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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.

Azil 4, 1900.

LEO XIII, Pope

Current Topics

The Financial Statement.

The Financial Statement which was delivered by the Acting Colonial Treasurer on Tuesday of last week has been remarkably well received throughout the country. Sir Joseph Ward has something of the Gladstonian gift for making even a Budget interesting and it is admitted on all hands that this year's Statement is as clear as it is comprehensive, and is besides thoroughly honest and straightforward. The present financial position of the country as disclosed in the Statement, is entirely satisfactory. Although the expenditure during 1901-02 was exceptionally heavy the Treasurer is able to show a net surplus of £270,486, and even the most hostile of the critics have not ventured to suggest that this surplus is fictitious or even exaggerated. Moreover, apart from the surplus, the revenue returns themselves demonstrate the continued buoyancy of our finances. The revenue proper of last year exceeded six millions, the highest in the history of the Colony, the actual figures being £6,053,070 1s 6d, or £234,451 in excess of the estimate, and £200,364 9s 6d in excess of the revenue received during the preceding year. This, Sir Joseph pointed out, has been attained not only without extra taxation, but in spite of the concessions made in Customs duties, in railway rates and fares, and in the adoption of penny postage of letters. Such an expansion certainly is, as he opines, satisfactory evidence that our people are prosperous and our trade is flourishing.

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But it is to the financial proposals for the future that the special interest of the Budget attaches, and it is in this portion of the Statement alone that there is any possible room for serious criticism. These proposals include the authorising of a new loan of £1,750,000, to be allocated for the following purposes: For the construction and completion of trunk and other lines of railways, £750,000; for the construction of roads, tracks, and bridges, £450,000; for the cost of additional rolling stock and the relaying of permanent ways, £450,000; for the purpose of developing the goldfields, £50,000; for telegraph extension, £50,000. The grounds on which Sir Joseph Ward justifies this proposal are: First, that the works for which the loan is asked are absolutely necessary; and secondly, that the works are for the most part reproductive, and this being so, and our revenue being buoyant and increasing, the increased charges can easily be incurred without in any way imposing further taxation upon the people. A loan proposal usually offers a splendid opening for Opposition attack and criticism, but on this occasion the force and cogency of the Treasurer's facts and reasoning are generally admitted, and beyond drawing attention in a general way to the increase in the public indebtedness of the Colony, the critics have practically nothing to say. It is safe to say that, large as the amount is, the loan will be agreed to by the House with scarcely a single dissident.

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Although the question of the new loan naturally bulks most largely in the public mind there are other proposals in the Statement that are very well worth noting. It is proposed to reduce the mortgage tax by 25 per cent., a proposal which,

while directly benefiting the mortgagee will tend also to benefit the mortgagor by easing the local interest market. Further railway reductions are also promised upon wool freights and passenger fares, also in the rates for small lots of farm produce, as butter, cheese, eggs, bacon, poultry, and honey; in the minimum of artificial manures from 30cwt to 5cwt; and in the extension of the period of free returns of stud horses, cattle, and sheep, these concessions representing a reduction in rates of at least £40,000 per annum. Passenger rates on the railway are also to be further reduced, but the reductions will only apply to distances of over 50 miles. An important and much-needed measure of relief is to be given to what are known as our 'back-blocks' settlers. It is proposed to introduce a Bill this session providing that in all future disposal of bush lands on settlement conditions the selectors, upon payment of first half year's rent, will not be called upon to make further payments of rent for the period of from two to four years of their leases, according to the expense of clearing, the rents remitted being capitalised and interest charged thereon for a period of ten years from the date that the rents became payable. This is undoubtedly a step in the right direction, and the concession granted will help to materially lighten the very heavy difficulties with which our bush farmers have to contend.

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Altogether it must be admitted that the Acting-Treasurer's Statement fully deserves the general commendation it has received. Its proposals are progressive without being reckless, and if the policy it outlines is fairly and judiciously carried out it gives every promise of helping to improve the condition of all classes in the community and of materially assisting to maintain our general welfare and prosperity.

The Dangers of Spiritualism.

The subject of Spiritualism has more than once been fully dealt with in these columns, and its fraudulent character and baneful effects have been clearly pointed out. It is interesting, however, to have the testimony on this point of those who have themselves had extensive personal experience of actual spiritual phenomena, and this is furnished in a little volume just published in London, entitled *The Dangers of Spiritualism*, written by a member of the Society for Psychical Research. It is a carefully written record of actual experiences and of the conclusions to which they lead an honest and candid inquirer on the subject. As the result of his investigations the author is convinced that at least a percentage of the alleged spiritualistic phenomena are undoubtedly real, but that the overwhelming weight of evidence goes to show that they are the work of bad, and not, as the Spiritualists claim, of good spirits. He declares roundly that both amateur and professional mediums are 'possessed,' and gives numerous instances of the tremendous hold and debasing influence which the controlling spirit has upon its victim. It will suffice to cite one rather remarkable example:

It is stated by the author that the well-known medium, Home, determined to give up spiritism and to become a Catholic; that the spirits ridiculed the idea of one upon whom they had acquired so firm a hold escaping from their grip; but that they had told him they would leave him for a year, and that at the end of that time he would be again under their influence. 'Home,' says the author, 'was received into the

Hancock's "BISMARCK" LAGER BEER.

NEW ZEALAND'S
NEW INDUSTRY.