

The Daily
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NEW EDUCATION

ADULTS AND THE UNIVERSITY

FREE TO TEACH THEM ANYTHING

MR. MANSBRIDGE'S DEMOCRATIC MISSION.

"I really expected that Australians would listen with interest to the story of the educational movement, but I found this country like a sponge, ready to absorb every vestige of information I might have on the subject. I am satisfied that my visit has been made just at the right time, as I have met with splendid success."

The visitor was Mr. Albert Mansbridge, M.A., founder of the Workers' Educational Association of England. A pressman called upon him yesterday morning at the South Australian Hotel shortly after he arrived by the express from the eastern States. A few minutes conversation with this champion of democrats was sufficient to disclose how he had been able to force open the barred doors of the English Universities to allow the insufficiently educated workers a free opportunity of improving their learning. He possesses a remarkable personality, his very handshake bestowing a welcome which knows no distinction between the ignorant and the wise. An earnest friendship is established on the most casual acquaintance, and he seems ever ready to assist in breaking down any obstacle which might stand in the way of acquiring knowledge. He is the very essence of vitality in the movement in which he has embarked.

"Thousands have benefited by the tutorial classes," he declared, "and once they get on the path of learning their thirst for knowledge grows apace. There is no distinction made. All meet on the same footing. I tell you it is a splendid sight to see the manual worker gathered and welcomed in the class with the most scholastic. They exchange their views, and one learns from the other. We have clergymen, laborers, tailors, business men—a whole collection in some of our classes, all keenly desirous of learning. The teacher is a student, and the students are teachers; even the humblest is not afraid to teach, and the most advanced is willing to learn."

What would the humble teach?

"He perhaps possesses information of benefit to the whole world. For instance, there are no better persons to tell of the trials, circumstances, and misery of unemployment than the unemployed themselves. This is a burning question of the day. When the university deals with the matter you would hardly expect to get the best information from the person who has never been unemployed."

Do you find that the manual laborer is a diligent scholar?

"In the course of a three-years' study essays have to be written, and some of the best have come from the workers. The Melbourne University now treasures a copy of an essay written by a tailors on certain industrial matters. There are other cases where manual workers have given expression to their knowledge which is now in the possession of the universities of the world."

What subjects would the students take

"Any they liked. There is always someone in a town who makes a special study of a subject, and I find that they are ever ready to impart their knowledge. Some want to study philosophy and other economic history. A few ploughmen in one town at home wanted to learn algebra. It is a recreation to them, and I am sure it is better than studying betting lists. The day for the university to dictate what it thinks the student should learn has gone, and instead it asks him what he wants to learn?"

"For instance, at Hobart a number of women wanted to learn natural history," broke in Mrs. Mainsbridge, who was sitting near at hand and had followed the conversation with deep interest, "and we have decided that they should be taught that subject."

"My wife deals with the education of women, and they take as great a part in the movement as the men. She has decided to make herself responsible to keep Australia acquainted with the work of the women in the old country, and, of course, is gathering information which will be of advantage to those at home."

She was assured that the Women's Political Educational Association would give her every assistance.

"You asked me what does the average manual worker desire to learn?" continued Mr. Mainsbridge. "He wants to find out all he can about industrial history. It is revolutionising the universities, and is causing them to go into deep research. We have plenty of facts concerning Greek art and literature, but the question which has now arisen is, 'What about Greek industry? What did the working people do?' Of course, this applies to industrial history of all other nations."

Do you think Australians are as industrious as Englishmen?

"Yes. It has been said that the outdoor life here and the freedom which exists would tend to bring about lack of interest, but a similar thing was said in England. It was stated that the workmen would have little time to attend the classes, as they worked long hours and overtime, and got small salaries. You have to face a lot of problems which will affect England. Therefore, they naturally are deeply interested in your progress. If Australia failed in one of its big undertakings the cry for the future would be, 'Oh, what's the use of trying that; it failed in Australia.'"

How did the movement arise?

"Out of a small group of workmen who desired to hear lectures given by university professors. The association was commenced 10 years ago. To-day it has a membership of about 50,000, and over 2000 bodies are affiliated with it. It has met with a certain amount of opposition in its infancy, but in the last educational debate of the House of Commons it was praised from the three sides of the House—Conservatives, Liberals, and Labor."

On whose invitation did you come to Australia?

"I was invited by the manual laborers in New South Wales, and following on that the universities of Australia asked me to come to Australia and give a course of lectures."

Do you think you could get enough teachers?

"We in England have been turning out a lot of graduates, who do not have to work, especially lady graduates. They are keen about lecturing and imparting their knowledge. In one case out of one class 23 classes have been formed, so that shows that once it starts it will soon grow."

Are branches of the society to be formed in the eastern States?

"Yes; I had not been long in each of the capitals of the other States before it was decided to form branches. The universities of the three States are to be asked to extend their working, and I am hopeful that classes will shortly be started. I have met every type of audience in Australia. During the four months I have been here I have given 30 lectures and 25 speeches."

In those audiences you have seen do you think we have the right men to guide the destinies of this country?

"I have no doubt of it. Australia must learn to develop her own sons to hold the high positions. At the present time if you have some big irrigation scheme on hand, you run to America for an expert. If any other big problem occurs you run somewhere else for advice. You import your archbishops. This is a system of immigration that will have to be seriously studied."

What do you think of our present educational system?

"The organization of the Australian primary education is producing as good

results as in England, and there are difficulties to be met with to get the supply of teachers. I am glad the school doctor has been introduced here. I have been also struck by the determination of the various departments of public instruction to give each child who desires it a higher education. The bursary system established in New South Wales is splendid, and offers a chance to the poorest child. But in the future attention will have to be paid to rural education. The present circumstances compel children of tender years to work from 6 in the morning till 9 at night. I am sure Australia only wants to realise that it is better to develop fine, healthy children, than dairy cows, and that better attention is necessary to populating the place with physically fit boys and girls than to so much profitmaking."

THE WORKERS' EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION.

Mr. Albert Mansbridge will deliver an address to-night in the presence of members of the University, and of representatives of the School of Mines, and of the Trades Hall on the aims and methods of the above association. Mr. Mansbridge comes with very high testimonials from educational authorities at Oxford, and other parts of England. In New South Wales, Victoria, and Brisbane he has left the impression of a man who has an inspiring personality and also a definite knowledge as to the manner in which his work is to be carried on in a practical way. The series of addresses which Mr. Mansbridge is to deliver in Adelaide will be inaugurated at the University this evening. The accommodation of the Princes of Wales Theatre is limited, and it is necessary to restrict admission to ticket-holders. A notice giving further particulars appears in another column.