

Sept 23<sup>rd</sup> 1903

### MATERIALISM.

#### UNIVERSITY EXTENSION LECTURE.

At the University lecture theatre on Tuesday evening Professor Mitchell gave the first of his series of lectures on materialism. There was a good attendance. As explained in the syllabus, the treatise was concerned only with the connection between mind and matter. The first lecture dealt with the facts of this connection, and consisted mainly in an account of the nervous system. The professor explained that the latter was constituted of millions of millions of cells, and by a number of slides prepared by Mr. Andrew Scott the different nervous forms and forces in our bodies were shown. The units of the system were called nerve cells or neurones, and a definite aggregation of these, without, as a rule, contact between them, made up the whole structure. The cells were embedded in a cement for which, until recently, there had been considered no other definite use. But lately theories had been originated which located in this substance certain qualities connected with experience and the formation of such traits as habit. Practice, for instance, continually repeated a transference from one neurone to another through the cement, until the path became easier, and habit asserted its influence. Professor Mitchell explained that he was not going to take into consideration the origin of life in this course of lectures. It did not affect materialism whether life could be formed in the laboratory or not, although the chemical structure of the protoplasm was of such complexity that there was very little likelihood of this being done. However, there was nothing theoretically wrong with the idea that life could be made from matter. Referring to the distribution of the nervous system of the brain, he said that no scientific man held with the theory of phrenology, as it localized certain separate powers of the brain. No single part of the brain could act by itself, and cause its own individual result. The lecture was illustrated by a number of intricate views of the nervous system, which considerably aided the speaker in his explanations.

Next Tuesday the second lecture will deal more specifically with the coincident working of mind and brain, and go further into the explanation of materialism.

## The Register.

ADELAIDE: WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 1903.

### THE RAMSAY SMITH ENQUIRY.

In a personal sense the essential result of the report of the Board of Enquiry concerning the charges brought against the City Coroner is to acquit that officer of having done anything more serious than the display of undue zeal in dealing with the corpse of the aboriginal Tommy Walker. In these circumstances Dr. Ramsay Smith may fairly be congratulated upon his satisfactory emergence from a painful ordeal, and upon the benedictions which the Board has so lavishly showered on him. Certainly its members express the opinion—which The Register has consistently urged for years—that the office of City Coroner should be held independently of private practice or official duties that may clash with it; but this obviously wise pronouncement implies no disparagement of Dr. Smith, who acted in his multifarious capacities with the full consent of the Government. So much for the personal equation, and with that ceases the occasion for gratification. The finding of the Board must tend to increase instead of allay the dread which fond survivors have felt because of what may happen to the bodies of those who were dear to them when in life. The declaration of the Board on this general issue is in effect that the Anatomy Act is little, if any, better than a broadly farcical statute, merely leading people to believe that the sanctity of the dead is respected, when in reality there is no guarantee that it is not constantly violated. According to the Attorney-General's extremely suggestive commentary, the Act applies if a body is cut into little pieces, but it does not apply if the corpse is deprived of its head or any other part, or even its skeleton, so long as it is not cut into little pieces. On this reading a medical practitioner may after a person's death take away for any purpose any part of that person's body, unless some one specially interested in the deceased should—whether consulted or not—expressly tell the doctor not himself to use or allow any one else to use the knife upon it. Something may be said in support of this extraordinary latitude as a means of aiding scientific research, but what of the interests of justice? If the law is such as the Board has represented it to be, it is an absolute menace to the public safety and security against crime. The personal integrity—or "taste," as the Board says—of medical men is virtually the only source of reliance; and, though 98 doctors of every 100 may be worthy of implicit confidence, the 99th may be a ghoul and the 100th a murderer, and yet the grim vagaries of neither can, under the law, be checked. A doctor may accidentally or otherwise cause the death of a patient, and may remove the telltale organ from the corpse, and dispose of it as he likes, and so enjoy immunity from consequences. All is a gruesome go-as-you-please; and an exhumation of a corpse, ordered after the revelation of suspicious circumstances, may or may not lead to the dissipating of a tragic mystery—that will depend upon whether the body is in the grave or scattered round the world in detachments. If, for instance, in the case of the man Green, who was adjudged to have committed suicide, fresh evidence were to be adduced to engender a doubt whether he had not been murdered, the presumption is that such a doubt could not be solved because of the mutilation of the body after death. Manifestly, therefore, one conclusion in which all readers of the Board's report will agree is that the anatomy laws must be speedily altered. At present they constitute a gruesome jest which might well inspire a Gilbertian satire.

