

## The Sisters of Mercy

(CONTRIBUTED.)

When old-time memories are being brought forth from the storehouse of the past and the progress of Catholicism in New Zealand is being reviewed in the *Tablet's* jubilee edition, a brief outline of the history of the Dunedin branch of the Mercy Order may not prove uninteresting to the readers.

On the morrow of his consecration the saintly and well-beloved Bishop, Right Rev. Dr. Verdon, confided to his life-long friend the Venerable Bishop Murray, of Maitland, his desire to introduce Sisters of Mercy into his episcopal city. Dr. Murray, having promised to use his influence in the matter, immediately on his return to Australia commenced negotiations with the Superioress of the Order in Maitland—Rev. Mother Stanislaus Kenny, a largehearted woman, deeply imbued with the Apostolic spirit of the Celtic race, who had already sent out filiations to the dioceses of Wilcannia, Armidale, and Wellington. Mother Stanislaus willingly acceded to Dr. Verdon's request for a foundation and from many volunteers seven were chosen. Mother Mary Kostka Kirby, whose administrative ability and religious zeal marked her out as the natural leader of the missionary band, was named superioress. Early in January, all preliminaries having been satisfactorily arranged, the Dunedin pioneers knelt for the last time at the altar before which they had vowed themselves to God, and looked their last on the Convent home endeared to them by many holy associations. On Sunday, January 17, 1897, they arrived in Dunedin where they were cordially welcomed by Dr. Verdon, his priests, the Dominican Nuns, and the Catholic laity.

Solemn High Mass was celebrated in the Basilica by the Bishop, a touching sermon was preached by Rev. P. M. Lynch, Adm., and the Sisters took possession of the little cottage Convent, prepared for their reception by the pastor Rev. P. O'Neill, there to begin for God's greater glory a work which has, like the mustard seed in the Gospel, prospered and spread wide its branches.

At the outset the Sisters trod the thorny path of adversity. Poverty and changed climatic conditions tried them. Death, too, visited the community, carrying off one of the devoted young pioneers, Sister Mary Bertrand McDonall, who breathed forth her pure, gentle soul to her Creator nine months after her arrival in Dunedin. So numerous were the promising aspirants who sought admission that in a short time the novitiate was well filled with postulants from the Green Isle of the West, from Australia, as well as from various parts of New Zealand—valiant generous souls all of them, ready to sacrifice themselves for the good cause they had espoused.

Towards the end of 1897 the Sisters of Mercy in the Gore parish, a community founded from Carrick-on-Suir, Ireland, in 1890, by Bishop Moran, amalgamated with South Dunedin. As early as May, 1898, the first branch Convent, St. Mary's, Mosgiel, was opened. Houses at Winton, Wrey's Bush, Riverton, and Alexandra followed in rapid succession, enabling the Sisters to bring the blessings of religious education to the children of the remotest districts of the diocese. In July, 1919, a house, St. Michael's, Mornington, was opened in the Cathedral parish. Dr. Verdon, at all times the unfailing friend of the Sisters, encouraged them in every undertaking. With true paternal solicitude the saintly Prelate watched over the expansion and progress of this, his first work in Dunedin, and before his lamented death he had the joy of seeing the wooden cottage Convent replaced by a splendid pile of brick building—Convent, College, Orphanage, and new primary schools; he saw that the Master's work was being done not alone in South Dunedin but in seven flourishing branch Convents.

