

CATHOLIC FEDERATION

Mr. D. L. Poppelwell, president of the N.Z. Catholic Federation, addressed a crowded meeting on Federation matters in the Catholic hall at Timaru on Sunday last at 3 p.m.

Very Rev. Dean Tubman presided, and Dr. Loughnan (vice-president of the Timaru parish committee) also took a seat on the platform, and there was also a full attendance of the members of the committee of the local branch.

Dean Tubman, in introducing the speaker, referred to the good work the Federation was doing and to the necessity of every Catholic in the parish joining the movement, which had received the approval of his Holiness the Pope, who had given his blessing to the Federation and bestowed a signal honor on its president by conferring on him the decoration 'Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice.'

Mr. Poppelwell then addressed the meeting as follows:

The age in which we live is one of organisation, and it is no wonder when we consider the tremendous advantages that organisation gives to those who wish to impress their ideas upon the community. However strenuous the individual may be in propounding his ideas, if he is merely speaking for himself he does not receive much attention, and this for several reasons. Modern communities are no doubt as a whole much more learned in some respects than those of bygone years. The individual has developed his personal capacity to make known his views to such a point that a very large number of ideas are propounded, many of them destructive of one another and many of them merely the specialised development of the crude notions of others. In this babel of tongues it is practically impossible to follow any definite idea unless the many opinions are classified and sorted out, weighed one against another, and brought into something like order. The natural and distinct way to do this is for groups and societies having similar ideas to combine and arrange a common platform upon which they can all meet, and from which the elements of destruction are eliminated. We are told that a house divided against itself shall fall, and it is undoubtedly impossible for contending parties to do any building up. Destructive criticism never leads to any positive result. Realising this, leagues of all kinds have been formed for religious and social purposes and friendly societies, labor unions, and political parties of every shade and degree of consistency have come into existence. These combinations are striving to impress their 'joint' ideas upon the people, usually with a success in direct proportion to their numerical strength, and consequently social or political power, in the community. Recognising that it was futile for the individual to stem the force of public opinion, let loose by these various groups, Catholics considered that the time was ripe to answer unity by unity, hence the Catholic Federation of New Zealand. The idea is not new. In America, Britain, Germany, Australia, and elsewhere, Catholic Federations were started long before anything was done in New Zealand, and wherever steps were taken, good results followed. In almost all countries where Catholics are in minorities they will be found to suffer from more or less injustices. The persecution of the Church has lasted since the beginning, and so long as we are prepared to allow ourselves to be shorn, shearers will never be wanting. Having decided to form the Federation, the next step to be taken was to frame a constitution. A preliminary committee was formed in Wellington, and the various dioceses were requested to form branches and appoint delegates to attend a conference there. This was a little over three years ago. I had the honor of being one of those chosen to represent the Dunedin diocese, and consequently helped to frame a working system of government, and have since continuously sat as one of the Dominion representatives. Our chief difficulty in framing a constitution arose from the peculiar geographical configuration of New Zealand. The Govern-

ment of the Federation had to be centred in Wellington. We desired to make the constitution as democratic as possible without interfering with the necessity of Catholic unity, firstly as regards the proper representation of both clergy and laymen in the councils of the body, and secondly without running any risk of destroying either diocesan or parochial unity. We therefore began with the parish committee, the constitution of which is known to you. Next in order came the diocesan councils, consisting of the Bishop of the diocese, two elected delegates, and the parish priests. This body of course ensures diocesan unity. The final governing body is the Dominion Council, which consists of all the members of the hierarchy in the Dominion or their representatives, and three elected delegates from each of the four dioceses in New Zealand. This body forms the responsible head of the whole Federation, but in order that all matters should be duly carried on when the Dominion Council was not in session, a Dominion Executive was created, who have power to act within certain limits when the Dominion Council is not in session.

It will be noted that the governing theory has in view the preservation of the unity of the various natural Church entities, and at the same time provides that the chief governing body shall consist of those who in the first place have the confidence of the parishes, inasmuch as they must have been elected by them. They must also have the confidence of the parish committees before they can be sent as delegates to the diocesan councils, and the last-named bodies must also be satisfied with those it sends to the central governing body. Provision is also made for the setting up of sub-diocesan councils to meet the special need of the district.

The finance has also been framed on broad lines so as to put everybody under the Federation in as strong a position as possible, allowing for the various duties each of these bodies has to attend to.

The objects of the Federation are all set out in the constitution. They may be shortly stated as 'The furtherance of all Catholic interests, whether of a religious, social, or public nature.' The Federation is not political in any sense. It does not seek to touch politics except where politics touch religion or where the civil rights and liberties of Catholics are affected.

It may be asked by some, 'What has the Federation done in the three years of existence?' Well, I will tell you. It has defeated the iniquitous proposals of the Bible-in-Schools League. It has acquired the right for Catholic winners of scholarships resident near Catholic secondary schools to attend such schools. It has secured the right of Catholic secondary school pupils to obtain University bursaries. It has been mainly instrumental in bringing about a much-needed censorship of picture films. It has established Catholic women's hostels in the principal centres. It has helped to make provision for looking after Catholic waifs and strays, and it has done a great deal towards the comfort and spiritual welfare of our brave Catholic soldiers at the camps and elsewhere. These are some of the things accomplished, but better than all these, it has created a strong Catholic spirit among our people. We have awakened to a consciousness of our existence and power as a set of people. Great possibilities have sprung into existence. Much remains to be done, and, if we get the united support of the Catholics of New Zealand, much more will be accomplished.

This brings me to the question of the Government's attitude towards Catholic questions. As I have already pointed out, we are not a political body. In the course of looking after our own interests, however, we have had upon several occasions to approach the Government to redress our grievances. Recently we asked that certain unreasonable restrictions concerning scholarships won by Catholic children should be removed. We also asked that secondary free places—which are, after all, only minor scholarships—should be tenable at Catholic schools by those who desired to hold them, and that our primary registered schools should be put on the same footing as other schools so far as medical inspection and swimming lessons are concerned,