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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

ALTHOUGH the Victorian Defence League has only been in existence for little over three months, it has already accomplished such results as to amply justify its existence. The first conference of delegates from the various branches was held recently in the Hibernian Hall, Melbourne, when there were about two hundred present from nearly every electoral district in the colony. There was no lack of earnestness and enthusiasm in the meeting, and the various speakers evidently voiced the feeling of all the members of the League when they, with one voice, declared their determination to put forth all their strength until complete success should crown their efforts. The report which was presented was devoted mainly to explaining and vindicating the platform of the League, and to urging on Catholics and on Protestant sympathisers the duty of still more extensive organisation. We quote the concluding passage:—"No room having been left to doubt the object of Orangeism, the League claims the right to cleanse all our public channels of the baneful influence of such a dangerous and scurrilous organisation. This right belongs to us under our constitution, and we are not only justified, but by duty called upon to avail ourselves of every constitutional means to redress such an evil. The only way that this can be accomplished is to organise. To many such a combination may appear undesirable, but when they consider that such a position is forced upon them through no fault of their own, but in self-defence and preservation only, we feel confident that all will fully endorse the objects of the League appearing as they do in our rules. Although we have only been in existence for some twelve weeks, the results attending our efforts have far exceeded our expectations, and that success in the future is within our grasp. It only requires the unanimous and conjoined action of all sympathisers." The chairman, in moving the adoption of the report, made more detailed reference to the work done by the League, and considering the very short period during which it has been in existence the results achieved are most satisfactory. The League was started on the 8th of August last, and since that time 34 branches have been formed, some of which have already a membership of between two and three hundred. The time between the inception of the League and the general election was of course far too short to allow the organisation to get fairly into working order and to show what it could do when properly established. The League succeeded, nevertheless, in exercising a marked influence on the elections. One very practical result of its efforts was the return of 28 members, who are pledged to vote solid for a Royal Commission on Orangeism in the colony. Twelve others were returned who were in sympathy with the platform of the League. The result is that when the time comes for raising the question in the House there will be a party "ready to espouse the cause, and to demand that the existence of a sworn conspiracy against the civil and religious rights of colonists should no longer be allowed." Prior to the election the question of registration received the careful attention of the League, and fully 25 per cent. additional voters names were, through its exertions, placed on the electoral rolls. A practical illustration of the purely unsectarian character of the League was given at the general election, when, in some instances, Catholic candidates were asked to waive their claims in favour of non-Catholics whose chances at the polls were greater than those of their Catholic rivals. The Orange test prosecutions have not been lost sight of, steps having been already taken to prosecute certain individuals who took part in the illegal act, the intention being not to ask for any penalty, but simply to test the question of the legality of the processions. The details are in the hands of a committee outside the League, who have given ample proof of their determination to carry the matter through. Altogether the record of the work done by the League is most satisfactory. The results effected during the brief period of

its existence afford matter for sincere congratulation, and are a happy augury of the ultimate complete success of the organisation.

Jews
AND
CATHOLICS
IN THE
TRANSVAAL.

"A FELLOW-FEELING makes us wondrous kind," and the annoying and humiliating disabilities under which both Jews and Catholics labour in the Transvaal have drawn these two bodies together in bonds of close and active sympathy. Under the laws at present in force in the South African Republic both Jews and Catholics are debarred from holding the most subordinate office in the state; they are both denied a share in the Government grant for education; and both may be arrested on suspicion without warrant. Against these irritating and insulting disabilities both Jews and Catholics have made frequent, though so far ineffectual protest. According to a correspondent in the London *Tablet* the Jews are about to make one more determined effort to secure redress. A committee consisting of the most influential members of the Jewish persuasion have sent a letter to the Executive Council, setting forth the disabilities under which their co-religionists suffer, and asking that the ordinary rights of citizenship be extended to them. Mr. H. Solomon, the chairman of the Stock Exchange, and a large number of prominent Jews have taken great interest in the movement, and an influential deputation will shortly wait upon the Executive. Should the Jews succeed in obtaining the measure of justice they ask for from the Boer Government it is certain that the Catholics also, sooner or later, will reap the benefit of the concession. The *South African Catholic Magazine* has the following remarks on the movement thus initiated by the Jews of the republic:—"The Jews, who are both influential and numerous in the Transvaal, are beginning to agitate more actively for the removal of those disabilities to which they are there subject in common with ourselves. It is not the first time we have stood shoulder to shoulder with the Jews in such a contest. Of course it is only a question of time. Even Mrs. Partington kept the Atlantic off her doorstep for a while by vigorous plying of her mop; but the Atlantic always wins in the long run. We wish our Jewish fellow-citizens speedy success." It appears that there are other influences which tend to bring about a kindly feeling, and to establish the happiest possible relations between Jews and Catholics in the Transvaal. "There is another point," continues the writer we have just quoted, "in which it has been remarked that we are often drawn near to the Jews. I have seen the matter discussed in some papers quite recently. I refer to the number of Jewish children in our schools. One would say at first sight that the Jews ought to find least in common with the most uncompromising form of Christianity. The fact really is that what moves men is not paper-teaching, but the concrete expression of belief in real life. As so regarded, the Jews find they have more in common with us than with Protestants, and we on our side find their children often better Christians in deed than many who bear the name. The beautiful traditions of the best form of domestic life are common to them and to us by unbroken descent from the remotest antiquity. This is the salt that has saved Judaism; it is what we prize for ourselves, and what we admire in them. This is the real reason why so many, of their girls at least, are so willingly sent to our schools. They do not like the happy-go-lucky way in which many Protestant schools treat those virtues which require delicate and constant training. The new-woman army, with its aggressive eccentricities and unbalanced moral feeling, is not largely recruited from either Catholic or Jewish maidenhood. I think, too, that in our social atmosphere they feel a greater liberty. Catholics have a discipline which is strict enough for themselves, but part of this discipline is to allow the widest possible liberty to others. Puritanism is perpetually getting shocked or severely laying down laws for others to keep. A Catholic child in a Protestant school cannot do any of the most ordinary external religious acts without being made to suffer. Catholics, however, have sympathy with personal religion, whatever form it takes." There is much truth and sound sense in our contemporary's remarks, and we heartily endorse his statement that