

Topics of the Day.

By Our London Correspondent.

A MOUNTAIN IN LABOUR.

LONDON, October 21.

MR. LLOYD GEORGE seems likely to get a severe reasting when Parliament reassembles over his land taxes and his colossal land valuation scheme. The cost of compiling the new Domesday Book will be prodigious, and if the rate of valuation goes on at the pace observed during the first year, the task of valuing all the hereditaments in the Kingdom will occupy nearly 30 years.

In order to value all the land in the country in accordance with the 1909-10 Budget scheme an immense staff of valuers, assistant valuers, draughtsmen and clerks was established. So far as can be ascertained from the Inland Commissioner's report just issued, the salary bill for this army of officials for the first year of their work was something like £280,000, and the cost of their office accommodation about £5,000. In addition there was a very heavy printing bill in connection with the issue of millions of different forms and instruction papers, so that all told the total expenditure could not be far short of £290,000.

And for this expenditure the result is that out of 11,000,000 valuations to be made only 369,000 were completed, and only £1,162 was raised as the yield of undeveloped land tax during the year.

As only 369,000 lots of land out of a total of 11,000,000 have been valued in one year, the total valuation of the whole country will, at the same rate of progress, occupy more than twenty-nine years, and the cost will be over eight millions.

Meanwhile it is obvious that either the valuation staff will have to be largely increased at an enormous cost to the country, or the Act will completely paralyse all dealings in land. Already things are in a tangle, and the operations of the Act are causing great inconvenience.

For instance, here is a case of a woman who died some three months ago, leaving a house to be sold, and the money to be divided by her trustees. The house was sold, and the solicitors have since been trying in vain to get the district valuer to value the land. No fewer than three valuations are required by the Act—a valuation on April 30, 1909, a valuation at the time of the woman's death, and a valuation at the time of the sale. But the solicitors cannot even get the first valuation, let alone the others, and meanwhile the purchaser will not complete the contract, and the trustees cannot divide the money. That is a sample of what is going on.

The task of the valuation is too immense, and it really looks as though the Act will have to be dropped as unworkable in its present form.

As a revenue producer Mr Lloyd George's scheme was not expected to shine during the early days of its operations, but the miserable amount standing to its credit in the report just issued has surprised everybody.

The publication of the Commissioner's dismal report is taken by Mr Lloyd George's enemies as an indication that he "realises the fact that the game is not worth the candle," and is ready to drop the scheme. The wish is no doubt father to the thought, but Lloyd George is not the sort of man to abandon a pet project because the first year's working has only produced results which give him a chance of scoring off him.

to it with uplifted head. . . We deliver death into the dim hands of instinct, and we grant it not one hour of our intelligence."

So this is, apparently, to be our new attitude—to talk of, analyse, study, and deliberate upon death as a common contingency rather than avoid it as an awful finality. Maeterlinck wants us to learn to look upon death free from the horrors of matter, and stripped of the terrors of imagination:—

"Let us first get rid of all that goes before and does not belong to it. . . We impute to it the tortures of the last illness, and that is not right. Illnesses have nothing in common with that which ends them. They form part of life and not of death. . . Death alone bears the weight of the errors of nature or the ignorance of science that have uselessly prolonged torments in whose name we curse death because it puts an end to them."

With this as his premise it is natural that Maeterlinck should discuss the question of ministering to the pains of those on the death-bed. To-day, he says, Science prolongs the agony which is "the most dreadful and the sharpest peak of human pain and horror for the witnesses at least." Often the sensibility of him who is at bay with death is already greatly blunted and perceives no more than the distant murmur of the sufferings which, to the watchers, he appears to be enduring.

Some day the prejudice will, Mr. Maeterlinck believes, strike us as barbarism:—

"Its roots go down to the unacknowledged fears left in the heart by religions that have long since died out in the minds of men. . . They (the doctors) seem persuaded that every minute gained amidst the most intolerable sufferings is snatched from the incomparably more dreadful sufferings which the mysteries of the hereafter reserved for men. . . The prolongation of the agony increases the horror of death; and the horror of death demanding the prolongation of the agony."

Thus does M. Maeterlinck plead for the right to put an end to the pains of those whose case is pronounced hopeless. His point of view is certain to command attention and a great deal of criticism on humanitarian as well as philosophic lines. His point of view is by no means a new one, but it is the first time that one of the literary giants of the world has ventured to so openly advocate the extinction of life in those whose case is hopeless, and who are doomed to linger in agony till kindly Death intervenes.

SAVINGS BANK NOTES OF HUMOUR.

The archives of the British Post Office Savings Bank—which is looking back with pride on 50 years of good work—contain many records of conscious or unconscious displays of humour on the part of depositors.

One of the questions a would-be depositor has to answer is to whether his address is "permanent," and to this one

man replied, "Heaven is our home," while other answers were—"Here is no continuing city," "Yes, D.V.," and "This is not our rest."

A depositor, asked on what grounds he applied for the sum standing to the credit of his brother, who had been described as "deceased," although no proof was given of his death, wrote back: "I have my brother's children to keep. I wrote to him six weeks ago, but he has never answered. He keeps writing to say that he is dead, or getting someone else to do it."

On the other hand, the Department had little difficulty in accepting as conclusive evidence of the death of a depositor the statement that he had died from "injuries caused through accidentally coming in contact with a passing train suddenly."

