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Obituary.

Victor B. Neuburg

We regret to record the death of Victor B. Neuburg, after a lengthy and distressing illness. Neuburg commenced his Free-thinking career early. He contributed articles to the old *Agnostic Journal*, we think, in the closing years of the nineteenth century, or in the very early ones of this. He wrote for other Free-thought journals and for many years was a very frequent contributor to the *Freethinker*. His work was always valued, because through all he wrote there ran the evidence of the careful thinker, and the talented writer expressing opinions solidly based on sure knowledge. He was also one of the very few men who had an intimate knowledge of Freethinking publications from the days of Richard Garble onward; and what was also striking a familiarity with French Freethinking that is not very common nowadays. He was tolerant in temperament, and without self-seeking in his work. That is something which will always endear his memory to those who knew him. A select gathering of friends assembled at the Golders Green Crematorium on June 4th, to pay their tribute of respect to one who is now only a memory. An 1 address was delivered by Mr. Bayard Simmons, which I here appended. It gives an aspect of his character worth recording.

This little gathering of relatives and friends has come here to give a last salute to the Soldier-Poet Victor B. Neuburg. For it is to that select company of English Soldier-Poets that our comrade belonged, and we, when we think of Sir Philip Sidney, Richard Lovelace, and Lord Byron, and all the wonderful company of soldier-poets in the last Great War and the Spanish Civil War, will remember that Victor Neuburg was of that immortal fellowship. It is indeed impossible to think for one moment upon Victor Neuburg without dwelling on his two-sidedness. He was the Man of Thought and the Man of Action. He was no Hamlet caught in a web of thought and rendered

impotent for action. He was that *complete whole*, the Man of Thought, *in Action*, the sane and balanced man, in short, the Man of Genius.

There is a certain appropriateness in our comrade's passing at this hour of peril to us and to all of beauty, culture, and freedom of the spirit that Victor Neuburg strove for so manfully. We can almost hear the guns of the embattled Huns, who, there is only too much reason to fear, will shortly come pounding at our own gates. Although Victor Neuburg never shouldered a musket (nor carried a tommy gun) to march in this *present war*, yet in very truth he has fallen, *On Active Service*. The delayed operation (that is, the re-opening) of a lung wound received in the last onslaught on this country has snatched from our midst this bright intelligence.

Victor Neuburg was an armed combatant in the 1914-18 War, but I should give the wrong impression if I left this company with the idea that he was a Fire-Eater. Indeed, I cannot recall any among my friends who was more gentle. In this Victor Neuburg resembled the prototype of all Soldier-Poets, the serene, and gentle, yet courageous and active, Sir Philip Sidney, our English Bayard. Victor, though called upon to face the private soldier's common lot, dirt and discomfort, wounds and death, was a soldier in the wider meaning of the term, a soldier in the struggle to deepen our sense of beauty, and to make wider the bounds of freedom. But what true poet that ever lived was not a soldier in this wider sense; a campaigner in the struggle against dullness, sloth, cruelty and oppression.

One had only to know Victor Neuburg even slightly to be aware of the fact that his sensitive soul would have gladly turned aside from the world's contentions to the undivided pursuit of Beauty. But our comrade was too great a lover of this world and its queer inhabitants to seek refuge in the Ivory Tower. It is reported that Michelangelo once reproached Leonardo for his indifference to the misfortunes of the Florentines. Da Vinci is said to have replied: "Indeed, the study of Beauty has occupied my whole heart." But Victor had the wider vision: he *knew*, as all poets know, that *Beauty* and *Truth* and *Right Living* are bound up together, and that none can flourish without the aid of the other two.

We must now speak of the Poet side of our dear comrade. What the good Soldier does has its value in righting a wry world, but this is perhaps not so well remembered as *what the good Poet sings*. This is not the place and time to assess Victor's contribution to the Art of Poetry, but one *can* say this. If in

his earlier years he, like other young poets, was concerned with those subjects natural to youth—Which are summed up in the word *Panic* (from the God Pan), so often used by our comrade; if, too, to some of his earlier work the word “precious” could be rightly applied; if, I say, such a judgment should be passed (and which young poet is altogether free of such tendencies?) then it must equally be emphasized that in later years Victor Neuburg became more and more conscious of the *social and prophetic* ingredients of the poets make-up. He saw clearly two words at grips, two systems struggling for man’s soul, and he unhesitatingly put his great talents on the side of the spiritual autonomy of the individual man.

But over and above what a man may achieve himself, whether as a Soldier or a Poet, there is the effect of an artist’s work on the rising generation, An artist proves his wisdom by aiding and encouraging the younger people in his own art, never regarding them as his superseders, as they well may be, but actively and unselfishly aiding his own surpassing in the interest of the *greater* Beauty and the *deeper* Truth. In this direction Victor Neuburg’s contribution to English letters, to English Poetry, is incalculable. It can only be compared to Mitrofan Belaieff’s contribution to Russian music. First, in *Poet’s Corner* in the *Sunday Referee*, then, in his own valiant little organ *Comment*, by counsel, criticism, and, above all, encouragement, Victor Neuburg has made his mark on the rising English poets. If this present War, like that of a generation ago, produces “a nest of British singing-birds,” the instructed among us will know that it was Victor’s gentle hand that first guided their footsteps. The memory of Victor Benjamin Neuburg will be revered by many of these young men and women, and through their verses something of his dauntless spirit will be carried to generations yet unborn. *That* will be Victor Neuburg’s best and abiding monument.

Victor Benjamin Neuburg, in the name of this company, I bid you Farewell, and untroubled sleep!

Bayard Simmons