

Vol. XII. No. 4

April, 1920

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## ABLETT

### EASY OUTLINES OF ECONOMICS

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# THE PLEBS

"I can promise to be candid but not impartial."

Vol. XII.

April, 1920

No. 4

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## FOREWORD

WE need make no apology for holding over many of our regular features in order to devote most of our space this month to preliminary sketches of the important subjects to be discussed at the next Plebs Conference (at Bradford on the 17th and 18th of this month). The urgent need for a series of adequate, well-considered textbooks is apparent to us all. Their precise scope, and the method of presentation to be adopted, are the next points to settle. And discussion of these points at a conference of teachers and class-organisers is an ideal way of ensuring that every possible aspect of the subject has been taken into account before any one style or method is finally settled upon. Much time can be saved at such a conference if those attending have all had an opportunity of considering some rough suggestions and broad outlines beforehand.

That is the reason for this Special Number—that, and the desirability of giving Plebs unable to attend some idea of the matters to be discussed, and thereby enabling them to send along any suggestions in writing. Every one of the contributors has sent in an apology for his or her inadequate treatment of the subject along with his article. It should therefore be made clear that these articles make no attempt to be final statements. They are simply rough notes, to serve only as a basis for discussion.

The agenda of the Bradford Conference, it is suggested, should be somewhat as follows:—Saturday, April 17, 2.30 to 6.30 p.m.: Appointment of Credentials Committee; Chairman's Address; other preliminary business. Then one hour devoted to each of the following subjects:—Biology, Science of Understanding, Economic Geography. The speaker introducing each subject to be allowed a quarter of an hour, other speakers five minutes each. Sunday, 10.30 to 7.30 (with lunch and tea intervals): morning, Industrial History; afternoon, Economics. Election of Textbook Editorial Committee would probably fit in between these two subjects.

The following speakers will introduce the respective subjects:—*Biology*, L. T. Hogben. *Science of Understanding*, Alice Pratt (perhaps better known to Plebs as Alice Smith). *Economic Geography*, J. F. Horrabin. *Industrial History*

W. W. Craik and (or) W. MacLaine and (or) Robt. Holder. *Economics*, T. A. Jackson and (or) W. H. Mainwaring.

All Plebs will be welcomed—don't wait for a personal invitation. The Conference takes place at BRITTON HALL, WHETLEY, BRADFORD; Saturday, 17th, at 2.30 p.m.; Sunday, 18th, at 10.30 a.m.

## HOW ARE WE TO WRITE HISTORY?

### I.

**T**HE scientific method of historical investigation has been found, but the actual carrying out of historical reconstruction in the form of textbooks is by no means easy. It is certainly not nearly so simple as some half-developed Marxists suppose. For it is not merely a case of setting on record the economic conditions of a given epoch and straightway deducing all the laws, customs, institutions and ideologies from those economic conditions, but of analysing the forms in which events on the surface appear, resolving them into their simplest elements, and reascending through the series of often complicated processes which mediate between the inner propelling mechanism and the external course of events. This is the art which he must master who would reproduce for our thought the actual way in which history has been made.

First of all, then, the scientific historian should start from the given, from the things as they present themselves on the surface; but not resting there and confounding the appearance with the reality.

Secondly, the classification of outward characteristics should be followed by analysis and reduction, and finally by interlinking and reconstruction—*i.e.*, the genetic as distinguished from the mere empirical method which invariably loses itself in chronology.

Another question arises—the question of starting point. Antagonisms, according to Historical Materialism, are the chief medium of progress. For a longer or shorter period in the history of an epoch those antagonisms are not manifest on the surface of events, and the actors moved by those antagonisms lack the consciousness of the real nature of such propelling forces. Sooner or later equilibrium is lost in revolution, which latter is a struggle to regain equilibrium on a new economic pivot. A text book on History, particularly where it is designed to serve elementary requirements, should, I think, be divided on the basis of revolutions. Starting in each epoch from a revolution, resolving it into its evolutionary elements and into the forms in which those elements ripen for a radical transformation, one is able to lay bare the internal history of the whole period.

