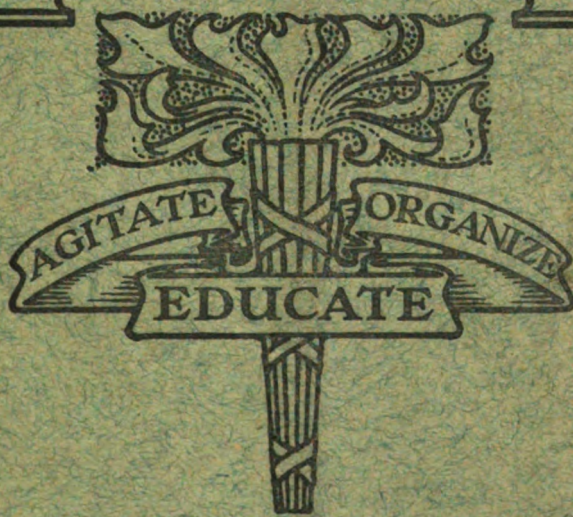


Vol. VIII, No. 9

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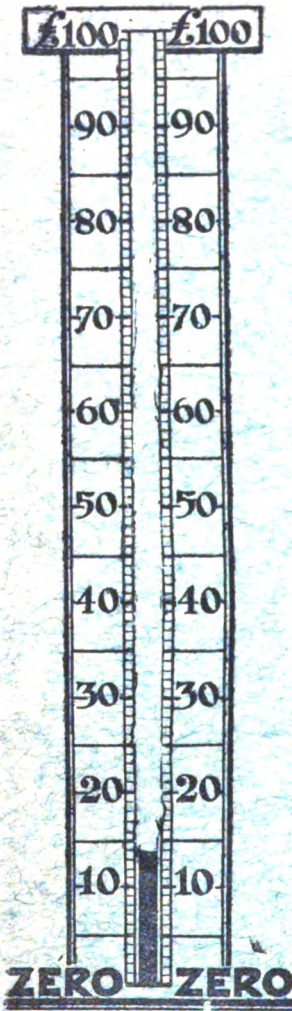
The
PLEBS
MAGAZINE



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at the same address.*

MONTHLY

TWOPENCE



We have to
get this
down
to



Zero

THE LAST LAP.

We've got so far—don't slacken now!
Can't we have a "clean slate" next month?

LABOUR & "EDUCATION."—Special Number.

THE PLEBS MAGAZINE

"I can promise to be candid but not impartial."

Vol. VIII

October, 1916

No. 9

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"What Labour Wants from Education"

ON more than one occasion in the pages of the *Plebs*, we have criticised the Workers' Educational Association with respect to its theory and practice of working-class education. The publication by that body of a pamphlet entitled *What Labour Wants from Education*, copies of which have been circulated among the branches of the Trade Unions, provides an appropriate occasion for drawing attention once more to the question of *what the W.E.A. can do for the working-class* in its industrial and political struggle against capitalist rule and oppression.*

What was the essential core of our former criticism? It was the inability of the W.E.A. to understand the problem of working-class education, as manifested by its statement of the problem. From this fact followed our conclusion that the W.E.A. was *incapable of solving the problem*. Whoever would help the working class to acquire a scientific consciousness of itself, through an understanding of its social position, power and purpose, must above all be in *possession* of this scientific consciousness. An organization that would devote itself to the development of *working-class understanding* must, in the first place, have developed *an understanding of the working class*. Otherwise, it will confuse instead of clarifying, hinder instead of helping, the progress of Labour.

*We are inviting Mr. Mactavish, the author of the pamphlet, to reply to Messrs. Craik & Ablett's criticisms.—Ed.

The genuineness of intention on the part of many of the W.E.A. representatives to assist the Labour movement is not the essential point. We must judge not by intentions, not by subjective feelings and wishes, but by objective results. For us, the retrograde results of inefficiency are not removed by good intentions and "fine feelings" on the part of the inefficient toward us. We do not argue, on the other hand, that all the W.E.A. representatives are animated with evil intentions or engaged in a consciously designed conspiracy on behalf of reaction. Nevertheless, their lack of understanding of the working class is well calculated to serve the cause of the enemies of the working class. Confusion serves as a cover for reactionary forces. While there are many in the W.E.A. who take its phrases about "democracy" and the "good of the workers" seriously, there are also the artful ones who are anxious that these fine sounding and sympathetic phrases *should* be taken seriously.

In the course of our criticism, we have often illustrated the theoretical confusion of the W.E.A. from its claims to be a working-class organization and, at the same time, to be "non-political." An association which really aims at the emancipation of the working class *must be political*. Every class question translates itself into a political question. Those who place themselves on the side of the working class in its struggle for freedom, must, in the very nature of the case, oppose themselves to the whole existing system of society and must, therefore, stand in opposition to the capitalist political parties who seek to conserve that system.

The W.E.A. attempted to get over the contradiction involved in their claim to be both "working class" and "non-political," by taking the ground that education was something independent of class antagonisms and conflicts, something to be "sought for its own sake." In this way, the W.E.A. was able to keep in touch with the working class without alienating its Liberal and Tory supporters. It is, however, the fate of all movements which detach themselves from reality to lay bare their unreal character precisely to the extent that they attempt to give themselves a logical justification. The attempt of the W.E.A. to justify itself by its extravagant separation of *working-class education from working-class conditions and needs*, enabled us still more explicitly to demonstrate its unscientific outlook.

The practical course of events has now forced the W.E.A., in order to gain a firmer footing among the workers, to assume a *political* character. In order to win working-class support it has found itself obliged to identify its propaganda with demands which it asks the working class to take up and force through the State. True it is, that these demands do not go beyond certain reforms in education. Nevertheless they are *political demands*,

This new departure is signaled by the publication of the pamphlet already referred to. It is written by Mr. J. M. Mactavish, Mr. Mansbridge's successor in the General Secretaryship of the W.E.A. It is proposed, according to the preface, that before the W.E.A. shall accept official responsibility for the pamphlet, there should be "a series of District Conferences to express the needs of Labour in the form of definite proposals." We do not in this article propose to discuss the various educational reforms suggested in the pamphlet. They are all of a more or less formal character, are largely directed to the education of children, and have by no means been originated by the W.E.A. What the latter has now discovered is that it may be expedient to advocate these reforms as a means of giving to itself the *appearance* of a working-class character. For the moment, we intend to confine our attention to that part of the pamphlet which attempts to define the educational needs and ideals of the working class and to show, thereby, that the W.E.A. is still "stuck in the mire of confusion."

Viewed broadly, all that man is apart from heredity is due to education. It is therefore necessary that Labour should have an educational ideal. (p. 4)

In the first sentence, which contains Mr. Mactavish's premise, we are introduced not to this or that "man," but to "man" *in general*. That is a very characteristic W.E.A. starting point—an abstraction. It is, however, very natural for an association which shrinks from questions of reality, to remain, as much as possible, "in the air." Yet it has to attach itself in some way to the class whose title it bears, and whose interests it claims to serve. In doing so it is fated to plunge into further contradictions. Mr. Mactavish has set himself to establish the necessity for an "educational ideal," not for an abstract man, but for that concrete and historical class of man summed up as "Labour." Very well! Then he should have started from another premise than that contained in the first sentence quoted above. If he wished to prove it "necessary that Labour should have an educational ideal," then he should have started, not from what "man" is, but from *what "Labour" is*, from the social conditions of "Labour," its relation to Capital, its economic and political needs &c. It would then, however, have been impossible to say that "all that man is, apart from heredity, is due to education." For now, this general "man" would have given place to *concrete social classes of "man,"* to the "man" of Labour and the "man" of Capital.

