

ESSAYS AND ADVENTURES OF A LABOUR M.P.



Elliott & Fry

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As we noted in last month's issue, *ESSAYS AND ADVENTURES OF A LABOUR M.P.* has now been published in paper covers, price 3s. 6d. (Allen & Unwin). The book was reviewed in these columns in August, 1924. It is dedicated "To All Who Love Freedom and Adventure," and this certainly means every reader of *LAND & LIBERTY*, as well as a wider public we only wish we could reach. We cull the following passage from the Chapter on "Freedom or Police?" :—

"The man who seeks to do away with exploitation, and yet believes that regulation and regimentation are essential, contradicts himself. Human nature has no chance in a straight-waistcoat. The choice before us is obvious. There are just two roads. . . . And there are those who know that exploitation can be stopped, and that man can yet be free; they will take liberty and justice as their guides, and pin their faith to the perfectability of human nature. Is our guide to be—Police or Freedom?"

Some Press Notices and Reviews

The *SPECTATOR* (9th August, 1924): The author is in line with Arthur Young and Trelawny, and John Sterling, sometimes even with Old Cobbett. Radical and Revolutionary as he likes to think himself, he is at heart one of the most traditional of men. Whether you accept his views or not, the fellow has an alchemy that makes you love him. You disagree with him, when you do so, as Carlyle disagreed with Sterling, "in opinion only." In one important respect indeed—in the introduction of political matter—Colonel Wedgwood has forsaken the English tradition; but in an introduction of delightful modesty he explains quite clearly how he came to do so. In his own view of himself—a view which this book sufficiently refutes—he exists "only for the Single Tax." He would have us believe that he talks of it both in season and out. He fixes you like the ancient mariner with his glittering eye; but as his

lips begin to form the word "land" a strange movement takes place. His friends begin to disappear. That is quite admirably described, and amongst the author's friends there is, if we may believe him, a somewhat similar panic when he begins to talk of the Single Tax. So he has devised, as he says, this new form of sandwich to catch us. The adventures, which are wonderfully various and exciting, are to be our bread and mustard; the essays—on the law of rent and the taxation of land—are intended as our political meat; and we, the public, are to munch them up together.

In *THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT* (24th July): These *Essays and Adventures* suggest that their author has identified himself with the Labour Party not because he likes it much, but because he likes the others less. It cannot be that he is in sympathy with Socialism, which implies the subordination of the individual to the State; his expression for that is "a damnable un-English heresy." He regards the private ownership of land as the chief restraint in this country, and the chief theme of the essays is advocacy of the Single Tax on land. So long as he writes as an economist he must be read with attention—which may be relaxed when he turns politician. Confiscation of land from its present owners is thus defended: "If this is confiscation there was just such confiscation when Captain Kidd's profitable trade was driven off the Western Ocean." To read what the author writes of the incidence of taxation under the present system one might suppose that there was no income tax and no super tax; and one might suppose that there was enough land in England to support the whole population as agriculturists. The explanation, perhaps, is that Colonel Wedgwood is not interested in his land tax as an economical expedient; in so far as it strengthened the existing fabric of society it would have no merits in his eyes. Its merits for him lie in his regarding it as a lever for the overthrow of capitalism; and he is apparently so convinced that Britons ever will be slaves until this desirable consummation is arrived at that he is indifferent to the cost to his contemporaries at which it would be brought about.

In the *DAILY DESPATCH* (15th July): It is refreshing to find a politician who can laugh at himself—it prevents others laughing at him. In his new book Colonel Josiah C. Wedgwood, M.P., plunges off with these observations: "It is regrettably a matter of common knowledge that I exist only for the Single Tax. My best friends looked pained when they observe my lips framing the word 'land'; others move rapidly in another direction when they see me approach, lest, like the ancient mariner, I distract them from their dinner by a dissertation on the law of rent." However, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster lets us down lightly in regard to his pet hobby, and the fact is that his two chapters on the subject are exceedingly interesting.

In the *MORNING POST* (16th July): As a brigadier of Labour politics, however, we find him less admirable. Thus in "Land Values—How they should be Taxed," which might very well have been left in the political end of his shard-ruck, there is merely a repetition of the old worn-out arguments which have been abandoned even by Labour economists. And what if his reasoning were applied to Labour which, since the efficient population of a country cannot be increased, is also a monopoly? Again, he has that peculiarly biassed mind—common enough with the town-bred followers of Cobden—which admires the results of hereditary knowledge in its conduct of manufacturing industry, but is indignant when it is applied in the management of a landed estate.

In *THE TIMES* (31st July): Colonel Wedgwood must be a puzzling colleague. He is a Roundhead in his principles, and a Cavalier in temperament. The

publishers allude to the puzzle in describing the essays as an "exposition of the author's well-known individualistic views of Socialism." Every law is a restraint on human liberty, and in these essays Colonel Wedgwood is an anarchist in the sense that he would abolish laws. To bring this about he advocates the Single Tax on land. His arguments for the tax are cogently put; it is when he comes to dwell on the spiritual advantages that will flow from it that landless readers—family men living in time and not in eternity—will cease to be tickled by the proposal. He recognizes that you cannot make omelettes without breaking eggs, and with him the omelette is made by the mere breaking of the egg: the egg is the landlord; the omelette is the abolition of slavery.

In the *SUNDAY TIMES* (20th July): Colonel Wedgwood has produced an extraordinarily interesting and fascinating book, which is about as capable of being reviewed as the store-room of a pawn-broker or the Wembley Empire Exhibition. It includes—among other things—a sort of sketch history of the famous family of which he is a descendant; splendidly vivid descriptions of his personal experiences of war as waged two and twenty years ago in South Africa, and ten years since in Belgium and Gallipoli; a glimpse of Hungary under the Bela Kun régime; a dissertation on Home Rule in India; a description of the impassioned burst of oratory by which, in 1911, Jean Jaurés swept the Briand Ministry from power; a defence of the strike as the one practical and effective weapon in the armoury of the proletariat which will warm the heart of Mr. Robert Smillie; and—inevitably and of course—articles on the absolute necessity of the taxation of land values. All are admirable specimens of the superior class of journalism to which they belong, written with that sledge-hammer forthrightness which, if it may fail to convince, at least leaves the reader no shadow of doubt as to the absolute sincerity of the writer.

In the *NATION* (2nd August): Colonel Wedgwood's book is a collection of stray papers, extending over many years. As a whole, it is somewhat disappointing, because we feel that the author's genuine literary gifts have lacked opportunity for adequate development. Colonel Wedgwood's career has been so full and versatile that he can have had but scant leisure for writing, and these essays are occasional exercises rather than serious efforts. As they stand, however, those adventures lose much of their effect by being sandwiched between carefully argued pleas for the taxation of land values, memories (at once affectionate and caustic) of the Wedgwood pottery "institution," and lyrical pages in praise of cycling.

In the *CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR* (13th September): Colonel Wedgwood's book is dedicated to "all who love freedom and adventure." Politically, the book is a plea for freedom as against authority. As Colonel Wedgwood puts it, one doctrine "depends upon the belief in the perfectability of human nature, the other on the belief in original sin." Over and over again he pleads for giving humanity the chance of "living dangerously" and learning from its own mistakes, instead of keeping it quiet in the leading strings of constraint and control. And every now and again peeps out his pet device for insuring greater freedom and opportunity to the rank and file—the single tax theory of Henry George.

In the *NEW YORK WORLD* (30th November): The book bears out his confession that "I exist only for the Single Tax." And so, he expands, in a most agreeably clear and reasonable manner, on the subject of land values and why and how they should be taxed. You learn from him about native lands and crown colonies, to say nothing of illuminating matter regarding Indian Home Rule, and the better way of bringing about a social revolution. It would be hard to find a

more amiable, intelligent, coolly written book. Even the chapters on Single Tax aren't Messianic. They do carry a message from the lips of a highly civilized messenger.

In the *NEW YORK EVENING POST* (22nd November):

A reading of this book impresses one with the high and homely humaneness of the writer. But above all he is a fine, free spirit, a philanthropist actuated by lofty ideals. One cannot but respect his sincerity of purpose, whether in agreement with this purpose or not; and among his personal friends and admirers are to be found his bitterest political enemies.

From *NEWTON D. BAKER*, Cleveland, Ohio (19th December): "I have just finished reading, with more pleasure than I can describe, *ESSAYS AND ADVENTURES*, by Josiah Wedgwood. I think I have seen nothing from any source about the war more graphic than his story of his experiences. I would be glad to have Mr. Wedgwood know what a thrill his book has given me. It could only have been written by a gentleman; and then only by a gentleman of mature years, to whom frankness and candour came as naturally as it does to him."

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