Voltaire's Grave

THE discovery of a skeleton at a farmhouse on the site of the Abbey of Scellières bids fair to reopen the old argument regarding the burial place of Voltaire, for scientists who have examined the skull of the remains, which were buried in quicklime, insist that not only do its protruding jaw and other features resemble those of the famous French iconoclast, but that the skull is obviously that of an old man. Votaire, who provided many a sleepless night for his protagonists in the eighteenth century, has never been permitted to rest in peace since his death. Although he is supposed to lie in the Panthéon, many scholars question this as the final resting place of his material remains. Good Christians do not doubt Jehovah's disposal of his godless soul.

When Voltaire was on the point of death in Paris his nephew summoned the Abbé Gaultier of Scellières and two other priests. But Voltaire, half conscious, waved the priests away and died unshriven, maintaining his hostility toward the Church up to the very end. On July 10, 1791, by order of the National Assembly, his body was transferred to the Panthéon, and in 1864 it was proposed to restore the heart, which had been preserved in a little silver case, to the remains in the Panthéon. But when the coffin was opened it was found to be empty. At least such was the report at the time, although on December 18, 1897, a commission appointed by M. Rambaud, Minister of Public Education and Worship, and headed by Senator Hamel, again opened the tomb of Voltaire, which, according to the London *Times* of December 20, 1897, was said to contain a skull which showed a striking resemblance to his last portraits. The latter view is held by Mr. Richard Aldington and Professor Guerard of Stanford University, but it conflicts with the earlier report that the tomb was empty. No evidence was submitted in the latter investigation as to whether the skull was in two parts or not, although both the brain and the heart of Voltaire were removed before his body was embalmed. The heart is now preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale. Such, however, is the case for Voltaire's grave at the Panthéon.

But English newspapers of 1791 speak at length of the substitution of the body of a gardener or monk when Voltaire's remains were supposedly taken to the Panthéon. In a letter written to the Empress Catherine of Russia by her Ambassador to France, Prince Bariatinsky, we find an account of the manner in which the French public was being misled; and a letter from the lieutenant of police at Troyes at the time says: 'Voltaire was buried in the Abbey by his nephew, Abbé Mignot, who at once had the body placed in quicklime; so that the remains taken with great pomp to the Panthéon were not those of Voltaire.'

The discovery of a skeleton buried in quicklime at Scellières is supposed to authenticate the thesis that, since the Church had forbidden Voltaire's burial in consecrated ground, the story of the hurried burial by Abbé Mignot is true. The remains were unearthed by work-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

men making alterations in the chateau of Scellières, which is built on the site of the old Abbey. In making excavations for a furnace one of the laborers drove his pick through the skull, and a farmer, knowing nothing of the story of Voltaire, had the bones reburied immediately after they were photographed. The owner of the chateau, however, is much perturbed, and insists that if the bones are really those of Voltaire they should be taken from his premises immediately, for he will have nothing to do with the heretic.

The world has always made great fuss over the disposal of the mortal remains of men. Shakespeare himself felt constrained to warn, 'Curst be he that moves my bones,' while in the East the religious veneration paid to ancestors makes the authenticity of their graves of extraordinary importance. The London *Times* ventures the statement, 'Indeed, it might be argued that reverence for authentic graves is an invariable characteristic of the most highly civilized nations,' and quotes Pericles in Greek to add weight to the remark. But the veneration of worms and ashes is perhaps little more than sentimentality held over from a more superstitious and unreasoning age. What difference does it really make whether Voltaire lies buried at the Panthéon or not, so long as a few people, for whom Voltaire would have had no sympathy whatsoever, believe so? The real admirer of the fiery author of *Candide* will scorn the bickerings of scholars on this matter.

A Serb Poet

BALKAN men of letters apparently travel the road to international literary fame via the Boulevard Montparnasse, for we were ignorant of that talented Rumanian raconteur, Panaït Istrati, until Romain Rolland discovered him, and now Rastko Petrovitch, a Serb, has succeeded in making a name for himself in the French capital. After acquiring a reputation, numerous acquaintances, and some experience between the Rotonde terrace and the Fontainebleau classroom, he has returned to Belgrade to publish his first volume of collected verse, *Revelation*.