Whence these different classes of "man"? The capitalist is, certainly, not a capitalist by "heredity", however *much* he may inherit! Neither is the wage-labourer a wage-labourer by heredity however *little* he may inherit! Are these economic differences due to educational differences? This is evidently Mr. Mactavish's point of view. It is precisely the contrary which is true. The capitalists are capitalists because of well-filled purses rather than

well-filled brains. The truth is that the *educational differences are due to economic differences*. Education is a commodity.

This does not mean that the workers must first rise to economic equality with the capitalists before they can acquire understanding. That would only be necessary if the education required by the workers was a capitalist education, i.e., an education which would equip men for the carrying on of business, or for the political and juridical operations essential for the protection of business interests. There can be no capital without wage-labour, any more than there can be a king without subjects. The attainment of social-economic equality means the abolition of capital and wage-labour. This is the task which history has assigned to the working class. It is for this task that it requires education. As this task is *one of abolishing economic differences*, the essential element of the education required for the discharge of this task is the *clear recognition of the economic differences to be abolished*.

It is this clear recognition, this understanding of the social battlefield and the tactical requirements dictated by the nature of the same, that "*Labour wants from Education*." And Labour is not likely to get this from the W.E.A. We believe that Mr. Mactavish at one time had some regard for this fundamental necessity, but apparently, since he has soared to the level of the "*Higher Education*," the things fundamental have been lost to his view. Be that as it may, the question for "*Labour*" in this connection is:— Does the W.E.A. understand "*Labour*?" Does Mr. Mactavish's pamphlet show any conception of the needs of the working-class movement? If not—and we claim to have shown this from Mr. Mactavish's own utterances upon the subject—then *how can it help Labour to understand?*

Mr. Mactavish, immediately following the sentences already quoted, goes on to say:—

That ideal must take into consideration the needs of the individual, the needs of the class, the needs of the nation, and the needs of the race. In a perfect society it would be possible to harmonise fully all these conflicting needs. (p. 4)

Our friend Ablett has been asked to undertake a criticism of Mr. Mactavish's classification. We are content to note that, according to Mr. Mactavish, these four aspects of the "*ideal conflict*." How then comes it about that an "*educational ideal*" of "*Labour*" contains within it those conflicting needs? The fact is that these conflicting needs are *not* needs of "*Labour*," *but needs of "Labour" in conflict with the needs of Capital*.

This conflict, and its development after the War, is a matter to which the capitalist class and the Government are by no means indifferent. There is more than one indication of anxiety about the future in this respect. Evidently, the W.E.A. is "*doing its bit*" to "*secure peace*." A few weeks ago, a private conference

on "Education after the War" was held at Oxford, on the invitation of the Master of Balliol College. Among those taking part in the deliberations were Professor Sadler of Leeds, Mr. A. E. Zimmern, (H.M. Inspector) and *Mr. J. M. Mactavish*. The conference agreed:

That the antagonistic attitude between capital and labour may be abated most effectively by more humanising conditions both in the elementary schools and in industry, and that educational reform is one indispensable method of *securing industrial peace* and *larger productivity* of the labour and mental resources of the nation.

The italics are ours. We suggest to the W.E.A. that it might publish such findings in the pamphlets which it prepares for circulation among the organizations of "Labour." It may, however, be intended to reserve such as these for a subsequent publication, entitled, "*What Capital Wants from the Education of Labour.*" "Industrial peace!" "Larger productivity of labour!" Evidently Mr. Mactavish's "man" is not so abstract after all, but a "man" with very definite ideas and with very concrete desires, a "man" of the Third Estate.

It is the need to establish a common ground for reconciliation between the "man" of Labour and the "man" of Capital, which forces such pleaders as Mr. Mactavish to make abstraction from the different and antagonistic economic and political requirements of each. It is because the need for reconciliation itself is dictated by the requirements of Capital—"industrial peace" and "larger productivity of labour"—that, now and then, the abstraction proves too thin and the reality shows through. "The world as it is to-day" will out!

W. W. CRAIK.

The Magniloquent Mactavish

I AM commanded by "him who must be obeyed" to write about W. L. W. F. E. This is not intended as a puzzle. It is the title of a pamphlet—"What Labour wants from Education." The peculiarity of this title consists in this: that if you say it over twice to yourself you are more puzzled the second time than you were at first as to what it means. The pamphlet itself maintains the same reputation for clarity of expression and precision of thought. It is written by one of the clan Mactavish. Mactavish! How are the mighty fallen! I remember (and no doubt it is a treasured memory of many *Plebs* "readers from the first") how in 1907, at a joint conference of the W. E. A. and the Oxford Extension movement, this same Mactavish *up* and told 'em a few home truths—so much to the point, indeed, that the chairman, the Rev. Hudson Shaw, exclaimed—"We must admit that Mactavish has given us h—l to-day." But now, alas! this purveyor of infernos has become the secretary of the Infernal Association itself, and I presume must "behave as sich." I therefore *have* to deal with him accordingly, so here goes.

Our author starts out with the postulate, derived rather curiously from "National necessity," that "Labour should have an educational ideal." Obviously, Labour's ideal must therefore be strictly national. Nevertheless he persists—

That ideal must take into consideration the needs of the individual, the needs of the class, the needs of the nation, and the needs of the race.

What a lot of nonsense, grandiloquent nonsense, in a small space! Mactavish knows as well as anyone that so long as we have nations, classes, and races with conflicting needs, the problem is so to reorganize society on a basis of men and women without regard to nationality, class or race, that there should be no conflicts in their needs. I will ask Mactavish—If there is a need of your nation or your race which conflicts with the need of your class, which need are you going to devote your time to supply? Mactavish's response in pre-war times, certainly in 1907, would have been immediately—My class, of course! What cause witholds him then from making a similar reply to-day?

However, I don't think our editor wanted me to bludgeon him out of existence forthwith, but rather to dissect him piece by piece *a la* Ablett. Old age and domestic responsibilities having induced a new docility in my nature I am constrained to comply with the unspoken wish.

The Mactavish, then, goes on to "examine these needs more closely." Prepare, Plebeians, for the coming brainstorm:—

The need of the individual is the development of those inherent qualities with which heredity endowed him and which, when fully developed, make personality.

We need not stay here very long. W.W.C. has told you of this "individual" who lives exclusively in the brains of Mactavish & Co. and who cannot be found in the British Isles nor her Dominions across the seas. But assume such an individual, and it remains to ask:—How much personality can he be allowed to develop? The author is constrained by his classification to say that he must not have so much personality as to over-ride the needs of class, nation, and race, or the W.E.A. harmonizers would find "their occupation gone." Now for need No. 2:—

The needs of the class. The working class has its own peculiar educational needs. (What! Yes, it is the same Mactavish). The material prizes of life are limited, and only a few can win them. After all the prizes have been won there still remain the great mass for whom under existing conditions there are no material prizes other than work and wages. These form the working-classes, and as such have educational needs peculiarly their own.

Since, under the existing state of society, the vast majority are wage-earners, education must give them a knowledge and understanding of the social and economic forces that mould and mar their lives. Only through a fuller knowledge and clearer understanding of these can the workers attain to economic and social freedom. (This last sentence must be regarded as an unconscious resurrection of the old Mactavish.) Further, since the experiences of the past ages are embodied in history, science, art and literature, education must equip the working class to share in its racial heritage.

