

## THE STRANGER.

By Norman Tiptaft in *The (London) Labour Leader*.

"There is always in Nature," said the philosopher, "what one might term the law of compensation. What I mean is that if, say a man loses the use of one organ, the others increase in development, so that that which he previously performed with five senses he is able to do with four. The man who is blind finds his hearing more acute, and so on. The principle extends right through. Poor people are happy, rich people miserable. Youth is unable to afford the things it would enjoy; it is better without them. Age can afford it and doesn't desire them. I saw only to-day a beautiful motor-car; in it an ugly, wrinkled old woman. Well, there you are. It is highly improbable the car was any pleasure to her; she was too old for it, but it was certainly convenient. She had lost her power of getting about as she could when she was young, and compensation comes to her in the shape of a motor. Or, again, look at man as compared with the animals. He is weaker, more liable to disease, less able to rough it than they, and, as compensation, he has a brain which enables him to overcome their strength, prevent him from contracting disease, or cure it when contracted, and generally to look after himself in such a manner as to make up for what he physically lacks."

"In short," said the parson, "the universe is ruled by justice, and Browning hit it off correctly when he said, 'God's in his heaven; all's right with the world.'"

"That's just it," replied the philosopher, "actually things are all right. There are, of course, as I readily admit, certain evils in the world, but each has a compensating good. That, in fact, is the reason of evil. If there were none, we couldn't appreciate the other side. Fancy being good with the goodness of a stone image; that sort of goodness—something which is merely negative—is no use. Because a man can't commit evil, that is no proof that he is good. It is when he can commit it and doesn't that he proves his goodness."

"I am glad," said the parson, "to hear you speak like this. Lately, I must admit, I have been somewhat disturbed in my mind as to the justice of the universe. Like you, I recognize that evil is a real thing. Like you, I believe it necessary, only I have placed against it as compensation, not so much the benefits we obtain through it on earth as those we shall obtain in the after world. I look on it as a discipline necessary to us, as all discipline is necessary, to fit us for something better than we have yet attained, and I am glad to find that, arguing from a different standpoint, you have reached practically the same conclusion. After all, this is certain, that a belief in the ultimate justice of the universe has done more than any-

thing else to inspire people to nobler and better lives."

"Oh," said the business man, "I think most folks will admit that. Personally, I never have much time to think whether the universe is founded on justice or not, but I am certain the idea that it is is a good one for all classes of society. Things are as they are, make the best of them. That is the ticket. Take the majority of my 'hands' (and they are typical of the working classes of this country). I can't afford to pay them big wages; competition makes it impossible. If I could pay them more I would, but I can't, and that's the end of it. Well, now, practically all of them are convinced that it's for the best. They live in uncomfortable homes; they cannot afford any luxuries; often they end their days in the workhouse, and yet they firmly believe that it was divinely ordained to be so. I don't say I believe it myself, but supposing they didn't, what would happen? You would simply have red revolution, and the last state would be worse than the first; all of which, to my mind, proves quite clearly that whether there be compensation in this world, as the philosopher says there is, or in the next, as the parson affirms, it is a good thing for people to believe it so."

"Pardon my intrusion," said the Stranger, "but do you think it better for people to believe something which is not true because it keeps them quiet, than to search after the truth, even if it makes them restless?"

"Precisely," said the business man.

"I would rather say," said the parson, "that a belief, even if it be not logically correct, providing it satisfies the individual, is better than agnosticism."

"I say very little about belief," said the philosopher. "My point was that facts went to show that the universe was based on the principles of justice."

"Yes," replied the Stranger, "and you proved your case by quoting the old lady and the motor-car, the fact that blind people's hearing was usually acute, and the superiority of man over the animals. From these isolated instances you argued that for all evils there was some compensating good, and, therefore, everything was all right."

"I admitted there were certain evils."

"Exactly; so did the parson. But, again, you quoted them as almost blessings because of the compensation they brought; in your view, in this world—in his view, in the next. Let me hazard a guess. You, sir"—his eyes seemed to look clean through the philosopher—"have never known what it is to go hungry because you had no money to buy food?"

"Food? Good gracious, no!" said the philosopher.

