

ST. MARY'S CONVENT, WANGANUI

DEDICATION CEREMONY.

In spite of the inclemency of the weather a large crowd assembled at the opening of St. Mary's Convent on Sunday afternoon, August 17 (says the *Wanganui Herald*). At 2.30 his Grace Archbishop O'Shea, S.M., assisted by the Very Rev. Father O'Connell, S.M., blessed the building and dedicated it to Our Lady as an additional future home for the Sisters of St. Joseph of Nazareth, and a temporary primary school for girls.

After the blessing his Grace the Archbishop addressed the people as follows:—It is a great pleasure for me to be here to-day to bless and open this new convent and school for the Sisters of St. Joseph. The ceremony takes place on an auspicious occasion. It was practically on this day 62 years ago that the first Bishop of Wellington, the late Dr. Viard, opened the first Catholic church in Wanganui. So this is an anniversary, and it helps to mark the wonderful strides that have been made in things Catholic during the last 60 years. From small beginnings great results have come, and to-day we set up another milestone on the road of Catholic progress in Wanganui. I most heartily congratulate Father O'Connell on having secured such a fine building for the convent, and such a suitable central property for the parochial school. It will make things much more convenient for the devoted nuns who teach in the school, as well as for the children and the parish generally. The acquisition of this property shows the spirit of enterprise that animates your pastor, as well as the loyalty and enthusiasm of the parishioners for their nuns and their schools. It also shows the spirit of sacrifice that continues to animate the Catholic body, whenever it is a question of religion or of religious education. The Catholics of N.Z. are taxed to the tune of about £180,000 a year for the education of the people, and as conscientious reasons compel us to use the State schools as little as possible, and to build and support our own system, which saves the public another £100,000 a year, it follows that nearly all the money contributed by Catholics for education is spent upon the education of other people's children, and that the users of the public schools are having their children educated much more cheaply at the expense of the believers in and supporters of private schools. Hence you see the utter absurdity of the statement that is so often made that the Catholic body are enjoying educational privileges at the expense of the general public. It is really the other way about, as anybody after a little reflection can see.

The opening of a new convent is not only a source of gratification to us, it will be a source of blessing to the whole community. For what is a convent but a residence for nuns, and nuns are ladies who voluntarily dedicate themselves to the service of God and of their fellow-creatures in a life of self-sacrifice. And in this life they find not only their own happiness, but they contribute much to the happiness of others. Besides devoting themselves to prayer and their own sanctification, they devote every spare moment to the service and welfare of their fellow-creatures. Some engage, and most successfully, in the arduous work of teaching, others nurse in hospitals, others take care of the aged and poor. And they all engage in their work, whatever it may be, with a courage and devotion and singleness of purpose not surpassed by any other section of the community. Their courage and utter disregard of all danger and even death is shown in time of war and epidemic. During the last four or five years our nuns all over the world have stood out in glorious fashion in the midst of much brutal selfishness and cowardice. Their praises have been on the lips of men of every nationality and belief. Though New Zealand was not itself in the theatre of war, it experienced one of the aftermaths of war—plague. And in the dark days of the end of last year, our New Zealand nuns, like their sisters all the world over, were every-

where in the midst of the sick and dying. Several of them died in the discharge of their heroic duty, and words of admiration and gratitude were uttered by men of every creed. A Presbyterian minister of Wellington stated publicly that during the epidemic the Catholic nuns were everywhere, and that many Presbyterians would be grateful for the rest of their lives to the nuns for having nursed them back to health. This is only a specimen of many similar tributes. Yes, in every great crisis that calls for courage and true charity as well as utter disregard in the face of death, you can always count on our nuns.

And in a world where there is so much wickedness and lack of moral restraint, where the disruption of the family is proceeding at such an alarming rate and domestic virtue is so rapidly decaying, as shown by the growing records of the divorce courts, it is good to have bodies of women consecrating themselves of their own free will to lives of chastity and self-denial and making of their convents centres of virtue and purity in the midst of so much that is adulterous and corrupt in our generation. Every additional convent that is opened in this land will be another barrier against the brute forces that ever lie below the surface in man, and will be a source of fresh blessings to the community. Yes, our convents are the abodes of truth and prayer, of purity, refinement, and culture, as well as of every Christian virtue. They are centres from which radiate the blessings of true education and of real heroic charity, especially in times of crisis and danger.

Hence I can congratulate not only the Catholics, but all the people of Wanganui on the opening of this fine new convent, which I know will be to this city an additional source of the blessings and advantages that I have just enumerated. Callers and visitors to this convent will find that Catholic nuns are the happiest and brightest of mortals, and that they have the knack of communicating some of their own happiness and brightness to all who come to them weary and sorrow-laden.

The Very Rev. Father O'Connell, S.M., said he wished in the first place to thank his Grace for his great kindness in coming at personal inconvenience to bless the convent and temporary school, and to show his practical interest in the work of Catholic education. His Grace had referred to the fact that this day was memorable because it happened to be the 62nd anniversary of the opening of the first Catholic church in Wanganui, which was built by the Rev. Father Pezant, S.M., and opened by the Right Rev. Bishop Viard, first Bishop of Wellington. The speaker hoped the Archbishop would pardon his reference to another anniversary. To-day was the sixth anniversary of the consecration of his Grace as Coadjutor-Archbishop of Wellington, and on behalf of priests and people he wished him many happy returns of this great day. Referring to the work that had been begun in the blessing and opening of the new convent and temporary school, Father O'Connell regretted the inclemency of the weather. The falling showers were symbolic of the blessings coming down from heaven upon their new work. When he purchased the Alexander property for £12,500, an amount which seemed enormous to most people, he was told that the place was far too valuable for school purposes. But his answer was that no place was too valuable for the education of a child. The amount paid for the property would not compensate for the loss of a soul, and all the money in the world would not satisfy for the loss of the proper training of a child. Personally he was satisfied that the Catholic body had received good value for their money, and he would not be tempted to dispose of the property at £50,000. No collection would be taken up for the payment of the purchase money, but he would give the people an early opportunity of building an up-to-date girls' school, and he could pay no better compliment to his Grace the Archbishop than to say that he would be glad to have a school just like the beautiful one opened on the previous Sunday in Wellington by his Grace. He announced, amidst applause, that he had received from a generous benefactor £1000 towards the

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