What does he mean by "existing state of society" and "economic and social freedom?" Is there to be another state of society? Has Mactavish been converted to the C.L.C. point of view? Where is this fuller knowledge of the economic forces that mould and mar the lives of the workers to come from? Is our author writing a new book? Are the W.E.A. going to revise their whole curriculum and start afresh? In short, what does need No. 2 really mean? It means, as we shall soon see, that as the prizes of life are limited to a few, the vast majority are to be consoled by lectures (from real university men) on history, science, art, and literature. It means that the references to economic and social freedom are a little window dressing. Need No. 3 will enlighten us on this point:—

The needs of the nation. Our educational ideal must fit in with our national ideal. But the world is divided into nations whose interests are to some extent conflicting . . . Hence our Educational Ideal must provide for a people who are efficient in national competition, strong in national defence, yet free in thought, speech, action, and government, having initiative, intelligence, self-reliance, self-discipline, respecting others as they respect themselves.

So, "Efficient in national competition"—"strong in national defence!" What, oh what, about economic and social freedom? Where can it come from in a society blessed with a strong army of soldiers, diplomats, and politicians, (strong in national defence); in a society whose workers are highly trained technically, and whose capitalists are shrewd enough to beat the "other fellow" down (efficient in national competition)? The solution is that the people are to be "free in thought speech, action and Government, having initiative, intelligence, etc., etc." (how very wordy). It is as if he had said—We must have efficient monogamic unions, strong in the defence of the marital rite, yet a people free to develop concubinage, and having initiative to discover other forms of union! For if we are to be strong "in national defence," how are we to be free in thought, speech, action, and Government, *against* national defence and in favour of international defence of the working class, whose oppressed situation our "peculiar educational needs" have shown us? If we are to be "efficient in national competition," how are we to be free in thought, speech, action &c., &c.—to capture the industries of the world for the workers and abolish national competition? If on the one hand we are free to destroy national defence, and abolish national competition—which we must do to attain "economic and social freedom"—then what use are they in our educational ideals? If on the other hand we are not free to do these things, then what becomes of "economic and social freedom?"

Echo answers, What? Let us now look at Need No. 4:—

The need of the race. Just as the great need in the national development of the individual is freedom to become one's self, so the great need in the development of the human race is the freedom of each

people to work out its own destiny without undue interference from others. For this reason, our educational ideal must include the making of good will.

This is obviously a rhetorical flourish, for what does "freedom" and "good-will" want in company with "efficient national competition" and "strong national defence?"

It is all very vague. And the vague has an irresistible attraction for the W.E.A. Look at the title of this pamphlet—*What Labour Wants from Education*. Would a C.L.C'er express himself in this slipshod manner? Throughout the pamphlet one finds phrases such as "Education must give them"—"Labour wants from Education," and so on, until one gets the impression that Mac-tavish thinks "Education" is some personal monster who gives and witholds as he pleases. It reminds me of the father in our village whose sons were footballers, always talking football. The old man, hearing so many references to *Nil*, and seeing in the papers remarks such as 8 goals to Nil, 6 tries to Nil, &c., gave it as his opinion that this Nil was the most successful footballer of the whole lot. The analogy goes further than the personality; the results are also the same—Nil.

NOAH ABLETT.

What Labour Gets—from W.E.A. Education

IN a brief note last month I referred to certain lectures on "Trade Unions and Friendly Societies in the Roman Empire," delivered to the members of the Workers' Educational Association, by Prof. Edward V. Arnold, at University College, Bangor, August, 1914, which have recently been reprinted in the *New Age*. As an object lesson in W. E. A. education these lectures are marvelously interesting. I propose, in such space as is at my disposal, to quote a few extracts from them, and append a few comments.

At the first glance, the subject of the lectures would strike the outsider as eminently appropriate to such an audience, gathered in such a place. The university scholar is to speak to a group of 20th century workers about the life and conditions of the workers in a past civilization; and the workers, made wise by the lessons history has to teach, will be the fitter to face the social and political problems of to-day. Thus is the Professor to justify his existence—and the existence of his university—to the working-class.

Prof. Arnold is evidently conscious of the need for some such justification of his existence. He begins his first lecture thus:—

To you, workers at the mill and in the mine, who for a short time are visitors in these halls, the question must naturally suggest itself—What practical services does a university render? Of what use are the volumes, piled by thousands in its library, recording the languages and experience of the past? . . .

(You will note the paternal tone, as of omniscience condescending to a properly respectful ignorance—and the implication that, until they came and gazed open-mouthed at the volumes “piled by thousands” in “these halls,” these honest people had never seen a book, or heard of a “past.”)

Can we say that the past teaches practical lessons? Can it guide our actions to-day, warn us against dangers, and point out the way of *true progress*? Can the student help the worker to ascertain the *true* meaning of the facts of our social life to-day, and can he mark out the limits within which reform is possible?*

“Opinions differ,” declares the Professor, in answer to his own queries. But opinions—intelligent opinions—will hardly differ as to the value of his contributions to this very desirable end. These lectures will help no-one—worker or anyone else—to “ascertain the true facts” either of our social life to-day, or of social life in Rome 2,000 years ago. Let me declare as emphatically as I can, right at the outset, that they afford no justification whatsoever for Prof. Arnold’s existence, nor for the existence of the W. E. A. From any point of view—the worker’s or anybody else’s—they are rambling, woolly-minded, wearying compositions. Why the *New Age* should have regarded them as worth printing is something of a mystery. If the W. E. A. has nothing better than these to offer as specimens of its teachings, then the “internal decay which in the end destroyed Rome” has evidently already set in in the Workers’ Educational Association. R. I. P.

But let us listen to the Professor:—

In the social life of to-day it is evident that unions of working-men are playing a part of increasing importance. In the Roman Empire 2,000 years ago this was also the case. In this short course of lectures I purpose to draw a parallel between the two. The lectures will be four in number. In the first I propose to give you a general sketch of the history of the Roman world, so that you may be able to judge for yourselves how far it was like, how far unlike, our own. In the second, I propose to trace the growth of trade societies in Rome, to show you how they were governed, what services they rendered to society, and what benefits they secured to their members. In the third, I shall tell the story of the decay and final collapse of the societies and of the Roman Empire itself. About the last lecture I will not speak too confidently. My desire is to apply Roman experience to the facts of to-day. Such an attempt implies serious risks. . . I will only say this in advance: I shall not attempt either to prophesy or dictate. Science can foresee the eclipse of the moon and measure exactly the force of the tides; but the wisest of men have failed to foretell rightly the future of a nation or a class. And where we do not know it is a folly to speak positively. . . . The truth will reveal itself in its time. (!)

