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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

Divorce Legislation

Our over-accommodating legislators are once more busy planing, sandpapering, and greasing the slippery slope that leads disgruntled or misfit wedded couples to the divorce mill. All such legislation against the unity and sanctity of family life starts on the strange assumption that matrimony is a temporary contract, terminable (to all intents and purposes) by whim, temper, or mutual arrangement; that the need of patience and mutual forbearance can be legislated out of the married state; and that when white-gloved couples stand before the altar and solemnly promise before God and man that they will cleave to each other, for better or worse, till death does part them, they are deliberately lying, or taking their words in a Pickwickian or non-natural sense. In either of these cases there would be no true marriage. Samuel Butler, in his 'Hudibras,' gives some quaint reminders to impatient and ill-assorted pairs who find their self-inflicted woe 'beyond enduring.' He says:—

'Tis of their own procuring.
As spiders never seek the fly,
But leave him, of himself, t'apply,
So men are by themselves employ'd,
To quit the freedom they enjoy'd,
And run their necks into a noose,
They'd break 'em after, to break loose.
As some, whom death would not depart,
Have done the feat themselves, by art.'

Some people, like the French cynic, find that it 'gets on their nerves' to have to try, day by day, to be agreeable to the same person. Generally speaking, those that by temper or temperament are unfitted to bear the grave trials of the married state, should take Punch's historic advice, and adorn a single life with so much virtue as they can attain. One of the curious and instructive features of the discussion on Mr. Laurenson's Divorce Act Amendment Bill (now before the House) is this: that Mr. Heke, a Maori Member, has given expression to more correct ideas as to the sanctity of the marriage bond than the great majority of his co-legislators of the 'superior' Pakeha race. He, at least, had the grace to 'oppose the Bill as a whole, objecting to any interference with the solemnity of the marriage tie.' And he is right. For the pagan ideals canonised in our divorce legislation tend of themselves to shatter domestic peace, to destroy family life, and to induce a form of moral degeneracy that would do discredit to the civilisation of Liberian negroes. Which is a hard saying, but true.

'Dirty Foes'

Even in self-defence decent people draw the line somewhere. They do not, for instance, stop to argue at fisticuffs with a drunken brawler, nor do they exchange verbal compliments with a foul-mouthed blackguard that volleys coarse brutalities from the vantage-point of a street-corner. These are left to the uncovenanted mercies of the p'leeceman or to the cat-o'-nine-tails of Decent Public Opinion, Esq., J.P. For this reason we cannot accept the invitation of a correspondent to enter into a discussion with a lewd fellow of the baser sort who has recently been trailing his controversial coat-tails and cutting the customary July capers on the Donnybrook Green of an Orange platform. His war-whoops and mentally drunken antics have had a disquieting effect upon the mind of our correspondent, who wonders why his local clergy don't descend into the arena and give the combative ex-cobbler—or whatever he may have been—the father and mother of a controversial 'batin' for his coarse attacks on Catholic womanhood. Good old Samuel Butler supplies a bit of wisdom which fits such cases to a nicety. He makes Hudibras say to his squire Ralpho—the Sancho Panza of the piece:—

'Quoth he. That man is sure to lose
That fouls his hands with dirty foes;
For where no honor's to be gained,
'Tis thrown away in being maintained.
But as those poltroons that fling dirt,
Do but defile, but cannot hurt;
So all the honor they have won,
Or we have lost, is much at one.'

A good deal of this malodorous July oratory—especially the clerical part of it—comes from the lips of men who, like Oldham's Ugly Parson, have 'dined on assafoetida'—fed on the swinish garbage that (like the unclean romances of Maria Monk, Margaret Shepherd, and other such-like gaol-birds and impostors) is industriously circulated in the lodges.

Don Quixote was the Spanish Hudibras—but cast in a much nobler mould. He took a line somewhat similar to that of his later English counterpart in his dealings with 'dirty foes.' 'Friend Sancho,' said he to his squire Panza, 'for the future, whenever thou perceivest us to be any ways abused by such inferior fellows, thou art not to expect that I should offer to draw my sword against them, for I will not do it in the least. No; do thou draw and chastise them as thou thinkest fit. But if any knight come to take their part, then will I be sure to step in between thee and danger.'