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LEO XIII. to the N.Z. TABLET.

THURSDAY, MAY 19, 1904

MR. SEDDON'S PALLIATIVE



THE Premier has given press and pulpit in New Zealand matter for moralising from Auckland to Invercargill. Even Josh Billings forgot his labored waggery and wrote phonetic eloquence when he spoke of the little new life in the home as one of the fixed stars of life. But the gross and pagan ideas that are spreading among many of the matrons of our day and country make them shirk the sacred duties of motherhood, and they fail to realise how

'With what a kingly power their love Might rule the fountains of the new-born mind.'

This is, in part, the burden of a circular which the Premier sent to the Press of New Zealand when he was about to step on his vessel's deck and sail in chase of health around our coasts. From 'bemoaning the low natural increase' of our population, he turns his thought to the preservation of infant-life in the Colony. 'From a return,' said he, 'that I had recently prepared, extending over a period of ten years, I find

that during that time twenty thousand children between the ages of one and five years have passed away forever. It is probably a harsh thing to say, but it is nevertheless true, that under altered conditions a very large number of these infants could have been saved; and it is with this object in view that I and my colleagues have come to the conclusion that an opportunity should be given to Parliament of dealing with the matter, and that, if something should be done on the following lines, the infant mortality in our fair land would be considerably reduced.'

Then follow the details of the proposed legislation. It is, in brief, proposed that the practice of midwifery should be restricted by Act of Parliament to those holding certificates; that in each centre there should be a number of such persons duly qualified and registered for gratuitous attendance on the poor; that State maternity homes and State foundling hospitals be established; that provision be made for nursing the poor in their homes; and that increased facilities be afforded, at the expense of the State, to young women to enter the nursing profession and qualify under the Act. Provision is also suggested for the prevention of cruelty to children; for cases of neglect of parents in time of sickness; for day homes for infants whose mothers have to go from home to work; for the regulation of infant insurance; and for the maintenance of illegitimate children. 'Apart altogether from the humane side of the question,' says Mr. Seddon, 'the capital value of every adult in this Colony is £300. Increased population is necessary to our welfare, and it is our duty to prevent sorrow and affliction. Too much money is spent in coffins, headstones, and funeral expenses, and to bewail the want of a proper natural increase is pure hypocrisy unless we do something substantial in the way of saving the infant-life that is born into the Colony.'

Mr. Seddon's proposals are good in themselves, apart altogether from his idea of introducing them as a palliative for the dire results of 'the sin of the twentieth century.' But he falls into a grievous error in supposing (as he seems to suppose) that he has found a remedy, at which effort can stop, for the national decay which threatens us from the phenomenal and still continued fall in the natural increase of our population. The economical and social aspects of this question, which he considers, represent a real point of view, but they are dominated by the moral standpoint. It lies at the root of the evil; and if we are to deal with causes and not quack-drug mere symptoms, that way, too, will be the only lasting and effective remedy. It is little use to treat a cancer with bran poultices or cholera morbus with pink pills. As it is, the outlook for New Zealand, even with Mr. Seddon's new proposals acting up to their full available horse-power, would still be far from roseate. This favored land is in the full flush of its youth. It is blessed with a fine climate, a fertile soil, and a wealth of mineral and forest resources; the struggle for existence is reduced to a minimum; yet it is fast treading the fatal path that is rapidly leading to the extinction of the decadent descendants of the sturdy Puritan settlers of the New England States of America. A shocking picture of the depravity and decay of the Puritan stock of New England was given in the 'New York Medical Journal' of August 17, 1895, by Dr. Lindley, Professor of Gynaecology in the University of Southern California and formerly President of the State Medical Society. The Puritan strain in New England is withering up. Their towns and farms are fast falling into the hands of the sturdy Irish, German, and French-Canadian Catholic immigrants that have been making up for the empty cradles of the old and rotten stock. New Zealand has no such resource to fall back upon. The whole trend of our legislation tends rather to discourage immigration. Its proportions are insignificant. Mr. Seddon is to be commended for his proposals. They are admirable, so far as they go. But even were they to