

The
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AN EDUCATIONAL MOVEMENT.

ADVANCING WORKING PEOPLE.

CHAT WITH MR. MANSBRIDGE.

With the formation 10 years ago of the Workers' Educational Association, there opened up in England an educational renaissance which has gripped all classes and conditions of the people, and is extending throughout the Empire. The founder and General Secretary of the movement (Mr. Albert Mansbridge, M.A.), who is on a visit to the Commonwealth, and has already achieved considerable success in the eastern States, arrived in Adelaide on Sunday. A man of striking personality and great intellectual power, it is not surprising that his campaign for raising the working people has been attended with such signal triumph, or that his enthusiasm has inspired the highest and the lowest with his ideals. None but a skilled pilot could steer so tranquil a course through the turbulent waters of party considerations, hailing as comrades on the voyage all the opposing elements of political life. The movement promises to rival in magnitude and importance the great religious revival of the middle ages, and to perform for the modern mind the miraculous development which that historic upheaval did for the soul of the English people. Mr. Mansbridge has a happy gift of expressing himself, and on Sunday he entertained a reporter with a number of observations on education in England and Australia. His tutorial classes in the mother country treat of practically every subject one might desire to study. The idea must, he prophesies, extend itself to all ranks of workers in the modern State. Take the instance of the medical profession. Why should not doctors congregate in the highest medical centre of their State, and give their experiences and ideas for the development of their subject? Nor are the benefits pertaining to the movement confined to the one sex. Mrs. Mansbridge, who is accompanying her husband on his tour, is very keen on the education of women. She promises to keep Australia acquainted with the activities of women workers in England, and similarly hopes to gather from Australian women news of what they are doing.

—Objects of the Association.—

Mr. Mansbridge was invited to explain in Australia the methods of the association by working people of Sydney, who were stimulated by reports from England. Coincidentally enough, a similar request was almost simultaneously made by the universities of Australia. "The association," he remarked, "covers the whole range of education, with the exception of technical subjects, to study which people attend the technical schools in England. Our idea is to give the working people the opportunity of leaving whatever they desire, but at the same time we think it unsound to impose education on adults. We want no man in the tutorial classes who does not wish to study." Dealing with the question of extending the movement to Australia, he pointed out that while some people maintained that the climatic conditions and the open-air life were an opposing factor to it, it must be remembered that in England disadvantages of long hours and bad houses had had to be contended with, and had been overcome. Australia's success in adopting the scheme would play a vital part in furthering its interests in England. He quoted figures showing the remarkable progress of the association, which comprised 2,164 affiliated bodies, including the biggest national movements in England. There were about 10,000 individual members, organized into 150 branches, and 50,000 people under its educational influence. "It commands the adherence of all sections of national thought, but its main source is supplied out of the minds and spirits of the working people, who are reaching out for knowledge as though for hidden treasure," Mr. Mansbridge stated. As illustrating its public importance, he cited an instance in the last education debate in the House of Commons, when it was praised from all three sides of the House—Conservative, Liberal, and Labour.

—“A Picnic of the Mind.”—

"The working people have been immensely delighted with the movement," he remarked, for it has been proved that a man engaged at his employment during the day can, by attending these studies, achieve results equal to the best work done in the universities. For example, when the first six classes had finished a year's work, and two classes had completed a two-year's course, the essays of those working people were declared, in a large proportion, quite as good as those of men who had gained honours at Oxford. And this by persons sometimes underpaid, handicapped by overtime and long hours, and even by unemployment. In fact, essays by working people are in circulation at Oxford, and the undergraduates are asked to read them. The secret of the success of each branch of the association is that it is a federation of the organizations in its area. Some branches have 100, and thus you get 100 Secretaries for the development of education in a town, unified into a common centre. Another striking thing we find is that our work can flourish in the smallest villages, in many of which last winter we had an average attendance of 30. Our great theory is that every normal person, when not under the influence of a counteracting master passion, does really desire to know about the things worth while. For example, the working man usually wants to study economic history—the history of the people. Study is to him a recreation, a picnic of the mind. Nor, except from a financial standpoint, is it made easy for him to join the classes. No man without money, however, is excluded. The fees are nominal, and the main cost is borne by the universities, the Government, and the local education bodies."

—Supply of Instructors.—

Questioned regarding the supply of instructors in the classes, Mr. Mansbridge remarked that in any modern community, one generally found a number of people with a knowledge of their subject only too glad of the opportunity to impart it to others. The teachers in the classes were well paid. "Again, we have in England for years been pouring out a stream of graduates," he said, "many of whom, and especially ladies, do not have to turn to work. Numbers of them take up the matter for the sake of doing something worth while." When informed of the extension lecture system at the Adelaide University, he cited an example in Nottingham where the Trades and Labour Council had requested the University of Cambridge to send them lecturers. "That was one of the main sources of extension lectures in England," he explained.

—Movement in Australia.—

The question of how far the movement would be applicable to Australia, and of what steps have already been taken in that direction, was touched upon. "Working people and scholars in the eastern States," he said, "have found it necessary to establish a body equivalent to the association, and to ask the universities to supply tutorial class teachers. The universities of Melbourne and Sydney have decided to extend their organizations in order to provide joint committees for tutorial class work to consist of—as in England—an equal number of representatives of the people and of the universities. I am hopeful that the Workers' Education Association, or its equivalent, may be started in each Australian State, each to be independent, but to help one another, and to be assisted by the English movement. So far as I can see that seems to be the general desire everywhere I have been."

—Enlightened the "Cow Country."—

The difficulty of driving the wedge of education into the backblocks, and enlightening the children of the popularly termed "cow country," was the subject of interesting references. "I am of the opinion," remarked Mr. Mansbridge, "that, roughly speaking, the organization of Australian primary education is producing as good results as in England. The difficulties of supplies in England, and the small groups of children, meeting at great distances, in the backblocks of Australia, are being attacked with a wisdom and courage that seem to me bound to bring complete success in the long run. I am glad that the school doctor has been introduced here, and that centres for medical treatment have been established. I have also been struck by the determination of the various departments of public instruction to give each child who so desires a high school education. The bursary system in New South Wales was defined to prevent the poorest child from missing an advanced education. So far as the universities are concerned, it is clear that they are facing a new era, being inspired by the university movement all over the world. In a similar degree to the bursary scheme, they are making sure that no young man or woman fitted for it shall fail to secure a university education. In fact, there is a determination to establish a

democratic highway to education. Of course, the States vary somewhat in their power in this direction, but their faces all seem set the same way. One evil, however, which Australia will have to face, especially in the rural districts, is the overworking of little children during the years of their attendance at school. In the towns, also I have seen boys of eight selling papers from early morning until night, but I am sure that Australia only needs to realize these things, and she will take steps to prevent them from becoming established features. One can, of course, sym-

pathize with the difficulties of the settler in working the land of his farm without the assistance of his children, but really the development of the child is of more importance than a margin of profit, or even well-developed cows. Generally, one can recognise the difficulties in rural districts, but Australia, in her wisdom, must surmount them if she is going to be a leading Commonwealth."

—Series of Addresses.—

Mr. Mansbridge will deliver an address at the Adelaide University to-night on the aims and methods of the association. A series of discourses will be delivered in Adelaide. The accommodation of the Prince of Wales Theatre is limited, and it is necessary to restrict admission to ticketholders. A notice giving further particulars, appears in another column.