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Passing Notes

BY JACQUES.

Laugh where we must, be candid wherever we can.—Pope.

DE MORTUIS

In pensive mood I wandered, at the dewy close of day,
Through the silent, solemn graveyard,
and at every turn I read,
Inscribed on snowy marble, or engraved in granite gray,
The many, many, virtues of the under-lying dead.
Their lives had been perfection, full of grace and piety,
And every one was certain of his mansion in the skies;
But since I read those epitaphs, the thing that puzzles me,
Is where in earth they hide the bally sinner when he dies?

The scientific world is quite fluttered just now over certain mysterious etheric vibrations or pulsations that have butted in, as it were, on our own wireless system, and which, for want of a better explanation are surmised by some to be fragments of messages from Mars or some other planet, which is trying to send us a civil greeting. Some very much in earnest in their belief, and Signor Marconi has announced his intention of investigating the matter as thoroughly as possible, and perhaps attempt a reply to the seeming signals. There is something very fascinating in the idea that we may yet annihilate the millions of leagues separating us from our planetary neighbours, and daily exchange political news and views, market reports and racing tips with them. It may be that the Martian or Venusian (is that the right word?) would be able to give us some valuable hints on our electrification scheme, and it would be interesting to get their unbiased opinions of President Wilson or Mr Massey. But there are dangers, too, in breaking down the barrier of space. The "splendid isolation" that we have enjoyed in the past would be lost to us, and we do not know what kind of neighbours we would get. They might prove of that class who indecently ignore our claims to privacy, who practise the cornet at midnight, and who are always borrowing our garden tools. It were well to be careful; it is much easier to make undesirable acquaintance than to break it off.

School teachers, for the most part, wear, like Cassius, "a lean and hungry look." This curious physiological fact is rather perplexing—until one reads the printed schedules of teaching salaries. There lies the explanation. Few men could wax fat, like Jeshurun, on the miserable pittance of the average pedagogue. Our persistent policy of parsimony in matters educational is difficult to understand, in the face of our professional concern for the "uplift of the race." The elevating process—which is growing more strenuous every generation—is largely assigned to the schoolmaster, and he is expected to be equal to it. The day of Goldsmith's pedagogue, who "could write and cipher too," is over; we ask now for Admirable Crichtons as the teachers of our children. They must have brains, their knowledge must be cyclopaedic; they must be athletics, botanists, gymnasts, singing masters, and what not; and we expect in them understanding, tact, patience, sympathy and quite a host of other virtues to make up a character that will leave its healthy impression on our boys and girls. And for these qualities and attainments we offer a "screw" that if offered to a scavenger would provoke him to assault and batter us. Small wonder that, as one ex-teacher sweepingly declared, "No man willingly stays in the service one day after he discovers that he has brains." And so the "uplift" drags.

Time was when we regarded the man in khaki as a hero. We told him so in a thousand ways and places. We also said that we would never, never forget him, and to prove our bona fides we set about raising funds for his later benefit—incidentally getting a lot of fun for ourselves in the process. That was when we were foolishly scared that the German might get here, and wanted someone to stop him and his bullets. But we have now got over our scare, time has opened our eyes. With clearer vision to-day we

see that the fellows who fought for us are not the heroes we mistakenly supposed them to be, but are, rather, something like cadgers, or worse. To the Southland War Funds Association must be given the credit of first making the discovery. For some time past a number of soldier-invalids in the hospitals and elsewhere have been in receipt of a monthly dole of tobacco, the cost being met out of the funds subscribed by the public in its days of funk and enthusiasm. The monthly bill was not very startling in its amount; but it would seem that some of the soldiers had badly hurt as a result of foolishness in stopping bullets etc., in Flanders and other places, and have remained too long on this tobacco pension list. Anyhow, the War Funds Association, in a most commendable spirit of bumbledom, decided to "cut it out." And "cut it out" they did, with no other explanation, so far as the public knows, than that given by one of the members that the sick soldiers were "coming it a bit too strong." But then, no other explanation should, or could have been expected from such a body.

One can hardly pick up a paper nowadays without reading that so-and-so, "a returned soldier," has been convicted of some offence or other. What useful purpose is served by mention of the fact that a particular transgressor is a returned soldier is not very clear, while much harm may be wrought thereby. Probably the returned soldiers yield no greater proportion of malefactors and misdemeanants than any other class of the community, though, their numbers being so great, it might seem so. But the persistence with which our papers record the fact that the aforesaid so-and-so is a returned soldier will certainly spread the impression that our R.S.'s are an exceptionally tough lot, and that it would be well to take in the washing while any of them are about. It were well that the R.S.A. did a little kicking against this unfair treatment of them, as a body, by the press. But perhaps such publicity is necessary in the interests of something or other. If so, let us impartially carry the practice further, and when John Nillick is convicted of bigamy, mention that he is a member of the Invercargill Golf Club, or when Thomas Stiggins forfeits the amount of his bail for drunkenness, inform the public that he is a teacher in St. Jeremiah's Sunday School. Sauce for the goose is also good for the gander.

THE DISCHARGED SOLDIER SETTLEMENT ACT.

ANOTHER ANOMALY.

Another anomaly, this time in connection with the D.S.S. Act, has been pointed out by a correspondent, who remarks that it is possible, by applying for one loan for the purpose of purchasing a section and erecting a house, to obtain a greater sum than is granted if loans are separately applied for, (1) for purchase of a section, and (2) for the erection of a residence.

The correspondent, it seems, applied for a loan for the purchase of a section, and was granted it—an amount of £60. Then he applied for a loan to erect a dwelling and fence, and was granted the maximum amount of £750. The total of his loans, therefore, was £810.

Later, he discovered that his neighbour, applying under the same Act, and wishing to build precisely the same type of house; asked in the first instance for one loan to cover both the cost of section and the erection of a house. He was granted £850 for the purpose.

The position is that a man applying for a loan for the erection of a dwelling cannot be granted more than the maximum amount provided for that purpose, which, as said, is £750. Yet, should he make application for a loan to purchase land and erect a dwelling he is entitled to a maximum grant of £1000.

The obvious inference is that a man wishing to build should apply for a loan to cover both the cost of erecting the house and purchasing the section.

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