

was not a single case of capital punishment in Canada during those twenty years, and we are told it was largely due to the feelings of Queen Victoria which were respected by the Governors of this country. If we could get along without capital punishment for twenty years in this country, why not for all time? There never was a time when Canada was more peaceful than during these twenty years. I ask the Parliament of Canada to give this a trial; it is not very long from one session to another, and we do not run any risk in trying the experiment. I am going to point out twelve or eighteen different countries and states in which capital punishment was abolished many years ago. In not a single case do the figures show that crime has increased, and in most cases the fact is that crime has actually decreased. I know that there are probably men who do not believe that there is a Creator; men who do not believe in the eternity of the soul, and who will say: Well, it is best to get rid of the murderer. From a purely earthly point of view that may be so, but I believe in the eternity of the soul, and I believe there is a Creator, and I, for one, will never permit, if I can prevent it, having a man's soul thrust into eternity by process of law. There may be some who have such a thirst for human blood that they would resent the suggestion I offer, but if there be such a man in this House, I say to him: let him who is without sin cast the first stone.

(1) Capital punishment brutalizes the public, as well as the officials who have to carry it out, thus tending to destroy all notions of the sanctity of human life. (2) Capital punishment is not deterrent, and by some criminals is less feared than penal servitude for life. A large proportion of the murders committed are due to influences over which no deterrent can avail, such as drink, jealousy, etc. (3) Capital punishment being irrevocable, is too extreme a measure; with a wrong verdict and the sentence carried out, the mistake cannot be rectified. (4) Since it is largely accidental whether the victim of a murderous assault dies or recovers, the sentence depends upon chance. It is illogical that identical crimes should incur different penalties. (5) Capital punishment, being irrevocable, induces juries to decline to convict, and leads on the slightest pretexts to petitions for mercy to the Minister of Justice, and to pleas of insanity, neither of which are desirable in the interests of justice. (6) Punishment

[Mr. Bickerdike.]

ought to be reformatory, not vindictive. (7) Capital punishment has already been abolished in several foreign countries without ill-effect.

Towards the convicted murderer the State acts as though he were not fit to live. Then, let me ask: Is the Justice Department of Canada quite sure that he is fit to die? Having been condemned to death, he is apparently a fit subject for any kind of outrage. On the day of execution the wretched man is led out towards the gallows, and with revolting hypocrisy the burial service is read over him. One must not overlook the degrading effect of such scenes upon all who take part in them and receive payment for doing so. Take, for instance, the chaplain, the warders, and, above all, the hangman, who earns his living solely by taking other peoples' lives.

In many European countries, though still at times in force, capital punishment has been practically abrogated through the marked growth of humanitarian sentiments. In Austria, between 1870 and 1879, eight hundred were sentenced to death, and of these only sixteen were executed. In Sweden, during the same period, out of thirty-two sentenced only three were executed; in Denmark one out of ninety-four; in Bulgaria seven out of two hundred and forty-nine, and I am safe in saying that with the advance of civilization and christianity, there is a tendency all over the world to look upon the death penalty as unwarrantable.

We all believe in a future state, better in every way than the present one, yet we pay that future state the sorry compliment of hurling into it, in the most degrading manner, the souls of those whom we consider unfit to live, and we thrust that soul into eternity before the appointed time. The very phrase, 'May God have mercy on your soul,' is a flagrant abuse of words; it implies that the mercy which is lacking on this side may or may not be granted on the other. It repudiates human responsibility, and implies that one who is not fit to live in man's world is to be sent into God's world, as though the refuse of this world was good enough to be ushered into the next. How many men have been hanged on circumstantial evidence which has afterwards been disproved?—but life is gone and no redress is possible. We almost had just such a case in the city of Montreal a few weeks ago, when a poor Italian was found to be innocent and was let out after having spent five years in the peni-