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THE TYRANNY OF THE MICROBE.

Whatever the exact scientific truth may be as to the part which the microbe plays in the drama of life, there is no doubt that the fear of him grows apace in the heart of man. What would our fathers have said of this proposed innovation in our churches, the individual communion cup, over which the consciences of our ministers and congregations are exercised now? They would have regarded such a thing as utterly subversive of the beautiful idea of Christian fellowship and nothing short of sacrilegious. It would hardly have been worse to complain of the quality of the vintage on such occasion, a thing they could not have dreamt of doing even had the cup been filled with hemlock instead of wine. But then our fathers knew nothing of the microbe that lurketh unseen. Bacteriology was to them quite an unknown science and they ate and drank oblivious of the dangers by which they were surrounded. A happy ignorance theirs I am disposed to think, for even if they did occasionally fall a prey to the insidious foe they were able to enjoy life while they lived free from the thousand misgivings and fears that beset us their descendants to whom it has been granted to learn the mysteries so mercifully hidden from them. I must confess that I envy the insouciance of childhood in these matters. Their blissful ignorance of scientific truth allows them to gratify their unjaded palates to the full. They eat and appreciate anything and everything that is nice, unappalled by the vision of the microbe. Practices that revolt our hygienic taste are universal in childhood's happy realms. Charley does not reject the offer of a suck of Willie's half depleted orange, and the transference of the saccharine morsel from one mouth to another is merely a token of unselfish friendship. Why cannot we indulge in these gentle interchanges? But we must have our own particular orange, and our own particular lozenge or piece of candy. It is true we had grown stomach proud in that direction even before the microbe came to our knowledge, but his advent will assuredly make matters ten thousand times worse. I can foresee the day when he will have become the greatest danger to the social fabric, the destroyer of fellowship, the breaker of family ties, the cruel foe of love. If you will not drink of the same sacred cup as I, the time will no doubt come when you will be chary of sitting at the same table or even in the same room. A little later and the grounds of friendship will not be mutual respect or mutual affection, but a common freedom from or a common subjection to the same microbes. From their birth men will be alienated from those to whom they are naturally joined by the closest ties. How can a mother fondle her baby in the good old fashion when she knows that every act of endearment means perhaps the transmission of some deadly germ? And as for cooling the pap after the traditional fashion of putting it first in her own mouth before it goes in the baby's—that will be reckoned a criminal act. Scientists have already indicated that in the new bacteriological age that is dawning the kiss, that exquisite emblem of love, must become as unknown as it was in Japan before civilisation introduced it there. No one is disposed to take that prediction seriously, and it merely serves to give opportunity to the humorist. But I am afraid it is no joking matter. I cannot understand how without the kiss cupid can fail to become cold-hearted and Lymen's torch be quenched. Consider it what act could one substitute for it that could have the same supreme fulness of meaning?

tion was increasing. The Government statistician had already made us familiar with the circumstance of a decreasing birth rate, but mere figures, however cleverly arranged, do not appeal to the average mind. As it appears in the statistical tables, the dearth of babies does not evoke our personal interest, just as the intimation that the wheat crop has been a failure seldom suggests any interference with the supply of the family's breakfast rolls. The death rate is calculated to touch us individually much more nearly, for each of us has got the dying business to go through, while the matter of birth is over and done with. After all, what can it concern you or me if there are a few less youngsters born into the world? That is how the average individual, regarding the thing in the cold light of statistics, will most generally feel. Under Professor Segar's hand, however, the fact becomes invested with significance for every one of us—the married man and the bachelor, the mother of children or the spinster who has none. The Professor conjures up a vision before which we cannot stand unmoved. The colony is producing old people, but it is not producing young ones in the same proportion, and unless a change comes we must inevitably arrive in some years at a sad and painful condition of things. New Zealand, this young country, will have become a community of old, or comparatively old, people. Hushed will be the happy chorus of childish voices that now salute our ears, half-drowned by the sober sounds of middle-aged converse and the querulous complaints of age. The sentiment of such a future must appeal to us; yet, if we are so hard-hearted in heart that it fails to do so, there are other considerations to be met with which assail us on the purely selfish side of our nature. The falling off in the proportion of young shoulders to bear the burdens of life must mean, of course, that these will fall heavier on the older shoulders. Those, then, who are growing up, cannot look, in a few years, for the same friendly assistance from the juniors that has been the privilege of the old. And the old age pension, that blessed solatia of the needy sexagenarian, which would have been some compensation to look forward to, it looks as if it were likely to fall a victim to the declining birth rate. For, says the Professor, in a decade or so, the number of folks entitled to it will be doubled, entailing an expenditure of £100,000 instead of £100,000, and, of course, the number of people able to contribute the increased amount will be correspondingly lessened. The outlook is anything but cheerful, it must be confessed, and inevitably forces the enquiry: What is to be done? There is but one answer. We must increase the stock of babies. It is plain that there is no more important problem for New Zealand at the present time than that. To discuss that problem now would lead us much further than the limits of a mere topic that deals with the surface of things. Moreover, it is a decidedly delicate subject to tackle, but I have no hesitation in saying that when we begin to realise as a community all scruples in that regard will have to be thrown aside and the naked truth stand revealed.

