

Miscellany

Worth His Salt

THIS is a story of the sea. It is not a story telling of storms, shipwrecks, mutiny or desert islands, but of a teacher, enterprising, determined and full of undampable enthusiasm. Fred Auld, a recent tutor at the Henry George School of Social Science, was returning on the S.S. Orion (a 99 per cent. emigrant ship) to his native Australia after many years in England. He decided he would run a series of economic lectures on board.

Following a public announcement of the forthcoming lectures by the ship's liaison officer, over 50 people attended the first lecture. As Mr. Auld had equipped himself, on leaving England, with only 25 copies of *Progress and Poverty* the students had to share text books, and this shortage, coupled with other factors such as lack of suitable accommodation and the rival attractions of Bingo and sport, caused a decline in numbers, although 18 stayed to the finish.

After the first meeting Mr. Auld was called to the office of an Australian Government official to explain his conduct. The purpose and nature of the course was demanded, and the suggestion was made that it was either an attempt to gain free publicity for the Henry George Party of Australia or a new method of introducing Communism into the country. He was even questioned about his qualifications for lecturing on economics.

Mr. Auld stood firm and continued with the daily classes, which he conducted in a dignified manner in spite of the presence of people planted there as "spies," who sought to discover the "plot" behind it all.

The course was enthusiastically received and, in his own words, "it was really good to walk about the ship and see so many people reading the text book."

An official leaflet circulated throughout the ship giving emigrants an introduction to Adelaide provided an interesting study of South Aus-



tralia with reference to early land problems, and good use was made of it during the discussions.

According to the leaflet, a London writer, Edward Wakefield, who had never been to Australia, published "A letter from Sydney" in 1829, suggesting a new system of colonisation. Land was to be sold at a "sufficient price" so that the amount owned should never outstrip the population. By the old method, land had been so cheap that no one was too poor to buy it and therefore no labouring class existed willing to help the landowner develop his property, "which often became a crushing burden upon him." Many powerful speculators saw the force of these arguments, which came at a time when there were discovered enormous tracts of rich land at the mouth of the Murray River.

In 1836, two shiploads of settlers arrived, but were soon left unemployed and destitute, for the colonists, who bought enormous quantities of land, were holding it for speculation without any intention of developing it. Mr. Auld made full use of this information, which must have provided his students with a striking example of the evils of the private appropriation of natural resources. This could hardly have been the purpose of the official leaflet — indeed, it indicates that the bad, rough days are over and all is now well with the system of land tenure.

Time may prove that this routine journey of the S.S. Orion has accomplished much more than the mere transportation of emigrants to a new land. Let us hope that many prejudices have been lost at sea.

(Note: For a more complete story of these early Australian settlements we refer readers to our booklet "The Law of Wages and Land Monopoly," by E. J. Craigie: 6d.)

ANIMAL FARM

The power of government covers the surface of society with a network of small complicated rules, minute and uniform, through which the most original minds and the most energetic characters cannot penetrate, to rise above the crowd. The will of man is not shattered, but softened, bent, and guided; men are seldom forced by it to act, but they are constantly restrained from acting. Such a power . . . does not tyrannise, but it compresses, enervates, extinguishes, and stupefies a people, until each nation is reduced to nothing better than a flock of timid and hard-working animals, of which the government is the shepherd.

—Alexis de Tocqueville.

To the Editor of Land & Liberty,

Sir,—You may be interested in a bit of American history. Thomas Jefferson wrote many letters, of which I have some 300 pages — "Life and Selected Writings of Jefferson," Modern Library, New York. Wish we had more statesmen of his breed today. He wrote the original draft from which the Declaration of Independence was composed. His chapter on slavery was stricken out. As a result, American soil was soaked with blood less than a century later.

But what may interest you is that Jefferson was ambassador to France (1785-89), where he met the physiocrats, and became acquainted with their teaching. He appears to have some reserve as regards their tax ideas, but on the whole he had great respect for them. In his letters he makes a number of references to man's relation to land, and clearly understood the condition of the peasant under the aristocratic "landowner" system. He did suggest that properties below a certain value be free from taxes, and all from that value on be taxed in geometrical proportion. In France at that time, labourers paid half their earnings in taxes. The failure of the French Revolution he blamed on "closet politicians merely, unpractised in the knowledge of man."

Yours faithfully,

WALTER W. GERVER.
Lancaster, Pennsylvania.