The best approximation to this method of historical reconstruction, although it is far too meagre in detail, is the late Gustav Bang's *Crises in European History*. Intending historians should give an eye to this little work. They should, above all, as a preliminary exercise, carefully study the late Professor Labriola's *Essays on the Materialistic Conception of History*.

Finally, the scope of a text book for beginners should, I suggest, be European rather than exclusively English. A broad general outline will facilitate the more specialised historical studies besides being a good psychological corrective against insularity.

The book might include the three broad periods of Classical Antiquity, Mediæval Society and Modern Capitalism. The prehistoric phase ought to be treated separately and constitute a more advanced study.

W. W. CRAIK

## OUTLINE OF A TEXTBOOK ON BRITISH ECONOMIC HISTORY

[This outline should not be taken as final, but only as a possibility. The actual writing of the book would suggest points which would in all probability cause it to be modified.—W. M.]

1 *Introductory.* Roman Britain. The Saxons. The Mark—conflicting views regarding it. The Manor in Saxon Days.

2 The Manor. Domesday. Methods of Cultivation. The Tenants. Services. Payments. Manor always changing. No fixed state.

3 The 14th century and its importance. War famine. Pestilence. Revolt. Effect on Manorial System.

4 Policy of Edward III. Townsend Warner's Theory of "Policy." Is it correct? Does it cause development? What were the facts?

5 Towns, their rise. Charters. The Burgess. Early Trade—the Traders' Organisations—the Merchant Guilds. Early Industry—the industrial organisations. The Craft Guilds. Developments in the Guilds; what caused them? The Journeymen's Associations.

6 Enclosure movement 16th century.

7 Labour in the Middle Ages.

8 Financial Position 16th and 17th centuries. Connection between national finance and political happenings. Statemanship or expediency? Connection between extravagances of Henry VIII. and Cromwellian Revolution. A bad system going worse with time.

9 Trading Companies and their finances. Their relation to the Crown. Patents and monopolies. Bank of England.

10 Domestic System. Early Capitalism. The middleman in industry.

11 England and Ireland. Economic Relationships (see current numbers of *Data*).

12 Agrarian Revolution. A Willing Parliament. The agricultural wage Labourer; expropriation of the peasantry. Brutal repression. War and agriculture.

13 Industrial Revolution. Machinery and Power. The industrial proletariat and its creation. Capital and the Plutocracy.

14 Later developments in Capitalism. Increased production and its effects. Wars for markets. Industrial crises. Competition. Trusts.

A discussion on the scope and arrangement of a textbook (or textbooks) on economic history will be very useful. There are several possible alternatives to such an arrangement as the above. (i) Each chapter to deal with a century and to include agricultural and industrial changes. This involves much repetition. (ii) To deal with the land and agriculture in the first half of the book and industry in the second half. (iii) Alternate chapters on agricultural and industrial developments. It will be interesting to have the views of class teachers.

W. MACLAINE

## A TEXTBOOK OF ECONOMICS

EVERYWHERE one is asked—What textbook on economics do you recommend? This article is not a reply, but a few suggestions as to the kind of book we require. If agreement can be reached on this point, the textbook will be the more easily produced.

All those who have been active in organising and conducting classes will agree that each succeeding year followed the same course as the preceding one. Up to a point all was well, but. . . .

We may differ, perhaps, about the measure of progress made—satisfactory or unsatisfactory—and about the precise scope of the required textbook; but whatever the ultimate contents of the latter may be its suitability must be judged in relation to the need it has to meet. The students, as well as the subject, have to be taken into consideration.

We have to deal with a particular kind of student, peculiar in the sense that he has neither read widely nor acquired the power of expression. The problem is to provide a course of study simple enough for these students. Practically, I have no doubt, two courses are required, elementary and advanced.

