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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.

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., P.M.

LEO XIII., Pope

Current Topics

Progress or Stagnation.

It was no great loss to the country that the Financial Debate, which was expected to last at least a fortnight, abruptly and unexpectedly fizzled out. Of the speeches that were delivered, the vast majority were hopelessly commonplace and uninteresting. Sir W. Russell alone of the Opposition members made any pretence at a serious attack on the Budget, and even his criticism was obviously more partisan and conventional than the expression of real and genuine feeling. The two principal points made by the quasi-leader of the Opposition were, first, that the Government had departed from the 'self-reliant' non-borrowing policy originally laid down by Mr. Ballance; and second, that the Government were adding to the public indebtedness at such a rate that we would soon be brought to a condition of national bankruptcy. The points were easily disposed of. In answer to the first, it was pointed out that owing to the inauguration of the Advances to Settlers and Lands for Settlement schemes, the circumstances of the Colony had changed since Mr. Ballance's time and borrowed money had become a necessity, though by far the greater part of it was directly reproductive. As to the second, Sir W. Russell, in common with all the other Opposition speakers, conveniently ignored the fact that there are a large number of half-completed railways in the Colony that can be soon converted into good paying lines by either being completed or by being constructed up to a given point, but that this work cannot possibly be done except on borrowed money. In the Opposition were to boldly declare that they would be willing that all public works should be allowed to remain as they are rather than that we should continue further borrowing, their attack on the Government might be entitled to some weight, but they have not done this, and under the circumstances everyone must feel that there is a certain amount of unreality and sham about the criticism they have offered.

For undoubtedly that is the crux of the whole question which the country is now called upon to face—Are our public works to remain at a standstill and the country to be allowed to stagnate, or are we to make an effort to continue the live vigorous progressive policy of recent years? The position was put very plainly by Sir Joseph Ward in a speech delivered just prior to the opening of the Financial Debate. Speaking at a gathering of journalists in Wellington, Sir Joseph Ward said that the Colony was now passing through a very important epoch in its history, and legislators were face to face with the question of whether the Colony was to be kept going ahead and to maintain its prosperity of the last few years, or whether it was the wish of the people that it should 'go slow.' What he desired was that the position should be fairly stated and that there should be no hypocritical pleadings for economy on the one hand, and clamorous demands for the prosecution of public works such as making roads and railways in various districts on the other. Sir Joseph Ward gave it as his opinion that it would be a ruinous thing for the Colony to adopt a 'go-slow' policy at the present juncture, because to stop or curtail its development would lead to a wave of depression throughout New Zealand.

There have been plenty of 'hypocritical pleadings for economy' on the part of members of the Opposition, but no one has pointed to any one of the works for which the loan moneys are allocated as being unnecessary, and if the works are thus really necessary and are to be carried out at all, the country may as well make up its mind to it that it can only be done on borrowed money.

The Pope, the United States, and the Philippines.

A short time ago on the suggestion, it is said, of President Roosevelt, Mr. Taft, Governor of the Philippines, was despatched to Rome to hold a conference with the Vatican with a view to settling the difficult question of the friars' lands. The conference is now proceeding but as is usual in such cases the news supplied to us by the cable agents as to the progress of the negotiations is not very satisfactory. A few days ago we were informed that the Cardinals who represented the Vatican had declined to accept Governor Taft's proposals and that negotiations had been broken off. Almost the very next day we have another cable to the following effect: 'The Daily Chronicle' states that the Pope is intensely displeased at the Cardinals' conduct in the negotiations regarding the Philippines, and has over-ruled their decision. He declares that the American demand is reasonable, and has expressed readiness to treat with Mr. Taft, Governor of the Philippines, personally in the matter.' Obviously, the wise thing for Catholics here to do is to receive the cabled items with even more than the conventional grain of salt and to take nothing as final until full and definite information comes to hand by mail.

In the meantime it may be interesting to recall the position in which the matter stood when it was decided to despatch Governor Taft to interview the Vatican. The American Government had then made an offer of seven million dollars to the religious Orders in the Philippines for their property in the islands but this offer could not be accepted except with the approval of the Holy See. It was to secure the Pope's acceptance and ratification of this proposal that formed the main object of Governor Taft's visit to Rome. So far the Pope had been unwilling to authorise the sale of this property lest such action should be twisted by the Church's enemies into a condemnation of the friars themselves. The charges made against the Orders had been fully investigated by Archbishop Chappelle who found only a very small percentage among them worthy of censure. The friars have, on the admission of even Protestant travellers, done a magnificent work for Christianity and civilisation in the Philippines, and it would be cruelty and base ingratitude if they were sent out of the islands with even so much as the suspicion of a stain upon their good name. Fortunately Leo XIII. has the gifts of a statesman and diplomatist as well as of an administrator and it may be confidently anticipated that his exceptional tact, courtesy, and ability, will enable a satisfactory settlement to be arrived at.

In addition to the main question as to the disposal of the friars' lands some other pressing problems will also be likely to come up for discussion at this conference and notably the present position of the schools in the Philippines. The avowed policy of the American Government was to introduce a 'non-