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

Pergant Directores et Scriptorum 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 by the ways of Truth and Peace.
April 4, 1900.

LEO XIII., Pope.

Current Topics

The Earthquake

As we were preparing to go to press with our last issue, the 'Tablet' buildings got a mild shivering fit and groaned and creaked as though with inward pains. We knew it was a 'quake' and later on heard that it had given pretty nearly all New Zealand a passing palsy, inflicted on Wellington a vigorous shaking, and shivered the timbers and masonry of many a building there. Wellington has had experience of rude shakes in 1848, 1855, 1868, and 1875, and scores of minor tremblings. Such long-term visitations, however, do not reconcile people to the sudden onset of 'quakes' that set to work without preliminary warning and rip and tear and shake things to pieces. Custom has hardened people more to earthquakes on certain other portions of the earth's surface. A recent book on the Philippines, for instance, states that the inhabitants pay very little attention to the constant recurring 'shakes' unless they are accompanied by a moderate degree of mortality. In Japan and in Quito (Ecuador) people are even more phlegmatic. Of the twenty to fifty earthquakes that, according to Professor Milne, crack and corrugate the earth's surface every day, at least one occurs in Mikado-land.

Those that occur in New Zealand's far-extending volcanic areas give us not infrequent reminders that the earth's crust is not the mass of cast-iron rigidity that the English footballers fancied the Australian portion of it was when they happened to 'come a cropper' upon its surface. The density and elasticity of the earth's materials vary widely. The world's shaky areas, happily, comparatively small. But the whole ball has a 'creepy' skin; it is a bundle of 'nerves'; and shivering fits—technically known as earth-tremors—are constantly running through some portion or other of it, like the premonitory symptom of influenza. Some of these are so undemonstrative that only such delicate instruments as seismometers can find and make a note of them. Others are 'regular' earthquakes, of varying intensity of shock. But in one way or another they keep the earth-skin in a pretty constant state of motion—swelling it here like a puffed fetlock; shrinking it there; crumpling and rolling and fracturing it yonder—as at Cheviot, in 1901, when the mighty blow of a steam-explosion or rock-fracture far down beneath the surface smote the crust with a vertical and horizontal

shock and sent the soil moving like the billows of the Tasman Sea. The house-breaking and chimney-wrecking that the earthquakes produced in Wellington last week were, however, mere anarchist bomb-throwing compared with the revelry of devastation that it indulged in half a century ago—in 1855. That was our record 'shake'—so far as history can tell. Professor Thomas, of Auckland, told a representative of the Christchurch 'Press' the other day how it ripped a great fissure ninety miles long in the earth and shouldered the land on one side of the rent till it stood nine feet above its former level. 'The valley of the Hutt,' said the Professor, 'was raised from four to five feet, but in the South Island the Wairau Valley subsided five feet, and the tide came up for some miles beyond where it ordinarily reached, and matters remain unchanged there to this day. The strange part of this disturbance is that, while the elevation of the east face of the Rimutaki Ranges increased, the Wairarapa Plains were unaffected by this great earth movement, and yet the shocks were felt in Cook Strait, and by persons on vessels 180 miles out to sea.'

It is strange that the men who know everything and a good deal besides are unable to tell us precisely what causes earthquakes. Doctors proverbially differ. So do earthquake experts. 'But people are not likely to go sleepless over the question of causation when so potent an agent of destruction has made a visitation and left without curtailing the population of our tight little islands. Mulhall and the historians tell how over 100,000 human lives were cut suddenly short in the historic earthquake that destroyed 54 cities and towns and 300 villages in Sicily in 1693. Among its other exploits, it wiped Catania and its 18,000 inhabitants off the face of the earth. As many as 40,000 were slain at Cairo in 1754 and the same number in the Neapolitan territory in 1783. Here are other figures, that look like a roll of the dead in so many big wars: Peking (1731), 95,000; Lisbon (1755), 35,000; Guatemala (1773), 33,000; Quito (1797), 41,000; Mendoza, South America (1861), 12,000; Manila (1863), about 10,000. When the Krakatoa eruption jolted the earth in 1883 it caused a loss of 36,500 lives and sent a wall of water on a tour round the earth. These are a few sample figures taken at random from two works before us. The Bengal tiger is said to be 'right enough w'en yer comes to know 'im.' And in all the circumstances detailed above, it is a comfort to learn, on so good authority as that of Herschel, that earthquakes present, to those acquainted with their action, some compensa-



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