

NOTICE.

Correspondents are particularly requested to bear in mind that to insure publication in any particular issue of the paper communications must reach this Office not later than Tuesday morning.

Correspondents forwarding obituary and marriage notices are particularly requested to be as concise as possible.

All communications connected with the literary department, reports, correspondence, newspaper cuttings, etc., should be addressed to the Editor.

NOTICE TO SUBSCRIBERS.

Complaints re irregular Delivery of Paper should be made without delay to the Manager.

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'To promote the cause of Religion and Justice by the ways of Truth and Peace.'

LEO XIII. to the N.Z. TABLET.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 1901.

THE H. A. C. B. S.



THE Wise man wrote: 'A brother that is helped by his brother is like a strong city'; and again: 'It is better that two should be together than one; for they have the advantage of their society. If the one fall he shall be supported by the other. Woe to him that is alone, for when he falleth, he hath none to lift him up.'

We are reminded of these words by the annual movable meeting of the Hibernian-Australasian Catholic Benefit Society of the New Zealand District, which was held in Dunedin at the close of last week. This excellent organisation presents in concrete form the idea of the inspired royal writer. It is an association of brothers to stand by one another and to lift up one another in the day of need and suffering and sorrow. It offers at least as high monetary benefits as the least objectionable non-Catholic associations of a similar nature. It presents, moreover, the vital advantage of social intercourse between Catholics and Catholics in a Catholic atmosphere. It provides warm Catholic sympathy by the bedside of the sick and the open grave of the dead, and its sweet charity goes out to the deceased brother or sister beyond the portals of death. It is the only representative in our midst of those ideal benefit and social organisations, the old Catholic guilds of the middle age, which did so much to emancipate and dignify honest toil, and to make the England of pre-Reformation days the paradise of the worker of every degree.

The Hibernian Society is emphatically the association for a pioneer land. There is in it a potential energy for good, the splendid possibilities of which, however, have never yet been fully evolved. In this Colony—for whose needs it is so eminently suited—it is practically everywhere working at low pressure. The machine is right. What it wants is more steam—more motive energy in the shape of active members. According to Mr. COCHLAN's estimate, there were in New Zealand at the close of 1899 105,150 Catholics. And yet the numerical strength of the Hibernian Society is well under 2000 members. A few branches are suffering from

marasmus. In great tracts of heavily populated country in every province of New Zealand—dotted here and there with considerable towns—the emerald sash is seen almost as rarely as the Cross of the Legion of Honor. And over those wide areas our workers are in a manner forced into benefit organisations whose rules, rituals, and associations are unfavourable to the growth and cultivation of Catholic sentiment. In twenty centres there are altogether twenty-three branches of the H.A.C.B.S.—usually consisting of small but devoted groups of earnest men and women struggling on in comparative neglect and obscurity—frost-bitten, so to speak, by the icy apathy of the very people for whose physical and moral benefit the Society was founded.

What is the cause of this lack of appreciation of a great and good work that is going on quietly and unostentatiously in our midst? It seems to us that the lion's share of the blame must fall upon the apathy of that portion of the Catholic public to which the H.A.C.B.S. is entitled to look for its chief support. Some of our people live on in happy-go-lucky indifference towards the whole system of providing for a rainy day through the medium of any benefit society whatsoever. Others turn up the tips of their lordly noses, or nourish small-minded grudges, against this or that trifling and non-essential detail of the Society's working—such as, for instance, the personnel of a particular Branch. Others are led, beguiled, or—in places where there is no Branch of the H.A.C.B.S.—to some extent compelled by the pressure of circumstances into membership of non-Catholic benefit associations. Some of these societies are as baldly secular as the State-school system. Others—like the Rechabites—are a sort of annex to some Protestant denomination. Some—like the Oddfellows—are semi-secret organisations, and make use of signs, grips, pass-words, and much of the puerile and ridiculous 'flummery' of societies that are in very earnest secret and forbidden by the law of God. It requires no violent stretch of fancy to perceive how such associations might become, for individual Catholics here and there, vestibules to the Freemasons' lodge. Most of these non-Catholic benefit societies have rituals of introduction or for funeral use which are altogether out of harmony with Catholic usage and feeling. In the United States the Oddfellows are, and have long been, under the ban of the Church. For Catholics in any country it is not lawful to be officials of societies having non-Catholic prayer rituals, or using secret signs, grips, pass-words, etc. Neither is it permissible to attend their meetings. Membership of the associations referred to, even when tolerated under certain conditions, is contrary to the spirit of the Church's legislation in point. Such associations, moreover, serve only to enhance the dangers that are inseparable from a country in which the social atmosphere is decidedly non-Catholic, even when it is not anti-Catholic or non-religious or irreligious.

We stand in crying need of two things: (1) the formation of a public conscience among Catholics regarding this matter of benefit societies; and (2) greater facilities and greater encouragement for Catholics to become members of that benefit organisation which has the first and most urgent claim upon their support. The formation of a Catholic conscience in point is a matter in which the hierarchy and the parochial clergy can give the most direct and powerful help. In their joint Pastoral Letter—which was published just two years ago this week—the Archbishops and Bishops of New Zealand strongly urged the clergy and laity to make the young people under their care 'members of a good Catholic Benefit Society or other approved and pious associations.' By this means (said they) 'you promote their temporal welfare while safeguarding and increasing their piety and religion.' And we have no doubt that the clergy everywhere throughout the Colony are prepared to do what in them lies to foster the H.A.C.B.S., and to extend its good influence by every reasonable means at their disposal. It will, however, be of little avail to form a Catholic conscience in this matter of benefit societies unless the Catholic public are provided with reasonable facilities for giving in their adhesion to the H.A.C.B.S. And this can be effected only when the clergy, parents, and members of the Society join in 'a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together' in cordial co-operation throughout the length and breadth of the Colony.

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