

FEATURES OF THIS WEEK'S ISSUE

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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.

Die 4 Aprilis, 1900.

LEO XIII., P.M.

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.



THURSDAY, OCTOBER 13, 1921.

FEMININE FOLLIES



HE preaching of the early Fathers of the Church concerning the virtues and the domestic duties of women could be repeated without a note of staleness after all the centuries that have passed since Chrysostom and Basil and Gregory taught to the people of old the lessons of Christianity. In those far away years, spheres of social action now open to women were still closed, and we cannot hope to find in the ancient sermons and homilies guiding lights on many modern topics that interest the new woman. Human nature, however, remains more or less the same at all times. Kipling reminds us in one of his jingo ballads that the "Colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady" are sisters, in spite of the difference of their apparel: and he might have added that as a rule it is "Judy O'Grady" who is the lady. Eve was the mother of the girls of to-day, who are consumed with the same curiosity as that which led to our first mother's unfortunate acquaintance with the serpent. Times have changed with the passing years, and, in spite of the poet's assurance to the contrary, we have changed little with them. Feminine follies, the foolish love of dress, the quest of distraction and dissipation of the present epoch have aroused denunciations from preachers that are but echoes of the burning words spoken in the same strain and for the same reasons hundreds of years ago by the Fathers.

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Gregory Nazianzen wrote in his maturer years a poem in which he inveighed against women who were too much concerned about their outward apparel. He denounces those ladies who distort the image of God in their countenances with paint and powder and even with masks. We have not the masks, but the paint and the powder disfigure twenty faces to-day for the one of Gregory's time, and if when he wrote it was an exceptional thing to find the manners and morals of the sisters of Rahab copied by more innocent if more foolish females, there is nothing exceptional about the apparently studied imitation that is common enough at present. Gregory told the girls and women of by-

gone years in plain language that they were like peacocks, strutting the streets in borrowed beauty that deceives nobody, that they only succeeded in causing amusement and pity among those whom they strove to attract, that they wasted precious time in their foolish efforts to ornament themselves, and that the path they pursued led inevitably to vice and sin. "It is not in such a manner that you ought to seek your glory," he says. "It is not in the rose of the paint that you put on your cheeks, but in the rose of the blush brought there by modesty and humility, and in the fairness and pallor born of watching and praying." Chrysostom made similar counsels resound from the pulpits of Antioch and elsewhere. He knew that among his hearers were many who resented being told how they appeared in the eyes of right-minded men, but he did not shirk his duty. "I am the physician," he told them. "My words are the remedy, and I apply it in time to heal the wound and to prevent its corrupting." In our own time a bishop has refused to allow to Holy Communion females dressed in a manner not in keeping with Christian modesty. Chrysostom in his time warned his hearers against customs and manners and dress that were in violent contrast with the sanctity and dignity of the Sacraments instituted by Christ for the sanctification of souls. Another point upon which he touched is not altogether without application in our time, when the "flapper" with her latch-key and her proneness to "spots" is not unknown. In no mild terms he denounced women who were addicted not only to gluttony but to the intemperate use of intoxicants, and he drew a true picture of the degradation of a female who became a victim to such vicious habits. No doubt, there were, in his time, some things similar to the "batches" down the Bay, and the joy-rides, with their consequences, concerning which more than one mother in New Zealand could unfold a sad story.

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Another lesson might be derived from Chrysostom's preaching against expensive and useless jewels displayed at home and abroad by the daughters of Eve. He reminds the ostentatious wearers of costly trinkets and of ephemeral and expensive apparel of the hungry mouths that might be fed with the money spent on such things, and he might have also said a word about the angry eyes with which the hungry watch the peacocks that flaunt their extravagances in public. He recalls to his hearers that Adam and Eve had to wear clothes as a punishment for sin and to hide their shame; and he points the moral that a sincere Christian who remembers the Fall ought to be careful that clothes should not become an occasion of sin and an advertisement instead of a concealment for shame. It was when Adam and Eve lost their innocence that it became necessary for them to wear the skins of animals. They had come nearer to the animals by their Fall and the skins they wore were surely a reproachful reminder of that fact. It is otherwise nowadays when the expensive skins are rather a proof that their wearers often glory in the fact that their ways and manners are those of beasts rather than of human beings. One last word of his is worth impressing deeply on the tablets of memory: "The dresses you wear might suit actresses who want to attract the eye of the public, but they are not suitable for Christian ladies who are watched by eyes in Heaven." It may be that the repetition of the words of these great preachers of old times may have some effect on a generation of girls who will, unless aroused to a sense of their shame, end by imitating the females who walk by the banks of the Niger with rings in their noses and barbaric bracelets on their wrists, and nothing else to show that they respect themselves as higher creatures than the tigers that crash through the jungle.

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No laborious travels are needed for the devout mind; for it carries within it Alpine heights and starlit skies, which it may reach with a moment's thought, and feel at once the loneliness of nature and the magnificence of God.
—James Martineau.