

New Blessings

(Specially written for N.Z. Tablet.)

It is frequently asserted that the Church has blessings for all manner of things for fruits and crops, for buildings and machinery, for ailments of various kinds. One sometimes wonders whether that boast, or claim, can be made in respect of modern inventions. The scoffer may scornfully laugh and say, "No, surely the Church could not be so ridiculous as to think that in the twentieth century people believe in having a blessing invoked upon new inventions such as steam engines, wireless telegraphy, and the like." The Church is not in the least perturbed by the jeers of pigmy scientists whose opposition to religion is the most convincing proof that they are biased and unreliable guides. The Church welcomes new discoveries in every sphere and utilises them in the furtherance of the Cause she has at heart. Hence she formulates a blessing for everything that the ingenuity of man can discover or invent. The beauty of the prayers contained in those Blessings appeals to every lover of religious poetry by reason of the devoutly delicate allusions drawn from the Holy Bible. Railways were not long in existence when she formulated a blessing on that useful novelty. One of the prayers employed in the course of that Blessing may be translated as follows:—"O Almighty and Eternal God, Who hast made all things for Thy glory and for man's benefit, deign, we beseech Thee, to bless this railway and all things pertaining thereto and by Thy kindly Providence to protect them so that Thy children while travelling quickly on this way may happily arrive at their heavenly country by walking in Thy law and running along the way of Thy commandments. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen."

The beautiful imagery, in the use of which she is so lavish, is exemplified also in the "Blessing of the Telegraph."—"O God Who walkest upon the wings of the winds and Who alone dost wonderful things, grant that when, by means of the virtue infused into this metal, Thou dost transmit to us by lightning-stroke things that are distant and to those who are away the things that are present to us, we may avail ourselves of new inventions and, aided by Thy Grace, more promptly and easily come to Thee. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen."

These prayers, more concise and beautiful in the original Latin than in translation, are to be found in Rituals published soon after the railway and the telegraph became factors in commercial life. As showing that the Church owes and offers no apology for formulating blessings for up-to-date inventions, it is worth while referring to the latest formulas which are contained in a recent issue of the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*. Three new blessings are there published, the blessings of a Seismograph, of a Library, and of Archives. It is not a mere coincidence that the second and third blessings should be appointed in the reign of a Pope much of whose life was devoted to the duties of Librarian and Archivist in the most celebrated libraries of the world. His fame as

custodian of the Ambrosian Library secured for him the greater honor of being made custodian of the Vatican Library. It might have been, indeed, on his initiative and not at the suggestion of advisers that the Congregation of Rites made and issued the form of blessing henceforth to be used.

The prayer used in the blessing of the Archives (or, building in which documents are tabulated and protected) is as follows:—"O God, the lover of truth and justice, graciously bestow Thy blessing upon this building established for the purpose of preserving historical documents and charters of rights from injury whether at the hands of man or through the ravages of time, so that they may be safe from fire and other perils and that all who come here to study may faithfully endeavor to learn truth and justice and at the same time advance in the love of Thyself. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen."

The prayer for the blessing of a Library is similar to the foregoing:—"O God, the Lord of all knowledge, give Thy blessing to this library that it may be preserved from fire and other perils and may daily grow in extent and influence and that all who are officially engaged here or who come here for purposes of study may advance in knowledge both divine and human and likewise in the love of Thee. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen."

Irreverent students of science who profess no knowledge of anything but *matter* and sneer at *mind* and all it connotes will be astonished to learn that the ancient Church is acquainted with even such a modern thing as a seismograph. The Form of blessing for a Seismograph is here given in full:—

V. Our help is in the name of the Lord.
R. Who hath made heaven and earth.

Let us pray

O Almighty and Eternal God, Who lookest upon the earth and makest it tremble, pour out Thy blessing upon this seismograph and grant that the evidences of an earthquake may here be indicated and rightly interpreted for the benefit of Thy people and to the greater glory of Thy Name. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Sorrowful Virgin Mary, be propitious to us and intercede for us.

St. Emygdus, pray for us, and in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth defend us and protect this seismograph from earthquakes.

(The seismograph is then sprinkled with holy water.)

At first sight it seems difficult to explain how it comes about that the intercession of a saint is invoked in this blessing. On consulting an old Breviary or an old Missal, however, one will find repeated reference to earthquakes both in the Office and the Mass of St. Emygdus. For instance, in the Introit are the words of the 17th Psalm, "The earth shook and trembled: the foundations of the mountains were troubled and were moved, because He was angry with them."

The special hymns in Matins and Lauds have allusions to many miracles performed by the saint when preaching against and destroying pagan belief in many countries of Europe. It is clear that in countries subject to earthquakes, such as Italy, there should be special devotion to a saint at whose word pagan shrines are said to have been demolished as if by disturbances of the earth. It is worthy of mention that St. Emygdus is the patron of a pretty church erected in recent years in a delightful suburb of San Francisco. It is natural to suppose that in a city so fresh from the destructive effects of a terrific earthquake, help would be sought from a saint whom the Missal and Breviary associate with such prodigies of angry Nature.

To return to our starting-point. When the votaries of physical science assert that the ancient Church is out of touch with modern progress and knows nothing of the conquest of earth and sea and sky accomplished by the Science of to-day, the Church calmly replies, "Let us think of future ages and preserve in Archives all the documents that will enlighten generations to come, and we will set God's blessing upon the precious collection. Get together all the books that have done good in the past and will continue to keep the torch of learning aflame in future times, and we will ask Almighty God to preserve from destruction and decay those mute teachers of God's children. And now, ye men of science, let us see and reverently salute those new inventions, your wireless stations and your seismographs, and lest Satan, that angel of darkness, might use them for the injury of man, we will ask God, in all humility and reverence, to bless those agencies of temporal and spiritual good in the interests of the race for which the Redeemer died."

ST. COLUMBKILLE'S CONVENT BUILDINGS, HOKITIKA

RECENT EXTENSIVE ADDITIONS.

The new boarding school attached to the local Convent of Mercy is rapidly approaching completion so that it will be ready for occupation on the re-opening of the school (says the *Hokitika Guardian* for January 31). The building, which is an asset to the town, is the work of Mr. C. O'Neil, architect and contractor, of Christchurch. It is a two-storey building on a concrete foundation. Upstairs are the girls' sleeping apartments—two dormitories each 40ft by 20ft, a dressing room 80ft x 11ft, three bath rooms, lavatory, linen, and medicine rooms. The interior is panelled in rimu, the dressing room being fitted with 30 porcelain basins, and wardrobes.

Downstairs is the hall from which the staircase ascends. The windows and doors in the hall and on the staircase have lead-lights of special designs—that of the hall door bearing the motto of the school—"A.M.D.G." The lead-lights are the work of Bradley and Co., Christchurch. Off the hall, panelled in plaster board and rimu, is the cloak room, fitted with presses, basin, rack, etc. The class rooms, three in number—a room for

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