

Correspondence.

(We are not responsible for the opinions of our Correspondents.)

To the Editor of the NEW ZEALAND TABLET.

SIR,—I have to ask of you, as a matter of common justice, that you should insert a reply to your leader of last week on the subject of Freemasonry.

In that leader you accuse us English Freemasons of being accomplices of those foreign Masons whose opinions you quote. Have no means of verifying the quotations you make, but admitting, for the sake of argument, their correctness, I beg to state that no one would condemn them more strongly and earnestly than the great body of Masons belonging to the English, Scotch, and American Lodges, who form, of themselves, the immense majority of Masons throughout the world. Perhaps no better proof of the non-complicity of English Masons in such opinions as you have quoted, can be given, than the character of the men who are our chiefs. Bishop Nevill himself is a Freemason, and was the Master of a lodge in England but a short time before he came out to New Zealand. No one who has the pleasure of a personal acquaintance with Bishop Nevill can doubt that he is a man of the highest honor and of deep religious feeling, and is an earnest and conscientious adherent of the church in which he holds high office. No one who knows him can believe, for one moment, that he is capable of belonging to an organisation which has for its objects the destruction of Christianity. He has proved his disinterested zeal in his work, by giving up a valuable living in a town where he won for himself the admiration and esteem of all classes and all sects, and coming out here at an enormous pecuniary sacrifice to work for nothing. His episcopal income is, to the disgrace of English Churchmen, next to nothing. It certainly would not pay his travelling expenses. Is it likely that such a man would invoke the aid of a body, guilty of the conduct you ascribe to Freemasons, in laying the foundation of a church?

The fact is, that you wholly misunderstand the position of the so-called higher orders of Masonry. Masonry proper includes three degrees—that of Entered Apprentice, Fellow-Craft, and Master-Mason. The Grand Lodge of England recognises no other—including in the last named, the degree of Royal Arch Mason. It has always, and does now, refuse to recognise in any way the so-called higher degrees. It has no more to do with them than it has with any other association into which Freemasons choose to enter. The principles and objects of Masonry, as thus defined, are not secret; they have been published in scores of books which are open to all the world. There is no concealment made of them. The charges given to the Master of a Lodge at his installation comprise them all, and are printed in every copy of the laws of the Grand Lodge. The charges given to the Masters of Lodges holding under the Scotch and American Grand Lodges are almost identical.

Many staunch and worthy Masons regard the so-called higher degrees as so much childish nonsense, and absolutely refuse to have anything to do with them. They are contrary to one of the most elementary principles of Masonry, namely, its universality. In Masonry proper, Jews and Mahomedans, Hindoos and Buddhists can join, but these so-called higher degrees exclude them. I know very little about them, but I believe they—or some of them—require a declaration of faith in the Christian religion.

It must be remembered that Masonic lodges in Italy were established at a period when Masonry was illegal in that country; they were, therefore, in direct opposition to the established governments. It was not unnatural, therefore, that their members should take advantage of their bond of brotherhood to plot against some of the most atrocious despots the world has ever been cursed with. Can it be a matter of wonder to Englishmen that educated Neapolitans, under King Bomba, should make use of Masonic lodges as a cloak for conspiring against his tyranny?

I submit that, even if all that your article states can be proven, it is most unfair to charge us, the English, Scotch, and American Masons, forming about nine-tenths of all the Masons in the world, with the guilt of a small minority whose tenets we absolutely disclaim, and whose so-called degrees our Grand Lodges refuse to recognise.

We are a very harmless set of very ordinary individuals in England, composed chiefly of the smaller tradespeople, with just a sprinkling of the educated classes, who when once initiated hardly ever attend a lodge except on some special occasion. Here there are not only tradespeople, but numbers of working men. In England the attendance at the lodges is pretty good because there is always something in the shape of "refreshment"—either a dinner or a supper. Some of the lodges are very famous for their feasts, and take good care that no "work" interferes with the sacred hour of dinner. Here so little interest is taken in Masonry that notwithstanding the hundreds who belong to the Order in Dunedin, it is extremely difficult to get a lodge meeting formed at the time for which it was summoned, and often half-an-hour elapses before the requisite officers can be got together, or substitutes for them provided. All this arises from the fact that we have no suppers except once a year, on St. John's Day—then we have a good attendance! And these are the people the Vatican thunders against, and Bishop Moran denounces! If the ecclesiastical authorities were worldly-wise they would adopt the policy of severely letting us alone. The great majority of Masons are secretly flattered to find themselves of so much importance, and are rather pleased than otherwise to hear themselves denounced as dangerous to society, to monarchy, and to religion. You may fancy the secret elation of Chobbles the butcher, or Smuffkins the grocer, when he finds a telegram in his "Penny Dreadful" stating that his Holiness the Pope has issued a fresh denunciation of the "sect" of Freemasons. He gets chaffed

about it by his brother tradesmen at their weekly club, and tries to assume an air of solemn mystery, and look as if he habitually carried a dagger in his breast coat pocket, and were prepared to emulate the deeds and death of Ravallac. All the while the good man never did anything more terrible in his lodge than express "heartily good wishes and welcome to our visiting brethren" with much slaughter of the Queen's English, and destruction of the letter "h."

