

The Church in New Zealand

THE CHURCH IN TARANAKI: A SKETCH PREPARED FOR THE JUBILEE OF THE PARISH OF HAWERA.

(Continued from last week.)



Father McKenna was appointed pastor of New Plymouth in January, 1889, and was longer in Taranaki than any other priest, longer indeed than all the pastors from the first down to this year, 1925. In 1899 on the occasion of the Arch-

bishop's silver episcopal jubilee, he was made Dean of Taranaki. On the 14th of July, 1922, a Papal Brief was issued from Rome, making him a Domestic Prelate of the Holy See with the title of Right Reverend Monsignor; but alas! this was a week after his holy and edifying death. His work in North Taranaki needs no telling, it speaks for itself. The fine churches in New Plymouth, Stratford, Inglewood, and Waitara, together with the founding of the convents in the three last places were his work. His silver jubilee was kept in 1911 in presence of a vast assembly including all the priests from Taranaki and many from remote parishes, and the joyful manifestation of loyalty with which he was surrounded on that occasion will long remain in the memories of those who witnessed it. The discourse, eulogising his work, was made by his life-long friend, Dean Power of Hawera. Another memorable manifestation of esteem and affection was that made him by the Taranaki priests on his return from England after a long illness and a serious operation. His funeral on the 8th of July, 1922, will be long remembered for the great line of mourners, including fifty priests, that extended along Devon Street. The beautiful panegyric preached by Father MacManus at the funeral touched the hearts of all present and made them realise acutely the loss they had sustained. Another great gathering of priests and people assembled for the Month's Mind on the 8th of August, when Monsignor Power spoke on the characteristic virtues of the deceased priest. He was a deeply spiritual man, of fine mental equipment and of strong character. His life was a lesson to all who knew him. He set himself a high standard of life and lived well up to it. His life was largely spent in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament; he never forgot that God had separated him from all the people and joined him to Himself that he might serve Him in the service of the Tabernacle and minister to Him. He knew how powerful for himself and for the people was the daily lifting up of the chalice, and so he was faithful in sickness and in health to his daily Mass. His beautiful mind was perfectly attuned to God, and on this account his ministry of preaching was most effective. To the very end he kept up his study of sacred learning, for the shepherd must not be without understanding if the flock is to be saved. And this understanding is not merely intellectual: it is rather



THE LATE DEAN THOMAS McKENNA.

the mastery of the laws of the spiritual life manifesting itself in true and valid sanctity. He knew that the cure of souls, the highest of all arts or vocations, demanded personal sanctity, that the pastor might teach by example as well as by words, and so his constant aim through life was to sanctify himself, that he might sanctify his flock.

He was acquainted with the various views of the priestly life that were being discussed in modern times, some saying this and some saying that, but he interpreted that life for himself in the light of the Gospel spirit and according to the great Fathers of the Church. He knew with St. Bernard that "the flame of the pastor is the light of the flock," and he knew that it was through solitude and contemplation that flame would shine out. So he became a man of deep contemplation, loving solitude and finding in it his strength. He was aware of the much advertised theory that a priest who visited much had a full church; he did not value this theory much, as he often told the present writer in private conversation. He was always conscious of the danger that pastoral visits might easily decline into social visits, and that the priest would then be at his worst disadvantage. At any rate he took good care that the active duties of his own ministry did not infringe upon his beloved solitude and contemplation. In this and in the personal realisation of the doctrines and practices he would expound lay the secret of the unction with which he preached.

He never forgot how sacred was the command to preach, the command to use the talent: "Trade till I come!" On the last Sunday but one before his death he had to

be lifted from his car at Waitara and set at the altar, the same thing had to be done at New Plymouth a few hours later, yet in both places at the proper time in the Mass, he sat down and preached fervently to his people, though he was visibly struggling with death. "Trade till I come" was the command; he had kept it and could say: *Veni, Domine Jesu, Come, Lord Jesus*. He was carried to his room where he remained unconscious for several hours; and then after ten days' preparation, surrounded by faithful, praying friends, he closed his eyes to earth and opened them beyond the veil to gaze upon the face of the High-Priest Whom he had so faithfully served. His life was indeed a lesson to all. He never took care for his own comfort, he spent as little as possible on himself. With his savings he purchased little properties in the parish, during his life he devoted their income to the schools, and before death he made them over to the schools by his last will and testament.

DEAN THOMAS McKENNA

was pastor for just one year, but his declining health did not permit him to take any part in the administration of the parish. His past career gave promise of much fruitful work. His widely-lamented death took place on the very day of the first anniversary of his predecessor's, and his Month's Mind in his former parish in Wellington South saw a record number of priests for any such memorial.



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