

merry on Christmas Eve, shouting at us to come out and meet them. I was horrified at discovering some of our men actually had gone out, imbued more with the idea of seeing the German trenches than anything else; they met half-way, and there ensued the giving of cigarettes and receiving of cigars, and they arranged (the private soldiers of one army and the private soldiers of the other) a forty-eight hours' armistice. It was all most irregular. Christmas Day was very misty, and out came these Germans to wish us "A Happy Day"; we went out, told them we were at war with them, and that really they must play the game and pretend to fight; they went back, but again attempted to come towards us, so we fired over their heads, they fired a shot back to show they understood, and the rest of the day passed quietly in this part of the line, but in others a deal of fraternising went on. So there you are: all this talk of hate, all this fury at each other that has raged since the beginning of the war, quelled and stayed by the magic of Christmas.'

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Even in the Belgian lines—where, if anywhere, the spirit of unrelenting hatred might have been expected to hold sway—there is the same touching story of the Christmas truce. 'During the day of the 24th there was a rather severe cannonade,' writes a Belgian soldier. 'In the evening the chaplain administered the Communion to the soldiers and heard confession in the cellar of a ruined house. We seemed to be living again in the time of the catacombs. Before us lay the town; all is in ruins; the houses that are left are rent and torn by shells and riddled by bullets. Of the church only part of the tower is left, and the priest, driven from his temple, was utilising instead an underground cellar, dark and wretched. Never shall I forget that touching ceremony, when amid the deafening roar of the guns I took Communion on Christmas Eve. Christmas in the trenches! It must have been sad, do you say? Well, I am not sorry to have spent it there, and the recollection of it will ever be one of imperishable beauty. At midnight a baritone stood up and in a rich resonant voice sang "*Minuit Chretien*." The cannonade ceased, and when the hymn finished applause broke out from our side and from the German trenches! The Germans, too, were celebrating Christmas, and we could hear them singing 200 yards away from us. Now I am going to tell you something which you will think incredible, but I give you my word that it is true. At dawn the Germans displayed a placard over the trenches on which was written "Happy Christmas," and then, leaving their trenches, unarmed, they advanced towards us singing and shouting "Comrades!" No one fired. We also had left our trenches and, separated from each other only by the half-frozen Yser, we exchanged presents. They gave us cigars, and we threw them some chocolate. Thus, almost fraternising, we passed all the morning. Unlikely, indeed, but true. I saw it, but thought I was dreaming. Was it not splendid? Think you that we were wrong? We have been criticised here; it is said that we ought to have fired. But would it not have been dastardly? And then, why kill one another on such a festival day?'

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There it is—a remarkable and unanswerable testimony to the reality and vitality of the Christian spirit, under perhaps the severest test to which that spirit has ever been subjected. Spite of all precedents, spite of regulations, spite of the iron rule of militarism, the Christian sentiment and instinct asserted itself, and the sworn enemies became mutual friends. The moving incident of this Christmas in the trenches throws the whole brutal business of the war into its proper perspective, and gives a faint adumbration of what the world would be like were Christianity given free scope and play. No, Christianity has not failed. The word 'failure' implies that a thing has been tried and has not succeeded. The present war has been caused not by the failure but by the blind rejection of Christianity.

¶ When shopping with our advertisers, say—
'I saw your advertisement in the *Tablet*.'

CATHOLIC FEDERATION

MEETING OF THE DOMINION COUNCIL.

OFFICIAL REPORT.

The half-yearly meeting of the Dominion Council was held at the offices of the Federation, Cuba street, Wellington, on Wednesday, February 24, at 10 a.m. The president (Mr. D. L. Poppelwell) was in the chair, and the following members were present:—Auckland—Very Rev. Dean Darby and Mr. B. McLaughlin; Wellington—Very Rev. Dean Power, Rev. Father Daly, and Mr. O. P. Lynch; Christchurch—Very Rev. Dean Hyland and Mr. W. Hayward; Dunedin—Mr. T. Hussey and Rev. Father Edge (acting as proxy for Very Rev. Father Coffey, Adm.).

THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

On behalf of the Federation I have to offer the delegates, and especially those who are attending for the first time, a most hearty welcome. The invariably good attendance at the half-yearly meetings of the Council shows that the Catholic people of New Zealand are determined that the Federation shall be a live body, and that its great possibilities shall be developed for the benefit of the Church and the Catholic people generally. The work of the last six months has been in a great measure defensive. The great and successful fight put up against the attempt of the so-called Bible-in-Schools party is one which we should all be proud of. We are much indebted for the result to the work done for us by the hierarchy, and especially by our great champion, the Bishop of Auckland, who, we trust, may be long spared to carry on his strenuous fight for the rights and liberties of the Catholics of this country. The proposal that a fund should be established to recompense him for his personal expenses in connection with this campaign should not only commend itself to our people as a bare act of justice, but the necessity for a fighting fund for future propaganda must be apparent to all, and it is to be hoped that a satisfactory scheme will be set on foot at this meeting. The work, too, of the Catholic Immigration Committees has been fraught with much good and, I am sure, will grow and develop. Since we last met the disastrous war in Europe has broken out. Deep regret must be felt by all Catholics at the vast damage that has been done to and the profanation of many ancient cathedrals, convents, and other seats of learning, but the records of our Church and faith have been enriched by great and noble examples of bravery and devotion to duty by our priests, religious, and laymen. The Catholics of New Zealand are not behindhand in their duty at this serious crisis, but have shown their patriotism and loyalty in a manner worthy of the great traditions of our people. No doubt, after the war there will be a large movement of Continental people abroad. Such a stream of emigration is almost a certainty, and possibly some steps may be possible to induce suitable immigrants from Catholic Belgium and France to settle in this country. Perhaps a scheme of such settlement, if taken up here, would be looked upon favorably by our Government, and concessions granted, which would not only assist the distressed peoples of the Old World but also materially help the development of our own country, both agriculturally and industrially. The work of purging the shelves of the sellers of anti-Catholic and injurious literature has gone on successfully during the half-year just past, and this work can be developed greatly not only in the negative way of abolishing objectionable literature, but on its positive side by assisting and encouraging the dissemination of good, wholesome Catholic literature by every means possible. The strides made in having the Education Act amended, so that the Minister of Education has power to approve private secondary schools for scholarship holders, are of great importance. I am satisfied that continuous agitation on this matter must result in the free-place system being also extended to private secondary schools. There is no logical difference in the position of scholarship pupils and free-place pupils, and