

The Advertiser
September 22nd 1913

"Educating the University."

A leading feature of the work is that university classes are conducted away from the universities?

"Yes. A matter of great importance is that the students of the association give education to the university. How can the university understand economics, for instance, unless it studies it from those who suffer from economic conditions? That is where these classes give this perfect comradeship. It has been truly said of the movement that the working people have rediscovered the methods of Plato. The tutorial class idea must extend itself to all ranks of workers in the modern State. Why should not the politicians, for instance, come and study with the university political theory and institutions—not so much because they want to learn from a professor as that they ought to give of their experience to the university, which is best calculated to gather and transmit it through that great freemasonry, the universities of the world? Why should the political experience of Australia be kept here, or only passed through perhaps the ordinary channels? We are going to establish an Australian department because the movement here has been a voluntary one. It was first asked for by the working men of Sydney, who, stimulated by the reports from England, started a similar organisation on their own account, and, just after that, by a happy coincidence, I was invited to visit this country."

A Far-reaching Movement.

When invited to deal in some detail with the English Workers' Educational Association, Mr. Mansbridge said it arose out of a desire of the working people for the benefits of higher education, and it now consisted of 2,164 affiliated bodies, including the biggest national movements in England, and about 10,000 individual members organised in about 150 branches. There were some 50,000 people under educational influence, and 5,000 had studied in connection with University tutorial classes. "It takes in the adherents of all sections of national thought, and its main thoughts are supplied out of the minds and the spirits of the working people, who are reaching out for knowledge as for a hidden treasure. To show its public importance, I might mention that in the last debate in the House of Commons the system was praised by all three sides of the House—Conservative, Liberal, and Labor. Essays written by working men have, in a large proportion of cases, been adjudged to be as good as those of men who had gained honors at Oxford."

How are the branches of the association conducted?

"The secret of the success of the branches is that each is a federation of the organisations in its area. Some branches have 100 organisations connected with them, and each organisation appoints a representative on the council, which is the governing body. If each of the 100 affiliated societies appoints a representative to the council, you get 100 secretaries for education, unified in a common centre. Another striking thing is that we find our work can flourish in the smallest village. In many villages last winter we had an average attendance of 30—agricultural workers studying history, rural science, and so on. Our great

theory is that every normal individual, when not under the influence of a counteracting master passion, does really desire to know about the things that are worth while knowing. In the towns the working men generally want to study industrial history."

"A Mental Picnic."

Do not the people who have to work hard all day find the study laborious?

"On the contrary, it is a mental picnic. The happiness of the tutorial class is equal to that of any picnic of the body, however excellent. The students are obviously eager to learn. No man is turned away through lack of money. The fees are quite nominal, in order to meet local expenses. The main cost of the classes is met by the Government, the Universities, and the local educational authorities?"

How about the instructors?

"We generally find that in any modern community there are a number of people who have knowledge, and who are only too glad to take opportunities of imparting it to others. As to the tutorial classes, the teachers are well paid, and they are the most experienced teachers from the universities. In England for a good many years we have been turning out a lot of graduates, special lady graduates, who have no need to earn their own living, and they are keen about this movement. Out of one of the classes in Staffordshire no fewer than 23 new classes have been formed by the students. These are all working men and women who pay their own expenses. A man will spread education at all costs when he gets the right spirit in him."

The Movement in Australia.

What success has already been achieved in Australia?

"In the other States I have visited, working people and scholars have found it necessary to establish a body equivalent to the English Workers' Educational Association, and to ask the universities to supply tutorial class teachers, while the Universities of Melbourne and Sydney have decided to extend their organisation so as to provide joint committees for tutorial class work, the joint committees to consist, as in England, of an equal number of representatives of the people and representatives of the University. I am hopeful that a Workers' Educational Association or its equivalent may be established in each Australian State. Each one should be autonomous, independent, helping one another, and helped by the movement in England. That seems to be the general desire, and definite steps in that direction had been taken in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, and Tasmania. I have every reason to believe that similar action will be taken in South Australia and Western Australia. At Melbourne the architects, stimulated by a lecture I gave there, have asked the University for classes on architecture."

Praise and Criticism.

