

MUSCLE AND BRAIN.

AN EDUCATED DEMOCRACY.

THE WORKERS' EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION.

"We believe that thus only can the dangers attendant upon an uneducated or what is still worse, a half educated, democracy be avoided." In this pithy sentence Professor Atkinson, who arrived from Sydney, on Tuesday, on behalf of the Workers' Educational Association, summed up the aims and objects of a movement possessing in embryo untold possibilities for the good of the nation.

Professor Atkinson, to whom Australia is looking for a lead in this important matter, has an almost youthful appearance. He is an M.A. of Oxford, where he was a



Professor Atkinson.

lecturer in economics, and the winner of the highest distinction in economics and history. He has recently been appointed director of tutorial classes in the University of Sydney, but until the movement is thoroughly established in every State he is acting as hon. secretary to the Workers' Educational Association of Australia. In that capacity he has come to Adelaide, and he will remain here until Friday, to assist the establishment of the association in South Australia. He has just spent a week in Melbourne with the same end in view.

Speaking to a reporter, in reference to the genesis and aims of the association, he said:—"The movement originated in England some 11 years ago. Its chief objective is higher education for the working class. This it seeks to promote by linking up all working class and educational organisations with the universities. Summed up, it is really university extension carried much further, and going much deeper than any previous movement. It has had enormous success in England, where over 2,000 organisations, educational and labor, are affiliated to it, and all British universities are undertaking what are known as tutorial classes, which constitute the chief activity of the association. Mr. Albert Mansbridge, the general secretary of the association, paid a long visit to Australia last year, and as a result of his efforts the W.E.A. of Australia has been formed, with branches in every State. The New South Wales Government was the first to give a grant, as a result of which Sydney University established a department for tutorial classes, and appointed me as its director. Melbourne University has just secured a temporary grant for the promotion of classes in Victoria, with the promise of further supplies when the Estimates come up for consideration. In South Australia the W.E.A. has just been placed upon a very firm basis. It has commended itself greatly to the University authorities, and negotiations are now taking place with a view to engaging in joint work."

What are tutorial classes? queried the reporter.

MUSCLE AND BRAIN.

(Continued from page 15.)

"A tutorial class consists of about 30 students, who apply through the W.E.A. for a tutor to instruct them in the subject they have selected for study. We believe in giving the workers what they know they need, not what we think they ought to have. Naturally the subject generally chosen is economics or industrial history. The demand for a tutor is dealt with by a joint committee of University representatives and workers' representatives. Thus the workers secure direct control over the whole movement. In fact, this joint committee represents the alliance of labor and learning, which has been productive of such fine results in England. The committee appoints a tutor, who is always a man of distinction in scholarship and possessing the requisite sympathy for his work. The class meets once a week throughout the winter for two hours a night. The first hour is devoted to a simple exposition of the subject by the tutor, but it is the second hour that makes the class vital and valuable, for in that hour the class questions the tutor and discusses the subject from all points of view. We claim that this method is the best that could be devised for arriving at a true view of any subject. The members of the class also write one essay a fortnight on subjects set by the tutor. In the matter of essays there have been some most astonishing results. Many of the compositions of the students have been declared by Oxford and Cambridge professors to be up to the standard of first-class honors at those Universities. Since each class extends its studies over three years it can well be imagined what fine results are possible. We believe that thus only can the dangers attendant upon an uneducated, or, what is still worse, a half-educated democracy, be avoided. Attached to each class is a select library of works on the subject investigated. This is the property of the class for the time being. All other possible reading facilities are obtained from the universities and public and private libraries. We never fail to find all who are interested in knowledge eager to afford to our students every opportunity for referring to the great authors. Perhaps the most important feature of the tutorial class movement is the spirit of fellowship in study that springs up between students, and the tutor. The latter is not to them a super-academic person of remote and chilling outlook, but simply the thirty-first student of the class, who has merely had exceptional opportunities. This spirit of fellowship provides the atmosphere in which knowledge grows to be regarded as the instrument of social service, and we confidently anticipate that every student from our classes will become a social and educational missionary, carrying the light that he has gained amongst his fellows. We are not concerned with providing trade and technical education, for the direct increase of industrial efficiency, but rather with that higher cultivation of the mind and spirit that makes for good citizenship and devotion to the community."

How has the movement been received in Australia?

"In Australia our initial efforts have received the heartiest of welcomes. Everywhere we see a fertile ground ready to be tilled. But we have not come to till it with instruments, or to sow it with seeds of alien origin. We see clearly that the Australian movement rapidly growing, as it already is, is going to take upon itself a form in many respects different from the English movement. We have no cut-and-dried plan to be applied to Australian conditions. For example, one department of our work, which has hardly arisen at all in England, is already assuming considerable proportion in Australia. I refer to the correspondence and advice department. I have already received numbers of letters from men and women who have heard of us, living as they are, in the remotest shearing sheds and back blocks of Australia. For these isolated seekers after knowledge there is a great work to be done. Who can tell what may not result for a rising nation like Australia, from such far-reaching efforts? In fact, my chief impression as to the work in Australia is of the amazingly promising prospects for our movement in a country whose material prosperity is absolutely assured, whose institutions are deservedly famous, and whose people are probably the readiest to receive new ideas in the whole world. Our success up to the present has been so great that we have a difficulty in finding University teachers enough for the classes, the demands having been so much greater than we expected."

Professor Atkinson will address meetings at the Trades Hall and at the University. He intends to return to Adelaide in a few months, when his visit will be of longer duration.

LECTURE AT THE TRADES HALL.

On Tuesday evening Professor Atkinson addressed a good audience at the Trades Hall on the aims and objects of the Workers' Educational Association. Mr. T. Ryan presided.

The professor said that reproach had been cast wrongly on the Universities, which were charged with producing conservatism and introducing studies that intoxicated rather than educated the mind. He claimed that those charges could not stand. There had always been a controversy between men who believed in the useful and in the higher education. Certain it was that there was a great need for chemists, physicists, and engineers, but their findings only became useful to humanity when they were made available in a general way. They claimed that the detailed sciences were only useful when they became available to the common thinker. The Workers' Educational Association offered a solution of one of the most difficult problems of the world, namely, how to educate the democracy? The supreme activity of the association was in conjunction with the Universities, and took the form of what was known as the tutorial classes, which he explained at length. The association pinned its faith to the tutorial class method as being productive of clear thinkers. It was not out to induce men to think in any particular direction, but to educate them in order that they might be capable of selecting any type or school of thought that they felt disposed to favor. When a man was trained to think, it could be safely left to him to accept or reject any new situation that might arise, and to decide what the community was mostly in need of. The association workers claimed that they were quite as practical as those who advocated schools of engineering and agriculture. The first men to grumble at the errors of the Labor movement were those who were stifling the workers by preventing them from getting the education, such as he had outlined. The association offered the working men an extension of the university movement to a wider school, and with a deeper motive than had ever been conceived before. It was an absolutely new force in history. There had never been, since the palmy days of Greece, an educated democracy—a democracy of straight thinking men and women—and it was that kind of democracy that the association was out to provide. He could assure them that in all Universities they would find the majority of professors quite willing to impart their knowledge to earnest students. He would say, in conclusion—"Woe betide Australia if it was not preparing itself to meet the crises which must come up before any nation so that it could chin, at least, that the whole of the community is permeated with that higher knowledge that makes for the best life of a community." At the close of the address the professor answered numerous questions, and he was accorded a hearty vote of thanks.