Now it is obvious that if the “parallel” which Prof. Arnold is setting out to draw between the “unions of working-men” of our own day and those of old Rome is to be of any use or value whatsoever, he must first of all explain carefully the essential

*Italics, in this and later quotations, are mine.

differences between them, and between the respective social conditions in which each had its origin. To attempt to draw any "parallel" until this has been done is to make it clear that one has never grasped even the elementary facts of social development, or begun to understand the why and wherefore of the "unions of working-men" of to-day. To "draw a parallel" between a band of iron and a Band of Hope, because both are called "bands," would be no more futile than to draw parallels between the craft-guilds and burial societies of Rome and the trade unions of the 20th century, simply because the membership of both was made up of "working-men." One is therefore entitled to expect that Prof. Arnold will start out with some description of the social, political, and economic structure of the Roman Empire, as contrasted with that of European civilization to-day. Shall I be believed if I say that he manages to give us his "sketch of the history of the Roman world," traces "the growth of trade societies," and tells "the story of the decay and final collapse of the societies and of the Empire itself," without so much as hinting that in any particular whatsoever, political or economic, the "civilization" of Rome differed from the "civilization of to-day? His "history" consists of picturesquely little facts and quaint little anecdotes about the Roman trade societies; just as a journal like the *Bookman* prints pictures of an author's birthplace, and of the author at the age of three, and of the author's maiden aunt, who first perceived his budding genius—all of which a certain sort of reader eagerly devours in the fond belief that he is really and truly studying "literature." Prof. Arnold's lectures are no more "history" than are those countless volumes of anecdote and scandal about Court life up and down the ages, with which the libraries do such good business. It is impossible to gather from him whether, or to what extent, "the great structure of Roman society" was based on slave-labour; how far the members of the trade-societies were workers for hire or how far small owners; to what extent industry was organized or specialized; what, in short, were the essential facts about Roman civilization—from the point of view of an audience of workers. And he proceeds to "draw parallels"!

But first let us glance at one or two of the moralizings scattered up and down these precious addresses. The Professor, in the vague and pompous manner of a P. S. A. orator, has been holding forth on "the internal decay which in the end destroyed Rome." What this "internal decay" was, is left vague; something biological, so far as one can make out. But—

Here at least History can speak with definiteness: there is in society decay, degeneration, dissolution, destruction. There are dangers all around us, and graver dangers within us. Those who seek to better the world must at the same time be careful that it does not become worse. (!)

Let us pray . . . "There is in society"—did ever woolly-mindedness coin a woollier, emptier phrase? And did ever the W. E. A. achieve a more spineless "impartiality" than is conveyed in that last priceless sentence? But whether or not History ever "speaks with definiteness," Prof. Arnold finds it terribly hard to do so. Here is another specimen of—shall we call it his agnosticism?—

It may be that the British Empire is now in this very stage (of decay): that whilst red strips are still being added to the map of the world there is already degeneration in the great cities of the island home country. *It may be so, and many think it is so; others judge differently.*

But we must come to the "parallel"—to "the application of Roman experience to modern circumstances." What was the cause of Rome's decay?

The following theory may serve as a basis for discussion. All States at their rise are composed of numerous organizations such as families and clans, which are almost independent . . . and in incessant conflict. Young States are therefore liable to early dissolution. If, however, they surmount these first dangers, a process of increasing organization sets in. Law is established and wars become fewer. The work needed by society is increasingly specialized: the State is divided in many ways, into social classes, professions, trades. The State becomes richer and happier so long as all goes smoothly.

("State—State—State," observe. If "the State is rich and happy," then, of course, everybody is rich and happy.)

But if one part becomes injured, the whole society suffers, and does not easily repair the mischief. The individuals are no longer adaptable. Ambition and enterprise decay: children are looked upon as a burden: the physical frame becomes less robust. Upon this weakened society some new danger bursts, and in a few short years it is destroyed. . . . If this sketch fits the history of Rome—

If, please note! Far be it from the Professor to say definitely that it *does*. But *if* it does—well, there you are! There's the evil—specialization. Illustration:—great steamer, much more complicated, and immensely safer, than small boat. But if it is struck at a weak point—

the musicians still perform on their instruments, waiters serve food and drink, postmen move about mail-bags, sailors lower the boats and—still indefinite!—

the passengers may or may not be saved!

Lack of versatility. There is "the danger all around us"—and I hope the members of the W.E.A. went away comforted after being forewarned about it.

We must, I think, allow that our present civilization stands in danger of such destruction. . . . Society is organized—and divided. . . . Increasing organization, specialization, standardization, centralization of our social activities: decreasing ambition, energy, elasticity, self-assertion, and vitality of the individual. . . .

(Who said "unequal distribution of wealth?" Go away—you're partial!)

Thus it is true that we live in the midst of the most terrible dangers.

But—don't be too definite !—

It is equally true that we venture to cherish the highest hopes. And our dangers and our hopes alike arise from the same causes (see catalogue above.)

So where are we ?

During the centuries of Rome's decay, Prof. Arnold tells us, "the Latin language, which once had been the pliant instrument of the subtlest thoughts, became a *dialect for expressing the conceptions of infants.*" Well, English has been a noble language in its time. . . . But perhaps it would be kinder not to draw a " parallel."

J. F. HORRABIN.

Strike at the Roots

"OH, if someone would only discover how to destroy this microbe of militarism which ravages the world!" is an exclamation in Mr. Zangwill's novel *The Mantle of Elijah*. Mr. Morel, in his book,* claims to have discovered the remedy for this "microbe," and he informs us that as a consequence of placing his solution before the British Public he has been subjected to the most malignant misrepresentation and personal abuse. There is no need to question his sincerity and honesty of purpose, and those critics (including a species of Socialist) who have indulged in this abuse are worthy of nothing more than our unmitigated contempt.

This book is divided into two parts. The principal aim of the writer in the first part is to show that Germany alone is not responsible for the war, but that all the Governments of the belligerent powers are equally to blame. That he succeeds in doing this is beyond question. He quotes the speeches of various political leaders and gives extracts from military writers and from newspapers to prove that it was well-known to every War Office in Europe that military necessity would compel Germany to march through Belgium to attack France in the event of a general European War, and that her preparations had been made accordingly. Our author also deals with the diplomatic trickery of the various Governments whilst playing their eternal game of maintaining the "Balance of Power." He devotes chapter IX to "The Morocco Intrigue," and shows how France and England came to a mutual arrangement as to their interests in Morocco and Egypt, working together for the exclusion of Germany from Africa. This resulted in the British quarrel with Germany in 1905, which again became more acute in 1911 with the Agadir incident and Lloyd George's

**Truth And The War*. By E. D. Morel. (National Labour Press, 2/- net.)

famous Mansion House speech. The history of practically all the European Governments from the violation of the Congo Treaty by Leopold II. of Belgium to the violation of Belgium herself by Germany in 1914 is proven to be "a veritable basketful of scraps of paper."

But whilst one can agree with Mr. Morel in his indictment of the European Powers as being equally to blame for Armageddon, nevertheless his opinions as to the cause of war between nations, and the remedies he proposes for its removal in the second part of his book are open to serious question, especially when considered in relation to the modern working-class movement. According to Mr. Morel:—

A secret and autocratic diplomacy . . . is the greatest obstacle to the emancipation of the peoples from the shackles of militarism and war. It is the greatest obstacle to the solidarity of the human race. (p. 112.)

Further we are told in Chapter XXXI to—

look out upon the world as it is and frame our action in conformity therewith. We must not act and argue as though the world were what we wished it to be.

Very good advice! but unfortunately Mr. Morel does the very opposite; he looks out upon the world not as it really is, but as a Liberal Democrat of the Free Trade era—the era of Cobden and Bright—would wish it to be. (As a matter of fact he was the Liberal candidate for Birkenhead up to the outbreak of war, when as a result of his opinions on British Foreign Policy &c. he was informed he was no longer acceptable.) On page 256 he writes—

When we look out upon the world as it is, what is the irritant we observe everywhere at work poisoning the relationship between nations? The tariff.