that the war was of our seeking, and would place in the hands of Kruger a power vastly superior to that he possessed before the suicidal dispatch of his ever famous ultimatum. This object they hope to achieve by means of a broadest distribution of pamphlets full of half truths and whole fictions, arguments with a surface speciousness calculated to deceive, backed up with wholesale abuse of Mr Cecil Rhodes, and the party they call the South African gang. It would, I think, be a mistake to describe these men as disloyal. They claim, indeed, that they have only the good of the Empire at heart, and seem honestly and heartily afflicted with the idea that the present war is the first step to our national dissolution and disgrace. Their arguments have the merit of age. They are those that they have flung at us ever since Mr Rhodes began to loom large in South African politics, namely, that he is a bold bad man, whose sole idea is money, who has corrupted and bribed every newspaper in the metropolis, and, indeed, in the kingdom, so that none dare say what they know to be true, and that he and his set would sacrifice the entire Empire to gain their ends. As proof of this they urge the means which secured monopoly of the De Beers mine, and urge that the present war was partly promoted in order that white men may be reduced to the position of the Kaf-fir compound "boys," who are, they allege, worse than slaves. Of course one knows it is nonsense, and not likely to shake strong minds, but such words as these for example might influence the weakly impulsive and emotional: "England's real difficulties in South Africa will begin after the killing is over, and the supreme question we shall have to answer is: Shall the country that prides itself on being the 'Home of the free,' the Mother land of free nations, accept the ungracious and liberty-destroying mission of placing the population of South Africa, white and black alike, at the mercy of men like the diamond and gold fields 'bosses'—half a continent in the grasp of a gang of company promoters, stock exchange gamblers, diamond mine monopolists, and sweaters of labour! Ponder well this problem, for it is one of life and death not only for South Africa but for England. Little light can be obtained on it from the current journalism of the day, because, with a few noble exceptions, it has been misled or bought up by the lies or gold of the men who have led us into the present fratricidal war. A more conscientious group of men has never risen to prominence in a nation's affairs. These men are unscrupulous alike in the manipulation of markets and of political leaders and passions, and they are driving this noble old land of ours towards incalculable perils for their own ignoble ends." Of argument proper, or even of reason, there is not a trace from one end of these pamphlets to another. They are from cover to cover filled with just such wild and random statements as those I have quoted. Their effect will of course be nil, but if there were any danger of such caparings commencing attention, it would be our place as a part of the people of the Empire to battle against such opinions, influencing the peace proposals. Experience has shown—though those people cannot apparently see it—that tolerance is attributed to weakness. The peace proposals will be stringent, I doubt not, and I believe that in a very few years the most enthusiastic Pro-Boer will admit that in their stringency lay their true liberalism and mercy.

KRUGER AND HIS MILLIONS.

PRO-BOER IDEAS OF PEACE PROPOSALS.

That eminently conscientious and well-meaning minority, who have rendered themselves somewhat objectionable, and extremely ludicrous by their shrieking admonitions to "Stop the War," made little, if any, headway in New Zealand, and soon relapsed into silence, or even became apoplectic and sang patriotic songs; but in the Old Country, though equally heavily "sat upon" by public opinion, they are proving irresistible. Finding their efforts to arouse pro-Boer sentiment on a large scale only provocative of ridicule, and realising that the "fight to a finish" is now drawing very near to its conclusion, they are using the most frantic endeavours to alarm us as to the results of the war, and to persuade us that the only terms of peace tolerable, are such as would tacitly admit

It looks as if Mr Kruger were going to have some trouble with that million—or two millions, is it? He could explain his flight easily enough and justify it. When his armies and burghers were in full retreat it was natural that the old gentleman should also make tracks and yet not have the least intention of quitting the country altogether and leaving his followers to their fate. But the collaring of the two millions and suddenly departing, leaving Pretoria officialdom lamenting its unpaid salaries, had an altogether suspicious aspect about it. After that little act of his even the most blindly devoted adherent of the President might be excused for entertaining a shadow of doubt regarding the sincerity and patriotism of Uncle Paul. His care to secure the treasure for himself at the last moment consorts ill with the loud expressions of single-hearted devotion to his country which have

AN AWFUL OUTLOOK.

These are startling deductions which Professor Segar draws from the fact that for the last twenty-one years the number of babies which make their appearance in the colony per year has been the same, although the popula-

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