

Current Topics

Catholic Federation

Last week the delegates from all the provinces of New Zealand assembled in Dunedin for the meeting of the Federation. The fickle weather of the south was at its best, and the visitors saw the picturesque city and the surrounding district under most favorable conditions. They were enthusiastic over the progress made here by the Church and marked by so many striking monuments in the shape of churches, schools, and hospices for young and old. They will take home with them pleasant memories of the drive round Dunedin and its suburbs, and, perhaps, understand always why southerners are so proud of the scenic beauties of their city, of the drive through native bush which circles about the hills, and of the glorious glimpses of landscape and seascape from the heights of Roslyn or Maori Hill. The Solemn High Mass on Wednesday morning was a fitting opening for the events of the Dominion meeting. The choir was strong in numbers and in quality, and the preacher by his eloquent words co-operated with ceremonies and music in making those present feel proud that they belonged to the fold of the Catholic Church. The public meeting on Thursday night was attended by a large and attentive audience, filling the parterre and galleries of His Majesty's Theatre. Non-Catholics who were present must have been impressed by the logical arguments in favor of our Catholic educational system and by the appeal made to all other members of Christian bodies to imitate us not only in maintaining religious schools but also in compelling the Government to exercise ordinary justice in its dealings with such schools. The addresses were an object lesson of the fact that we are content to go on minding our own business and that we interfere with nobody unless we are forced to do so in self-defence. Dean Burke's address was a model of close reasoning, relieved here and there by a flash of Irish wit which told effectively: Father John O'Connell's forcible presentation of the Catholic claim for common justice was clear and convincing, and heard with intense interest by the audience; Mr. Reddington acquitted himself well and needs only experience to make him an effective lecturer; Mr. Poppelwell, in his usual lucid manner, put before his hearers the object, the aims, the scope, the methods of the Federation, and alluded briefly to some of the good work it had already accomplished. We recommend our readers to study the addresses, which will be published in the *Tablet* in due order.

Soup

Not the least striking part of Father O'Connell's address was his castigation of that narrow-minded body of Civil Servants who, shirking competition with private schools, recently went out of their way, with gross impertinence, to ask the Government to create a monopoly in their favor: a plain confession of their worthlessness for any man to read. What the Teachers' Executive did in regard to educational matters was already done down here in another sphere by teachers whose schools had been so thoroughly thrashed in open athletic competitions by our boys. Scheming of this kind always defeats its own purpose, and there could be no better argument for the superiority of the private school in every department. We can beat the others at games, and we can at least hold our own with the best of them in education; beyond that we have what they have not—the real foundation of true education, the real secret of the formation of Christian character. Now we wonder if it is as an effort to bolster up his staggering system that the Minister of Education makes his last brilliant proposal. He has thrown out a suggestion that in the future pupils attending his schools will get a plate of soup! That is reminiscent of what was done in the land of our Minister's ancestors in by-gone days. Does he forget that when the Irish people were starving and English soldiers carting away the

corn which could save them there came among the poor suffering women and children a gang of Pharisaical ladies and gentlemen who were ready to save the lives of whatever hungry children would take, with the soup, a Protestant Bible. History repeats itself. Take an irreligious school, dear people of New Zealand, and your children can have a plate of soup.

What Simpson Said

We have assisted at many a Catholic Synod and at half a hundred conferences in our time, and though free discussion was allowed we do not remember one single case in which any speaker bothered his head about the doings of his Protestant brethren—no, not even in Ireland, where once an honest parson stood on his feet and told his Primate that his ravings about Catholic bigotry were directly contrary to fact. On the other hand we find it hard to recall a case in which a Presbyterian Assembly has not gone out of its way to make unwarranted and uncharitable attacks on Catholics. There is no doubt that it would not be easy to find a more respectable and learned body than the Presbyterian ministers in general; but, as the old Irishman said, there are a few queer fellows in every crowd, and in this case the shape taken by the queerness is to attack people who take no more notice of the attacks as a rule than a cow does of the flies on her horns. Reading casually the accounts of the proceedings at the Assembly recently held, as days went by we began to wonder if the record was going to be broken and not a single offensive word said about us. But the usual thing happened in the usual way. One fine day, when a Mr. Durward set the ball rolling, a certain Mr. Simpson, who was very uncertain of his facts, took the floor and went for us with head down and horns bristling. He told his appalled hearers an awful story about the bigoted ways of those horrible Gore Papists: a gory Gore story it was indeed. There was a picturesque detail about "second-hand" eggs; there were accusations about Popish plots to break up meetings and to prevent free speech; there was a war cry for the Orange Lodge which helped the poor old Kaiser to his undoing a few years ago; and there was a sort of subconscious suggestion that the right man in the right place for all good Presbyterians to follow was the hero of the filthy letters, the man publicly stigmatised as a cad by a magistrate and afterwards castigated by members of Parliament, with as much effect as he had been in deed horsewhipped by the brother of a dead girl whose fair name he had attempted to blacken. It is not recorded how the Assembly received the manifestation of the symptoms of Simpson; but we can imagine the sheer disgust of all the honest men there on hearing such an outrageously silly and offensive rigmarole. We have made inquiries and have been assured that there was not a single word of truth in what Simpson said. And if more than our word were needed there is the fact that a respectable non-Catholic clergyman of Gore has written to protest against such malignant and baseless fabrications. Such a thing had to come, we suppose. There is something strange in a system which admits among scholarly and broadminded clergymen one who is capable of uttering such offensive and untruthful nonsense. It is no concern of ours how to explain it, but surely the responsible persons ought to look to it. It does them no credit; it is a stain on them all. And surely it is time to recognise that the day is gone when decent people can be gulled any longer by individuals who pretend that the work of a minister is to scarify Papists and curse the Pope with bell and book. There are bigger things than that for the Churches to tackle. Some of them ought to take a leaf out of our book and confine themselves to the preaching of the Gospel. In the meantime the Catholics of Gore ought to get out the band and welcome Mr. Simpson home after his effort; for there is no room for doubt that we have no better friends than people like himself and Elliott, and that latter-day apostle of culture, the mellifluous Earnshaw. The Catholic Federation ought send them a testimonial for services rendered.

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