

The Church in New Zealand

THE BEGINNING OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION IN CHRISTCHURCH

Diamond Jubilee Year

The *N.Z. Tablet* for May 22, 1875, printed the following interesting contribution:—

"Ten years to-day exactly, the first Catholic school in Canterbury, patronised by the priests, was opened in a building which still stands in Liebfeld Street, East Christchurch.

Had you visited it on Monday morning, May 3rd, 1865, between the hours of 9 and 11, you would see a bashful, delicate, clean-faced youth, whose nationality you could not mistake, catechising two little urchins, his only pupils during the remainder of the



THE LATE MR. EDWARD O'CONNOR, of Christchurch. First Catholic School-teacher in Canterbury.

week. His school apparatus consisted of a few books, slates, and copies, and his furniture comprised a few forms lent him by the good priest, and a packing case converted into a table. Seeing that he had to pay 14s per week house rent, and support himself into the bargain, having only two children during a full week, he had but poor consolation for a beginner—for he had only just arrived in the Colony.

The following week a few fresh faces made their appearance, and as the parish priest could bear testimony to the teacher's worth, and as the few who attended progressed satisfactorily, the number gradually went up. Yet the income was hardly sufficient to defray expenses, so the teacher opened a night school which took well, and both incomes combined enabled him to live. Rev. Father Chataigner, the then parish priest, was trying hard to raise funds to build a decent schoolhouse, but as Catholics then were few and far between, a long time elapsed ere the building was completed; it was far advanced in October, 1865, before the children

could take possession of it. You will perceive that five months of the severest part of the year had elapsed since first starting the school in the cottage till the completion and opening of the building which was to be used as the only Catholic school in the Province for many years afterwards.

How things went on with the teacher you can form an idea, when I tell you he marched 86 children from the old into the new school on the day the latter was opened. I think you will allow, though he had a poor beginning, that his patience and perseverance were eventually crowned with remarkable success.

The Government then allowed the Catholic school a sum of money towards the payment of the teacher's salary, provided he passed a satisfactory examination, which he did, under Mr. Restell, Government Inspector of Schools. Our new building was then considered a very fine one, high, well-ventilated, and measuring 40ft by 19ft. There being

able Father Chataigner commenced erecting a girls' school, which they (the Sisters) took charge of. So now, in a few years, there were two schools—one for boys, another for girls.

The Rev. Father Chataigner left Christchurch for Timaru shortly after completing the second school, where he is still working for the cause of religion and denominational education. He was succeeded by the Rev. Father Chervier, who in turn was replaced by the Rev. Father Feuyer.

Some two years and nine months ago the schools were literally crammed, especially the boys', so a *third* school, very much larger than the others, was erected for the boys by the Rev. Father Feuyer, who has since left, and been replaced by the Rev. Father Belliard.

Many changes, you will perceive, have taken place re the progress of Catholicity here, since the commencement of the time about which I wrote till the present day. Priests have been changed from one locality to another, schools and churches have been erected. Some of the teachers have taken to other avocations, the Government here have withdrawn all aid from our schools,



(On left) First Girls' School (St. Joseph's)
(On right) Second Church (afterwards Pro-Cathedral) erected in Christchurch

plenty of space, the attendance increased rapidly, so an assistant was needed. A Miss Vallance, a lady of no mean attainments, was engaged, who looked after the junior portion of the children—it being a mixed school. After she left a Miss Oakes was engaged, who remained till the arrival of the Sisters. The Catholic school then had a good name, which can yet be seen from the Government Inspectors' periodical reports of the time, and circumstances at the present time go to show that it has lost none of its *prestige* in bringing on those children who attend thereat regularly.

The Sisters having arrived, the indefatig-

able Father Chataigner commenced erecting a girls' school, which they (the Sisters) took charge of. So now, in a few years, there were two schools—one for boys, another for girls.

St. Vincent de Paul Society, Christchurch A Golden Jubilee

The oldest social organisation in the diocese of Christchurch is the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. First established away back in the 'sixties, it would appear that various lapses occurred in its continuity during the intervening years. This, in the circumstances, need not be wondered at.

When we consider the struggles endured

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