Here we have the cause of wars between nations according to Mr. Morel and his friends of the Union of Democratic Control—secret diplomacy and tariffs. The remedies they propose are that the nation as a whole ought to control foreign policy by means of its representatives in Parliament, instead of leaving it to the secret diplomacy of the Cabinet; and further there should be Free Trade in the exchange of commodities the world over as opposed to a tariff war between nations. We are now in a position to judge how far Mr. Morel has looked out upon "the world as it is." To say that wars between nations are due to secret diplomacy and tariffs explains about as much as to assert that hunger is due to an empty stomach. We require to know what is the cause of the empty stomach? Likewise, it remains for Mr. Morel to explain what is *the cause* of secret diplomacy and tariffs. According to his book, he implies that they are due to the people leaving the direction and control of the foreign policy of the nation in the hands of an autocratic minority; but we still require an explanation as to why and how this minority came to obtain so much power over the people.

In the economic life of the nation Mr. Morel wants to re-establish the conditions pertaining to that peaceful epoch of British Capitalism when Manchester was the leading city and the textile industry the leading industry of the capitalist world. He overlooks the fact that capitalism has taken another step forward to its death; that to-day Iron and Steel is the leading industry and Birmingham with its Tariff Reform is replacing Manchester and Free Trade. Thus it is useless for him to ask, as he does on page 268 :—

Is it possible that at least the North of England and Scotland does not even now contain sufficient elements impregnated with Cobden's teaching to evoke a counter-programme to that tariff war which the Government in power, and the Northcliffe Press . . . are undoubtedly hatching ?

Capitalism is in its Iron Age, and its dominant economic needs require a policy of "Blood and Iron"—a policy which it is now busy practising on the Continent of Europe. This policy is not due to certain individuals as such, but is made necessary by, and springs from, the immanent laws of capitalist production itself. It is of no avail for Mr. Morel to blame secret diplomacy, which is only an effect due to capitalist control of industry; nor will he achieve anything by appealing to President Wilson, who is himself faced with demands for a larger army by the huge capitalist trusts which control the social life of America.

Chapters XXXI and XXXII of his book prove Mr. Morel to be nothing more than a Free Trader. On p. 257 occurs the following passage :—

Cobden's vision not only went to the root of the actual, it pierced the future. We read his utterances with reverence, for if they embodied the truth in his time, they apply with tenfold significance to the world of to-day. Unhindered commercial intercourse, the right of all peoples to exchange their produce and their merchandise on a basis of mutual equality—this still remains the greatest of all reforms to be accomplished in the relationship of States.

At which point one is compelled to remind Mr. Morel of the fanatical opposition of Cobden and Bright to the 10-hours Bill for factory operatives, thus proving the love these Free Trade representatives of the nation had for that section of the people—the working class. Further, the reason for Cobden's opposition to the Crimean War was due to Russia being a good customer for his calico, not to any altruistic motives.

Mr. Morel seems to think that the microbe of militarism would be destroyed if only the peoples of the various capitalist nations would come together and devise some plan whereby they would all freely compete on a footing of mutual equality. But human society has not and does not evolve and progress by its members meeting together and making decrees. They can only act in accordance with the industrial conditions of their existence; these latter determine their decrees, not *vice versa*. It is the industrial conditions of to-day, with their present capitalist control, that

have inevitably produced the very evils which Mr. Morel denounces. That the industrial conditions of a nation's existence determines its actions and policy our author unconsciously discloses on p.271 where he says :—

The essential condition of Germany's industrial requirements is, and has been for the past two decades, free markets over-seas. If she cannot obtain free markets over-seas under foreign flags, she must acquire over-sea territories for herself.

Precisely so, and every other Industrial nation is in the same position ; hence secret diplomacy, tariffs, and intrigues on the part of the European nations to secure the dominant position in various parts of the world, such as Morocco, Egypt, the Balkans, the Bagdad railway, &c., finally culminating in the terrible slaughter of to-day. Mr. Morel is advocating a pathetically futile remedy for this state of affairs when he demands that capitalist nations should give up all restrictions against each other and endeavour to live harmoniously together in a world of free and equal competition. Why ! the very restrictions and monopolistic tendencies which he condemns are the inevitable result of the capitalist free competition he seeks to enforce. Competition begets monopoly with the inexorability of a law of nature, but in spite of this Mr. Morel stands for " unhampered commercial intercourse, the right of all peoples to exchange their produce and their merchandise on a basis of mutual equality." And he thinks this can be brought about by Free Trade ! It is in such a passage as this that one finds the clue as to why Mr. Morel and his friends of the U.D.C. have failed to discover the true cause of war between nations, and how their policy in spite of their sincerity tends to confuse the working class.

In the first place, our author has apparently overlooked or forgotten the fact, that a large section of the people, *viz.*, the wage-workers, have no products or merchandise to exchange ; they only possess the power to labour, and this power they are compelled to sell for wages to another section of the people, *viz.*, capitalists, who own the means whereby society produces its material requirements. Consequently it is only this latter section who have products and merchandise to exchange. Hence, we are met with a glaring inequality among the people right at the outset which is left untouched by Mr. Morel's panacea of Free Trade. The kind of democracy advocated by the U.D.C. is not control by the working-class ; it is a control by " the people." On p. 170 of his book Mr. Morel informs us that " Adherents daily swell the Union's ranks from all sections of society. As its name implies, the Union directs its appeal to the Democracy—to the people as a whole." Now " the people as a whole " are divided into two antagonistic sections—wage-workers and capitalists, with a " middle " class between them. How comes it that Mr. Morel and the U.D.C. fail to recognise, or overlook, this division, and use instead an abstract

word like the "people" which serves to hide the antagonism between Capital and Labour? The following quotations from Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire* provide the answer to this question :—

The peculiar character of the Social Democracy* is summed up in this: that democratic-republican institutions are demanded as the means, not to remove the two extremes—Capital and Wage-Slavery—but in order to weaken their antagonism and transform them into a harmonious whole.

The U.D.C. like these "Social Democrats," seeks a—

transformation of society upon democratic lines but a transformation within the boundaries of the small traders' class. No one must run away with the narrow notion that the small traders' class means on principle to enforce a selfish class interest. It believes rather that the special conditions for its own emancipation are the general conditions under which alone modern society can be saved and the class struggle avoided. Likewise must we avoid running away with the notion that the Democratic Representatives are all "shopkeepers" or enthuse for these. They may—by education and individual standing—be as distant from them as heaven is from earth. That which makes them representatives of the small traders' class is that they do not intellectually leap the bounds which that class itself does not leap in practical life; that, consequently, they are theoretically driven to the same problems and solutions, to which material interests and social standing practically drive the latter. Such, in fact, is at all times the relation of the "political" and the "literary" representatives of a class to the class they represent. . . . The democrat—by reason of his representing the middle class, that is to say, a TRANSITION CLASS, in which the interests of two other classes are mutually dulled, imagines himself above all class contrast. The democrats grant that opposed to them stands a privileged class, but they, together with the whole remaining mass of the nation, constitute the PEOPLE. What they represent is the "people's rights" their interests are the "people's interests." Hence, they do not consider that, at an impending struggle, they need to examine the interests and attitude of the different classes.

These quotations sum up exactly the arguments and position of Mr. Morel and his colleagues of the U.D.C. Their outlook and tactics in the political sphere of capitalist society is exactly the same as that of the W.E.A. in the educational sphere.

