

## MARIST BROTHERS AND CONSCRIPTION

### STRIKING ADDRESS BY FATHER EDGE.

An address on "The Marist Brothers and Conscription" was given by the Rev. Father Edge, of Huntly, at St. Patrick's Cathedral, on Tuesday evening, July 24, to the men's branch of the confraternity. Although the notice given of the important subject to be dealt with was brief, there was a very large congregation. The members occupied the front rows of seats. At the outset the speaker said that to make mistakes is a property of human nature. That human nature retains this property in our time is lamentably evident from the catastrophe at Gallipoli, from the unfortunate Macedonian expedition, and from the uprising that made an Easter Monday memorable in the story of modern Ireland. Mistakes, too, may be enormously expensive. If you would know the cost of some ask it of the many crosses that adorn the land about Suvla Bay; ask it of that skeleton of an army that handed up its sword in Kut-el-amara, not really to the Turks, but to stark starvation.

Though we in New Zealand think a lot of ourselves, we have not yet concluded that we are supermen. Being merely human, we are capable of mistakes—even of costly mistakes. Personally, I think we have made one mistake in the conscription of the teachers of our schools—public and private, primary, secondary, and university,—all the schools in the Dominion. The reason why he (the speaker) was compelled to think a great mistake had been made was that it was evident to him that conscription of teachers inflicted a grave injury on the pupils. Merely amateur knowledge of teaching and the management of a school would enable them to grasp at once that the task was impossible where a school was not continuously working, or where the staff was frequently changed. He knew of schools that had been closed for periods of a few weeks to six months, the children being deprived of education during that time. In one school in his district, with a roll of 400, there had been 16 changes on the staff in 14 months. It was clear, under such circumstances, that discipline was out of the question, and efficiency impossible. If children were not being educated a grave injury was being inflicted upon them. Education was a means whereby they were going to earn their livelihood as the men and women of to-morrow. Ignorance was the biggest life long handicap that could be inflicted, yet it was being inflicted because teachers were being compelled to give up their work, and to go to the war. He contended that a man maimed in the war was no more handicapped than a child with a stunted mind. The schools in his district were in the midst of an industrial locality, most of the pupils being the children of coal miners. They were not born with silver spoons in their mouths, and the day would soon come when they would have to start earning their living. These children were being unduly handicapped by reason of this measure—the Conscription Act. The injustice of taking away their teachers was not confined to the children; it was a grave injustice to the whole country.

When the men who are in the field to day turn their swords into ploughshares (continued Father Edge), and their cannon into ornaments for the public parks, there will begin a war such as was never before known in the history of mankind—a struggle for industrial supremacy. If we are to entertain any hope of succeeding in that struggle we must take the greatest care in the education of our boys now at school. The impending struggle will be one not only of the hand but of the head, and our children's minds must therefore be cultivated. If, however, they are attending schools that are under-staffed, or where the staffs are constantly being changed, they cannot get sufficient education to enable them to take their part in this coming industrial war. Another thing that is perfectly evident regarding the future is that power, thank God, is going to pass into the hands of the masses. What

is happening in Russia to-day is only the forecast of what is to come elsewhere. It will be sad, however, for a country which is going to be ruled by the people if those people grow up ignorant. Their ignorance will be an evil, the magnitude of which we cannot possibly imagine, and that nation must fall back. If we are to avert the tragedy we must do it to-day by putting the teacher in the school; he is more wanted there than at the war. The difference his presence will make among the millions of troops on the western front will not be much, but the difference his absence from here will make is such that we shall not get over it for some generations. My conviction is that, even as things are now, ten years hence we shall be further back than we are at present in educational matters. The mistake has been made and should be remedied.

Father Edge proceeded to say that he did not disapprove of teachers voluntarily going to the war. That they should be compelled to go, however, he considered was a mistake. "We Catholics," he said, "have a perfect right to see that all the schools in the Dominion—primary, secondary, Catholic, and university colleges as well—are efficiently equipped, because we are helping to 'pay' for all of them. We are perfectly justified, therefore, in criticising what concerns all the schools. We are, however, more intensely interested in that body of teachers, the Marist Brothers, who are teaching in our own Catholic schools; and you may be asked who and what are the Marist Brothers? So that you may answer, let me tell you some facts concerning them. The Marist Brothers are members of a religious society which, although founded only 100 years ago, includes within its ranks men of every civilised nation in the world, including New Zealand and Australia. Applicants for admission to the society before being finally received into it, undergo a period of probation extending over at least five years. If, after that period, they are satisfied, and the society is satisfied that they are fit for the work, they voluntarily bind themselves to serve God and their fellow-man by devoting their time and talents to the education of boys, preferably the boys of the poorer class. To this end they renounce all material possessions and prospects, receiving no payment whatever beyond necessary food, clothes, and shelter. They solemnly undertake to work wherever the superior, democratically elected, may deem wise to send them. And they renounce for life the social and domestic ties that would interfere with their voluntary state of poverty and obedience. Of this and a kindred society of Irish origin there are 49 members in the Dominion, 14 of them being in the diocese of Auckland. Nine of the total number are over military age. Of the remaining two score I doubt if a dozen would pass the military medical test. Although a dozen would make no difference to the military department the removal of this number would totally destroy some of our Catholic boys' schools, for it would be impossible to replace these men now or in the near future. They are in New Zealand solely through zeal for the education of our boys; for, had they wished to do so their superiors could have withdrawn all of them before conscription became law. They are practicing a self-sacrifice unparalleled in New Zealand, outside the religious life of the Catholic Church. By virtue of their vows these men are really leading a life spiritually higher than the merely clerical state, and they are perfectly entitled to every right that has been conceded to members of the clerical community."

"Apart from their condition of life and religious state, their vows and their duties, I am sorry to say I have been compelled to conclude," proceeded Father Edge, "that the Marist Brothers are absolutely necessary to the Catholic community. As an illustration of what I mean, a lady teacher who was beginning to work at a primary school in my district, about a week ago, approached a class for the first time at the hour that was to be devoted to English history. The teacher asked the children what point they had reached in their study of English history, and the children replied, 'The Reformation, in the time of King Henry VIII.'