

THE ALLIANCE OF LABOR AND LEARNING

MEREDITH ATKINSON, M.A., EXPLAINS THE TUTORIAL METHOD

THE SUCCESS ACHIEVED IN ENGLAND AND ITS INTRODUCTION INTO AUSTRALIA

JUSTIFICATION OF DEMOCRACY AND THE SALVATION OF THE WORKING CLASS IN EDUCATION.

"THE DAILY HERALD" SECURES A MESSAGE FOR AUSTRALIA.

"You ask me to give 'The Daily Herald' a message for the workers of Australia. May I say this to them—'If Democracy is to be justified it must be educated. A vote is the certificate of rights and responsibilities, but not of knowledge and ability. If it be true that only the workers can save the working class, let them seek knowledge and save it; for, without, they will not achieve salvation, but damnation. So they must create a new highway of education, along which all may freely pass who desire knowledge—not merely a highway to the university, but a highway from the university to all who seek to expand their souls. That object once accomplished, the workers of our generation will take their place in history as the servants of humanity—as the men and women who taught the race how to revitalise the common life.'"—Professor Meredith Atkinson.

When the yellow flag flies from the masthead of the incoming liner the mailboat interviewer generally turns his face shoreward again, for he knows that even if he did succeed in clambering to the decks upon which are clustered the groups of men and women who travel the world doing and seeing things he would have scant opportunity, under the quarantine laws, of escaping back to port and retelling the stories that he had gleaned.

When the Orsova arrived at the Semaphore anchorage on Saturday the Port pressmen approached the mailboat as near as they dared in a launch, for there was "big game" on board in the person of Mr. Meredith Atkinson M.A., who has come out to Australia to take up the directorship of the tutorial classes at the Sydney University and also the honorary secretaryship of the Workers' Educational Association of Australia, which latter body was established by Mr. Albert Mansbridge, M.A., during his recent tour of Australian cities and inspection of their universities. But medical restrictions forbade the representatives of Adelaide's three dailies the decks of the boat, and they had, perforce, to return without the interview they had hoped to obtain. "The Daily Herald," learning that a fellow-passenger of the professor was a Sydney journalist returning from England, set the Marconi apparatus in operation, and consequently is now able to publish an exclusive interview and convey to the workers of this State the message printed above.

Mr. Atkinson, though he has achieved high distinction, is still quite young. Only 30 summers have flown by since he was born, but the years have been filled with much work. He obtained his M.A. degree at the Oxford University, and also gained high honors in economics and history at that university. Until recently he occupied the post of extension lecturer at Oxford, and he has also been engaged as lecturer to the tutorial classes at the Durham University. He is well qualified to fill the position which he is about to take up in connection with the Workers' Educational Association in Australia, as he was prominently identified with that body in England.

Mr. Atkinson's first remark was made consequent upon a comment relative to the unfortunate necessity for the quarantining of the mailboat.

"I can only commend the Commonwealth for taking such precautions," he exclaimed, "even though the case is such a mild one. But I am naturally keenly disappointed at being unable to begin my active work at Perth, where letters and telegrams awaited me, planning cordial and highly complimentary receptions at each university city. However, I must seize the first opportunity of a return visit under happier conditions.

Tutorial Classes.

"Doubtless the term 'tutorial' has caused you some wonderment. I can best explain it by giving you some account of the Workers' Educational Association. This society exists primarily to convey to the working class higher education in all its forms; to open up a highway of education, along which way shall pass all men and women who possess the passport of ability. We aim not at persuasion or the inculcation of particular doctrines, or even academic instruction, but at broad enlightenment—not merely tolerating differences of opinion but welcoming and respecting them. Though we cater by study circles, courses of public lectures, scientific and historical rambles, and the like, for the workers generally, the supreme activity of the Workers' Educational Association is reached in the university tutorial class which consists of about 30 students, working men and women, taught by a tutor sent down by one of the universities.

Establishment and Control.

"In establishing a class the initiative is generally taken by the branch of the association in any particular locality which organises the students, and then applies to the university for the appointment of a tutor. You ask if the class has any part in the choice of its tutor. Assuredly, though in an indirect way. The tutorial classes under each university are controlled by a joint committee, composed of equal numbers of the university representatives and those of working class organisations affiliated with the Workers' Educational Association. This committee appoints the tutor, who is always a man or woman of distinction in scholarship. Thus no tutor considered by the class to be undesirable could possibly be thrust upon it.

Choice of Subject.

"The class always chooses its own subject. We are insistent upon that vital condition, only it must not be a 'bread-and-butter' subject. We do not seek to give the workers the education someone else thinks they should have, but the education which they know they need. Our method of conducting the class further emphasises that principle. It is literally impossible for a tutor to thrust a particular type of teaching upon the student. This important end is achieved by the method of teaching we adopt. The class meets one night a week for at least half a year, each meeting lasting two hours. Usually the tutor devotes about half the time to a clear exposition of his subject. The other hour is at the disposal of the class for the purpose of asking questions and discussing thoroughly the points at issue. Then we betide the student or tutor who exhibits either intolerance or aggressive ignorance. Since the class has its own select library of special works and access generally to larger collections the students have ample opportunity for reinforcing their knowledge and criticising, if need be, the views of the tutor. Moreover, the method soon makes extremely able questioners, and the class becomes 31 students bent on the common objective—pure knowledge. The spirit of fellowship and comradeship is a striking feature of tutorial classes. No visitor can fail to be impressed by it. It is the spirit of the University in its finest impression—a small community of students working harmoniously together

in an atmosphere of tolerance, unimpaired by differences of opinion.

The Popular Subjects.

"What subjects are in greatest demand? Well, I can reply undoubtedly industrial history and economics. And naturally so in England where the social problem is agitating all minds, most of all the workers themselves. It is also highly desirable that the working class should learn whence it sprang and whither it is going. There is, however, a significant increase in the demand for such subjects as literature, philosophy, biology, anthropology, and so on. In Australia, where, I am told, the social problem presses you less heavily, the demand for economics perhaps will not be so great, and the broader studies of the humanities may attract the interest of many workers. The written work of the students is, of course, highly important. Each student must write one essay a fortnight. This task most of them approach with fear and trembling, but their temerity is soon dispelled by practice, and it is astonishing how many toil-worn men and women write fine papers. One professor after another has declared many of them to be up to the standard of first-class honors at Oxford and Cambridge."

Influence of Tutorial Classes.

Questioned as to the number of students enrolled under the system in England Mr. Atkinson replied that there were approximately 4000 attending the classes. "Besides a vast number reached by less intensive methods," he added. "The ultimate influence of this new 'Workers' University' upon the life and thought of our nation is incalculable. It is quite a new force in history, the alliance of Labor and learning. It is modifying the universities themselves by its influence upon the tutors who are now producing books, especially on economics, quite different in spirit from those of the older school. In most cases the universities have looked with favor upon the movement. We have had our difficulties, of course. Some people said it was none of the business of universities to organise such classes. Others raised the bogey of party politics, but every university is now converted and runs tutorial classes, though the experiment is only six years old."