My own strong conviction is that the elementary course should be as much industrial history as theoretical economics. I believe it to be a mistake to give too much theory, unless at the same time the historical background is presented. The student will find the subject much easier to grasp if the historical factors are emphasised. For this reason I would advise no first-year student to take economics. To illustrate *theory* we are compelled to refer to *history*, and history is generally to first-year students an as yet unopened book.

For the elementary course a brief survey of *Capital* as a whole is desirable, ending rather nearer the beginning of the 20th century than the middle of the 19th. This could be done in a generalised form without going into exhaustive (and exhausting) details; and thus pave the way for the more advanced course, in which more attention would be paid to theory than is possible in the earlier course.

In the advanced course much more attention should be given to modern problems than has usually been attempted up to the present. Here again it is a matter of relating *theory* to actual historical happenings—contemporary history, instead of the events of past centuries. And I think that this question—*i.e.*, the relative emphasis to be placed on the *theoretical* side of the subject, as compared with the historical-illustrative side—ought to be thoroughly discussed, and settled, before the skeleton of a textbook is decided in further detail.

W. H. MAINWARING

## SUGGESTIONS FOR ELEMENTARY ECONOMICS LECTURE-COURSE

(Contributed by a Plebs Student)

1 *The Marxian Categories*:—Their revolutionary character; Bourgeois economics—(a) Classical, (b) Eclectic, (c) Apologetic—Their historical background.

2 *Commodities*:—The starting point of economic inquiry. Typical capitalist products. Use-value and exchange value. Labour and Labour-power. The two-fold character of Labour. Simple and skilled labour. Social labour time: its measurement.

3 *Exchange*:—The basis of exchange relations. Historical factors.

4 *Wages*:—Evolution of the wages-system. The nature and determination of wages payment. Forms of wages—(a) Time, (b) Piece, (c) Inclusive wages. National and International forms of wages (with particular regard to stages of social development of crafts and countries).

5 *Competition*:—As between workers, between capitalists, between capitalists and workers Local, national, and international. Fluctuations in price and the point of equilibrium. The secret of the establishment of social value.

6 *Money*:—Definitions. The origin and functions of money. Money, as (a) Measure of

value, (b) Standard of price, (c) Medium of circulation, Laws of currency.

7 *Money*:—The precious metals. Tokens. Paper money: (a) cheques, (b) notes. Money of reckoning and account. Hoards. Money and crises.

8 *Capital*:—Definition. Origin, function, aims, recovery, growth. Other Forms of Capital: Commercial, Transportation, Financial, Agricultural.

9 *Capital*:—Productive and unproductive. Bourgeois concepts criticised. Municipal and State Enterprises and their relation to private competitive capital. Taxation.

10 *Analysis of the Elements of Profit*:—The Production and Forms of Absolute and Relative Surplus-value. Interest. Law of Population.

11 *Machinery*:—Definition. Simple and complex machinery. The rise and growth of machine-made products. Effects of Machinery on the organisation of labour. Intensity of labour. Value of products.

12 *Land*:—Historical Forms of ownership. Capital (a) Farmers, (b) Holdings. Minerals. Fisheries. Other Holdings. Labour: (a) Agricultural wage-labour, (b) Peasant proprietors and small holders. Rent. Royalties.

## BEGINNING WITH THE BEGINNER

**E** DUCATE, Educate, Educate! Um—yes, but how? Just precisely how? Our object is to make the working class realise its position in relation to the master class. To that end we conduct classes in social science which, if others' experiences are at all like mine, work out something like this:—

The promoters advertise a course of, say, 24 weekly lectures on Economics, starting in October—twenty enthusiastic students turn up—lecture starts to time—students studiously attentive—lively questions—slight shrinking in numbers as Christmas approaches—after Christmas, slump in attendance—students coming late—occasional good question and some poor ones—attention not really bad (in between yawns) but indefinable dullness pervading atmosphere

—teacher tries to rouse things by questions of his own—after that, a few have urgent appointments elsewhere at question time, excuse themselves graciously and go out on tip-toe—very few studying at all after first couple of months and hardly one with a view to teaching. During one course I have in mind we started with twenty students and finished with three.

