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MESSAGE OF POPE LEO XIII. TO THE N.Z. TABLET

Pergant Directores et Scriptores New Zealand Tablet, Apostolica Benedictione confortati, Religionis et Justitiæ causam promovere per vias Veritatis et Pacis.
Die 4 Aprilis, 1900.

LEO XIII., P.M.

TRANSLATION.—Fortified by the Apostolic Blessing, let the Directors and Writers of the New Zealand Tablet continue to promote the cause of Religion and Justice by the ways of Truth and Peace.
April 4, 1900.

LEO XIII., Pope.

Current Topics

Attempt at a State Creed

'It's a real splendid world,' said old Eben Holden. 'God's fixed it up so ev'ry body can hev a good time if they'll only hev it. Once I heard uv a poor man 'at hed a bushel o' corn give tew him. He looked up kind o' sad an' ast n they wouldn't please shell it. Then they tuk it away. God's gi'n us happiness in the ear, but he ain't a-goin t' shell it fer us.'

God has 'fixed up' Australia so that a reasonable mortal may find in it a reasonable amount of happiness—in the ear. But there has ever been a knot of irreful malcontents whose little souls are soured because all creeds have (nominally at least) enjoyed equality before the law, and the spirit of religious ascendancy finds little favor among the free institutions of these new countries. Repeated attempts—some direct, others indirect, some open, some by underground and devious ways—have been made to establish a State Church in Australia. The latest attempt belongs to the round-about and side-wind series. It took place recently in Melbourne, when some banners presented by the King were blessed and consecrated by a number of Protestant clergymen according to what Archbishop Carr correctly describes as a 'distinctively Protestant form of prayer' which was 'drawn up without the concurrence or knowledge of any Catholic representative.' The Commonwealth military authorities appear (says the same distinguished Prelate) to have 'studiously ignored' the Catholic body in the matter of the appointment of a Catholic chaplain. For several years—ever since the Commonwealth became an accomplished fact—there has not been so much as a solitary Catholic chaplain in the Australian forces. Only Protestant clergymen (Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Methodists) are permitted to minister in things spiritual to the men that constitute the first and second and last line of Australia's defences. The latest performance of the military authorities affords fresh and flagrant evidence of their disregard for the denominational equality which is (on paper) supposed to be one of the proud distinctions of United Australia. The incident will, no doubt, be urged as a precedent by those who desire to see Anglicanism recognised as the State religion. And years hence, when our toes are turned towards the roots of the daisies, why should not this bit of departmental blundering be appealed to by some Federal Premier, with ambition to

be a 'Supreme Head,' as historical testimony of his sacred and inherent right to formulate prayers and draw up Orders of Service and impose them upon the various creeds within the seas that wash the shores of the Commonwealth?

Englishmen are credited by their Gallic neighbors with taking their pleasures sadly. Throughout the ceremony of blessing the King's banners there ran a vein of high comedy of which the participants seem to have been solemnly and absurdly unconscious. It was what Shakespeare calls a humorous sadness. A Presbyterian and a Methodist military chaplain took part with the Anglican celebrant in the blessing. Which led Cardinal Moran to point out to a representative of the 'Catholic Press' where (to use the late A. Ward's words) 'the failure came in.' 'Another feature of the ceremony,' said he, 'is that it appears to be a parody on religion to invite representatives of various Churches to unite with those who profess that they have no power to impart blessing, and have no power to bless, and have no blessing to give. I think,' added his Eminence, 'the system pursued in Germany is the proper one. When the Kaiser presents colors to a regiment he has them brought to the church with solemnity, and there they are duly blessed. He then presents them in due form to the regiment. When our own King Edward presents banners and they arrive in Australia it seems a strange thing that before they are presented to the regiment the Premier thinks it necessary to exorcise them.' It is better to prevent the demon of religious ascendancy sneaking his head into the body politic than to have to exorcise him later on. We are of the number of those who regard

'The cause of Christ and civil liberty
As one, and moving to a glorious end.'

But its conquering chariot-wheels may receive passing checks in its onward way, or creak along with slow and toilful grind where it might glide with swift and easy run. 'Obsta principiis' ('resist the beginnings') is a good rule of personal conduct in many of the incidents of daily life. It is likewise a good watchword as against the obscurantists who try to block the onward progress of the conjoined 'cause of Christ and civil liberty.' In our own country the chief, and practically the only, effort to establish and endow a State creed is that which is being made in the interests of the indolent clerics of the Bible-in-schools League. Those who value equality before the law should watch that retrograde movement with their eye-balls skinned.

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