations could unite to engage one or more lecturers to visit the various centres of population, much good would result to freethought.

DINNER.

The proceedings of the Conference were terminated by a dinner at the Coffee Palace, tendered by the Dunedin Freethought Association to the delegates in honour of the inauguration of the Freethought Federal Union. The President, Mr R. Stout, occupied the chair, Mr Charles Bright the vice-chair, and there were between fifty and sixty ladies and gentlemen present. This is, we believe, the first occasion in New Zealand in which the right of ladies to be present at a public dinner has been admitted. In accordance with Temperance principles, instead of toasts sentiments were expressed. The President wished "Success to the Federal Union." Mr. J. N. Watt responded. Sentiments in favour of "The Press," "The Platform," and "The Ladies," were proposed and responded to by Messrs Charles Bright, Dixon, Rutherford, and Messrs Willis and Farnie respectively. Mrs Charles Bright, in a pleasant speech, responded on behalf of the ladies. The proceedings were enlivened by the presence of a small orchestra under the leadership of Mr Parker, and by a few songs. The night's amusement was brought to a close about 11 p.m. by the company singing "Auld Lang Syne."

The Council meets at Wellington next year during Easter week.

The constitution and resolutions passed by the Council will, we understand, be submitted to the local Associations, and when replies have been received therefrom the President and Secretary of the Council will, where necessary, take steps to have the objects entailed carried out.

PUBLIC MEETING.

On the evening of the 11th March a public meeting was held at the Town Hall. Mr. Stout presided, and delivered an eloquent address on "Freethought in relation to the State." He said the crime of blasphemy was unknown to the law of the colony, quoting the following case in point: "Hitherto there