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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

The Melbourne Movement

The prediction which we made a fortnight ago that the attempt which was being made in Melbourne to establish a new Protestant organisation would only bring about an era of religious strife and bitterness shows signs of being only too rapidly fulfilled. The proposed preliminary meeting, to which we then referred, was duly held and from the full reports appearing in our exchanges we learn that it was marked by scenes of intolerance and disorderliness that were most discreditable and were themselves a sufficient indication of the real motive and spirit that is at the bottom of this movement. Before the first resolution was proposed the Rev. Dr. Rentoul, one of the best known leaders of Presbyterianism in Victoria, pointed out that according to the circular the meeting had been called to consider the proposal to form a league and asked whether he would be allowed to criticise the resolutions and discuss the proposal. The chairman's answer, and the account of the subsequent proceedings, may be given in the words of the *Melbourne Argus* whose report is as follows:

The Acting Chairman: No; this is a meeting of sympathisers (Loud 'Hear, hear.')

The Rev. Dr. Rentoul: According to the circular, the meeting is called to consider the proposal to form a league. Will not those who oppose such a proposal be permitted to discuss it? (Uproar, and cries of 'No, no.')

The Acting Chairman: No; the meeting is of sympathisers with the proposal. (Hear, hear.)

The Rev. Dr. Rentoul: I claim my right to speak. ('Boo-hoo.')

I have done more for Protestantism than any man here. (Cries of 'No, no,' and uproar.)

A Voice: You're a pro-Boer. (Cheers.)

Chorus of Voices: Pro-Boer! Pro-Boer! Pro-Boer!

Another Voice: Give the man fair play. (Boo-hoo.)

A Third Voice: Go back to Pretoria. (Cheers and disorder.)

The Rev. Dr. Rentoul (gesticulating and endeavoring to make himself heard) We are citizens whether we are Protestants or not, and I maintain — (Uproar.)

The Acting Chairman rose, and both he and the Rev. Dr. Rentoul endeavored to address the meeting simultaneously. The voice of neither, however, was audible for some seconds.

At length after further continued uproar and disorder Dr. Rentoul retired from the meeting amid loud cries of 'Hear, hear,' and 'That's right.' The same intolerant spirit was shown even to the speakers appointed to propose the resolutions whenever they ventured to make the faintest and feeblest admission in favor of Catholics. Thus when the Rev. Dr. Fitchett remarked that he 'did not blame the Catholics for exercising their vote according to their lights' he was, according to the *Argus*, greeted with cries of dissent and the same reception was accorded to another speaker's apparently safe assertion that he 'knew personally good men among the Catholics.' In a word although the one or two well-known clerics who were present saved the meeting from utter disreputableness it was abundantly evident that the gathering was Orangite through and through, and it was marked by the vulgarity, intolerance and rowdiness for which that discredited fraternity are notorious.

The resolutions adopted at the meeting are, on the surface at least, sufficiently harmless. The first proposed by the Rev. Dr. Fitchett, was originally couched in these terms:—

'That this meeting resolves to form a league for the purpose of meeting and counteracting the Roman Catholic influence on legislation and administration of this State, without in any way interfering with the Roman Catholic religious position.'

After some discussion, however, the reference to the Catholic Church was struck out and the resolution was finally accepted in the following form:—

'That this meeting resolve to form a league for the purpose of organising the Protestant vote and influence, so as to give them due weight in the legislation and administration of the country.'

It was further resolved:—'That in addition to the signatures of the circular letter, all present who desired it might be enrolled as members of the league, and that an executive committee be appointed to draw up a constitution, and to suggest action with a view to secure large membership, this committee to report to a future meeting.'

The only noteworthy point about these resolutions is the fact that in the first and principal resolution there is not a word about religious instruction in State schools, the very question which was supposed to be the origin and justifying occasion of the new organisation. If, as the resolution would indicate, it is only a general Protestant League that is required, this exists already in the shape of the Protestant Alliance and the Orange Society, so that if the alleged special reason for the existence of the new organisation is taken away, the organisation stands forth as a self-confessed excrescence or nullity. It is, as Dr. Rentoul said, as good as dead, and foredoomed to certain failure.

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But though the organisation as an organisation must fail, the bitter and offensive spirit shown at its inception may, and probably will, work much mischief. In the first place it has, as Dr. Rentoul said, effectually killed for a long time to come the hope of getting any practical solution of the problem regarding religious education in the State schools by means of a kindly large-minded arrangement with the Catholic Church. In the second place, its inevitable tendency is to still further separate Catholic and Protestant, to divide them into two hostile camps, and to give a serious set-back to the growing spirit of mutual charity and good-will. The whole movement is entirely opposed to the spirit of true citizenship, and it certainly ought to be, as it no doubt will be, heartily condemned by intelligent laymen of all classes and creeds.

Scotchmen and the 'Sabbath.'

It was, if we remember rightly, Max O'Rell who defined a Scotchman as a man who 'keeps the Sabbath and everything else he can lay his hands on'; but however much the latter half of the definition may still apply, the amount of truth in the former portion of it is a fast diminishing quantity. In the matter of Sunday desecration the Scotland of to-day is, according to the Edinburgh correspondent of the *Otago Daily Times*, in a very bad way indeed. In his last letter to the *Times* this writer gives a woful account of his countrymen's falling away from grace in this respect. 'Scots,' he declares, 'who revisit their native land after a prolonged absence speak