The policy of the working-class movement does not lie in the adoption of Free Trade as opposed to Tariffs or *vice versa*; their mission is to go forward to the abolition of capitalist control of industry altogether, whether under Free Trade or Tariff Reform, and substitute in its place their own control by means of their industrial organizations. Before the workers can attain to this, we shall probably pass through an epoch of State control of industry, under which the workers will gradually gain a larger and larger voice as to the conditions which should prevail, until they finally

*Readers will remember that the "Social Democracy" Marx is here talking about is that embodied in the Social Democratic party in France after 1848—a coalition of the small traders and working-men, in which "the revolutionary point was broken off the social demands of the proletariat, and a 'democratic' turn given to them."—Ed

obtain complete control and the State dies out. This process of gaining a voice in their industrial conditions has already commenced with the advent of the war. The *Times* of September 4th, in a leading article on "Trade Unions and the Industrial Future," declares that—

the trade unions . . . can exercise a decisive influence, and the question before them is whether they will help or hinder the future development of industry. They can do either. They can so help as to assure the future; they can so hinder as to destroy it. And the choice must be their own.

Thus, even the *Times* has to admit that the future belongs to Labour. War attains complete development before there can be peace; it is rapidly reaching this point to-day. All the evils which Mr. Morel sketches in his book are in the last analysis simply the effects of the subjection of Labour to Capital. In the words of Thoreau:—"There are thousands hacking at the branches of evil, to one who is striking at the roots." Mr. Morel and the U.D.C. are hacking "at the branches;" it is only the working class consciously organized and educated who can finally destroy "the roots." This is not to say that *individuals* outside the working class cannot assist, but they cannot remove "the roots" for the working-class; the latter acting as a *class*, must do this itself. It is with its advent to power that human society reaches a point in its evolution when "the microbe of militarism which ravages the world" will be destroyed.

ROBERT HOLDER.

The Mind of the Miner

The following extracts are from an article which appeared in the July number of the *Welsh Outlook*, a monthly magazine published in Cardiff. As a tribute to the work of the Plebs—from an 'outside' source—it is, we think our readers will agree, of some significance. The italics and sub-headings are ours.

South Wales is the industrial storm centre of Great Britain. The Welsh miner is always in the van of Trade Union progress; what he suggests to-day, his comrades in other coalfields adopt to-morrow. Most of the great movements that have agitated the minds of miners during recent years have either been originated in South Wales or have derived from South Wales their greatest support. As examples of these may be mentioned the demands for the greater safety of mines, the eight-hours day, and, most conspicuous of all, the minimum wage. South Wales also leads in wage agitations, and the higher standards that have been established here have much to do in setting on foot wage agitations in other coalfields. . . : Recent strikes, however, have been directed more purposefully than was formerly usual, and it is plain that mass opinion is to-day better informed and more class-conscious than was hitherto the case. This new aspect is ominous for capitalism. In days gone by the miners' officials led the men how and where they liked. Men of

the Mabon type dominated the coalfield. Those days are rapidly passing away. Giants cease to count, because the mass standard has been raised, and the men are nearly as capable as their leaders of appreciating the issues which are at stake as between employers and employed. This change must be attributed to the spread of popular education. The first-fruits of the Education Act of 1870 are now being reaped. The elementary schools have equipped working colliers with the weapons for acquiring knowledge and mental training. . . . The miners' agent is not now far removed in point of ability and attainments from the rank and file ; often, indeed, he is inferior in every respect to many of the men whom he represents. As a result, Trade Union policy is not now, as was the case in former days, formulated entirely by officials ; more and more the rank and file are asserting themselves, and the day may not be far distant when miners' leaders will cease to lead, but will confine themselves solely to carrying out the instructions of the men.

THE FAILURE OF THE W.E.A.

The influence of State education on miners' affairs has been effected mainly through the elementary school ; the more advanced grades have had but little to do with Trade Union development and activities. Few working colliers have attended secondary schools, and the intermediate system of education in Wales makes no provision for the training of the mining population in economic, political and civic subjects. Evening-school education also is confined mainly to men who aspire to positions outside their own class. From the working miners' standpoint our State system of higher education is hopelessly at fault, and those men who desire to study economic and political subjects have been obliged to cater for their own needs. In a few mining towns, e.g., Caerau and Ynysybwl, good work has been done by the Workers' Educational Association, and the instruction imparted in the tutorial classes organized by that body has been of considerable value. *Worthy though its objects are, however, the W.E.A. has not caught on in South Wales, and amongst the " advanced " men who are the live men in the various localities the movement is regarded with suspicion if not hostility. The W.E.A., it must be said, has only a very slight influence on the intellectual life of South Wales miners.*

Very much greater has been the influence of the Socialist society, the Independent Labour Party. Branches of this organization have been established in over a hundred of the principal centres of South Wales and the educational work in political and industrial matters done by this body has been of a very far reaching character. . . . Equally, if not more, important has been the less public work of the I.L.P. In large numbers of branch rooms classes in economic, political and other subjects have been held for years, some independent and others following the syllabuses of the Ruskin and Central Labour Colleges. It is not too much to say that to a large extent the policy of the South Wales Miners' Federation during recent years has been formulated in I.L.P. branch rooms. As the men who attend these classes are usually the most intelligent of the younger miners and often possess in a high degree the gift of public speaking, the influence of the I.L.P. very greatly exceeds its numerical strength.

WHERE THE PLEBS COMES IN.

The State Socialists do not now exercise the same influence over Federation matters as formerly, however, partly because of the development from the I.L.P. of a syndicalist section, comprising men of considerable ability and determination of purpose who have grown to distrust political action and to regard with great hostility any proposals for the nationalisation of mines, factories and transport services. We shall consider the aims of this group later—our present concern is with their educational activities, and with the influence they exercise on the life of the coalfield. The centre of this movement is the Rhondda, formerly an I.L.P. stronghold, but where the I.L.P. influence is now waning. Most of its adherents are Marxians, and many of the more active propagandists are old students of the Central Labour College, an institution which has recently come under the joint control of the South Wales Miners' Federation, and the National Union of Railwaymen. This college, it will be remembered, was formed as the result of a dispute over the character of the education given at Ruskin College, which resulted in the defection of a number of students in 1909. A number of South Wales Miners were amongst the strikers, and the Plebs League—the organization formed for the purpose of advocating the idea of labour-controlled working-class colleges with the class-war idea as the underlying principle of their education—has drawn much inspiration and support from South Wales. *The South Wales Plebs, although comparatively small numerically, has probably exercised a more profound influence on miners' trade unionism, than any other external educational agency.* The Plebs' Social Club, formed at Tonypany a few years ago, was the centre of Plebs activity, and within its walls were formulated the far-reaching schemes which contributed to the National Coal Strike and the enactment of the Minimum Wage Act. This club is no longer closely associated with the Plebs League, but the activities of the League have by no means diminished. Numbers of tutorial classes in sociology, industrial history, Marxian economics, and similar subjects have been held in the Rhondda Valley for years, and similar other classes have also been established in other parts of the coalfield. At one period a full-time lecturer was maintained in the Rhondda, but most of the work is undertaken by past students of the Central Labour College. Some idea of the extent of the movement may be gained from the fact that last year over three hundred young men attended the Plebs classes in the Rhondda. These men are usually among the most intelligent and most forceful of the mining population, and they are able to impress their ideas on the minds of their comrades, both during hours of work and hours of leisure. As they are also vigorous champions of men with grievances against the owners they are also popular, and their influence in their lodges is consequently very great. Sharing a common point of view, the Plebs adherents, drawn from all the big collieries in the Valley, have no difficulty in arriving at an agreement on points of industrial policy. Their views on these matters are readily accepted by their comrades in badly-attended lodge meetings, and the decisions of the lodges determine the policy of the district unions. Now the Rhondda district comprises practically one-third of the mining population of South Wales. It is evident, therefore, that

if unanimity is arrived at in the Rhondda only a small amount of support is needed from other districts to secure the acceptance of the Rhondda policy by the South Wales Miners' Federation, and as the latter body is the largest constituent unit of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, comprising nearly one-fifth of the total membership, its recommendations and demands must always receive respectful consideration, and ultimately, if persisted in, acceptance. The recent proposal of the South Wales Miners' Federation in favour of a "down tools" policy against conscription is an example of a decision arrived at in the manner indicated. The Rhondda is the strongest anti-conscription centre in South Wales.