Some people believe the workers are apathetic. I don't. With some exceptions they seem to me very energetic. Think of the energy displayed in football; in practising the piano; at choir, orchestral or dramatic rehearsals; at club houses; at whist drives or in cycling; some are even energetic in drinking beer. Then why all this apathy when it comes to study? I conclude the majority of working-class students *are not students* either by nature or training. True enough they are anxious to know our conclusions—high prices and bad conditions force them to want these—but they *will not* cover a long line of detailed argument, so why weary them and waste time when conclusions are all they will get when we have finished? Why not give the original twenty the conclusions before they dwindle to three, and reserve the detailed work for the training of teachers who certainly *must* have it?

One of the principles of our materialistic science teaches us to fashion our tools and methods to correspond with the nature of the material we are using, otherwise we FAIL. Now get that and grip tight! Very well! We want to make a present of our information to every worker, but, it is impossible to give what is not received—*e.g.*, I can't make a present of a safety razor to a man who won't have it. If I argue that he has to have a shave somehow (the revolution) and, therefore, he ought to accept it because it would save making a bloody mess of his face, I miss the point. Even if I put it into his hand, as we do in the classes, and he puts it away in a drawer and forgets all about it, again I have failed. Not until I have succeeded in making him *desire* to possess and use it can I make the presentation successfully.

With some such thoughts in my mind I decided on a change of tactics. I would give a short course, say, half a dozen lectures, which could be repeated three or four times *in one season*. In it I would avoid technical phrases—*e.g.*, I would tell my audience that value was labour, and if they wanted to know any more about it, let them ask. And beyond telling them that money was only another form of the labour *embodied in commodities*, I would not mention its functions; that also could come out in questions (it did, with excellent effect). The idea was *to keep within the limit of what interested them*, and to tell them only so much as would excite a further interest and make them want more. From such students I would select a very few individuals, force them to guarantee time for study or otherwise have nothing to do with them; these I would take on another evening, give them the best detail study I could, and then let them go to the Trade Unions in the district with the same summary as the general class was having. And I would continue that treatment until the Trade Unions were sufficiently alive to the necessity of *finding money* to equip residential Labour Colleges for training *their own men in a proper manner*.

I have had only one opportunity of putting the plan into practice; I give the results for the sake of comparison. The first lecture, an extremely simple affair, led, apart from some brilliant questions, to a unanimous request to go over it again with special reference to the "socially necessary"; mention of which had been brought out in questions. The course of six lectures was extended by request to eight. No late starts. Questions, the most searching I had ever had, were continued beyond what ought to have been closing time, so that the care-

taker told us we could not have the room again unless we would get out to time; we did so and stood outside in groups discussing matters—and the month was February. *The attendance rose in eight weeks from twenty-six to thirty-six—the only time in my experience when the number of students increased. They “sat up and begged” for a text-book, but the cupboard was bare.*

Now, if the above plan is considered to be good, it should be extended. But it can't be extended without a suitable book, and the purport of my writing is to supply a proposal concerning the form such a book should take. The proposal is only intended to *serve as a basis* for the discussion of this very important question at the forthcoming April Conference. It is, therefore, hoped that before they come, intending delegates will give some critical thought to the suggestion and that they will formulate any desirable counter proposals beforehand, thereby saving time at the Conference and enabling the idea to take some definite shape on that occasion.

In the foregoing I have treated the idea as though it belonged entirely to myself. Of course that is not so. Many people hold similar ideas, and several variations of it were introduced by different delegates at the recent Manchester Conference.

My suggestion is a simple preliminary booklet—more like a chat with the reader. Although I realise there is no one way which could be said to be the best (for some audiences are more intellectual than others), yet I suggest the following series of leading ideas as a basis for the discussion of the form our book should take; and will venture to remind intending delegates that we want helpful criticism towards the production of a book at once simple and impressive enough to help our teachers to move the “masses” better even than do the “movies.”

