

## A DEDICATED LIFE

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WE MAY BE grateful that Ashley Mitchell has set down an account of his life and deeds.\* Spanning a long and important slice of history — he is now eighty-eight — Mr. Mitchell's career covers the apogee of Britain's Liberal Party in the early 1900's, through two world wars and into the uncertain times of today. Written in an informal and engaging style, these memoirs move easily from the doings of high politics to personal narrative and they are full of striking and amusing anecdotes.

Mr. Mitchell's first significant encounter with politics was the election of 1906 which swept the Liberals into power. He recounts in some detail the important events of the next few years which saw the rise of the land-values movement to near victory and its fall with the outbreak of World War I. Echoes of this epic adventure have come down to us and it is edifying to see events set down in some detail. That campaign deserves a whole book to itself — what happened, why it happened, what lessons may be learned from it — and if such a book is written, Mr. Mitchell's book will provide important source material.

Mr. Mitchell sees the land-values episode in the perspective of the growth of the Liberal movement from the Reform Act of 1832, to the abolition of the Corn Laws, the success of (relative) free trade and the Budget of 1909-10 which called for a national land valuation. All this was tragically cast aside in the holocaust of 1914-18 and the shifting sands of politics which followed.

Nevertheless Ashley Mitchell remained a staunch Liberal and stood for Parliament periodically from 1920 on. Though he never made it, he came close and won respect. What stands out is that with all the sorry deals and shifty expediency going on, Mr. Mitchell remained a man of principle. He was a true Liberal in the old sense and never gave up his adherence of those good precepts. He once said of Senator Arthur Roebuck of Canada that if he had been willing to compromise he could easily have become Prime Minister of his country. Might not the same also be said of Ashley Mitchell?

"A fallen political warrior" Mr. Mitchell calls himself. But it is not so much he that fell as the party to which he gave his allegiance. Like Hector of ancient Troy, we still find him of sterling worth though what

he was defending was to be lost. (The analogy is apt — was not it a "Trojan horse" that undermined the Liberal Party?)

Among the things related by Mr. Mitchell are his extensive travels mostly in connection with his business of selling wool. The Yorkshireman from Huddersfield was a recurring and welcome visitor in North America, Europe and elsewhere.

What I missed in his narrative was more reference to the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade of which Mr. Mitchell was long Treasurer and is now President; and mention of his long-time colleagues, especially Arthur W. Masden. I would like to have seen some mention of Joseph Fels' visit to London and the arrangement of the first International Georgist conference in Ronda, Spain in 1913; and the formation of the International Union ten years later. I believe Ashley Mitchell is the only one who has attended every one of the international conferences. But perhaps that would require him to write another book — well, why not?

Ashley Mitchell's "Memoirs" fill an important place in the history of the land-values movement and should be on every shelf that has a collection of such literature.

\* *Memoirs of a Fallen Political Warrior* Land & Liberty Press Ltd., 88pp, A4, Limp cover, £1.50.