The position of the Government in connection with the enquiry has been misrepresented in a curious manner. Attempts have been made to convince the Parliamentary Opposition that, if the charges against Dr. Ramsay Smith were not sustained in the enquiry, Ministers must be prepared to be ousted from office for that reason alone—that if he stood they must fall, and vice versa. What nonsense this

is—what politically indecent nonsense. So far as the community knows at present the worst that can be laid to the charge of the Government in this matter is that Dr. Smith was not given a sufficient opportunity of explaining his position before the formal investigation was instituted. There may or may not be something in this—nothing which has yet been disclosed enables any one to decide the question with confidence; but to talk of it as a sufficient justification for officially killing the Ministry is to utter an arrant absurdity. In the enquiry itself, if some evidence may have been liable to the suggestion of prejudice, other testimony was possibly subject to the discount of partiality; but there is no suggestion of Ministerial animus. There is no idea that the Government had anything to gain or any revengeful feelings, to gratify by calling upon the Coroner to answer his accusers in the way which the law prescribes. According to the balance of

probabilities, shown by official records, Ministers were rather solicitous friends than severe opponents of the aspersed officer; and, whatever may be contended on the opposite side, a great deal may be urged in favour of the determination of the Attorney-General that—even in the interest of Dr. Smith himself—the matter should not be hushed up, but that all the facts must be revealed to the people in the unobscured light of day. If a similar policy had been followed in connection with the Hospital dispute, that miserable and destructive disturbance would not have lasted half so long as it did. The Ministry may fairly be commended for having promptly and decisively taken proceedings which not only have given an accused official the fullest opportunity for an open scrutiny of his conduct, but have also enabled the taxpayers to learn precisely what is being done in a most important matter which had long been the subject of animated discussion, if not of serious and painful misunderstanding.

Apart from the direct issue involved in the case itself, two extraneous considerations arising out of it are worthy of notice. First, it seems remarkable that the Crown Solicitor should have been passed over in such an important enquiry, and that a brief should have been given to an outside advocate. The ordinary observer might naturally fancy that a case like this was eminently one for the handling of the Crown Solicitor's office; and, as more than the mere feeling of a non-official lawyer is concerned in this matter, the Government will be expected to explain a course which it is difficult to understand in the absence of explanation. If, however, a mistake has been made in this direction from one point of view, it has at least served the purpose of giving a golden opportunity to a young legal practitioner who has made the most of his chances, and proved himself thoroughly worthy of the trust reposed in him by the Government. To perspicacity and manifestation of legal lore Mr. Parsons added that quality of gentlemanliness and that consideration for the feelings of the witnesses which are not so often exemplified as they ought to be among members of his profession. He is entitled to thanks for having maintained a high tone—even though he may have erred occasionally on the side of too great tenderness—in his examinations and cross-examinations; and for having shown that it is possible to conduct a legal investigation without bullying and insulting witnesses who offer their testimony, not for their own benefit, but in the interests of what they deem to be truth and justice. The fine example which he set in these respects should be noted and imitated. While, as a rule, the gentlemen of the long robe do not broaden liberty into licence in their management of cases, there are too many exceptions in which sensitive people in the witness box are tortured as victims of the cheap wit or the insolent imputations of lawyers, to whom ought to be applied as a guide to behaviour the limitation that they should not be permitted to address to people in Court language which, if it were uttered to them in the street, would cause the user to be knocked down or sued for slander. While the public have yet to learn why Mr. Parsons was engaged in the case at all, they can at least compliment him upon the conspicuous success which he has achieved in his first appearance under conditions of special prominence and corresponding difficulty.

Reg. 19<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1903.

### UNIVERSITY EDUCATION.

London, September 17.

Sir William R. Anson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education), in a speech which he delivered at Manchester last night, criticised Sir Joseph Norman Lockyer's statement at the annual meetings of the British Association that £24,000,000 was required to place the British system of university education on a par with those existing in Germany and the United States. He stated that the President of the British Association had begun at the wrong end, and expressed the opinion that a large extension of universities was unnecessary unless there should be a more widely diffused desire for education throughout the country.

Ad. 23<sup>rd</sup> Sept. 03.

### LECTURE ON MATERIALISM.

Professor Mitchell continued his course of lectures on "Materialism," in connection with the University extension lectures on Tuesday evening before a large audience. In the previous lecture he dealt with "the facts." His subject on Tuesday was "their explanation in materialism." He dealt with "what is popularly called materialism." The subject was dealt with in an interesting manner, and the views of a number of eminent thinkers in respect to it were discussed.