And your impressions of education in Australia generally?

"I am of opinion that, roughly speaking, the organisation of Australian primary education is producing results as good as those in England. The difficulties of supplying teachers to the small groups of children in the back blocks are being attacked with wisdom and courage that should lead to complete success in the long run. I am glad that the school doctor has been introduced, and that centres for medical treatment are being established. I have also been struck by the determination of the various Departments of Public Instruction to give high school education to every child who desires it. It is clear that the universities of Australia are facing the new era, being inspired by the university movement all over the world. In fact, it is evident that there is a determination to establish a democratic highway of education. One evil 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 towns I have come across boys of 8 years selling newspapers and attending school from 6 to 9 p.m., but I am sure that when Australia realises these things she will take steps to prevent them from becoming established features. One can, of course, sympathise with the settler who has to make the most of his farm without the assistance of his children, but, after all, finely-developed children for Australia are of more importance than a margin of profit. England is not without reproach in this respect by any means, but it is one of the difficulties Australia will have to surmount if she is to be a leading Commonwealth. I have addressed every type of audience here, having preached in two cathedrals, given 30 lectures, made 25 speeches, and attended some 14 or 15 committees. The people of Australia appear to me to be a most vital community who have developed wonderful constructive powers, and I believe they are gathering those powers together to deal with the great problems of their existence."

Mr. Mansbridge will deliver his first address at the University this evening.

HIGHER EDUCATION FOR ALL.

THE ADULT SCHOOL MOVEMENT.

ITS GROWTH IN ENGLAND

"AUSTRALIA READY FOR ITS ADOPTION."

A casual observer might have been surprised to see a couple of University professors fraternising with several representatives of the Trades Hall on the Melbourne express platform at the Adelaide railway station on Sunday morning. The meeting was significant, but not accidental. They were jointly engaged in welcoming Mr. Albert Mansbridge, M.A., secretary of the Workers' Educational Association of England, who with Mrs. Mansbridge has responded to an invitation to visit Australia for the purposes, by means of lectures and conferences, of bringing under the notice of the educational authorities and institutions in the Commonwealth the work achieved in the motherland by the organisation of which he is the founder. On the sunny balcony of the South Australian Hotel, shortly after his arrival, a representative of "The Advertiser" had a delightful chat with Mr. Mansbridge, who quickly made it clear, by his earnest enthusiasm, that his heart is in the movement—a step forward in the march of education, which in Great Britain appealed to all classes, irrespective of their political or religious beliefs, or their circumstances of life. One of the first things the visitor was anxious to impress upon the interviewer was that the association was non-political, unsectarian, and democratic in government. It has sprung into existence practically of its own accord, to meet the needs of the times. Primary education has created a demand for higher education among the adult population. It is that demand which the association has set out to meet, and during the ten years of its existence great strides have been made, but the scope for extension is almost unlimited. During his travels in the eastern States Mr. Mansbridge has been greatly encouraged by the hearty reception accorded the idea of establishing a similar association, or its equivalent, in Australia, which he thinks has arrived at a period of its history when the time is most opportune for such a movement.

Australia and its problems.

"Our association," said Mr. Mansbridge, "covers the whole range of education, except technical. Nobody has yet asked for technical education through the association. Our idea is to give people what they want. We think it un-sound to impose education on adults. We do not ask a man to join a tutorial class unless he passionately wants to study a particular subject. Some people say that the climatic conditions of Australia are against study. Well, the open life of the Australians may be a disadvantage. Our disadvantages in England are the too long hours of labor, the overtime, and the bad housing, but, just as the men and women in England have overcome their difficulties, so the Australian must overcome theirs."

"In Hobart, where we have just been," interposed Mrs. Mansbridge, who is devoted to the work of promoting education among women, "we found a body of women who wished to take a course of nature study. There was an instance of a start being made already in the direction of overcoming local conditions."

"Australia has great problems to work out," continued Mr. Mansbridge, "and she is the first country in the world that has had a chance to develop herself and her institutions freely. In proportion to her opportunity Australia needs to develop mental, physical, and spiritual power. If she succeeds, it means much to the motherland; indeed, it is as important as our own success."