

THE NEW ZEALAND TABLET

TWENTY-NINTH YEAR OF PUBLICATION.

VOL. XXIX.—No. 6.

DUNEDIN: THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 1901.

PRICE 6D

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.

CONCERNING CENTENARIANS.

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES once sagely remarked that every one who lives long enough catches old age. One Angus McDonald, a late Canterbury (N.Z.) resident, apparently caught a good supply of it before he resigned
His faded form
To waste and worm

a few days ago. A Press Association telegram in last Saturday's daily papers runs as follows: 'Angus McDonald, an old shepherd, died to-day at the age of 105 years.' The brief message which tells of the passing of the ancient Scottish shepherd reminds us that during the past twelve months the N.Z. TABLET has recorded the deaths of quite a considerable group of persons whose years passed five score. Among the number were the following: One Kennealy—the youngest of thirteen children—who passed away at Royton (near Oldham, England) at the ripe age of 110 years; Henry McCloskey, an Antrim man, who had sufficient *stamen vite* to tramp two and a half miles some months ago to secure his voting paper; G. Ryan, who died at Ballyhannis, near Cashel, after having seen the storm and sunshine of 112 years; Mrs. Brigid R. Riordan, who went Beyond at the age of 110—and of whom our correspondent wrote: 'As she neither smoked tobacco nor drank spirituous liquors, her doctors were at a loss to account for her early death'; Michael O'Shea, whose soul and body recently dissolved a partnership that had lasted 106 years; John Obispo, a Catholic Indian, of Huasteca, Mexico, whose birth is set down in the parish register in the year 1770, and whose death took place when he was 130 years old; Patrick Hayes, who saw the French fleet in Bantry Bay in 1796, and whose days were cut short at Cardiff after he had seen 109 winters and summers. In a recent issue we gave particulars of three other centenarians who within the past few months were said to be still living at the same great South Welsh port.

HOW LONG?

BUFFON, Haller, Hufeland, and Heller, basing their theory on the analogy of brute creation, stoutly maintain that, barring accidents, every Jack and Jill of our race should approach or touch the fifth score of summers before making their final tumble down the sloping hill of life. Buffon's calculation was based on the proportion which duration of life bears, in all animals, to duration of years of growth. 'A dog attains full growth in two years, which he can multiply by five or six in his term of life. The horse, full grown at four years, can live six or seven times as long—i.e., twenty-five or twenty-six years. On the same principle,' argues Buffon, 'man, fourteen years in growing, can live six or seven times that term, or to ninety or a hundred years.' The later theory is that an animal lives five times as long as it grows. But different kinds of beasts vary so much in this respect that no absolute rule can be laid down. The raven, the grey parrot, the eagle, and certain other feathered bipeds are probably *hors concours* in the longevity contest with the bipeds that are featherless. 'Ordinarily speaking,' says one authority on the subject, 'a man requires fully twenty-five years to attain his complete growth and full development. Therefore, by all the laws of analogy, he should

—barring accidents—retain within his mortal frame the 'vital spark of heavenly flame' for about 125 years. So say your physiologist and naturalist. 'Almost all those kinds of deaths,' they maintain, 'which take place before the hundredth year are brought on artificially—that is, by disease or accident. And it is certain,' they add, 'that the far greater number of men die an unnatural death, and that not above one in three thousand attains an age of over a hundred years.'

A writer in *Health* pointed out last year that 'within the past sixty years the average of life in Great Britain has been increased by about ten years.' This prolongation of vital energy is due to better ventilation, improved sanitation, and the use of more wholesome food. Theorists may theorise till their hair falls off and their eyes grow dim. But the royal Psalmist's ordinary limit of life duration—three score and ten—still holds good despite the plumber and the bacteriologist. Few nowadays—says Oliver Wendell Holmes—climb the white summit of the Mont Blanc of even four score. At sixty, men come within range of the rifle-pits, and at sixty-three, at the beginning of the grand climacteric, nature begins to administer her kindly anodyne. 'More and more freely,' adds Holmes, 'she gives it, as the years go on, to her children, until, if they last long enough, every faculty is benumbed, and they drop off quietly into sleep under its benign influence.' Chesterfield expresses the same thought in a different way. In 1765—eight years before his death—he wrote: 'I feel a gradual decay, though a gentle one; and I think I shall not tumble, but slide gently, to the bottom of the hill of life. When that will be I neither know nor care, for I am very weary.' Nowadays the downhill slope is smoothed and sand-papered by the newspaper, pebble lenses, slippers, easy-chairs, the 'divine weed,' and artificial grinders. Barzillai knew none of them; the Countess of Desmond and Old Parr very few. Their last long toboggan must have been a bit comfortless and monotonous.

A DASH of romance and of marvel surround, as with a halo, the study of longevity.
MORE CENTENARIANS. Juvenal, the Roman satirist, asks: '*Longa dies igitur quid contulit?*' (What is the use of a long life?)

When old Mary Campbell was asked by Sir John Sinclair if she desired to live longer, she exclaimed with right good heartiness: 'Not an hour! not an hour!' But the usual experience is that people cling to dear life like an Anglo-Saxon to an Irish jaunting car or a Member of our House of Representatives to a seat which is equally insecure. Says Dryden:—

Strange cozenage! None would live past years again,
Yet all hope pleasure in what yet remain,
And from the dregs of life think to receive
What the first sprightly running could not give.

Hence the efforts of alchemist and physician to lengthen life's day. Bacon fancied he found the elixir of life in a salmagundi of gold, coral, vipers, rosemary, lignum aloes, 'the bone of a stag's heart,' and some other rare and valuable 'properties.' Lord Verulam sought it in liquid gold, or 'golden oyle'; others in a diet of pullets fattened on vipers, and in philters and charms to scare off death or crack the blade of his scythe. And in 1513 the aged warrior Ponce de Leon

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