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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 Justitiae causam promovere per vias Veritatis et Pacis.

LEO XIII, P.M.

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., Pope.

The New Zealand Tablet

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 1925.

AN ARTISTIC CONTROVERSIALIST

THE purpose of controversy ought to be the manifestation of truth; its purpose, as it is often engaged in, is to submerge truth, defeat an opponent, injure a cause, feed a prejudice, or gain a personal triumph. It is characteristic of many of those who attack the Catholic Church that they employ tricks of literary legerdemain to beguile trusting readers, and positively besiege public opinion with an army of spectacular half-truths and convincing misrepresentations. The last number to hand of the *Dublin Review* contains an article by Father Leslie Walker, S.J., which provides some illuminating examples of the astounding adroitness and artistic guile which seem to be the chief stock-in-trade of Mr. Coulton, Medievalist and Don of St. John's College, Cambridge. For sixteen years, Father Walker tells us, Mr. Coulton has been throwing down gauntlets to Catholic priests, publicly challenging them to come out and break a lance with him in full view of a fair-minded and enlightened public. When the call came to Father Walker he responded to it, only to discover that Mr. Coulton had no intention of keeping the conditions of controversy which he himself had laid down, for he violated them at the outset and then proceeded to distort facts and suppress judiciously those portions of historical references which would destroy his case. Such an opponent is not out for truth: he is out merely for scalps.

It is in cases like this we see what a petty thing is public opinion; for while Father Walker's case as presented by him will bear the searching scrutiny of the trained eye, it is almost certain that the casual reader will miss most of the more important though less apparent points. On the other hand, the shallow artifices of Mr. Coulton will be

hailed as the soundest of logic by the man-in-the-street. That is why Mr. Coulton is so anxious to discuss before the public subjects upon which he knows the public to be totally ignorant. The public in his hands becomes as a mystified audience before a skilful illusionist. Professor Powicke thus complains of the manner in which he arranges his matter: "Stretches of serene and beautiful prose . . . are sometimes interrupted by incoherent wastes in which facts and quotations are flung together as by a hay-fork." There is design in the disorder, however, for the rhetoric carries away the casual reader; the petty criticisms captivate him; the overwhelming list of quotations and of facts complete the conquest by convincing him of the writer's astounding learning. The inevitable challenge was issued to Father Walker because the latter, in reviewing one of Mr. Coulton's essays, had pointed out eight errors—mistranslations and misquotations—which he had discovered, and in doing so he also referred to the fact that the *London Month* previously had exposed six other mistakes. Mr. Coulton admitted the errors discovered by Father Walker, but denied those found by the *Month*, and he issued the challenge accordingly. The wording of it, however, is pregnant with misrepresentation. "I have written," he said, "to make an offer [to Father Walker], which I have repeatedly made to those of his Church who impugn my accuracy, and which they steadily decline." Now it is one thing to ignore a challenge, but to decline it definitely is quite another. When Mr. Coulton says that his challenges have been steadily declined, he implies that his opponents communicated with him definitely declining to meet him in fair contest. It would have sounded ever so much weaker had Mr. Coulton written the exact truth and said that he had issued challenges which they *steadily ignored*. That would have left the reader open to believe that his opponents regarded him as a loquacious nuisance to spend time on whom was to waste time. So the negative had to be turned into a positive to provide the casual reader with a mental picture of a perturbed clergy acknowledging the prowess of a superior. It is just these subtle touches that proclaim the artist in Mr. Coulton. As the controversy proceeds the hay-fork method and something much more discreditable comes into prominence. He misrepresents Newman by tearing a sentence from its context so that the Cardinal is made to deny that which he had written his *Apologia* to establish. He confuses Canons of Discipline with Canons of Faith. By omitting portions of decrees he makes them say just the opposite to what they really say. In order to prove the exclusiveness of Catholic marriage laws and the dirtiness of Catholic villages he goes to Switzerland to compare Protestant Abelboden with Catholic Argentieres, ignoring the fact that Argentieres is in France. On the question of the privileges of a parish priest he quotes a nameless "experienced priest" of his acquaintance and rejects the decrees of Canon Law which Father Walker holds to be much more conclusive. He misquotes St. Thomas on the question of heresy and then refutes

his own misquotation, though later he is forced to admit that Father Walker's reading of St. Thomas is much clearer than his. Yet this does not deter him, despite the condition of controversy laid down by himself that neither disputant should have a last word, from publishing simultaneously with the discussion, a treatise the main purpose of which was to propagate his exploded error that on orthodox principles Catholics are bound to exterminate heretics as soon as opportunity may arise.

We refer to this particular controversy, not because it is unique in character; but because it is remarkably common. It would seem that the best way to propagate error is to attempt to refute it under conditions which make the public the judge of its quality. Let the scholar who tries to refute it be ever so able, if he is pitted against an opponent who refuses to be bound by a code of honor, and whose immediate object is to hoodwink his readers, the error is almost certain to be stronger after the controversy than it was before. Despite all the nonsense we hear about the "discerning public" there is no reason to believe that public opinion is anything but superficial at its best. It is a fallacy to suppose that the truth of a thing is determined by the number who believe in it. The philosopher who wrote that, in matters requiring taste and discrimination majorities are never right, expressed a truth which merits greater consideration than is usually given it. What, for example, does the man-in-the-street know of Canon Law? Nothing at all. Then why ask him to judge in a dispute that requires not only a knowledge of Canon Law but of a number of other subjects as well? Apart altogether from lack of information on subjects in which proficiency demands much study and careful training the public have other weaknesses which render them easy prey to the arts of the unscrupulous. Have we not on occasion witnessed the frenzy to which the public were driven by newspaper accounts of things that never happened? We wager that Mr. Coulton had his tongue in his cheek when he rushed to the thoroughfares calling for Daniels.

HOW YOU MAY HELP

The writer of the historical notes on the Church in New Zealand, now running through the *Tablet*, having in mind the added interest imparted by illustrations, would be very grateful if those possessing photographs of priests who formerly labored in the Dominion—the early missionaries especially—would forward such (with name, etc., attached) to the *Tablet* office. After being reproduced, these would be carefully returned to the owners.

"Dreams"—Ah, who has not had them, dreams pure and fair—dreams, lily-white, rose-red! In dreams one wanders freely into enchanted lands. In dreams things commonplace are imbued with fairest character. It is good sometimes to dream of lofty things, and the fairest dreams, the poets tell us, are of God.

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