

CALIFORNIAN VISITORS

Judge Jackson H. Ralston in London

AFTER THE strain of the intense campaign which Judge Jackson H. Ralston conducted in California for the proposed constitutional amendment, in the November 1938 State elections, he was obliged to have a rest and recuperate his strength, which has been so marvellous considering his advanced age of over 80 years. A trip to Europe was decided upon, bringing Judge Ralston and Mrs Ralston to Italy where they spent some months. After visiting Paris they spent a few days in London, and before returning to California they will see something of the country in both England and Scotland.

In London on 23rd May, by invitation called at necessarily short notice, Judge and Mrs Ralston were the guests of the United Committee at dinner where a company of between 30 and 40 were proud to entertain them, the dinner being followed by a meeting of some 80 friends, whom Judge Ralston addressed on "The Campaign for Land Value Taxation in California," with the greatest acceptance. Mr. H. G. Chancellor, ex-M.P., presided.

Judge Ralston explained the nature of the proposal that was put before the electors in his State. It was to present through the initiative a constitutional amendment which would at once abolish the sales tax, and by steady reductions, spread over nine years, get rid of all taxation on improvements and tangible property, substituting for these burdens on consumers and productive industry, the taxation of land values. For the 1936 election, the necessary number of signatures to the petition were collected, but the petition was disqualified, on a ruling of the Supreme Court, on account of a technical flaw in its title. The campaign had to be taken up anew in 1938, and again the necessary number of signatures (a little over 186,000) were obtained, but when the actual voting took place the proposition was defeated. It received 372,000 votes as against something like four and a half times as many given against. "So," said Judge Ralston wistfully, but with a ringing challenge, "I come to you as one who has failed." A failure, in rousing the whole State to such a debate and to the perception of the power of vested interest and privilege! In the light of the circumstances, the ferocious opposition of the real estate forces and their allies, the phenomenal expenditure incurred to cry robbery and disaster, the unscrupulous use of every device of vituperation and misrepresentation, it is idle to speak of failure. Judge Ralston recounted these events, as demonstrating to what practices the selfish interests will resort in their own defence, and what every reformer must be prepared for who would attack the "Ark of the Covenant"—the private appropriation of the rent of land. He referred to earlier agitations to institute the taxation of land values; they could at any rate be gratified that they got three times as many votes as had been given on any previous occasion. This, in spite of the fact that nothing was left undone, by menace and intimidation, to prevent the voters from even signing the initial petition that the proposal be put on the ballot.

Paying tribute to his colleagues and co-workers who, with minute finance to back them, had given themselves unstintingly and to exhaustion in the struggle, Judge Ralston spoke of the faith and determination which moved them. They believed it was a crime for the State to step between the individual and the results of his work; that every tax standing between man and

what he would do should be abolished; that as fast as tax is removed from production it should be placed on the value of land; they would throw open as of equal right to all the resources that nature freely offered to all, which no man created, the rent of which was the result of common effort not to be appropriated by any individual but paid into the common pool. They were devoting themselves to the movement which had originated in California, because here it was that Henry George (whom he had the privilege to know) had first proclaimed its demand, and gave the proof that all might have ease and abundance, and what was the cause of poverty accompanying material progress. The fundamental evil had of course been revealed by others before Henry George—Lycurgus in Greece, the Gracchi in Rome, Rousseau in France, not to speak of many others. What they to-day had to fear was that if the problem was not solved by reason and understanding, men knowing their suffering would at last become desperate, strike out blindly, and what we know of civilization would be utterly destroyed. In California they had gained from the recent campaign a knowledge of their own strength, and they had the measure of the strength of those in the opposite camp. He closed with the advice to prepare, as they had tried to do, all the details of a practicable measure, ready for the Statute book, whenever the opportunity presented itself for legislation. As for their own future, it might be difficult to put forward the case just in the same way as before, unless they had the financial support to command—that is, if there is no alternative to proceeding by way of initiative petition—since it would be necessary to obtain all the more signatures next time, namely 8 per cent of the total of votes cast at the previous election, a number that was rapidly growing with the increasing population.

Grateful applause was accorded to the address. How glad all were to welcome Judge and Mrs Ralston and pay their respects to them was expressed in a vote of thanks moved by the Rev Mervyn Stewart, seconded by Mr Rupert East, to which also Mr Madsen, Mr Harvey James and Mr Verinder spoke.

To each person present was distributed a copy of the printed paper on the California campaign, which Judge Ralston contributed to the International Conference in London, 1936, describing the aims of the constitutional amendment and informing the reader about the Californian situation. The fate of the amendment is since known, but the story told in this paper is none the less valuable. Also distributed was a copy of the new prospectus of the Henry George School of Social Science, with its call to form study classes and enlist both students and tutors. At the literature table the sales amounted to 27s., the book most in demand being Judge Ralston's *What's Wrong With Taxation?* which (now available at 1s. a copy) would make an excellent text-book for any of the extension or advanced classes of the School.

A NOTE ON ALBANIA.—*The Manchester Guardian* of 10th April in its leading article on Albania "The Latest Victim," said: "There are it is true powerful influences which the Italians might use. The land-owning families, all that is left of the old Beys, had no great love for King Zog. His aim was to turn their land over to the wretched peasants, while they sought to retain the whole wealth which the earlier foreign rule of Turkey had allowed them. It is possible that among these families Signor Mussolini's overlordship would be as welcome as the late Sultan's."