Although Petrovitch is but twenty-nine years old, he has enjoyed a store of adventures such as come only in the life of a Balkan. After spending several of his early years in Macedonia, he returned to his parents in Belgrade and took up literature. A Russian friend recovering from wounds received in the revolution of 1906 read Pushkin to Petrovitch, and his early work shows the strong influence of the Russian author. Petrovitch was fourteen years old when the Balkan War broke out, but he enlisted as a hospital attendant. Two years later he made his first trip through Europe, and then found himself on the verge of death from consumption, but recovered. During the World War he was forced to flee across Albania, marching through the snow for three months, and seeing thirty thousand of his comrades die of hunger and fatigue. He finally caught a ship for France, where he went to school at Fontainebleau, made friends among the younger French writers, and came under an influence which has superseded the earlier Russian strain. Rimbaud, Apollinaire, and Picasso opened up new perspectives for him, and shortly after he published his first poem in *Action* he became acquainted with Blaise Cendrars, Max Jacob, André Salmon, and a group of Dadaists.

For fear of being dominated by a foreign influence, he fled to his own country, as he wanted to express all the primitive force of his people in simple, strong language. He claims no system or theory, but merely seeks to express

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his thoughts precisely and clearly. This is what he has done in his first volume of verse. He had previously written two novels — one of them a decidedly puerile attempt to burlesque the Russian classics, the other an intellectual work based on the problem of knowing the value of life. His work is typical of the Balkans, and in its intellectual quality it is in the current of modern world letters.

Glozel's Alphabet

THAT French savants can make fools of themselves in controversy is obvious from the arguments which have arisen over the authenticity and identification of the archæological remains found at Glozel in France. Somebody, of course, must be wrong when one group, headed by Dr. Morlet and M. Salomon Reinach, who is none other than Director of the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres, asserts that the remains are Neolithic or six thousand years old; when another faction, led by M. Camille Jullian, an expert on Gallo-Roman civilization, insists with equal vehemence that the queer-looking bricks date from the Roman occupation of Gaul; and when M. Dussaud, curator of Oriental antiquities at the Louvre, calls the whole thing a fake and a fraud. Compromise is impossible; indeed, for any of the protagonists to admit error would be to destroy his reputation as a scholar, and all of them therefore cling to their theses with pitiful tenacity.

Briefly, the story of the finds is supposed to run as follows. In 1924 M. Fradin, a poor peasant living in the Auvergne region, turned up some peculiar brick formations while he was ploughing. He took samples to Dr. A. Morlet, the local physician, who discarded the stethoscope for the pick and shovel and turned up some brick wall on the little farm. M. Salomon Reinach was consulted, and a statement was issued saying that the remains were Neolithic and that the peculiar scratchings noted on the bricks constituted an alphabet which antedated the Phœnician.

This alphabet has caused most of the trouble, for should the opinion of these two archæologists prove correct it will become necessary for us to scrap many of our present teachings regarding early world history. Hitherto it has been believed that the East was the cradle of Western civilization, and that a clever race of merchants, the Phœnicians, invented the alphabet which we use to-day. But according to Dr. Morlet and M. Reinach, our alphabet is indigenous to Europe and was learned by the Phœnicians, who later taught it to Europe again after hostile Northern tribes had overrun Spain and Gaul and had destroyed all learning. M. Reinach has always leaned toward this theory, which may in part account for his ready acceptance of the Neolithic hypothesis at Glozel.

