TOPICS OF THE DAY.

WHY A STATUE FOR SHAKESPEARE?

The unimaginative people who want a national statue of Shakespeare erected in Portland Place are meeting with a good deal of healthy opposition in the literary and artistic worlds. The suggestion of Portland Place is really too dismal altogether. It is utterly out of keeping with the spirit of Shakespeare as a site well could be. It is as formal, stiff and prosaic in character as a German drill-ground. Nobody ever goes there. Its highly respectable and sombre mansions look out upon a silent street which the traffic of the great city never profanes. An occasional motor-car or electric brougham, a footman waiting at a carriage door, a stray pedestrian or two, are the only signs of life about this majestically dull thoroughfare. A statue of Shakespeare in Portland Place would be utterly cut off from the teeming life of the metropolis; and, furthermore, it would be as effectually removed from the old London that Shakespeare knew so well. It is utterly unconnected with any memory of the poet's London life.

Besides, why a statue at all? It is not needed, and it would be unbeautiful. We have a statue of Shakespeare already in the gardens in Leicester-square, where the effigy of the poet looks gloomily across at the revels of extremely gay young women and "bloods," who take no more notice of him than do the London sparrows perched disrespectfully on the top of his head! Besides, what British sculptor can do justice to the national poet in marble or in stone? London has far too many statues already, and nearly all of them are unlovely. Appalling effigies of statesmen in stove-pipe trousers and ungainly frock-coats, sometimes with allegorical females crouching in humility at their lordly feet, mar the prospect of many a London square and street. They all look horribly dejected, and soot and fog soon play havoc with their colour, reducing them to black monstrosities. It is terrible to think of the result if the Shakespeare statue hotheads are allowed to have their way. The only consolation would be that in Portland Place the statue would be decently hidden from the public gaze.

But a statue to the memory of Shakespeare is superfluous. The query in Milton's splendid lines has never been answered—

"What needs my Shakespeare for his honoured bones
The labour of an age in piled stones?"

Mr. Andrew Lang, who says he declines to have anything to do with any memorial to anybody, points out with gentle sarcasm that the memory of Shakespeare can never die so long as schoolboys are compelled to "do" him for examination purposes, and "swot up" the notes to the plays in the "Clarendon Press" editions. As the schoolboy well said: "We have to read the notes; we don't have to read the plays." And while Shakespeare figures in examination papers, succeeding generations will never forget him; they won't be allowed to. Compulsory Shakespeare, as Mr. Lang says, is an institution. And so millions of people, who never look at a Shakespeare play after leaving school, will continue for the rest of their lives to offer lip-homage to the national poet. So why a statue?

If Shakespeare must have a memorial of "piled stones," a well-endowed National Theatre would be far more in keeping with his supremacy in English drama. A National Theatre we must have, and the sooner the better; and it would be a fitting and a worthy tribute to the master dramatist to erect it in his memory.

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THE ART OF LIVING

A record of the experience of experts in the art of living was begun in the last number of the "Review of Reviews." Mr. Stead has succeeded in obtaining the views of more distinguished men on the important subject of what to eat, drink, and avoid, which he publishes in the number just issued.

General Booth's personal rules, which he does not insist upon as applicable to others, may be summarised thus:—

I have taken neither fish, flesh nor fowl for some years gone by, my diet consisting of bread, butter, grain, cheese, vegetables, with occasionally a little fruit.

I take tea in combination with hot milk, and when thirsty a little plain aerated water. I take no intoxicants or fancy drinks.

I neither smoke, take tobacco, nor any other opiate or pick-me-up in any form. I find my comfort and stimulation in the conscious flavour of God and the joy of doing good.

Mr. Thomas Hardy, who is now in his 63th year, gives the following rules of health:—

Food: Not to take much animal food.
Drink: To take very little alcohol.
Smoking: To abstain altogether.

Dr. Grace, the cricketer of the last half-century, who is now 60 years of age, says:—

Food: Eat in moderation.
Drink: Ditto.
Smoking: Ditto. I do not smoke, so cannot give my own experience on that.

Mr. Benjamin Kidd, the philosopher and writer on economics:—

Food: I have found well-cooked lean meat the most easily digested food, and that on which it has been possible to do continuously the best intellectual work. I cannot do good work on much starchy food. Very spare eating is, in my case, essential to the clear working of the mind.

Drink: I rarely take alcohol. I cannot do good work after it. It is not the immediate effects, but the after results which seem to depress the brain power.

Smoking: I rarely smoke.

Sir Oliver Lodge's plan is:—

Food: No time to think about it. I eat whatever comes—too much probably.

Drink: Next to nothing now, except on occasions of hospitality; then whatever is good.

Smoking: Did not smoke at all till forty, and very little since.

