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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 Justitiæ 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 the by ways of Truth and Peace.*
April 4, 1900.

LEO XIII., Pope.

Current Topics

A Gentle Hint

Our clever contemporary, the Boston 'Pilot,' gently jogs the memory of its subscribers in a recent issue. With slight verbal alterations to suit the circumstances of New Zealand, we repeat it for the benefit of those of our readers whom it may concern: 'Again the warning is raised that bank-notes are dangerous because they transmit microbes of disease from hand to hand. Perhaps it is solicitude for our health which keeps some tardy subscribers from sending us money in that form. But they need not fear. In remitting your notes please send by registered letter; it costs only three pence, and the microbes are killed on the way.'

Non-Catholic 'R.C.' Criminals

William Wilson—an old acquaintance of ours—some years ago shuffled off his mortal coil and his soul is in the Spirit-land. Some of our West Coast readers will probably remember him better as 'Billy Wilson,' or as 'King Billy of Ercildoune.' He was the last of the Ballarat district blacks, and in 1850 danced and feasted on roast bullock at a great corroboree with two hundred other dark-skinned tribesmen on the site now occupied by the council hall of the City of Gold. One day—it was in January, 1896—the dusky monarch loaded about a churnful of beer into his 'innards,' came into collision with the law, and was 'sent up' for drunkenness and obscene language. 'Do you profess any religion?' the warder queried. 'Religion?' said his Majesty; 'of course, mister. 'I'm a Catholic—a Roman Catholic.' 'Who converted you?' said a bystander. 'Why, a minister out along on Sir Sir Samuel Wilson's station at Ercildoune.' And so the semi-savage and wholly pagan aboriginal was entered up on the records to swell the criminal statistics of the 'Papishes.'

'King Billy of Ercildoune,' in declaring his religious belief, was merely following a fashion of falsification set him by white criminals in these countries. When, for instance, the Williamstown murderer—who was a Protestant Sunday-school teacher—was brought to justice, he had himself entered on the records as a 'Roman Catholic.' An explanation of the notorious misdescription was subsequently suggested by this youthful criminal's mother: 'I suppose,' said she, 'he did not want to disgrace his own religion.' Other similar cases

galore have been from time to time exposed by the Catholic papers in Australia, and some months ago authoritative evidence of the frequency of the practice in New Zealand was given in our columns. Among the long-sentence prisoners at present in Dunedin gaol there are at least two that are falsely entered upon the records as 'Roman Catholic.' The whole family history of both is well known. One of them is a Jew; the other (a female prisoner) is a Protestant. And both admit that they have never, at any period of their lives been Catholics. Entries of the religious profession of prisoners may be made for two purposes—with a view to spiritual ministrations, and for statistical information and comparison. If for the first-mentioned purpose, it might mean actual religious affiliation or profession, or it might mean prospective preference—no matter on what grounds—as to the kind of religious ministration desired while in prison. If the religious description of convicted prisoners were intended for these purposes only, we should not lay much, if any emphasis on the circumstance of actual religious attachments formally entered into by baptism or other wise. But it is quite a different thing when the religious entries of convicted prisoners are used—as they are in New Zealand and in Australia—for purposes of public information and comparison. Accuracy then becomes a matter of public right and of scientific and moral interest, and it should be secured by adequate precautions. Such affirmations as to religious profession should be taken as statutory declarations, in which false statements would be punishable as perjury. The details of this much needed change could be readily worked out, and a few prosecutions for perjury—for which the evidence is ready at any time—would serve to convince the criminal fraternity of the Colony that, in this matter at least, truth-telling is the better policy.

We are aware that this arrangement would not suit the card of some religious enthusiasts with whom we had a word or two lately. But the Pope and the Jesuits are, like the poor, always with us; and a respite from wrestling with statistical fallacies would give our over-eager critics more leisure to prove that Pius X, lit, with his 'taper' fingers, the Chicago theatre fire, and that it is the sons of St. Ignatius who 'fill the butchers' shops with large blue flies.'

'Pig-tail Politics'

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