M. Dussaud of the Louvre Museum, however, raised the most spectacular hue and cry when he denounced the whole affair as a fake. He has promised to expose the whole hoax in a pamphlet, but so far his attacks have not been marked by perfect sportsmanship. His first allegations were made in a secret communication to the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres, although he publicly announced at the time that he believed the remains fictitious. Then followed an anonymous letter which he later acknowledged as his own. His charges, however, and the evidence which he submits, seem to carry some weight. For example, he points out that the bricks are comparatively soft, and were found in soft ground; and that in the course of even one or two thousand years they

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would never have been able to keep their shape, much less their inscriptions. The circular wall consists of nothing more than the remains of some blast furnaces of the sixteenth or seventeenth century, whereas the markings on the bricks are obviously done by some sharp steel instrument of recent vintage. He then points out that the persons perpetrating this hoax — and he specifically mentions Dr. Morlet and M. Fradin — were incredibly stupid in their choice of characters for their alphabet. One brick, for example, is made to read 'Glozel' by some palæologists and 'Christ' by others.

Nevertheless, perfectly unbiased visitors to Glozel feel convinced that Dr. Morlet and the peasant have acted in all good faith throughout the affair. When, however, the controversy began to assume international proportions, and became the subject for debates at congresses and conferences of scientists in almost every capital of Europe, Herriot, as Minister of Public Instruction, stepped in and applied the law protecting historic monuments to M. Fradin's farm. He appointed the Conservator of the Prehistoric Museum of Eyzies and an official from the Museum of St. Germain to superintend future excavations and to catalogue the remains as they were found. But both Glozelites and Anti-Glozelites object to this intrusion of the Government into their controversy, for they perhaps feel that it is better to hedge beforehand in case the conclusions of the Government's experts should fail to coincide with their own opinions.

Meanwhile words fly thick and fast. For example, Dr. Morlet is accused by M. Vayson de Pradennes of digging holes in the ground in which the physician buries bricks which he has marked in his own home. Dr. Morlet replies that de Pradennes tried to buy the place, and when he failed his envy prompted this attack; M. Reinach adds that the gentleman had probably eaten and drunk too well on the day he visited Glozel, and that he probably mistook the workings of moles for something more artificial. Aspersions on the intelligence of academicians have become a daily affair, and the newspapers have entered the controversy with an enthusiasm proportionate with ignorance.

All this must be a deadly blow to French vanity, for quite obviously somebody is wrong. It is all strangely reminiscent of Ossian in English literature, but even then we had no such diversity of opinion as exists at Glozel. We fear that the lesson to be learned from Glozel is that scholarship, honesty, and common sense do not always serve as handmaidens.

The Right to Life

The right to life, the fundamental principle of our code of Christian ethics, has been widely discussed in England after a jury found not guilty a father who deliberately tried to kill his daughter in order to put her out of the intense pain which she suffered immediately before her inevitable death. The law, which is inexorable on this point, was circumvented by medical evidence which showed that the child died a natural death before being put in the bathtub to be drowned.

Edward Davies is a twenty-eight-year-old shipyard laborer with whom life has dealt harshly. He served his country honorably during the war, but when discharged in 1919 he could not find ready employment, and was forced to sell his furniture in order to save his home. Early this year his wife died from tuberculosis and curvature of the spine. Then Elsie, one of his five children, contracted tuberculosis, and after an attack of measles developed

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gangrene in the face. Death was only a matter of time, and the distracted father kept vigil at the bedside of his stricken child night after night, trying to assuage her intense suffering. On the night of July 9, unable to stand the strain any longer, he lifted the little girl from her cot and dropped her face downward into nine inches of water in the bathtub. In the morning he confessed to the police.

Had the victim been an animal rather than a human being, it would have been criminal to have permitted her to live. Our present code of ethics and law makes the act intended by Mr. Davies murder, although the public acclaim of the acquittal of the poor father indicates an attitude which would not draw a sharp distinction between human beings and other members of the animal kingdom. An amendment to the law to include the 'right to kill to end human suffering,' intelligent legislators fear, would weaken the entire structure; so we continue the code of the 'right to suffer.'

