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

LEO XIII., Pope.

Current Topics

Why it is Orderly

A writer in a local contemporary says of a fast-rising and crimeless Amhara in Central Otago: 'This is a very orderly township, as we have neither policeman, doctor, nor lawyer, nor any other disturber of the peace.' The humor of this delightful descriptive bit may be conscious, or it may be unconscious. But in either case it is rough on law and medicine.

Bre'r Rabbit

Is Bre'r Rabbit declining in New Zealand? It seems that he is, if we are to judge by the diminishing numbers of the burrowing pest that are finding their way to the world's cooking pot and felt hat and kid glove. In our export meat trade there has been a steady decline in rabbit-figures from 6,501,997 in 1900 to a relatively paltry 3,788,576 in 1904; while the skins of the 'critters' that have been sent out of the Colony have fallen in an almost unbroken progression from 17,041,106 in 1893 to a mere 6,103,930 in 1904. The good rabbit, like the good Injun, is the dead one. In 1904 he dropped £86,931 into the pocket of New Zealand; and the current 'Official Year-Book' pleads in consequence that 'rabbits can hardly now be looked upon as wholly worthless'—which seems rather a truism.

Our neighbors beyond the Tasman Sea in Victoria are in worse, or better, case, according to the point of view. Last year they exported no fewer than 12,585,506 rabbits. The plague seems to be growing there. And the long and ever-lengthening array of rodent 'stiffs' sets us a-wondering what has become of Mr. Pounds' chicken-cholera microbe, and the Rabbit and Vermin Exterminating Company of Australasia (Registered), and the trap-yards, and the 'drives,' and the poisoned water, and the deadly pie-melon, and the strychnine and apple-jam, and the phosphorised wheat, and the arsenicated chaff and pollard and grain, and the various asphyxiating (or choke-damp) machines, and Pateman's patent rabbit-exteriorator, and the thousand and one other ways and means which were devised by our cousins across the water to get the rabbit off the local earth, or to reduce his depredations to the limits of possible toleration. 'Dey ain't no smart man,' says Uncle Remus, 'cept w'at dey's a smarter.' Bre'r Rabbit in the Australian bush, like Bre'r Rabbit in the Old Plantation, seems to know more tricks than either Bre'r Fox or Bre'r Man. But his trump card is probably (if we may use the expression) his voluminous fecundity.

Funeral Reform

It appears that there is a society to be established in New York to wean people, and especially the poor, from their present extravagant displays in the matter of funerals. 'Nowadays,' says a writer in a New York paper, 'poor people, including some of the poorest, very generally carry industrial life insurance policies, on which they pay small amounts weekly. These policies are chiefly used in the payment of funeral expenses. In the case of poor people an undertaker always requires cash or a guarantee, and the policy is practically turned over to him.' There is in Australia and New Zealand many a priest who can speak with feeling of the manner in which sorely needed allowances of benefit societies have been swallowed up in foolish, and sometimes vulgar, displays of seeming wealth between the house of mourning and the grave. We, too, need a funeral reform association, though not so sorely as our friends across the Pacific.

The idea of the 'slap-up' funeral is at root a pagan one. The mourning of the Jews for the dead was marked in early times by fasting, as well as the wearing of sackcloth and the scattering of ashes. It was only in later and more degenerate days that funeral feasts became the fashion. And the fashion, according to Josephus ('Wars of the Jews,' II. i.), reduced many of the chosen people to poverty, because they were 'forced to feast the multitude.' A big 'tangi' has full many a time made the big brown-skinned tribesmen of New Zealand suffer the penalty of conformity to a tyrant custom. The pagan Romans loved to make their funerals the occasion of lavish displays of wealth. Part of their spectacles of 'mourning' consisted of deadly gladiatorial combats. Even the tomb of Caesar's daughter was desecrated by human blood.

The Church put a stop to displays of this kind. But a whiff of the old pagan love of reckless expenditure at funerals still hangs in the air. Some fifteen years ago, for instance, an Englishwoman named Haller spent £4000 upon the shroud which was to wrap her body in the grave. Sums quite as great are said to have been spent upon flowers alone at many an American funeral. The tendency to lavish expenditure is very marked among the poor of many countries—the Italians, for instance. The feeling is, perhaps, a kindly one. But it often leads to the sinful waste that makes woful want. The custom of reckless funeral feasts is still in full vogue among the poorer classes in the North of England. And many a poor Irish peasant, who had not,