You talk about "Secret Societies"! I would reply in the words of Canning's "Needy Knife-grinder":—

"Secrets! God bless you!
I've none to tell, Sir!"

The most amusing thing about Freemasonry is that you are perpetually thinking you are going to find out some wonderful secret, and when you have arrived at the highest degree of all—the Royal Arch—you find there are no secrets! No wonder that they are so carefully preserved! Of course there are certain signs and passwords which one is pledged upon honor not to reveal, but there is absolutely nothing else but what may be known to all the world. I am not arguing now in favor of the toleration of Masonry by the Pope. This is quite beyond my province. His Holiness has, of course, a perfect right to make what rules he thinks proper for the government of the Roman Catholic Church, and those who belong to that Church must obey those rules, or they have no right to complain about being excommunicated when living, or denied the funeral services of the Church when dead. It is perfectly childish to join a forbidden organisation, and then go whining about the world that the members of it are denied Christian burial. As they have made their bed, they must lie on it, and no one can with the slightest show of justice complain of being excluded from the rites and sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church because he is a Freemason. If the Pope chooses to say that no Catholic shall be a Fellow of the Zoological Society, I don't see that the Zoological Society has any ground of complaint, although it might have of remonstrance.

What I complain of is not that you say you shall not be a Freemason if you are a Catholic, but that you say you shall not be a Freemason and a Catholic—because the Freemasons are so wicked. I don't mean to say that I am not wicked, for I know that I am, but I am not wicked *qua* Freemason. Or as a priest of your Church once said to me when I was describing with great joy, how a Protestant friend of mine (an Englishman of course) wanted to see the procession on Corpus Christi Day in a Catholic country without taking off his hat, and kneeling when the Host passed; and very properly had his hat knocked off his head, and was pushed down on his knees by the indignant crowd—the priest said, in his tenderest tones, "Poor fellow! we must remember that he acted as he did, not in his character as a Protestant, but in his character as an *ass*!"—I am, &c.,

Dunedin, Jan. 31, 1877.

A ROYAL ARCH MASON.

P.S.—I omitted to state that the Grand Lodge of England forbids the wearing in any lodges under its jurisdiction of any "honorary or other jewel or emblem which shall not appertain to, or be consistent with these degrees which are recognised and acknowledged by, and are under the control of the Grand Lodge as part of free and ancient Masonry." These degrees are, as stated above—Entered Apprentice, Fellow-Craft, and Master Mason.

THE POPE'S HUMOR.

One of the ablest American journalists, Mr. J. R. G. Hassard, a Catholic, and associate editor of the 'New York Tribune,' has been recently received by the Holy Father. The Holy Father appeared to be wonderfully well and strong. Mr. Hassard has the following good sayings to attribute to the Pope:—"There is a photograph of the Pope in the shop windows, representing him under a broad and most unbecoming red hat. He does not like the picture, and when a lady asked for his autograph on a copy of it, he wrote, '*Nolite timere, ego sum*,'—'Fear not, it is I.' During the French occupation of Rome he was obliged to request the recall of a French Colonel on account of a gross affront to the Papal authority. Colonel ———, who seems not to have been a very wise man, surprised the Pope by going to the palace to take leave, and improving the opportunity to ask a great many small favors. No allusion was made to the unpleasant circumstances which led to his recall, but when the Colonel presented a picture, and asked for an autograph, the Pope wrote the words which Christ used to Judas in the garden: '*Amice, ad quid venisti*?'—'Friend, wherefore hast thou come hither?' The delighted Colonel showed the picture to all his acquaintances as a souvenir of the Pontiff's kind regard until somebody cruelly translated the Latin for him."

Bishop Gross related a little anecdote showing the Pope's cheerfulness and appreciation of a joke: "I hear, Monsignor," said the Pope, "that some good people in your country were afraid that because I made the Archbishop of New York a cardinal, I was about to go over to America and make myself a king!" "Certainly, Holy Father, that was believed by some people. Indeed, I myself met some very good Protestant ladies who were very anxious on the subject; and on one occasion they said to me, 'what a dreadful thing this cardinal business was,' and 'how foolish the Pope was to think of making himself a king in Washington,' I said to them, 'was it not possible that it might be a good thing?' They replied, 'O, Bishop, and you an American citizen!' I answered, 'But, don't you see, my good friends, now I am nobody. If the Pope makes himself king you see I'll be somebody—a power behind the throne, in fact. Why, then I can give your husbands fine fat offices.' "When I told this to the Pope," said the bishop, "he laughed outright, and said that banter of that kind was the most effective answer to such nonsense."