Nevertheless, we tread very close to the line regarding the sanctity of life in our infliction of the death penalty and in the legality of wars. Materialists would go further and deny the right to life to the mentally deficient and physically incompetent. The same argument pops up in the 'right to prevent life' held by birth-control enthusiasts, and it is reflected in some of our state laws which impose sterilization upon the incurably feeble-minded and insane. The entire question is a very ticklish one, for any wavering from the definite right of every individual to life may shake the entire social structure. The jury in the Chester Assizes in calling Mr. Davies not guilty evidently took all this into consideration, probably more so than the medical testimony showing that the child had died before the commission of the attempted murder. Perhaps Mr. Davies was not entirely wrong in his attempt; perhaps the duty to relieve suffering in this instance was stronger than the right to life; and perhaps the right to life, after all, is only a relative matter.

Sausages and Mud Packs

MR. JUSTICE HORRIDGE, holding court in England on a claim for damages, suffered the loss of no little dignity when a liver sausage, about a foot long, weighing two pounds, and wrapped in a white skin, was handed to him on the bench. It was a sample of the insidious evil which had wrecked the beauty of Miss Helen Richards, ruined her health, and brought an end to her life work as a beauty specialist. For with all her knowledge of mud packs, soaps, cold creams, powders, manicures, marcels, and other mysterious aids to feminine artificial beauty, nobody had ever warned her against making a quick lunch of a sausage sandwich. So she offered the *Wurst* as an exhibit in her claim for damages from a London caterer, and incidentally to warn other women of the dangers that lurked therein.

The attorney for the plaintiff pointed out that, although his client was only forty-eight years old, up to the time she ate the liver sausage 'she appeared to be less than her years. She had a fresh and a very good complexion, but her illness has largely ruined her figure, her appearance, and her complexion. She has suffered loss of earning power as a result.'

In cross-examination Miss Richards admitted that she did mud masks in facial massages. 'A mud mark?' asked Justice Horridge in surprise. 'No,' replied the attorney, 'a mud mask. I understand that mud masks smooth

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

away the wrinkles that time has planted there.' Miss Richards added, amid laughter from the audience: 'They turn old women into young girls. But clients have not the confidence in me that they had before, because I want beautifying myself now.' Even the attorney for the defense agreed.

Miss Richards admitted that the pursuit of beauty went on with relentless and unceasing fervor, and that by her profession she earned about thirty dollars a week. Returning to the discussion of the liver sausage, Justice Horridge asked, 'What exactly is a liver sausage sandwich?' A doctor on the stand replied, 'I think it is a mixture, and there is liver in it.' Justice Horridge: 'What liver?' The doctor: 'I can't tell you.' Justice Horridge: 'You seem about as ignorant as I am.' The attorney for the plaintiff: 'I believe the principal characteristic of this liver sausage is that it does not contain liver.'

The case was continued, but it at least furnished us with some delightful evidence on the pursuit of artificial beauty, diet, and justice in England.

A Living Newspaper

THE troubadour has been brought up to date in the troupes of actors and actresses which have been organized to go about Soviet Russia disseminating news and amusing the public. A normal edition of this 'newspaper' employs at least twenty acrobats, singers, dancers, and parodists, who interpolate the propaganda and news of the day in their acts in such a manner that the Russian workingman or peasant can sit back and enjoy himself, taking his news as a sugar-coated pill to the tune of the latest popular song.

The scheme is very simple. At Moscow about twenty dramatists, or scenario writers, arrange the news of the world in vivid and easily assimilated form, and every fortnight a new programme is forwarded to the six thousand troupes who tour the country. For example, the flaxen-haired beauty of the Russian cabaret does not sing of love, but uses all her charm and magnetism in teaching her public the latest traffic regulations or explaining the prevailing diplomatic tangle. Some acrobats, in imitating machinery, may interpolate remarks not at all complimentary to the American motor-car industry and capitalism. If an actress toys with a sunflower, her audience does not hear romantic gush, but learns the utilitarian value of sunflower seeds. Parodies are written for the old popular tunes so that the Russian peasant may learn about the latest agricultural machinery. Humor is supplied by references to the old régime. Recently the 'living newspaper' proved its worth in the dissemination of publicity on the new standards of weights and measures.

