

The Mater Misericordiae Hospital, Auckland

THE PIONEER CATHOLIC HOSPITAL.

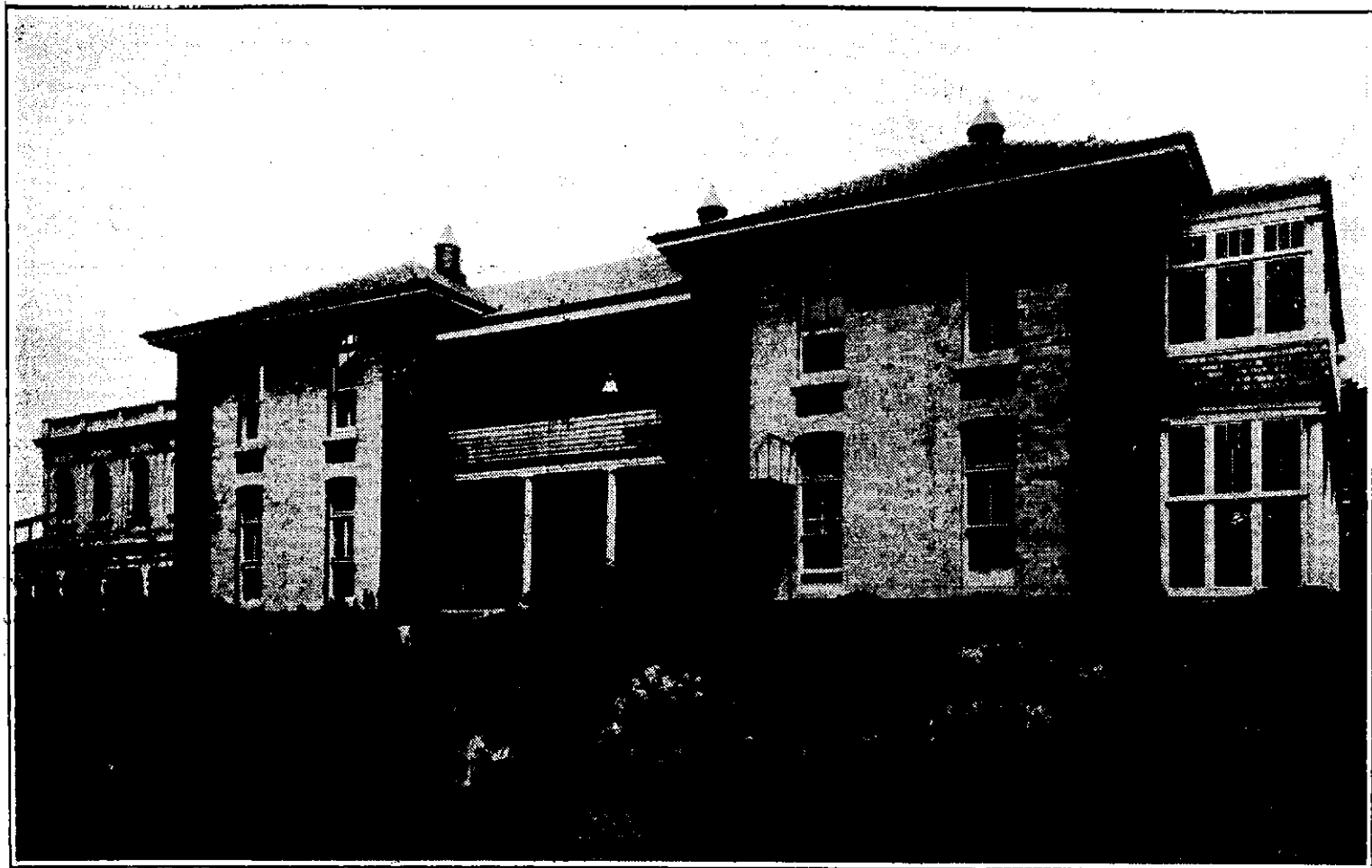
(By REV. JAMES ECCLETON, S.M.)