The anti-smoking brigade is still very strongly represented. Among those who have never smoked, or who advise total abstinence from tobacco, are General Booth, Thomas Hardy, Lord Rayleigh, Dr. W. G. Grace, Professor Sayce, Henry Arthur Jones, Sir William Ramsay, Mr. Beerbohm Tree, Sir H. H. Johnston, Mr. F. Benson, and Mr. Walter Crane. Sir Ray Lankester thinks smoking "perhaps better avoided," but finds "six small Turkish cigarettes in the day and one good cigar after dinner not obviously harmful, and very agreeable."

Chief among the smokers is George R. Sims, who begins to smoke directly he gets up, and goes on smoking until he goes to bed at night. He says: "I have tried to smoke less, but up to the present I have found it very difficult to do anything without a pipe or a cigar. I never smoke cigarettes." Mr. Edmund Gosse has no hesitation in saying that he has found tobacco of immense service to his general health and comfort. He never smokes at work. Mr. Silas K. Hocking never smokes until after lunch, never smokes while at work, and his daily quantum is half a-dozen cigarettes. Mr. Walter Crane says that he has not smoked for over thirty years, but it is an undertaking to explain to one's friends that one does not smoke, and he adds that if one has any bad habits it is best to break them occasionally.

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THE CHILDREN'S CHAMPION.

The death of the Rev. Benjamin Waugh removes the noble founder of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, a man who did more for the cause of ill-treated children than perhaps any other individual of his time. It was Mr Waugh who awakened the national conscience in regard to the cruelty inflicted upon children by brutal and vicious parents. He had found that the failure of children to attend school, and their miserable state when they did come, were commonly due to the neglect, or worse, to which they were subjected at home; and what chiefly aroused his indignation was the difficulty, as the law then stood, of bringing home to parents their responsibility. It is hard to realise now that in the seventies it was the accepted idea, not only among the general public, but among judges and magistrates, that, as an Englishman's house was his castle, the parents could practically do as they liked with their children, as with their inanimate goods and chattels. The stupid and paralysing old gag about "the liberty of the subject" was thrown in the teeth of any reformer who suggested that the interests of the community were of more importance than the parent's freedom to ill-treat his children. Mr. Waugh set himself to wear down public opinion, and he succeeded.

His first and greatest difficulty was to convince the country that cruelty to children actually existed. His appeal was nearly always met by the answer, "There is no cruelty in this town." By his persistence, eloquence, and charm of character, Mr Waugh gradually succeeded in changing public opinion. He spent five years travelling in Great Britain, collecting facts on which a Statute could be founded. Many of his disclosures were incredibly terrible. There seemed to be absolutely no limit to the variety of ill-treatment to which children were subjected. Referring to this labour he said: —"We find that there is more cruelty in the country than in towns. In the towns there is more brutality; in the country more wilful starvation, and starvation is worse than brutality. A child is strangled to death in six seconds; it takes six weeks of agony to starve it gradually to death." He told of an unnatural mother deliberately killing her child by thirst, and of a farmer devising the death of his son by patent medicine, in order to get the insurance money. Recitals like these, verified, alas! by prosecutions, convinced Parliament of the necessity of special legislation, and in 1885 the Criminal Law Aemndment Act was passed. Mr Waugh also secured a law by which others beside Poor Law guardians might prosecute in cases of starvation. In 1889 his legislative achievements culminated in the passing of the Act for the Prevention of Cruelty to and the better Protection of Children.

Under this "Children's Charter," supplemented in 1895 by a charter of incorporation conferred on the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the society has done a work of incalculable beneficence. It has dealt with over 300,000 cases of ill-treatment, and, but for it, in the vast majority of these cases the helpless little victims would have had to go on suffering. It encountered much opposition at first, even in police and coroners' courts, but it triumphed in the end. Happily it has of late become less and less necessary to prosecute, but the need of keen and persistent vigilance is still there. Every year the society deals with about 40,000 cases. Think of it—in a Christian country! The very fact of such a society being necessary is a disgrace to civilisation, but how necessary it is its record has shown only too clearly. And the chief credit for the whole work which it has done belongs to its founder, Mr Benjamin Waugh, "the Champion of the Child."

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"AN EXCISEMAN, ONE ROBERT BURNS," ON WHISKY.

Royal Commissions are usually sadly dull affairs, but the Public Analyst of the City of London, Dr. Teed, succeeded in livening up the Royal Commission on Whisky very effectually this week, in his capacity as an expert witness. He summoned no less an authority than Scotland's national poet, "Robbie" Burns, in corroboration of his views on the vexed question "What is Whisky?" He was acquainted, he said, with a poem written by "an exciseman, one Robert Burns," on Scotch drink. The following colloquy ensued:—

Dr. Brown: Do you think that has a bearing on our inquiry?—Yes, I do.

You wish to get the quotations I see in your "proof" on the notes of evidence?—Yes.

Then perhaps you will recite them or read them?—I am not quite sure about the pronunciation, not being a Scotsman. (Laughter.)

"Is there a Scotsman present?" asked the witness. There was no response, though one in the affirmative might have been expected where whisky was being discussed. As a matter of fact there