"And you, sir," he turned to the parson, "are in an exceedingly comfortable living?"

"Well, er—I—er—"

"Isn't it so?" said the Stranger quietly.

"Yes," said the parson, "though, of course—"

But the Stranger didn't hear him. He was looking at the man of business.

"You, sir, I believe, were quite honest in your confession that you had no time to worry over the principles of the universe," he said. "The fact that your 'hands' accepted their position as right was good enough for you, and you admitted that in order to keep you you found it more convenient that they should believe so; that if they didn't there might be trouble."

"That is my position exactly," said the business man. "I don't defend the system; I admit that the poor devils, many of them, have a hell on earth. I admit that they live in rotten slums; that they are underpaid, underfed, overworked; that a decent dog has a better life than millions of working men and women. But if I and the few like me are to be comfortable—or rather, to have luxury—then there is nothing else for it. We are on top; we have no desire to risk going underneath, and so we keep them there—but don't think I fail to see what happens to them—I do."

"Quite so," said the Stranger. "I can appreciate your position. You do not pose as an elevator of humanity?"

"I do not; I am out to make all I can for myself."

"Exactly, but your logical mind tells you that, for some people, there is no compensation. That their life on earth is hell, and that the future affords no guarantee of anything better?"

"That is so."

"Have you never," said the Stranger, "thought of what that means? No hope here; no hope hereafter. Life a perpetual torture; death an eternal night. See here, I want to make an appeal to you. You are a rich man; you have influence. If you exerted that influence you could probably effect some change in our legislation which would benefit these poorer people. You would suffer misrepresentation, slander, the loss of your friends; the decline of your business. You would get in return the dull apathy of those you were trying to benefit. You would go to your grave hated by your own class; rejected by those below you. Only, a long time after you were dead, would the children of those whom you lived and died for rise up and call you blessed. And, believe me, they would. Will you do it?"

"Does it sound a tempting offer to a commercial mind?" said the business man.

"Hardly, except that with all its defects the commercial mind in this sees things as they are."

There was a pause, and then the business man walked over to the Stranger and held out his hand.

"I'll do it!" he said.

"My dear fellow—" said the philosopher.

"Most extraordinary!" began the parson.

But the Stranger interrupted.

"Not at all," he said. "You, sir, are a preacher of the gospel. You follow, I believe, one Jesus of Nazareth. He came preaching about the Kingdom of God on earth. You have removed it to a distant heaven. You dare not preach it on earth because you know you would offend your rich and respectable congregation. You might, it is true, attract the poor and the despised of the world, but your modern religions take little heed of them."

"And you, sir," he turned to the philosopher, "are contented with things as they are. You have reason to be, for you have all that your own small imagination could desire. Philosophise while you may, for to you also the night cometh."

"Your name?" said the parson and the philosopher in one breath.

"I was called," said the Stranger, "some time ago, 'The Son of Man.'"

He put his hand through the business man's arm, and they passed out together.

"The Son of Man," stammered the parson, "could it have been—"

"I expect it was," said the philosopher.



### THREE SENSIBLE SOLDIERS.

By O. R. Washburn in New York Call.

Hans and Henri and I sat down by the bloomin' city of Liege,

They had red cards and so had I, and we weren't real fierce for the siege.

We laid our guns in a friendly heap and smoked and talked awhile,

We who were sent to shoot and die; men of the rank and file.

Hans spoke of Margaret back by the Rhine and Henri of girls by the Seine,

I of Kate, that wife of mine I left in an English lane, And we reasoned it out, we common men, that instead of enriching the loam

Our bodies would suit us just as well if kept alive and at home.

Hans, he saw it, and Henri saw, and I got the point myself,

And so I says: "Why don't you blokes lay this killing war on the shelf?"

"Why don't," says I, "we bloomin' fools, if we have to fight and die,

Fight for ourselves, to run this world?" And Comrade Hans said: "Vy?"

"Why don't we take the crowns and swords and ships and courts and lands,

And the whole big show and run it ourselves; we have the guns in our hands.

"Politicians and Kings," says I, "they have their business, see?

But we have ours, let's we take charge!" And Henri nodded "Oul."