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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 promoveri 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 11, 1925.

DEAN INGE ON MIRACLES

DEAN INGE is known as the Gloomy Dean, but an article of his in the *Morning Post* on miracle-mongering suggests fog rather than gloom, confusion rather than pessimism. He abuses his own Church for encouraging faith-healing; but at bottom his article is an attack on Catholic belief in the fact of miracles. This belief he characterises as the superstition of the half-educated, and he deplores the desire of the average man and woman for signs and wonders. We may say in passing that Our Lord Himself remarked on this trait in human character, but He did not counsel mankind, as Dean Inge does, to disbelieve the evidence of their senses. On the contrary, He used signs and wonders as a magnet with which to draw men to Himself. He cured the sick, raised the dead to life, and surpassed a multitude of wonders by raising Himself from the dead. But Dean Inge must not suppose that over-credulity is a failing peculiar to the half-educated. In spiritist circles, for example, he will find a large number of highly-educated people believing without question, not only what cannot be proved, but what is also palpably absurd. He does not appear able to distinguish between belief in that which is *above* reason and belief in that which is *opposed* to reason; and until he can discern the line of cleavage between these two beliefs he will continue to confuse Catholic faith in the supreme power of God to do what He wills, with ignorance, trickery, and superstition.

It is when he writes of Lourdes that the Gloomy Dean is least convincing. Lourdes, he tells us, is *une commerce*. This commerce, we may say, is confined to the sale of pious objects, which no one is compelled to purchase. Health, however, is not traded at Lourdes. In any case, the charge of exploiting cures is neither very serious nor

very creditable to the person who makes it. It is intended to rouse public prejudice against a disagreeable practice which does not take place in order to divert public attention from the miracles which do. The important point about Lourdes is not its shops but its miracles. But Dean Inge is much too wary to discuss miracles unreservedly. Instead, he merely deplores existing faith in them, and then trails off to the faith-healers, leaving the uninformed reader with the impression that the miracles of Lourdes are not different from what is done by professional faith-healers and physicians employing auto-suggestion in the treatment of nervous complaints. He attempts lamely to forestall the inevitable objection that medical men would not certify a cure effected without their assistance—sometimes in the face of their scepticism—unless the cure had actually taken place. He says, "medical certificates are always forthcoming in such cases; and we need not assume that all the testimony is consciously false." Mark the distinction: the testimony is false, but not consciously so. A bow to the integrity of the doctors, a sneer at their simplicity! But the Dean discloses his mental confusion in the next sentence in which he says, "it is as easy to imagine oneself cured as to imagine oneself ill; and mental exaltation will often cause a cessation of pain." The critic forgets, however, that the examining physician is not likely to be deceived by his patient's optimism, even if the latter has succeeded in deceiving himself; and we must bear in mind that it is the physician, not the patient, who signs the certificate. What effect would auto-suggestion exercise upon a diseased and shattered bone such as was in the leg of Pierre de Rudder? Could it cure tuberculosis and cancer? Could it transform what a doctor described as a living corpse into a sturdy being without a sore or blemish? Common sense says that suggestion would be useless in these cases, yet many such are cured instantly at Lourdes. We wonder, too, if poor Madame Rouchel, who suffered from loathsome facial lupus, could have found it easy to imagine that there was nothing the matter with her? As the sight of her face caused a shiver of horror to those who had looked upon it, it is safe to say that here at least is a case in which there was no danger of the faith of the patient deceiving the eye of the doctor who had previously pronounced her incurable. Auto-suggestion is not recognised at Lourdes. It is a tedious process at best, but the cures at Lourdes, on the other hand, are frequently instantaneous. New bones, new flesh, have grown quicker than thought, and putrid sores, which have defied medical and surgical science to remove them, have been healed instantly, leaving, perhaps, a scar to mark the spot from which they had scorned the doctors. Surely, some stronger power than auto-suggestion is at work here! Again, does auto-suggestion explain the cures wrought in babies? How would Dean Inge proceed to suggest to a child in arms, scalded beyond the power of human remedies to relieve it, that it suffered no pain? Another consideration is that before suggestion can be effectual the patient must

expect to be cured; but many of those who are cured at Lourdes do not expect to be cured, and frequently no one is more astonished at the cure than the patients themselves. The extent of their belief is that God has the power to cure them if He chooses to exercise it. We cannot command God; we can only beseech Him; but the fundamental principle of therapeutic suggestion is to command.

Doctors say there is no secrecy at Lourdes, no stage-management. Thousands of doctors have witnessed the cures wrought there, and all they can say is that they do not know how they are effected. Between the years of 1890 and 1904, 2712 doctors visited the Medical Office at Lourdes. Of these, 461 were foreigners, and it may be remarked also that there were three members of the Paris Academy of Medicine; one member of the Brussels Academy of Medicine; one physician to the King of Sweden; 26 professors of French faculties; 14 professors of foreign faculties; eight professors of medical schools; 48 hospital doctors and surgeons; and 74 house surgeons. From May to October, 1923, 560 physicians registered at the clinic. Of this number, on the occasion of about 20 cures which were officially registered, the President of Medical Verifications appointed 100 colleague experts. Of these, nine were distinguished practitioners in Paris. There were seven Belgians, five Englishmen, five Spaniards, two Dutchmen, one Italian, and one Portuguese. The others, two of them professors of the Faculty (Montpellier and Lille), came from all parts of France. All these men signed the official reports from which 500 other physicians who were in Lourdes concluded that the cures examined could only be occasioned by some supernatural cause. "Is it possible," asks the President, "that this number of physicians should have agreed to adopt this conclusion through ignorance, through complaisance, or dishonesty?" In the Medical Office no cure which might have been won by natural means is recorded. A patient suffering from an incurable complaint brings a certificate to that effect from his doctor to the Medical Office at Lourdes. The patient is then examined there, and if in the opinion of the doctors it is still possible to cure his trouble by natural means the case does not go upon the books. If, on the other hand, the patient is again judged incurable, his cure, if it be wrought as a result of his visit to the Grotto, will be recorded only if he returns to the Office for re-examination. Sceptics, such as Dean Inge, are much more concerned about imputing trickery than in facing the facts. We might suggest, however, that a trickster, able to cure instantly diseases of the most varied and loathsome kind, ought to be regarded as a public benefactor rather than as an object of aversion in these days of physical scourges and deadly epidemics. But Dean Inge, like the doctors, does not know how these things are done; and because he does not know how they are done he says they are not done at all. The medical world, however, knows better and does not hesitate to say so.

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