THE POWER OF EDUCATION.

The most striking instance of the power of the Plebs League was in connection with the Minimum Wage agitation. The dispute at the Ely Pit over the cutting prices of coal in new seams led to the Cambrian Combine strike, involving 12,000 men. The Combine strike lasted several months during which serious rioting occurred, and all settlements arrived at by their leaders, and by the M.F.G.B. were rejected. Now was started the agitation for the Minimum Wage, in which the Plebs enthusiasts played an important part, and the demand for a national strike to secure this reform was proposed. The Rhondda miners being unanimous the South Wales Miners' Federation decided to back the demand, and endeavoured to prevail upon the M.F.G.B. to declare in favour of the same policy. The abnormal places question and the demand for the minimum wage obscured the Combine strike, which ultimately broke down. The M.F.G.B. now declared in favour of a legal minimum wage for abnormal places, and a national strike was called to enforce the demand. Government interference then became necessary, and Parliament was forced to enact the Miners' Minimum Wage Act, one of the most important pieces of industrial legislation ever placed on our Statute Books. This great reform sprang directly from the industrial troubles of the Rhondda, and is mentioned to show *what far-reaching results may accrue from purely local agitations when backed by apparently insignificant educational forces*. I do not propose to discuss here the weaknesses of the C.L.C. education or of the teachings of the I.L.P. It must, however, surely be obvious, in view of the important results which may accrue from wrong systems of education both to the mining community and the nation at large, that *the subject of civic, economic, and political education should be carefully considered with a view to the provision of some State-aided system on unbiassed lines, which will appeal to the largest possible number of young men residing in our teeming mining valleys*.

PLEASE NOTE:—

That orders and enquiries for books (not magazines) should still be addressed to the Central Labour College, 13 Penywern Road, Earls Court, S.W.

That when postal orders are sent, either to the College or to the Plebs, care should be taken of the counter-foil, as certain enclosures have recently gone astray in the post.

Correspondence

MR. BLATCHFORD AND ROSES.

Sir,—Am more than pleased with this month's number of the little mag., but like all rebels I must have my kick. Mine is at J.F.H. for his comment on Robt. Blatchford in his "On Roses" article. His claim that R.B. had turned us all sick has a Tooley-Street-tailor flavour about it. Besides it isn't true. I know a lot of people whom it didn't turn sick. Besides, vitriol doesn't butter anything worth eating, and only spoils an otherwise good article.

S. W.

Ashton-under-Lync.

Sir,—Owing to certain remarks in current issue of *Plebs*, I feel compelled to withhold any further subscription until the end of the war at least. Seldom do I offer any criticism of the policy or opinion of any individual or group, but seeing that the motto of the *Plebs* is "Agitate, Organize, Educate," I am surprised to find J.F.H. slashing into the *Clarion* and its staff like an anti-Socialist in full war-paint.

In my humble estimation, the *Clarion* has done and is still doing good work, and I trust may continue to warn Britain when it is rushing pell-mell to disaster. Whether 'Jingoism' is the right word to use in this instance, I am not much concerned about. But surely no-one will argue that the *Clarion* has not attempted to save a nation, so that it may one day have the privilege of joining the 'International Group.' . . .

I am not a hero-worshipper, and the *Clarion* and *Plebs* staffs are equally strangers to me. I have enjoyed reading both, and I have discovered that Karl Marx and Robert Blatchford have the same end in view, viz., to Make the People Think. They have both been successful. They have both enjoyed their particular recreation. Then it is the business of others to become successful in turn. That will never be possible by such remarks as are contained in the *Plebs*. . . .

When the war is over we can all join in the scrap against militarism and all other isms—if we think it wise.

W. D.

Weymouth.

TWO FOR OUR SIDE.

Sir,—Please send me a copy of Boudin's *Socialism and War*, and also six copies of September *Plebs*, which I am going to introduce to our N.U.R. branch, because I believe that the only hope of the working-class lies in the dissemination of the principles for which the C.L.C. and the *Plebs* stand.

Aberdeen.

A. B.

Sir,—Just received *Plebs*—the best yet ! It's like a ray of sunshine to a man out here—only more dependable, as it comes more regularly. . . Enjoyed the jab at the *Clarion* Royal Family. Why don't they bury themselves—they've been dead long enough ?

(B.E.F., Somewhere in France.)

A. D. B.

Reports

DURHAM C.L.C. CLASSES.

The prospects for the classes in Durham are very bright. A new district will be brought into line for independent working-class education—South Shields. So with Chopwell and Consett in full swing, the day should not be far distant when Durham and the North-East generally should be in the vanguard. With the circulation of the *Plebs* going ahead, there is not much to fear. Will Lawther will again undertake the duties of lecturer, and the text-book is to be W. W. Craik's first venture in the book line. Our lecturer has had published through several of the local weeklies a series of four articles dealing with Labour and Education from the C.L.C. point of view.

The secretaries of the classes are as follows :—

CONSETT.—T. Orr, Derwent Cottages, Medomsley, Co. Durham.

CHOPWELL.—John Bell, 62, Forth Street, Chopwell.

SOUTH SHIELDS.—Will Pearson, 10, George Street, Marsden, South Shields.

If any Plebeians or others write to any of the above, they will be in touch with the movement that matters. T. O.

MARXIAN ECONOMICS AND INDUSTRIAL HISTORY.

Classes on the above subjects will be held under the auspices of the Socialist Labour Party, Central Branch, at 50, Renfrew Street, Glasgow, commencing on Sunday October 1st, at 7 p.m. Fee for Session, 1/-.

DONATIONS TO SPECIAL APPEAL FUND.

The Clydach Vale C.L.C. Class has decided to give £1. towards wiping off the debt on the *Plebs*, and they express the hope that other readers of the Magazine will "do their bit," so that before Xmas that debt may be a thing of the past.

The Shrewsbury Branch of the N.U.R. has also granted £1 to the same object. Other branches, please copy!

The *Plebs'* Bookshelf

REBECCA WEST ON ZOLA—R. B. ON ROSES—THE *British Citizen*.