#### ELEMENTARY MARKISM

##### AN IMPRESSIONIST SERIES OF LECTURES

###### Lecture 1.—COMMODITIES AND MONEY

Refer to social evils. Contrast riches with poverty. What is wealth and how got? Wealth a combination of matter and useful labour. Nature supplies the matter and *charges nothing for it*. Man supplies the labour. *Where does wealth go?* National Income divided into Wages and Profit. Wages paid to people who work; profit taken by people who do nothing for it. How is this done? By buying and using a certain commodity. How are quantities of commodities determined in buying and selling. Commodities are exchanged for commodities (C—C), the quantities being measured by the quantities of labour in them, say 10 hours labour in one form exchanged for 10 hours labour in some other form. Explain this by a simple imaginary picture of pre-exchange times—exchange beginning with direct barter (C—C), leading to the idea of indirect exchange (C—C—C). The middle one grows to become money. So, money is only a separate—*i.e.*, independent in-between form of labour (C—M—C). Since M is only *another form of some commodity's value*, profit cannot be made in exchange; for where one commodity has a price that exceeds its value, some other commodity *must* have a price below its value, because the extra price of the one *can't come from nowhere*. So, if one man's gain is another's loss, how do the profit-takers get the profit?

###### Lecture 2.—CAPITAL AND PROFIT

Recall the question of profit left over from Lecture 1. Go back to the savage and his poor tools—he had not enough to eat, let alone sell. Better tools produce more wealth, so buying and selling becomes possible. Further development of tools (and methods) begets the “one man one job” (division of labour in society), more buying and selling results in some folks getting a stock of other folks' labour (value) stored up in money form. With this M a trader would buy raw materials and get some workman *who possessed his own tools* to work it into commodities; he would pay the workman and sell the commodities elsewhere. Later, he gets a *workshop and tools of his own* and gets a worker to work for him *for wages*. The worker gradually gets separated from his own tools and eventually has nothing to sell but his strength (labour power). The price of labour power (wages) is determined like the price of any other commodity—by the *quantity of labour* consumed by (embodied in) the man, in the form of the necessities of life. Assume this quantity of labour to be 4 hours and that in the factory the man works 12 hours. This 12 hours is *new labour* in the form of some commodity that belongs to the master. The master sells it and converts that labour into the form of money, out of which he gives 4 hours in wages so that the worker can reappear the day after. This leaves the master with 8 hours profit in the form of money. If he employs 100 such men he gets 800 hours profit. We see that the capitalist advances nothing, for



the workman has created his own wages before they are paid to him.

If you were a capitalist would you tell your workmen how the trick is done? You'd be a fool if you did. Draw the moral as expressed in all forms of capitalist education (the press, platform, schools, W.E.A., Whitley camouflage, etc.) and contrast it with his struggles in the workshop against more wages and shorter hours.

**Lecture 3.—SHORTER HOURS AND MORE PROFIT**

Summarise chief points concerning profit, in Lecture 2. Longer hours mean more profit. From the Great Plague onwards Acts of Parliament (Labour Statutes) forced workers to conform to capitalists' wishes—showing the *capitalist nature of the State*. Why then did they pass Factory Acts to shorten hours. Tools again! Some people had better and quicker machinery than others. They could produce more goods in the same time which, when sold, resulted in more profit, so it paid these people to have an Act passed limiting hours of labour (legislation can only go as quick as capital will let it—it must pay first, otherwise no Act). But, how could it pay—machinery reduces labour and consequently price, doesn't it? It surely does; but if similar goods were sold on the same market at an average price, then those who produced with machinery gained in the form of money part of the labour put in by those who had no machinery, because the money can only represent labour that has been put in somewhere and what one gained the other lost. But even so, was there not a *general loss—e.g., if the total wages remained the same and the total labour embodied in the total goods was reduced, wouldn't the total profit be reduced?* True again, but when machinery makes it possible to produce the workers' necessities of life in 2 hours, wages can be reduced to 2 hours (the workman still getting the same quantity of stuff to live on—though it would be worth less), and then where it used to be a 12-hour day with wages 4 and profits 8, you can think of it as an 11-hour day with wages 2 and profits 9. With increased profits the capitalist could buy still more machinery, and the game goes on.

