

MR CHAIRMAN, PRESIDENTS OF ASSOCIATE CHURCHES, DELEGATES,
CHURCH MEMBERS, AND VISITORS :

I am deputizing this morning for our Associate Church President Mrs Kennedy who is here in her capacity as General Secretary. Perhaps I should commence this Address of Welcome by giving you, by way of an introduction, a brief sketch of the Spiritualist Movement in New Zealand leading up to the enactment which recognized our Church as a religious body.

In 1866, Mrs J.E.Harris-Roberts, whose framed photograph hangs in the adjoining Church hall, arrived in New Zealand from England and became one of the pioneers of Spiritualism in this country. Some thirty years later she settled in Auckland where ^{she} conducted meetings as a result of which the Auckland Society For Spiritual Progress was founded.

During July, 1879 we received a visit from Mrs Emma Hardinge Britten, authoress, gifted orator and medium. She conducted her first meeting in the Garrison Hall in Dunedin which meeting was attended by some 1000 persons. Her Chairman on that occasion was the Hon. Robert Stout who was Attorney-General at the time later becoming Chief Justice and then Prime Minister, when he was knighted. At the time of the meeting he was President of the Spiritualist Association of New Zealand.

Mrs Britten's subject was "Spiritualism Vindicated And Clerical Slanders Refuted." I am sure that most if not all Spiritualists are aware that it was through her mediumship that our Seven Principles were given to us from spirit by the great Welsh reformer and humanitarian Robert Owen who had himself become a convinced Spiritualist in 1852 - some six years before his transition. Mrs Britten's visit to this country gave considerable impetus to the efforts of our pioneers in their dissemination of our truths.

During the early part of this century, we received visits from many mediums and these visits included such personalities as Dr Peebles and Dr Moorey. In 1900 Spiritualist meetings commenced in Christchurch. In Wellington such meetings were conducted by Mr W. McLean and gradually the truths of Spiritualistic phenomena and our philosophy spread throughout the country.

In 1907, most of the Churches federated into a National Association of Spiritualist Churches and were served not only by local psychics but by mediums from overseas either visiting or settling here. This Association was the forerunner of the present Spiritualist Church of New Zealand.

In 1919, between 900 and 1000 persons attended a meeting in the

Auckland Town Hall with Professor Clement Wragge in the chair. The meeting was held primarily for the purpose of replying publicly to a number of Christian ecclesiastics who had publicly denounced Spiritualism without having any semblance of knowledge of the subject.

In 1920, that great British pioneer Sir Arthur Conan Doyle paid this country a visit which aroused considerable interest. He visited a number of centres on a lecture tour.

From the 18th April to the 22nd April, 1924 the first exhibition of psychic art was held in New Zealand in Auckland and later, the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts accepted for hanging, a number of designs drawn through the mediumship of Mrs Bertha Sinclair Burns.

At the Annual Conference held in 1924, it was resolved to prepare a Bill for presentation to Parliament. It was compiled with the help of the Senior Stipendiary Magistrate Mr Poynton and was presented by Sir Alexander Young. The House was sympathetic and the Bill became an Act of Parliament No 2 of 1924 on the 22nd September, of that year. It was thus, 50 years ago, that The Spiritualist Church of New Zealand, of which we at this Conference table together with others seated in this building, are members, was accorded legal persona.

This was no mean feat because the climate in those days was such that our Movement was, inter-alia, regarded, as it still is to a lesser extent to-day, as one of his Satannic Majesty's numerous cults. I speak from personal experience as my father was a Spiritualist and even as a small boy in the early nineteen twenties I was aware that the term 'Spiritualism' was infra-dig.

If one browses through Spiritualist journals of the Victorian days one is appalled by the virulence of the assaults made on our Movement by clerics and 'devout' Christians. Whilst our early propagandists in New Zealand did not have to put up with the extent of the indignities suffered by their counterparts in the U.S.A and Britain, they could not have got off scot-free for moving and remaining outside the mainstream of Christian tradition.

Robert Owen once said that Spiritualism was destined to effect "the greatest moral revolution in the character and condition of the human race" and it is on that note that I welcome you all here on behalf of the President, Committee and Members of this Church to this our tenth meeting of the National Council in the fiftieth year of our incorporation.