

FEATURES OF THIS WEEK'S ISSUE

Leader—Romancers on Religion, p. 33. Notes—Anglo-Irish Poetry; Some Examples, p. 34. Topics—pp. 22-23. Complete Story, p. 9. How the Faith was Kept, p. 13. Presentation of Mr. P. D. Hoskins, p. 15. Holy Year Privileges Extended, p. 19. The Church in N.Z., p. 21. Glory of Catholic Ireland, p. 25. Mgr. Lepicier on Catholic Education, p. 27. Faith of Our Fathers (by Mgr. Power), p. 51.

MESSAGE OF POPE LEO XIII TO THE "N.Z. TABLET."

Pergant Directores et Scriptores New Zealand Tablet, Apostolica Benedictione confor-tati, Religionis et Justitiae causam promo-vere 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, DECEMBER 30, 1925.

ROMANCERS ON RELIGION

A SHORT time ago the *London Daily Express*, as a device to interest people during the "silly season," invited several prominent novelists to express their opinions on religion in a series of articles. Among those who wrote were Arnold Bennett, author of the hardly decent *Pretty Lady*, Sir Conan Doyle, the senile Spiritist, Rebecca West, whom we do not read, Phillips Oppenheim, whom we rate very low, Hugh Walpole, who is said to be one of our best in a period of poor authors, and Compton Mackenzie, who is a convert to the Catholic Church. Hilaire Belloc was invited to contribute, but refused because, as he has since explained, "The popular press to-day will not print the Catholic Truth save as an occasional stunt, and the 'stunt press' is an evil which men who boast the high Catholic culture should avoid like a bad smell." Let us pause here to ponder on the twofold fact that the daily press (and the weekly press) of the day is practically all part and parcel of "the stunt press," and that this cultured and able writer finds nothing milder with which to compare it than "a bad smell." Plain talk like this appeals to people who retain their common sense.

Mr. Mackenzie did not refuse, and his article was a noble confession of the Faith which he found. In contrast to the nonsense contributed by many of his colleagues, he has something definite to say. "Fortunately the Catholic Church is not at the mercy of an individual apologist. Her dogmas rest on something firmer than the shifty sands of scientific theories. In no Galilean cave will

any enthusiastic young palaeontologist find the skull of Jesus Christ, and thereby make it advisable for theologians to change the date of the Incarnation by a trifle of 2000 years." Of the confessional he wrote: "I am prepared to maintain that abuses of psycho-analysis already exceed by far the sum total of the abuses of the confessional for which it is an inadequate and pretentious substitute." And of Spiritualism: "Did I possess the required credulity I might seek consolation and assurance in Spiritualism, but my reason revolts less from a belief in the resurrection of the body than from a belief in ectoplasm; and if I had to fancy for myself a postman's eternity after death—an endless rat-tatting on easily manipulated tables—I should prefer to be granted a certain faith in my ultimate obliteration. . . . If I did not believe and disbelieve with a deep conviction that I was believing what was true and disbelieving what was false I should never have allowed my voice to be heard at this symposium of testimony." It is astonishing how many of these famous authors seem hazy about what they do or do not believe, and if any one thing emerges from the series it is the certainty that most of them are incapable of expressing concerning religion an opinion that is worth two straws. Yet, it is the opinions of such people that influence silly readers. The *Observer* published a final summing-up by Professor Jacks, editor of the *Hibbert Journal*. Commenting on the verdict the *Universe* says: "Except for the Catholic writer, Mr. Compton Mackenzie, and the zealous upholder of Spiritism, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, this Judge of Appeal cannot find that these writers know or care or believe anything as to the End or the Beginning, or about religion taken in any sense you like. Their brilliancy as popular novelists drops to blank boredom when asked to deal with such an unprofessional and unprofitable question as this stale old query, 'What is at the End?' Except for Rebecca West's intuitive woman's wit, Professor Jacks can find nothing worth writing or reading in all the arid waste of these useless exercises." What most of them have to say concerning the most important of all questions, is, therefore, not worth reading. Yet, how many fools are swayed by their words when they publish novels which contain explicit or implicit attacks on the fundamental principles of our Christian morals. They are more ignorant than a child of ten who knows his Catechism, but they pretend to teach thousands of readers who buy the "best sellers" of the present day. Hence, the people of the British Empire continue to be what Carlyle found them: "mostly fools."

Naturally such an exhibition of ignorance was not allowed to pass unnoticed by Mr. Chesterton. As he, at least, is a novelist who is worth hearing, we quote his criticism by way of conclusion:

"It is very desirable to know what some of our most brilliant contemporaries believe or disbelieve; always supposing that the brilliant contemporaries know. But most of them seem to be quite agnostic even about

their own agnosticism. Some of the most intelligent of them practically say so. Mr. Hugh Walpole says sadly: 'I know that all this is desperately vague.' Only Mr. Hugh Walpole also, we are sorry to say, clutches madly at the cliché of saying that he wants his religion 'stripped of dogmas'; presumably in order to make it still more desperately vague. Some of them explain why they cannot believe in what they call orthodox Christianity and give a rather wavering outline of a rather unorthodox Calvinism. Some of them merely give descriptions of their own childhood, in the manner of some of that modern fiction which naturally comes more natural to novelists; the sort of novel of which the first volume brings us to the child's first experience of having his hair cut. But as they were brought up in a religion that they do not believe in, and we do not believe in, these memories hardly help us to consider whether we agree with what they believe. Mr. de Vere Stacpoole described how very dull it was to sit in the pew of an Irish Protestant church, and how the only relief was to see Queen Victoria's yacht arriving in the bay. It is indeed a parable of many things; but hardly one revealing a new religion. We doubt whether it can really be true that Queen Victoria is the Female Messiah now promised us by the author of *Divine Fires*. Mr. Arnold Bennett began with a number of statements that were at least clear though entirely negative. He ended with statements that became less and less clear as they attempted to be positive. He said several sensible things in which he was dogmatic without knowing it, as in his doctrine of good works, and of course he also repudiated dogma. It never came into anybody's head to define a dogma. Mr. Arnold Bennett once said that nobody who accepted one of these mysterious pieces of furniture could have 'a first-class mental apparatus.' He is now kind enough to say that he does know one or two people of good intelligence who accept the orthodox dogmas of Christianity, 'though with mental reservations.' How in the world, unless his belief extends to witchcraft, he can know what mental reservations are made by these intelligent people he does not explain, any more than anybody in this symposium really explains anything. The symposium, however, is in one way really interesting and important. It marks something curiously lopsided about modern life. These men are some of the ablest and most acute artists we have. It is amazing that they should be able to imagine, to create, to sympathise, to describe, and not be able to think. They can tell us what is in the subconsciousness of a suicidal South American violinist, but they cannot tell us what is in their own heads. It is very strange."

The "Tablet" Library LANDED PER LAST MAIL

The anchoress's Window (by a Nun of Tyburn Convent)—4/6.
The Anchorhold (Enid Dinnis)—6/-.
God's Fairy Tales (Enid Dinnis)—4/6.
Once Upon Eternity (Enid Dinnis)—4/6.
Mystic Voices (Roger Pater)—5/-.
Gertrude Mannering (Francis Nohle)—8/-.

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