

CORRESPONDENCE.

THE ANTI-SEMITIC TENDENCY.

To the Editor of THE WEEK :

SIR,—Editorials on what is termed the "Anti-Semitic Question" have recently appeared in many of our contemporaries, and as far as we have observed the balance of opinion has been against the Jewish race; that people as a whole are set down as labouring under an increasing dislike in all parts of the earth; reference is made to the scene on Calvary; they are usurers of the most exacting and unfeeling disposition; they cultivate habits of trade decidedly unpopular with other classes; they relentlessly insist upon the pound of flesh, and that all these and other charges inharmonious with public opinion render them aliens and enemies at all times, and so on, and so on.

We have a word to say on these very serious counts of indictment, and although they have found acceptance and punishment therefor has been relentless for the last two thousand years or so by the self-appointed administrators of divine vengeance, let us see how these other races that now claim a state of high civilization and privilege and who existed as hordes of mere barbarians hundreds of years after the brilliant periods of Jewish history, let us see how they, even now, compare with the race they delight to denounce.

Had not the Semitic race been the most capable and of the highest type of intellectual organization of all the human family that race would never have been the recipients of the oracles of God. To no other people, canonically speaking, has the divine intercourse been vouchsafed; hence, ecclesiastically, must all other races take an inferior position.

If that deplorable and horrible scene on Calvary cannot be justified by any standard of equity, have the nominal followers of the Christian system been guiltless of equal intolerance? Have not whole kingdoms and countries been desolated by one sect of believers at variance with another sect for the mere reason that they would not adopt their particular views of Christianity? and is not the contention as virulent even down to the present day? If not carried on to the extreme of physical cruelty, such as was common a few decades ago, yet the violent animosity that pervades the literature of the different sects towards each other confirms the charge that the same amount of intolerance still lives, human nature being the same in all ages.

We deny that the Jew is held in increasing dislike in all parts of the earth; to take the cruel and despotic policy of the autocrat of all the Russias as being an argument in point is unreasonable. In respect to the residence of Jews in that slavish country the fact is that they present there a state of civilization in perfect contrast to the swinish, arrack-drinking, gluttonous, mixed race of northern barbarians, who willingly dispose of all their substance to this better class of people for the means of indulging their vices, and then seek to exterminate the race in question by way of payment.

The charge of usury was patented for succeeding ages in the "Merchant of Venice," and is very effective in a drama, and forms quite an authority on this question of racial greediness; and also in the realm of romance. Your London money-lender is the shrewd and wary Jew who advances large sums on exorbitant terms to the profligate scions of the aristocracy and wealthy class wherewith to dissipate, but if the truth were admitted there is an unfailing supply of sharpers in the money-lending fraternity, not of that race, who out-Herod Herod; and even in "this Canada of ours" examples of extortion the most extreme and cruel suggest themselves to all connected with business, perpetrated not by Jews. However, under any circumstances, these loans for the most part are not forced on the borrower either by Jew or Gentile, and if the methods of trade are so objectionable as practised by the race, why are business transactions carried on with them unless the advantage is supposed to be mutual?

And what of their cosmopolitan influence? Does not war or peace rest on the fiat of their financiers? Have not the English generously ennobled many members of this race? And well are they warranted in their liberality, as the enlightened and wise policy of the late Lord Beaconsfield added more lustre and advantage to British supremacy than the present generation of "grand old men" can appreciate.

Napoleon the great, a consummate judge of men, found in this race his best generals, Marshals Massina, Soult, Davoust and others being Jews. In the highest class of musicians and the grandest masters in the science and composition of music are the Jews, and it is necessary only to name Mozart, Beethoven, Meyerbeer and Mendelssohn to illustrate the fact. Then, again, who so easily take a double first at Oxford and Cambridge?

We contend then that much of the bitterness that has ever been shown and existed in regard to the Semitic race greatly springs from the common hatred and jealousy that has ruled in all ages of the world in the minds of the bad against the better, in every race and country, and is still prominent in the ignorant, brutal and meretricious, against the superior and refined, from the time of Sodom and Gomorrah to Daniel, and from him to the present period of the world's history.

KLEIC.

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It is unsafe to measure one man by another man; measure all men by immutable standards.

A MEMORY.

