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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, MARCH 4, 1925.

MUSSOLINI AND SECRET SOCIETIES

SIGNOR MUSSOLINI'S new Bill, which aims at preventing public servants from belonging to secret societies, was bound to create a tumult among those who look upon public officials, not as the servants of the State, but as the creatures of the Camorra, the Mafia, and the Grand Orient. The secret society, in a greater or less degree, plays a sinister part in every country. Therefore, it is not surprising to find influential journals outside Italy severely condemning both the Bill and its sponsor, attributing it to a desire on the part of Mussolini to put political opponents out of action rather than to rid the country of an intolerable abuse. This is like saying that a Government should not suppress ruinous abuses which threaten the very existence of the State when such suppression will give it an advantage over its enemies. But even Mussolini's critics admit the abuse. They say that Italian Freemasonry is well represented in the highest ranks of the bureaucracy and the magistracy. The question, then, which is of first importance is not whether Mussolini wishes to intimidate the Lodges to serve his own ambitions, but whether any Government in any country can conscientiously permit oath-bound societies with a secret objective and a secret method of procedure to dominate the State so that the rights of the people are rendered subservient to the designs of conspirators.

In the eyes of the Church secret societies are an abomination. It is astonishing that they are not an abomination in the eyes of the citizen as well. The very test that can be said of them is that they are established for a secret purpose. In that case they are objects of suspicion, for secrecy always breeds suspicion. Candidates for membership are bound by oath to preserve secrecy, and they

bind themselves in the most solemn fashion to assist in something of the nature of which they are absolutely ignorant. When they give the required guarantees they are admitted as members, and not before. No person can conscientiously take an oath of that description. In a promissory oath that which is promised must be morally good and lawful. Candidates for membership in secret societies take a blind oath, which is decidedly unlawful. As the State is an institution delegated by God to assist the moral and material well-being of the collection of families which comprise it, it must take steps to prevent independent forces from turning it from its purpose or from using its servants to the hurt of the people. What a public outcry there is whenever it is found that private financial interests have bribed public officials in order to win some private advantage! This shows that the necessity of preserving the integrity of public office is generally recognised. Though transactions of this kind are highly reprehensible, they are comparatively trivial when measured by the actual and possible corruption of the State by secret societies. The State official who is also a member of a secret society is not free to carry out the duties of his office. He will be the subject of wire-pulling; he will be forced to carry out measures which he cannot conscientiously defend; and all the time he will be in the dark as to the object of what he is forced to do and of the identity of those whom he serves. Such an official is not a public servant at all: he is merely a secret society creature drawing a salary from the State. In his case the 30 pieces of silver are paid by the victim instead of by the persecutor. It is idle to say that certain secret societies are above reproach because high-placed persons are members of them. This is not a certificate of the good character of the society: it merely calls into doubt the integrity of the official by proclaiming the fact that above and beyond his duty to the State there is his blind and pernicious oath to an association that works in the dark. The people cannot safely admit as a master a person who is the bond slave of subterranean powers. One of the worst features of the secret society is that it absorbs the State, places its creatures in executive positions, and thus manipulates the State authority for its own ends. The objective of the more influential secret societies is now well known. They exist for the purpose of propagating Rationalism and undermining religion. They inculcate pernicious principles which can lead only to anarchy; and they make use of the economic stress for which their own gross teaching is in no small measure responsible, to entice to their ranks, not only the bold and ambitious seeking power, but even the humble workman who shuts his eyes and swears an oath in the hope that the society will solve his economic difficulties for him by using its influence to secure him a comfortable berth. Thus the secret society undermines religion by weaning men from spiritual ideals, and by teaching them to seek the things of the world as the only permanent good. By training humanity in godless schools they hope to "extinguish the lights of heaven." Pope Leo

XIII, in his Encyclical Letter, *Quod Apostolici Muneris*, refers to the Rationalism which since the sixteenth century has invaded the political, scientific, and economical order, and then he goes on to say that "as soon as secret societies began to take extension, in the midst whereof the germs of those evil principles already adverted to were nursed, the Roman Pontiffs Clement XV and Benedict XIV failed not to unmask the impious designs of the sectaries, and to warn the faithful throughout the world the mischiefs they were thus hatching in secret." In pre-war days France filled her departments with the creatures of the Masonic Lodges. The war disclosed their incompetency, and in order to save herself France had to get rid of them and fill their places with competent men who had been victimised to make room for the conspirators.

Mussolini has declared war upon these evil influences in Italy. It is a pity that his policy in this respect is not taken up outside Italy. Those who condemn him as a dictator conveniently forget that when he assumed control in Italy he was faced with gross abuses which could not be overcome by constitutional measures. It is worthy of note that the chief body of complaint is directed against his methods. The important point to remember, however, is that he has done good things, even if he has done them in a rough-and-ready fashion; and it is certainly much more creditable to have done good things roughly than to have done evil things with the grace of a courtier. Too long has Italy been the happy hunting ground of these vicious clubs with their aprons and trowels and daggers and cables and coffins and pagan mummery. Mussolini is taking serious steps to protect the State against them and their nefarious schemes. He is taking the initial precaution to ensure that the offices of the State will not be occupied by the agents of those who are the State's most dangerous enemies.

A "BOUQUET" FOR NEW ZEALAND

In a late issue of *America* reference is made to the work of Father H. I. Westropp, S.J. Readers of the *Tablet* will not need to be told that Father Westropp, of Our Lady of Victory Mission, Paharia, India, carries on a vigorous stamp crusade, and turns to good account the cancelled stamps which thoughtful donors send him. The work of classifying the stamps, which are sold only to collectors, furnishes thirty poor girls and women with a living, and pays fifteen catechists and some other workers. Father Westropp is quoted as saying that the most ardent promoters in this charitable work are those that are farthest away. "What," he asks, "is farther away from the 'hub' of civilisation than Dunedin, New Zealand, the last city this side of the South Pole? And yet it is there that Bessie Gallien, her brother Bert, and their friends are producing the greatest results. If we had a few more New Zealanders scattered throughout the globe we could work wonders."

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