

ONE HALFPENNY.]

RELIGION OF HUMANITY.

Order and Progress.

POLITICAL TRACTS.

VIII.—THE SOUTH AFRICAN VOLUNTEERS.*

A Letter to The Mayor of Newcastle-on-Tyne.

To the Right Worshipful the Mayor of
Newcastle-on-Tyne.

Sir,—I am in receipt of your Circular of the 10th inst.—addressed to me, as I suppose, in common with other ministers of religion in this city—in which you appeal for pecuniary aid for a public reception to the volunteers from this district who have returned from South Africa. Permit me to explain why I, as an adherent of the Religion of Humanity, and a representative of the Positivist priesthood, am unable to respond to this appeal.

It is impossible rationally to separate our estimate of the claims of the volunteers from our judgment of the war in which they have taken a part. A volunteer in a bad cause must share the discredit attaching to that cause—so much the more because he chooses it of his own free will, and thus decisively makes it his own. The mere fact that, after having embraced it, he defends it with courage and fidelity is no justification for him, if he has prostituted these high qualities in the service of injustice and usurpation. The soldiers of despotism and oppression have often displayed equal valour with the soldiers of freedom, but it is to the latter, and not to the former, that the world has accorded its highest homage.

Speaking as a student of public questions for thirty years, speaking, too, without partisanship or sectarianism, I have no hesitation in saying that the war waged by England against the two Republics in South Africa is the most shameful and inexcusable in which we have ever been engaged. I am proud to belong to a religious body which has openly condemned this war from the first, and condemned it as much in the interests of our own country as in those of the two little peoples whom we forced to become our enemies. The volunteers who have fallen in the prosecution of such a war are so far from deserving honour at our hands, that the kindest thing we can do for them is to forget, as soon as possible, the evil feelings which prompted them to take part in unnecessary and hateful bloodshed, and the want of intelligence which prevented them from recognising that those who urged them to do so were deceiving and misleading them. I trust the time will come, and come quickly, when not only will it be impossible to

* This Tract has already been published as an advertisement in the *Newcastle Daily Leader*.

secure volunteers for such a war, but when our soldiers themselves will rise and refuse to be made the instruments of a policy so stamped with incapacity and inhumanity. It is known that in the moment of battle, on more than one recent occasion, several English soldiers raised their guns and shot into the air, rather than fire against the Boers. These men were nobler than their masters, and it is to them, and not to the blind and willing agents of our usurpation, that we ought to accord our praise. We may well associate with them the general who at the outset counselled our Government against the policy of this war, and by doing so showed that a true soldier may also be a wise and courageous citizen. He better deserves our applause for the enlightened patriotism of his advice than the tenth-rate commanders on whom we are hastening to bestow disproportionate rewards and honours, and who, wielding all the resources of a vast empire, have failed, in fifteen months, to stamp out the life of two little states, struggling to preserve their freedom.

In your circular you intimate that a Thanksgiving Service is to be held in the Newcastle Cathedral, and that a memorial tablet is to be erected there to those who have fallen. I make no comment now upon the Religion which, in the twentieth century of its era, is capable of such a course of action. I simply ask leave to say, in return, that it is my intention, when the proper moment arrives, to hold a Requiem Service in the Church of Humanity for the Boers who have died defending their liberty against British aggression, and to place in it a tablet commemorative of their devotedness. I am persuaded that the time will come, and come before long, when many Englishmen, even Christian Englishmen, will recognise that their feelings are better represented by this monument than by that which is to find a place in the Anglican Cathedral.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

MALCOLM QUIN.

Church of Humanity,
St. Mary's Place,
Newcastle-on-Tyne, 14th January, 1901.

** * A price is put upon this Tract to facilitate its circulation, but as it is a principle of Positivism that authors ought not to derive a pecuniary advantage from their writings, it will, as far as possible, be distributed gratuitously, and any proceeds of the sale will be devoted to the Printing Fund. Those wishing to receive copies of this, or other Tracts in the Series, will oblige by forwarding their names and addresses to Mr. J. T. Looney, 119, Rodsley Avenue, Gateshead, to whom also contributions may be sent by all who wish to assist in defraying the expense of publication.*

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