HER eyes so blue and gentle
Look out with tender light;
Her throat among the laces
Is exquisitely white;
Her hair is caught upon her head
In little curling tresses;
Her lips illumined with a smile
That she alone possesses.
The sunlight stealing through the leaves
Drops gold upon her hair,
The sprig of balsam on her breast
Exhales a perfume rare;
And at her side upon the grass
Am I who love her so,
Awaiting till she speaks the word
That bids me stay or go.

Said I at any time her eyes were blue,
And looked from out their depth with tender light,
Or put in words the rapture of her smile;
Or said her throat was exquisitely white?
I may have said it, but it seems so long
Since that last time I looked upon her face,
That in my life she lingers like some dream
A sleeper has of heaven's holy place,
That falls from out the night upon his soul,
And fills him with the glory of its light;
Then leaves him, till he starts upon his couch,
And wakes to find that all it leaves is night.

STUART LIVINGSTON.

RUSSIAN PRISONS.

FROM a lengthy and intensely interesting paper upon "Russian Prisons: The Simple Truth," by E. B. Lanin, in a late *Fortnightly Review*, we have extracted the following:—

I would venture to point out that the almost exclusive attention paid in the question of prison treatment to the hard lot of political prisoners, whom in Russia it is often difficult to distinguish from ordinary criminals, has the effect of narrowing the issue to an extreme degree, and making us entirely lose sight of the extent and the root of the evil. Moreover, some allowance should surely be made for that peculiar irritation which the government of an autocracy must necessarily feel towards political conspirators who threaten its very existence, and who, before embarking in such unpromising ventures, may be taken to have carefully counted the cost. No state, ancient or modern, republic, monarchy, or theocracy, has ever shown much consideration for its political prisoners, and from the days of Darius Hystaspes, who tells us in his off-hand way how he mutilated and chopped up the malcontents who disturbed his peace of mind, down to the present year which has witnessed the death by flogging of Madam Sihida, there is little to choose in the way of clemency. For this reason I have thought it advisable, not only not to restrict my remarks to the treatment experienced by political prisoners, as has been done by most of the writers on Russian prison life, but to treat the latter merely as a part, and a not very considerable one, of the vast army of criminal and innocent people of all ages and both sexes who are always brutalised and often tortured to death in the prisons of Russia.

A short summary of some of the official data published by the Russian Government in 1885 will enable us to form a more correct idea of the life that throbs within these terrestrial hells than any rhetorical description. During the year ending in 1885, in addition to the 94,488 convicts who remained since the previous year, no less than 727,506 prisoners arrived in the various places of detention in the empire. Of these 116,998 were deported convicts; 324,807 were criminals on their way to their respective destinations; 11,631 were prisoners of other categories, and "administratives," and 52,904 were of their own free will accompanying the convicts. That same year 722,021 were taken off the list, of whom 103,453 were exiles deported; 319,375 were being forwarded to various destinations; 10,939 were "administratives," and 50,054 were, of their own free will, accompanying their relatives, who were convicts. Consequently during that year there passed through the *étapes* and the various forwarding prisons of Siberia 506,340 prisoners.

When we reflect that a large proportion of this army of half a million criminal nomads—about 300,000—are every year being sent backwards and forwards, we can form some idea of the difficulty of the problem which a humane Russian government will sooner or later be called on to solve. To regulate the conduct of legions of desperadoes who are here to-day and gone to-morrow is a task for the execution of which something more than good intentions combined with brute force is indispensable. There is not a prison in Siberia that does not contain from twice to four times the maximum number of prisoners for which it was constructed. The effects of this overcrowding are far more horrible than anything that can be realised by readers who have never seen prisons on the associated system moderately filled. It is the cause of inconceivable human misery; the rooms are transformed into loathsome cesspools, hotbeds of every species of disease, physical and moral; the stench of the noisome air is intolerable; the clammy, clinging vapours which poison the body seem to

eat into and dissolve the very soul; and to all these miseries is superadded a torture akin to that the mere anticipation of which seemed to Shelley's Beatrice a more terrible hell than any that priests or prophets ever conjured up to terrify guilty consciences with; the hated presence of human fiends, who are killing the souls as well as the bodies of the majority of the prisoners.

Internal prison control on the part of the authorities is a fiction; inspectors and inspected strike upon an agreement in virtue of which the forwarding prison becomes, for the winter, a semi-independent oligarchy governed—or mis-governed—by a few desperate villains amongst the worst class of the so-called tramps. These few ringleaders, resolved to live as comfortably as they can till marching time begins again, take the reins of government in their hands, organize and put in motion all the complicated machinery that takes every prisoner in hand and shapes his life and slightest actions, and turning the prison into a hell, enjoy the rights and privileges of devils.

Their first step is to get storehouses in which all their contraband property is hidden whenever a sudden search is made, and the remarkable success which they usually attain in disguising these secret strongholds is due to an amount of energy and inventive power which one seldom sees employed by free men engaged in the ordinary callings of life. A "good" prisoner is able, in a perfectly empty room, which has just been repaired, swept out, and put to rights, to stow away spirits, tobacco, tools, and even arms, and to hide them so effectually that their discovery can only occur as the result of treachery or of pure chance. Whole window-sills are taken to pieces, stone walls (when they exist) are scooped out to an incredible depth, planks in the floor are deftly removed, the posts that support the plank beds are drilled and made hollow—and all this is done so thoroughly, so artistically, as almost to defy detection.

The next care of the members of the prison oligarchy is to establish regular communication with the outer world, mainly in order to smuggle in spirits, cards, tobacco, tools, and "materials." In this matter the warders and the sentries who guard the prison from the outside render them inestimable services. Wares that are not very bulky are brought directly into the prison, in spite of the circumstance that persons coming in are always searched; large objects are thrown over the wall at a place agreed upon beforehand, spirits being poured into tin vessels, which are rolled up in straw or rags and flung over. *Maidans*, or prison clubs, are founded for the sale of greasy cards, wet tobacco, and poisonous spirits; a "common" fund is formed—always for the sole benefit of the oligarchs—from the monthly subscriptions, something in the nature of the "garnish" levied in old English prisons before Howard's time, which every prisoner who receives food-money is compelled *volens volens* to pay, and from the exorbitant tributes extorted by barbarous methods from the unfortunate wretches who pass through the forwarding prison on their way elsewhere. One, and not by any means the worst, of these inhuman practices consists in compelling all new comers, even though they pass but one night in the prison, to pay *three roubles* (about seven shillings) for the use of the *parasha*, or night vessel. The oligarchs select a complete staff of officials to carry on the work of "governing": "elders," "bakers," "cooks," "guardians of the *parasha*," etc., etc. Immorality is practised on a scale unsuspected in the very worst of over-civilised European countries, and contemplated only in the penal code of the Old Testament. Were it otherwise one might feel shocked enough to learn that not only do the prisoners succeed by means of bribery, cunning, or violence in gaining access to the female half of the *ostrog*, but they also organize, wherever possible, a Persian harem. Not only are these things connived at by the authorities, but the prison officials frequently outbid the convicts in unnameable immorality.

Lastly, a prisoner's committee of safety is formed—an institution which, in some respects, reminds one of the redoubtable "Vehmgericht" of the Middle Ages, terrible by the absolute, uncontrolled power it wields, by the Venetian suspiciousness with which it regards most men, and by the inexorable cruelty with which its decrees are executed. The life of every prisoner is in its hands. For acts which convicts call "light crimes," and free men term indifferent, seeing that they are devoid of moral guilt or merit, they are beaten with knotted handkerchiefs; for treachery or even neglect in executing commissions the penalty is death, and the sentence is immutable as the laws of the Medes and the Persians, and as sure to be carried out as a decree of fate.

The *Maidan*, or club—and some prisons are provided with several—has a canteen attached in which tea and sugar, cards, spirits and tobacco are sold at exorbitant prices. All the news is reported and commented upon in the *Maidan*, all questions of interest to the prisoners are discussed and solved there, and always in accordance with the wishes of the omnipotent oligarchs. The prisoners have numerous amusements in which they indulge by order of these ringleaders, and more barbarous, filthy, hellish pastimes it would be difficult to imagine. They cannot even be darkly hinted in a Russian review read only by specialists, and which publishes things which cannot be alluded to in this country. Among the few prison games that are not of this kind may be mentioned the "Belfry," which consists in the prisoners getting upon each other's backs in two rows, and every four such hauling up a fifth by the beard or by the hair of the head, and swinging him about like the tongue of a bell, crying out the while, "Bom! bom!" Another popular pastime is "Horse selling": a