**Lecture 4.—WAGES**

Increase of machinery (tools again!) is changing the character of society. More capital is put into tools and materials, and relatively less into labour power; machinery is no use to a capitalist unless it enables him to pay in wages a less proportion of every £100 invested than formerly. Capital is constantly managing with less labour per £100, and long ago we reached the point where the natural increase of the working population exceeds the number of workers required to work the other portion of capital—viz., that in the form of machinery and raw materials. Result—a permanent unemployed class, enabling capitalists to beat down wages. This gives rise to the fighting trade unions. There can be no conciliation about the matter.

Wages are of different kinds. *Nominal wage*—how much money you get. *Real wage*—how much wealth you can get with the money. Even if real wage rises, it can only do so if *profits rise still more*, otherwise the system becomes crippled. Though wages are the price of labour power they are always reckoned as a payment for time—e.g.,

if the price of a day's power is 6s., and a man works 6 hours, it would be called a 1s. an hour, if he worked 9 hours, 8d. an hour, or if 12 hours 6d. an hour, and so on. All wages are at bottom time wages, no matter what form they take. Wages do not affect prices of commodities; they are themselves the price of a commodity whose value is consumed and done with, and, therefore, not carried forward to the product.

**Lecture 5.—THE DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH**

The National income is divided into Wages and Profits. Profits are divided into producers, merchants, wholesalers and retailers' profits. Parts of all these profits are taken by other people to form interest and rent. Profit-takers fight among themselves as to the division, but on questions of wages and hours they stand together as a solid "freemasonry, arrayed against the workers." For if the workers get more wages or shorter hours (other things remaining the same) there is less profit then to divide. Taxes are not part of wages. Workers only pay taxes by proxy. Nominal wage is considerably reduced by National and local taxes (rates), cottage rents, monopolies and adulteration of goods—another form of monopoly.

**Lecture 6.—THE STORY OF SOCIETY**

(Up to the concentration of capital, give no more detail than is sufficient to leave a strong impression that the world and its people, its laws, moral codes, literature, art, etc., are in a perpetual state of change consequent upon changes in the material basis of life. Afterwards develop as much as time will permit—it being the last lecture they will stand a bit more.)

Stellar space—collision of dark stars—nebula and its condensation—geological formations—protozoa—plants—animals (tool users) man (*a tool maker*). Savages and their poor tools—little wealth. Better tools beget more wealth and exchange. Exchange begets money. Money begets international trade. All the time customs, laws, moral codes, politics, etc., are keeping pace. Division of labour in society has already taken place. The merchant trader gets a workshop and separates the workman from his tools. Division of labour in the workshop develops special skill. Capitalists to some extent at the mercy of workmen. Special skill and tools leads to machines. Skill no longer needed. Worker now at the mercy of the capitalist who owns the machines. Peasants driven off the land to make room for sheep (wool) and for other reasons. Workers now own neither tools or land. In the beginning of capitalism (16th century to 19th) tools and machines were small and could be got by many individuals. There were a *great number of small capitalists* competing for the market. Cheapness is the weapon of competition. They each saved up their profit (the concentration of capital) to enlarge their respective businesses. The bigger ones beat the smaller with cheaper goods, and drove them into the ranks of the workers. Then several capitalists joined their capitals together in a company (the centralisation of capital). In this way it comes about that to-day a few big capitalists own all the means of life and consequently control everybody else. On the other hand there is an immense army of workers who own nothing but their labour power. They

combine in unions to avoid underselling each other. In this way the workers are reforming society and arranging to produce and distribute wealth in the interests of all. With this economic organisation as a base, they will seize social power, destroy all capitalist parliaments and

establish Communism. Conclude with an appeal *re* Independent Working-Class Education.