These performances are free, the expense of putting on the show being borne by the trade-unions. The actors and actresses are professionals, whose salaries, though not high, are sufficiently attractive to draw one hundred thousand strolling players. The acts are given in quick succession, and every possible economy is effected in scenery and costumes. Crudely painted but vividly colored cardboard picture-frames, like those in the old Russian cabaret shows, are used extensively, and the costumes are ingenious contraptions which may be turned upside down, back side to, or twisted to make almost any sort of garment. Thus this unique theatre and newspaper combines many elements of the news reel, the town crier, and the troubadour, of Will Rogers, Balieff, and Lenin.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOOKS ABROAD

Spiel im Morgengrauen, by Arthur Schnitzler. Berlin: S. Fischer, 1927.

Mutter Marie, by Heinrich Mann. Vienna: Paul Zsolnay, 1927.

Töchter: Der Roman zweier Generationen, by Gabriele Reuter. Berlin: Ullstein, 1927.

[*Times Literary Supplement*]

ARTHUR SCHNITZLER has brought the short novel to something like perfection of form. His latest work in this category is not quite such a remarkable example as the two previous, *Fräulein Else* and *Traumnovelle*, both of which have been reviewed in these columns, but it is, from beginning to end, a most effective piece of writing, gripping the attention rather by its construction than by its diction, or its psychological interest, which is rather superficial. The plot is not very original. A young lieutenant in the Austro-Hungarian Army is appealed to by a comrade who is faced with disaster unless he can quickly pay his gambling debts. The lieutenant undertakes to gamble, and with the winnings he anticipates being able to help his friend. The long-drawn-out game of baccarat, with its alternations of loss and gain, its acute suspense and its intense anxiety, is admirably rendered. The fever of the play catches the lieutenant, and he finds himself at the end very heavily in debt. Now the expedient he had previously rejected as intolerable, an appeal to his uncle, is forced upon him. But he finds that the uncle has married a former *Geliebte* of his, has parted from her, and that she has control of his money. There is nothing for it but an appeal to her. Her manner is hard and businesslike. Still, she accepts a desperately proffered invitation to dinner, and leaves on the table, as 'payment for the entertainment,' a sum just enough to save the other officer. The young lieutenant shoots himself, and is found dead by his uncle, who had brought the necessary sum from his wife. The story is melodrama, inferior in depth and intelligence to both the stories already mentioned, but planned and built up with admirable skill.

Heinrich Mann's novel is also melodramatic, not only in matter, but in style; it is far from giving the illusion of complete reality. Felicie is the 'Mutter Marie' of the title. As a poor servant-girl she has an illegitimate child, whom she takes to the river-bank but has not the heart to drown. The baby is taken into the house of the childless General von Lambart and his wife, and brought up as their own. The mother, in the meantime, marries a rich old man, inherits his wealth, and then feels a longing for her child. At length she traces him, and finds him about to marry a poverty-stricken princess, if a shameless old profiteer, into whose clutches the General has come, can be forced to keep his hands off her. The rest of the story is concerned with how Felicie conquers her love for her son and her jealousy of the princess and coöperates in deceiving the villainous profiteer and in saving from financial ruin the General who had stolen her child. This is a frank piece of melodrama, even down to the long but, we fear, incredible scene in the confessional, where Felicie makes the great renunciation. The novel is saved from complete banality by the picture it gives of the General's household and the charming young princess, aristocracy reduced to beggary after the war.

The chief value of Gabriele Reuter's novel, too, lies in the picture it gives of a certain phase of German society during and after the war. In 1895 this popular woman writer made a 'hit' with her novel, *Aus guter Familie*, a story of a woman's emancipation, a kind of German equivalent to *The Woman Who Did*. The heroine, Dorothee, of this new book is of that generation. She goes away to Athens with her lover, an archæologist, has, unknown to anyone, a child before she marries, and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED