

## THE OXFORD LIBERAL SUMMER SCHOOL

## Impressions of a Student

By E. WHITAKER

We talked all day and we talked all night,  
But narry a little thing did we put right.

Mr. Elliott Dodds, in his published impression of the Liberal Summer School, says: "The lectures covered almost the whole ground of contemporary interest. Foreign policy, disarmament, finance, Free Trade, education, industry, unemployment, agriculture—all found a place in the programme."

In which respect they were like Barnum's purple cat—only on the programme. They were amongst the "also rans." Whether it was that the "bread and butter question" of unemployment was deliberately thrown into the limbo of things not worth troubling about I do not know, but as a Liberal, the son of a Liberal, the grandson of one of the Grand Old Man's vanguard, recently demobilized from the army after seven years' service, I went to Oxford to polish up my political enthusiasm and pick up the political threads of present-day knowledge. I came away a wiser but sadly disappointed man.

Edmund Keane, the celebrated actor, was once asked how he had enjoyed a new play to which he had been specially invited. "A fine comedy," said Keane. "But man," said the other, "it was no comedy, it was a drama."

As a comedy the school was very successful. But as a serious effort to "explore the foundations in reason and experience of what are called Liberal principles" it was like the short-sighted recruit's score on the range, "a washout." Pardon the military language. The word expresses my meaning so completely that I cannot refrain from using it.

Has Liberalism nothing to say on that most pressing of the bread and butter problems (no "quotes" this time, Mr. Printer, please) of the day—unemployment? Or have we as Liberals nothing but sweet words, honeyed phrases about booms—finance—depressions for the down and outer?

When a voter asks us for a job have we to console him in his unfortunate predicament by saying that he has not to worry? We cannot give him work, but if it is any satisfaction to him to know it, there is unemployment in all the Allied countries.

I was unemployed when I went to Oxford. And I knew hundreds of my friends in a like position. I cycled on a push bike from the West Riding of Yorkshire to Oxford to hear what Liberalism had to promise for those who, through no fault of their own, were out of a job. I wanted to hear all about the bread and butter politics Mr. Guadella so wisely spoke about. They are the only kind people will listen to, said he. And quite right, too. We in the North know what the struggle for life is.

I had desired on leaving the army to begin in a commercial enterprise of my own. My project required land. Which when one comes to think a bit is not strange. But I desired a whole acre. So big a piece of land, Mr. Editor, that I am not able to say how many square yards of land I required. I hunted about, and after more hunting came to the desirable spot.

"This land for sale" was the motto I read on the very strip that would serve my purpose. There was a name under the magic words. And after the name I was informed that the gentleman was an estate agent—a magician of the land.

I took a note of the whole lot. I usually carry a "wait and see." What is that? One of those patent things—you have always to wait and see if they will write or not.

"I would like to purchase that waste land at M. . ."

I said to the agent—magician, I mean.

"Please sit down."

I did.

"You may have heard that there are certain building clauses to be observed by anyone buying this land."

I didn't interrupt to ask him what he meant.

"You must build nothing but—"

Then it was that I smiled sickly.

The magician suggested water.

"You must build nothing but—"

Again I smiled. He noticed my pallor, but rushed on.

"Nothing but residential property on it."

That was the first ghost. I had evidently seen it coming.

But there was another to come. "It will cost you 10s. 6d. a yard—that is a square yard of course, of course."

That was the second ghost.

But I thanked the magician kindly and departed, declining his offer to drive me over the site in his Rolls-Royce. And that piece of land was in a town of less than 20,000 population, away from the business and residential part at that, and being vacant was wholly exempted from rates.

"Cheerio," I said to myself, "you will get over it at Oxford, old bean. They will show you how the land sharks should be tackled." I cycled back to Yorkshire a dis—(I cannot spell the word for thinking about my feelings)—man.

All that we were to be sure of was that within the next few years or so there would be some recovery of trade, but whether it would mean a real recovery of trade so as to absorb all the unemployed was uncertain. Such was the pabulum the lecturer, Mr. Henderson, had to offer. Had Mr. Henderson ever thought of the thousands of acres lying waste in the country, which, if taxed so that they were released for industry, would absorb much of the unemployment?

I thought of the 4,840 square yards (is that an acre?) of land that I had desired to purchase, but could not on account of the excessive price. And I thought of the six friends I had promised work if I had been able to purchase the land. I pictured them drawing their relief for themselves and families from the Guardians.

On my return home three of these men came to see me before the rucksack was removed from the cycle.

"Study booms and depressions if you want a job," I told them, and they stared at me open-mouthed. By the look in their eyes I could see that they sympathized with me in my affliction. They were men of ready sympathy. I had fought in France with each of them.

"Never mind booms, you get off to bed," they said. They thought I was mad.

And these are voters preparing themselves for the coming election.

What will the platform orators have to say to them? Will there be any talk of booms?

Nero fiddled whilst Rome burned, but we at Oxford talked and talked and admired the ladies in the balcony (privileged, by the way—and yet we were studying the very tenets, the foundation stones, of democracy). It was too *infra dig.* to listen to the lecture on "Land Values" by Mr. Madsen, consequently few of us went. Many of us went visiting Oxford—those of us, that is, who were privileged to join the "official" party organized by one of the executive of the school who at one time rendered lip service to the theory of land value taxation.

Some of us who heard Mr. Madsen were strongly opposed to the principle. I sat amongst the people, so heard many opinions.

One of the questions they put to me was: "Why should you hit on land as specially adapted for taxation? What of other property? Why has the landlord to suffer?" These people did not ask their questions at the meeting.

But we turned up in great numbers to hear about the Machinery of Government, the Balance of Power, India, and such like highbrow stuff.

We sympathized with Lord Robert Cecil, he means well and he shall have our support—but I wonder why all the society of demobilized soldiers of all the countries do not

start a stop-all-war movement of their own, many I have spoken to are in sympathy with the idea. Then Mr. Lloyd George and the others will be able to fight their own wars.

The chief trouble of the school was that our politics went so high that, like the voice of the young lady in the choir, they were nearly lost in the spire.

I am in despair for the welfare of the Liberal Party if the Summer School is any indication of the future. Where has gone its inspiration, its driving power, its impetus, its dynamic force?

In booms and depressions?

### SINGLE TAXERS IN RUSSIA

Translation of letter received by the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values from the Editor of TERISTO, a Single Tax Esperantist Journal. Address: post kesto 663, Stanislaw Szabuniewicz, Moscow, Russia.

We safely received your letter of 4th July and the literature you sent. We thank you warmly, and greatly desire to be in constant touch with you. Our friends are now translating your publications about which we wish to inform the readers of TERISTO, if you will allow us to do so.

We will gladly accept your publications in exchange for ours, which we will send you regularly. We shall also be pleased to give you information about the Single Tax movement in Russia when anything worthy of attention occurs. Just now we are excited because it has been decided to replace the present land tax by the Single Tax (as an experiment) in some of the provinces. When we have received more detailed information, it shall be forwarded to you.

The most famous works of Henry George—PROGRESS AND POVERTY, SOCIAL PROBLEMS, THE CONDITION OF LABOUR and others—have been translated into the Russian language by our friend S. D. Nikolajev, who, to our intense grief, died last year. In 1917 with his help we founded a Single Tax League, but the condition of the time made it impossible for the League to continue its operations. . . . By this post we are sending the chief of our pamphlets, including THE STORY OF MY DICTATORSHIP, translated by our second friend, Dr. A. I. Nikolajevskij.

Whether our hopes will be realized we do not know—we have not had enough experience. After a lapse of five years we resumed our work some months ago, under such difficulties that any extension is unthinkable. After all that has taken place, the people have hardly regained social consciousness and are chiefly concerned about re-establishing their ruined material conditions. On the one side lack of means, on the other apathy and indifference; this is not a favourable moment to propose a new social arrangement, the more so because everything new has been followed by disillusionment. We suppose, nevertheless, that the force of circumstances will break down this indifference. We are firmly convinced that not only Russia, but the whole world can find no other way of escape from the present imbroglia than that shown by Henry George. We endeavour to prove this on every page of TERISTO, which at present has only a small number of friends.

In our journal we nevertheless advocate not only the Single Tax system, which we believe to be indissolubly bound up with moral and social reforms, but also co-operation, garden cities, etc.

Up to the present time we have not succeeded in establishing relations with the chief world groups devoting their strength to the propagation of the teaching of Henry George. We would be very grateful if you would send to us the addresses of all such groups and journals. It seems to us that all groups must unite in a world-wide League to advance this most important social reform at this time. Our Moscow friend, Mr. V. Levenson, has just published his book about the Single Tax which he will

certainly send to you soon. Publishing difficulties greatly hinder us; we cannot produce everything which we have at our disposal.

We repeat our requests: kindly supply us with the fullest information possible about existing societies, journals, year books, experiments, etc. Specially we beg you to send the address of the SINGLE TAX REVIEW, New York, and L'IMPOT UNIQUE, France.

Accept our greetings and expressions of high esteem.

In the name of the Editor of TERISTO.

1st September, 1922.

[The request of our Russian friends has been attended to and has been passed on to our co-workers abroad and in the Dominions for further reports. It has been explained that L'IMPOT UNIQUE abandoned publication some time ago, and the Editor, M. Georges Darien, died last year.—EDITOR, LAND & LIBERTY.]

### "DIVINE DISCONTENT!"

In his original letter, which provoked this controversy, the Earl of Pembroke wrote, in pious horror, of the growth of the "revolutionary" spirit in the countryside, but he is alarming himself needlessly. So far as I can see, there is little evidence of that "divine discontent" which precedes revolution. The unjust privileges of the Earl and his class appear likely, I am sorry to state, to remain unchallenged for many years yet.

His Lordship perhaps imagines that our controversy is being followed by a host of interested readers, just as in the old days the Eglinton tournaments were watched by a crowd of spectators; but he would be mistaken. I venture to state that out of the thousands who buy the AYR ADVERTISER not above a dozen take an intelligent interest in our debate. A district closely associated with Bruce and Wallace, those brave champions of Scottish independence, has become a community of shop and boarding-house keepers, selfishly engrossed in their own petty concerns; the town which produced Robert Burns, the poet of Freedom, is almost wholly given over to football and betting on horses. The movement with which I am connected held a meeting recently in the High Street of Ayr. The event was well advertised, yet, out of a population of 35,000, only a handful of people attended. Let paltry questions like the restoration of the Scottish people's rights to their native land go hang! Other weightier matters demand our attention here. Know ye not that the "United" had a win on Saturday, that the public-houses close far too early, that the "Burroo" dole ought to be a shilling or two more?

In ending this discussion (so far as I am concerned), I can assure My Lord that he may sleep sound o' nights. There is no danger, no hope of an immediate revolution; it would interfere with the September race meeting! —John Cameron in the AYR ADVERTISER, 7th September.

The Ministry of Agriculture in 1919 purchased some 6,000 acres of land from Guy's Hospital Estate at Sutton Bridge, Lincolnshire, for small holdings, but as only about one-third were converted they decided to sell the remainder.—WESTMINSTER GAZETTE, 27th September.

In my own constituency there are no fewer than 2,000 unemployed, the bulk of whom have not earned a penny for 18 months or two years. Compulsorily idle, they have exhausted their savings, and, perhaps, their trade union benefits, and have had to eke out a living by means of unemployment insurance benefit and poor law relief.

I am inclined to think that unemployment insurance has been a sort of dope which has dulled the sensibilities of many workers and enveloped them in the torpor of semi-starvation.—Mr. Arthur Henderson, in the DAILY HERALD, 28th September.