It will have to be a case of *multum in parvo* with the Bookshelf this month. Space is tight—and we need a few more subscribers before we can run to 36 pages! So first to J.S.C., and his onslaught last month on Rebecca West, and on me for my little paean of praise of her book on Henry James. One gathers that it was Miss West's comment on Zola which was chiefly responsible for rousing J. S. C.'s ire. "Zola wrote his novels with such care and painstaking effort," declares J. S. C., in defence of his hero, "that his critics, weary of searching for a single incorrect detail, or even overstatement, gave up trying to disprove him and took the easier course of abusing him." Now this suggests that Miss West had been "trying to disprove him," or at any rate that she would have been glad to do so. Whereas she was merely criticising his artistic method. "Plodding and sweating up the wrong road to art" was the phrase she applied to that method—a phrase which seems to me a paraphrase, from another point of view, of

J. S. C.'s "care and painstaking effort." My own remark, contrasting Zola with Synge, also referred to their respective methods. Zola's method was—carefully and painfully—to pile up countless details; Synge's was to select from all the details he could gather those which he considered essential. To declare a preference for Synge as an artist does not imply that one is "trying to disprove" Zola's details. "Illumination," says J. S. C., "does not come from making contradictory illustrations." Neither, I shall remind him, does it come from dashing into the fray before one has paused to consider what one's opponent's line of argument is.

As for J. S. C.'s horror of Rebecca West's "refreshing irreverence"—well, if he doesn't enjoy it, it's his loss! I have heard of folks who cannot read Shaw for the same reason. J. S. C. must confine himself to polite literature. Naturally, since he doesn't enjoy "refreshing irreverence," he asks "what use Miss West is to the Plebeian?" Chilling phrase that—'What use?' I ask J. S. C. what use, since all the facts, figures, and details they contain are doubtless available in blue-books, works of reference, &c., Zola's novels are to the Plebeian? I presume he would reply that the Plebeian (being human) would be more likely to enjoy Zola than the blue-books. And in answer to his query I beg leave to explain that I do not suggest that Rebecca West's writings contain anything not available elsewhere—except Rebecca West's personality, her wit, and "irreverence." If he again asks me to state precisely the "use-value" of that personality to a Plebeian, I shall tell him to Ask me Another. Meantime I heap coals of fire on his head by publicly thanking him for putting me on to a fine historical novel—*Long Will*, by Florence Converse (Everyman Series 1/1 net), a tale of the England of the 14th century, of "Long Will" Langland, who wrote *Piers Plowman*, Wat Tyler, John Ball, and the revolt of the villeins.

* * * * *

We now come to the correspondents who, on another page of this issue, take me to task for certain remarks of mine about Mr. Blatchford and the *Clarion*. S. W. accuses me of saying that R. B. had "turned us all sick" of the subject of roses. If you please, I never said no such thing. I said, "In summertime gone by, Mr. Blatchford did his best to bore us all to tears with it." And so he did. Perhaps S. W., being an enthusiast for roses, wasn't bored. I can only apologetically assure him that I was—and so were several other people I know. My remark, please note, had nothing whatever to do with Mr. Blatchford's attitude to the war; but was "literary criticism," simply and solely. It struck me, and still strikes me, as a pretty harmless remark. And yet S. W. talks about "vitriol," and Miss Hilda Thompson perorated about "mean, biassed, and petty spites," &c., &c. Who is Mr. Blatchford, anyhow, that one shouldn't be free to speak one's mind about him? Why should he, any more than anybody else, be shielded from criticism by a sticky mass of sentimentality? I repeat my own opinion—that Mr. Blatchford got very boring on the subject of roses, just as nowadays he is more than boring on the subject of Germans.

As for W. D., I will leave his letter to speak for itself; merely remarking that we of the *Plebs* are only too anxious to follow the advice contained in his sentence, "It is the business of others to become successful in turp"—

but that we shall find some difficulty in doing so if readers "with-hold any further subscription" every time they disagree with anything we say.

The first three numbers of *The British Citizen and Empire Worker* lie before me (no double-meaning intended). They are chiefly remarkable for very excellently printed half-tone portraits of celebrities we have all seen many times before, very weakly drawn cartoons, and the staggering efforts in vituperation achieved by the editor and certain of the writers of the "reports from branches." As specimens of the editor's capabilities in this direction take the following (which refers, of course, to Socialist Internationalists):—

.....The infamous anti-national, cosmopolitan, dogmatic, narrow, undemocratic tools of German ambitions and German militarism, the Yahoos of cosmopolitan pacificism.....Like pestiferous bacteria this *canaille* must be rooted out.....

New pastime for patriots—"rooting out" the bacteria! A Lieut. Loyson, of the French Army, runs his bluff English editor close with a sentence about "the slime of all the slugs" of Internationalism; while Gentleman Joe Terrett comes in a good third with his mouthful (chronicled in a Leicester Branch Report) about "Germans, pro-Germans, anti-Britishers, peace cranks, conscientious objectors, the snarling dogs of British Socialism, or the Pomeranian poodles of the I. L. P." Really the *British Citizen* will have to run a menagerie for the cause; an exhibition of "pestiferous bacteria" and "Pomeranian poodles" would draw the pennies out of all pockets. But Gentleman Joe should be careful; poodles are usually associated with one of our gallant Allies—not with Pomerania.

But all this bold blustering turns to milk-and-water when the *British Citizen* becomes "constructive."

War has taught us that greater and more potent than our individual interests, our individual lives our class prejudices or our money, is that collectivity of all the citizens which is the State..... A keener and higher sense of citizenship must be one of the first lessons all shall learn in the future...

Will it be necessary to re-open the dreary record of the class-struggle when the international war comes to an end? . . . We are convinced that our comrades in the Labour world will seek and find the better way as already indicated by the British Workers' National League, and we see additional reason for this growing conviction in the strikingly changed attitude of an increasing number of representative employers We rejoice in the belief that from the better understanding in the trenches there will yet arise, etc., etc.

So your lion roars you as gently as any sucking dove when an employer looms on the horizon.

For the rest there was a music-hall critic who faded away after the first number; a Military Correspondent who, after making sundry comical errors in Nos. 1 & 2, disappears in No. 3; a letter of congratulation from the Editor of the *Railway News* (I forget for the moment which particular workers' organization that journal represents); some correspondence on "The New Socialism," which is based, it appears, on "trench comradeship;" and a large front-page advert. (in No. 3) for something which cures BAD LEGS. Something to cure weak heads would be more appropriate.

J. F. H.

The "Plebs" League

Object

To further the interests of Independent working-class education as a partizan effort to improve the position of Labour in the present, and ultimately to assist in the abolition of wage-slavery.

Methods

The holding of an Annual Meet: the issuing of a monthly Magazine, mainly devoted to the discussion of the various questions of Labour, theoretical and practical: the formation of local branches and classes for the study of social science, in connexion with the Central Labour College, and in every way to assist in the development of the latter institution, and its maintenance of a definite educational policy.

Membership

Open to all who endorse the object of the League.

Each Member shall pay 1/- a year to the Central Fund towards meeting the expenses in connexion with the Annual Meet, &c.

Management

An Executive of five members elected annually, and the Editor of Magazine, who shall be responsible as to publication and meets, &c.

The Magazine shall be 2d. per copy, 2½d. post free.

Subscriptions payable in advance: Quarterly 7½d., Half Yearly 1/3, Yearly 2/6.

☛ The NINTH Annual Meet will be held in London, August 5th, 1917.

P.O's TO BE FORWARDED TO

GEO. MELHUISE, Treasurer,

127 Hamlet Gardens,

Ravenscourt Park, London, W.

The "Plebs" League

(Organ: "PLEBS" MAGAZINE, Published Monthly,
Price 2d.)

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