In the last years of the 19th century the public hospital at Coromandel—a seaside town on the western side of Hauraki Gulf—was in serious straits. It possessed neither matron nor nurses, and the Hospital Board saw no succor nigh. It was suggested to the Sisters

gone through a course of training at St. Vincent's Hospital, Sydney, filled the columns of the Coromandel newspaper with prehistoric piffle. The Sisters worked on unheeding, even as they did, and would do again, in our day when plague swept through this

Sisters of Mercy, and from warm Celtic hearts aflame with love divine what deeds of splendor spring!

Mother Ignatius found opposition to her project. The time was not opportune it was alleged. There were other works at her community's hands! The Catholics of Auckland were committed to aid other excellent enterprises! Good men and women thus tried to measure a valiant woman with their narrow gauge. There were poisoned shafts, too, of falsehood and derision, but unhesitat-



THE MATER MISERICORDIAE HOSPITAL, AUCKLAND. THE WING BUILT IN 1918 IN THE FOREGROUND. THE ORIGINAL HOSPITAL TO THE LEFT. [Photo by Crown Studios, Auckland.]

of Mercy by the harassed secretary that they might of their charity in the hours left them when school work was done spend themselves during the day on the patients. At night the sufferers were to be left to the care of a wardsman. The gaunt spectre of enteric stalked through the decaying mining settlement, and the Sisters, ever quick to heed the call of the sick, found themselves perforce installed in the hospital. There were murmurings, of course. Weird misconceptions of Catholicism and of its clergy and religious had been imported from the United Kingdom and had in New Zealand lived stolid, stiff, and stodgy. The wild savagery of the Orangeism that survives in the spiritual and intellectual jungles of the North of Ireland and the stupid vaporings current in "papal aggression" days found echo in sleepy Coromandel. A new hospital was being built, and when it was ready the Sisters moved into it to receive the patients. Bilious bigots blind to the self-sacrifice of the Sisters, now reinforced by two of their number who had

fair land. Dr. McGregor, the then Inspector-General of Hospitals, gave the Coromandel Public Hospital the best report of its chequered history. The rugged, able, and honest Scotsman rebuffed the fools who babbled inanities and insanities. Not one farthing did or would the Sisters draw from the Hospital Board for their work. Charity in its only real sense was their spur, their magnet, and their reward.

THE VENERABLE FOUNDRESS.

In Auckland a valiant woman of wide vision, of all-embracing charity, of gentle mercy, the late Rev. Mother Mary Ignatius Prendergast, had dreamed of a Catholic hospital in the city staffed by the Sisters of her own Order, the Sisters of Mercy. She had made her plans quietly and fully. Across the gulf her sisters were working. To Auckland she would bring them to found there an Hôtel Dieu that one day might rival the Mater Misericordiae Hospital in far-off Dublin. For they are Irish in origin, these

ingly the lion-hearted nun moved on and peanut minds ceased to be vociferous although they long remained whisperingly vocal.

The Work Commenced.

In 1900 from the late Mr. P. L. Dignan was purchased his fine home, and with it three and a half acres of land, on the heights of the volcanic cone of Mt. Eden, the dress circle of Auckland. The city lies beneath. Parnell, Newmarket, Remuera, Epsom, densely peopled and throbbing with life and energy, send their sounds faintly upward to the white hospital that crowns the hill. Otahuhu and Mangere are in the distance with the blue ridge of the Waitakere Range behind and the Pukekohe Hill rising in the dim distance. Out to the west are the sparkling waters of the Waitemata, the many-islanded gulf, and the hills of Coromandel. To the north are the northern suburbs across the ribbon of the busy harbor, yet more islands, and the glory of the mighty Pacific, with the rugged, towering sentinel, Mt. Rangitoto, dominating all.

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