The Sisters of Mercy took over St. Patrick's School in February, 1897. Three weeks afterwards St. Philomena's was opened with a roll number of ten. From the first the parochial school succeeded, its roll number increasing wonderfully from year to year. On the other hand the initial work at St. Philomena's College was necessarily limited. In the early years a few boarders were admitted, but owing to lack of accommodation many applicants had to be refused and no notable extension was possible until 1905, when it was decided to erect spacious collegiate buildings; since that year the college has grown and prospered beyond

the hopes of the most sanguine, until now it occupies a foremost place amongst the secondary schools of the Dominion. In providing recruits for the cloister St. Philomena's has been singularly blessed by God; indeed it is particularly in this that it has outpaced the hopes of its friends. Each year has seen the brightest and best pupils passing from the study hall to the novitiate. Many of its past pupils are to-day successfully working as professed religious not alone in the Southern diocese but in many parts of the Dominion and the Commonwealth. In the days of his earthly mission St. Patrick, we are told, poured forth his soul in thanksgiving to the Most High on seeing so many of the fairest daughters of Erin crowding round the Sanctuary to consecrate their young lives to God. Surely from His throne in Heaven, Patrick, under whose patronage the South Dunedin Convent is placed, must rejoice that that same blessing of religious vocation is the heritage of so many children of Irish exiles in this remote corner of the spiritual harvest-field, as it has been down the centuries in faithful Ireland and in every land where Irish emigrants have found a home.

## St. Vincent de Paul Orphanage

LAYING THE FOUNDATION STONE.

On Diamond Jubilee Day, 1897, five months after the arrival of the Sisters of Mercy in Dunedin, a noble work of charity was inaugurated. A large congregation filled the Basilica where Solemn High Mass was celebrated in the presence of his Lordship the Bishop by Right Rev. Monsignor O'Leary, with Rev. J. Ryan as deacon; Rev. P. O'Donnell, subdeacon; Right Rev. Monsignor Mackay and Rev. James Lynch assistants at the throne; Rev. P. Murphy, master of ceremonies; Rev. P. O'Neill, Rev. W. MacMullan, and Rev. F. Moloney were present in the sanctuary. The sermon on this occasion was preached by Very Rev. Dean Burke, who delivered an eloquent and scholarly discourse on Christian Charity.

Immediately after Mass a procession headed by the Hibernians in regalia marched to the site of the orphanage and Dr. Verdon solemnly blessed the corner-stone in accordance with the ritual prescribed by the Church.

Addresses were then delivered by Bishop Verdon, Mr. P. E. Nolan, and Mr. John Blancy. A collection was made when the sum of £210 was placed on the foundation-stone.

## THE FORMAL OPENING.

On the Feast of Our Lady of Mercy, 1898, the institution was formally opened, with solemn religious ceremony in the presence of a vast concourse of people. Pontifical High Mass was celebrated by his Lordship Dr. Verdon, the Rev. John Ryan being deacon, Rev. James Coffey, subdeacon, and Rev. H. W. Cleary, assistant priest. The music on the occasion was Gounod's "Messe Solennelle," which was rendered by St. Joseph's Cathedral Choir, assisted by a large orchestra. The French composer's great work, performed in a most capable manner, was a fitting accompaniment to the solemn ceremonies of the day. The solo parts were allotted to Miss Rose Blancy (soprano), Mr. P. Carolin (tenor), and Mr. J. MacKenzie (bass), Mr. O. Naumann was leader of the orchestra, Mr. F. Stokes organist, while Mr. A. Vallis acted as conductor. Archbishop Redwood preached the occasional sermon.

Immediately after Mass a procession consisting of the prelates, clergy, and members of the sodalities marched to the orphanage where the ceremony of blessing was performed by Dr. Verdon. Subsequently an address, presented to Archbishop Redwood on behalf of the Catholics of South Dunedin, was read by Mr. J. J. Marlow.

The noble work done in the orphanage in the twenty-five years that have gone by since its opening is well known. The good people of Dunedin have, all through the years, generously aided the Sisters in carrying on this laborious but fruitful work. To cope with the ever increasing need for more accommodation, preparations are now being made to erect extensive additional buildings.

## THE BOYS' ORPHANAGE.

In January, 1920, the Sisters of Mercy, aided by charitable monetary contributions of a few kind friends, purchased a beautiful property on Otago Peninsula, occupying