*Note:* The book should contain examples of blackboard demonstrations and notes for use on blackboard.

FRED CASEY

## THE UTILITY OF THE BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES

(By a Biologist)

**T**HE lecturer or study-circle leader who starts a course in elementary economics or industrial history for working-class students is at once confronted with the fact that a number, probably a majority, of the members of the class have left the public elementary (or even secondary) schools entirely ignorant of the significance of the Law of Causation, which is the basis of all material progress, and of the doctrine of Organic Evolution (especially the evolution of man), which, with the Economic Interpretation of History, is the key to a scientific understanding of all social and economic problems. It does not matter, for our purpose, whether the individuals have been diligently taught the cosmogeny of Genesis, or have been reduced to a state in which they neither know, nor want to know, anything about what man is, where he came from, or why he is what he is. What matters is that without some conception of the course and factors of evolution, and of man as a product of evolution, history and economics are robbed of their significance.

It is therefore desirable that the *story of evolution*, so far as it is understood, and particularly the history of the descent of man from his ape-ancestors, and the progressive perfection of his bodily mechanism (hand, speech, brain, etc.), and of his arts and attainments, should form a subject of instruction in our scheme of proletarian education.

But there are other aspects of the subject, a knowledge of which is equally important. The Darwinian theory of the Struggle for Existence and survival of the fittest has been exploited as furnishing biological arguments in favour of individualist competition, international war, and other features of capitalist society. It is important that the proletarian leader should provide himself with the weapons to answer these arguments; which are based on biological conceptions which have now been in great measure superseded or perhaps we should say "re-interpreted." Moreover, he should have a working knowledge of the present position of the science of Heredity and Variation, a clear conception of the relative places of inheritance and environment as factors in determining the characters of individuals and races, and an acquaintance with the propaganda of the "Eugenics" school, and of the dangers which their practical application by a State based on class privileges might lead to. He will find that a study of modern genetics will give him a clear idea of the distinction between *economic inequality* on the one hand, inequality due to the possession or non-possession of wealth, and the educational and other advantages it can buy, and *genetic inequality* on the other hand, the inequality due to the presence or absence of inborn talent or ability. This knowledge will enable him to combat not only those supporters of capitalism who claim that the existence of genetic inequality justifies the concentration of hereditary wealth and the advantages it gives in the hands of a minority; but also those sentimental so-called socialists who, not content with demanding *economic* equality, or an equal chance for all, assume at the same time a natural or *genetic* equality, preach a "democracy" which means at best government by mediocrities, and howl against the "tyranny" and "negation of democracy" of the Soviet system.

Then again, and perhaps most important, there is the study, biological, physiological and psychological of what is called "Human Nature." This branch, if adequately treated, involves more psychology than is to be found in biological books, but also much more biology than is to be found in English textbooks on psychology. The M.C.H. is much more easily understood if the student grasps the nature of the mechanism which makes the behaviour, institutions, ideals, etc., of a class or its individual members a function of their economic environment—*i.e.*, of the particular methods by which, and conditions under which, they get their livelihood. What, for example, is it in the people addressed that sets a limit to the efficacy of propaganda? Why did the anti-German press propaganda succeed in promoting and maintaining the public opinion necessary for the prosecution of the war against Germany, while the anti-Soviet press propaganda failed to awaken, much less sustain, any general keenness for war against the Soviets? The biological reply is that in the one case there was a condition of the nervous system, or in psychological words a "complex," aroused by the proximity and strength of the enemy, in which the animal instincts of *fear* and *pugnacity*, with their accompanying emotions were active, and which provided a receptive "soil" for war propaganda; while in the other case the "enemy" was so remote, and the "danger" so ill-defined that no such strong emotional complex was present to furnish the "soil" in which the propaganda could germinate.

These phenomena, and all other phenomena of human nature, can be explained in terms of the laws of causation, of a rigid determinism, of man's biological nature, which in its turn is the necessary outcome of the forces which operated on him during the animal and sub-human periods in which biological natural selection had full play; before he interposed between himself and his natural or biological environment a barrier of tools, commodities, and traditional knowledge, in other words an economic environment.