A married woman who claimed the money deposited by her dead son, was asked whether the boy's father was still alive. Her reply was—"Father living, but insignificant."

A young man who applied for the money due under an insurance effected by his father, was asked to state the cause of the father's death. He replied: "I don't know, can't remember; but it was nothing serious."

Savings Bank books are always being lost, and the explanations given are many and varied. For instance: "I think the children has taken it out of doors and lost it, as they are in the habit of playing shuttlescock with the books of books," wrote one depositor.

"Supposed to have been taken from the house by our tame monkey," was another answer; while a third depositor confided to the Department the fact that "I was in the yard feeding my pigs. I took off my coat and laid down on a barrel; while engaged in doing so a goat in the yard pulled it down. The book falling out, the goat was eating it when I caught her."

ALBANI'S FAREWELL.

The "enthusiasm born of regret" was in evidence at the Albert Hall last Saturday afternoon, when Madame Albani gave her farewell concert. There have been many "farewells" of popular favourites within the memory of the middle-aged, but it is doubtful whether any one of them provided stronger evidence of the stability of British appreciation than that which marked Madame Albani's retirement. Every corner of the great building was occupied, and when at the close the link of forty years' service was broken the cheers of an audience of 10,000 told Madame Albani that her career both as an artist and a woman had won the appreciation and admiration of her fellow men and women.

The whole-hearted tribute was all the more remarkable because since her retirement from the operatic stage full twenty years ago, Madame Albani had practically devoted herself to the oratorio platform, and had thus greatly circumscribed popular knowledge of her gifts and her personality.

The Albert Hall tribute was marked by the re-appearance of Madame Adeline Patti and Sir Charles Santley, so that the retiring artist had not only a grateful and appreciative public, but the most distinguished of her artistic comrades to bid her farewell. Miss Muriel Foster also emerged from her premature retirement to assist, and the programme was further

strengthened by the efforts of Miss Ada Crossley, Miss Adela Verne, the pianist, Gertrude Elwes, Flinnet Greene, and Haydn Wood, to say nothing of the famous New Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Landon Ronald and the Smallwood-Metcalf choir.

To Mme. Patti and Sir Chas. Santley the retiring vocalist gave the places of honour in her programme, her own first appearance being made early in the afternoon. Her entry evoked a thrilling outburst of enthusiasm which nearly had the effect of throwing Madame Albani off her emotional balance. For a few moments it seemed that the singer's emotions would overcome her, but with an obvious effort she conquered them, and by her rendering of Handel's "Ombra mai fu," and Chaminade's "L'Ete" proved that though time can wreck a voice, it cannot obscure art. Madame Albani's voice is "the voice that was," but her keen sense of poetry and the vocal directness that counted for so much in the early days of her career, have not been impaired by the passage of years.

Amid the enthusiasm that followed a procession of bouquet-bearers threaded its way to the platform, which soon became a veritable floral bower. In response Madame Albani sang Gounod's "Ave Maria," almost as impressively as in the years gone by, but perhaps the item most suggestive of her triumphs of other days was her rendering of Mendelssohn's "Hear My Prayer," delivered with all the old impressiveness and sung as though Kindly Nature had for a few minutes renewed the singer's prime.

"Ye Banks and Braes" followed as an unaccompanied duet with Australia's greatest contralto, Ada Crossley. Here, again, the effect was admirable. Finally, the end of the programme having been reached, Madame Albani sang Toselli's "Good-Bye." Again her feelings came near to the singer's undoing, and her own emotions found a ready response in the hearts of all present, which found vent in a storm of cheering as the artist made her exit.

Though the interest of the afternoon was naturally fixed upon Madame Albani, there was, of course, a full measure of enthusiasm for Madame Patti and Sir Charles Santley, each of whom was received with tremendous enthusiasm. "Angels Ever Bright and Fair" came from Madame Patti with all the artistic charm of days gone by. "Pur Dieci" followed; but it was not until she had sung "Home, Sweet Home" that she was allowed to retire. Like Madame Albani, with floral offerings. Sir Charles Santley just before had triumphantly rendered old-time favourites like "Maid of Athens" and "To Anthea," the vocal delights of which were even excelled in "Simon the Cellarer." The presentation of a purse of gold to Madame Albani, and the National Anthem, with Madame Albani as soloist, concluded a memorable event. The only disappointment was the absence of Madame Sarah Bernhardt, who could not get released from her engagement at the Coliseum.

"When I was a young man," said Mr. Cumrux, "I thought nothing of working twelve or fourteen hours a day."

"Father," replied the young man with sporty clothes, "I wish you wouldn't mention it. Those non-union sentiments are liable to make you unpopular."

FAMOUS AUTHOR ON DEATH.

One of the most discussed books of the current publishing season will certainly be Maurice Maeterlinck's series of essays entitled "Death," published by Methuen. The famous author asks us to alter our attitude towards the final hour. Hitherto the human attitude towards death has been one of dread, even among people living under the most desperate and miserable conditions. That attitude is represented by the old Roman saying: "We know what we are; we do not know what we may be."

Maeterlinck asks for a new philosophy and a less fatalistic point of view:—

"Though we think of death incessantly, we do so unconsciously, without learning to know death. We compel our attention to turn its back upon it instead of going



QUICK LUNCHEON: AS IT SEEMS TO A SENSITIVE NATURE.