Human social conduct can be shown to depend for its prime movers on the *instincts* (inherited "neuron patterns") most of which man shares with the lower animals, on the capacity for forming *habits* (acquired "neuron patterns"), and on the tendency to organise and group these "patterns" in greater associations (the psychological equivalents of which are the *sentiments* or *complexes*).

All of these structures, tendencies, and capacities, however they may have arisen in the first instance, have been preserved by the operation of biological natural selection and perfected in the course of ages, and their sum total on the psychological side, is what is commonly spoken of as the "consciousness," "ego," "personality" or "soul."

But man's biological characters are much less at the mercy of the natural environment than in the case of even the highest animal, because man, by virtue of his capacity for making tools, and for communicating ideas (speech), has created an economic environment. It is this environment, and not man, which is now undergoing progressive evolution; while the changes which man himself appears to undergo, that is to say the change of ideas, tendencies, beliefs, habits, etc., are no more than the reaction of his versatile animal mechanism to passing changes of his environment; they are unaccompanied by any permanent (*i.e.*, inheritable) change in constitution, and they last only as long as the economic or environmental circumstances that evoke them last. An animal cannot do what man does because it has not the brain machine necessary for the invention of tools (fire, weapons, clothes, etc.) to ward off disadvantageous natural influences, and because it cannot transmit to others, or learn from others,

acquired knowledge and experiences; consequently the animal is at the mercy of its natural environment. The animal has one heritage, its inborn working mechanism, specialised during ages of progressive evolution to enable it to get its living and reproduce its kind in its natural environment. Man has a two-fold heritage: an inborn working mechanism, more perfect on the nervous side than that of any lower animal, and also a heritage of tools, commodities and accumulated knowledge which, inter-acting with his bodily and mental mechanism, has placed him in the position he now occupies, and holds up to him the prospect of ever greater conquests of his environment.

There is also a fourth aspect which, though of less practical utility, is of great philosophical value, in laying the foundation of the student's outlook on life deeply and firmly. I refer to modern theories on the nature and origin of life. The philosophically-minded student will demand information on this subject, and provision should be made, especially in the later years of study, after first essentials have been mastered, to introduce it. No book known to the writer covers all the ground indicated above. A teacher with some previous knowledge of biology and psychology could arrange a study course, involving the use of a number of existing books, dealing with different aspects of the subject. Suggestions for such a study course will be made in a future number of the PLEBS.

There is a real need for a special textbook, and it is suggested that the Labour College or Plebs League should arrange for the production of a book or series of books suitable for classes conducted, in the absence of specialists, by non-specialist teachers who had themselves attended such a course. The four aspects of the subject might be assigned to four specialists, and the whole edited by these specialists in collaboration with non-specialists experienced in the needs and practical working of the classes for which the book is intended.

Such a book or series would fall into the following parts:—Part i: *The Story of Evolution*; Part ii: *The Mechanism of Evolution*; Part iii: *Man as a Product of Evolution*; and Part iv: *The Nature and Origin of Life*.

The above course might be arranged so as to cover about twenty-four meetings of a class, of which Parts ii and iii would occupy the greater number.

### THE SCIENCE OF UNDERSTANDING

**T**HE Science of Understanding—how well I remember my first lecture on that subject. The whole matter was quite new to me, I had read none of the works of Marx or Engels, had never heard of the Materialistic Conception of History, and the dialectic was yet a joy of the future. I retired from that lecture feeling as though my brain had been stirred with a porridge spoon.

Still, I was not going to advertise my ignorance. I had the textbook under my arm and I resolved to take it out of that at the first opportunity. That textbook was *The Positive Outcome of Philosophy*, by Joseph Dietzgen, and anyone who has engaged in a catch-as-catch-can encounter with this book will appreciate the irony of my resolution. For one does not "take it out" of J. D. in the preliminary tussle! Joseph "took it out" of me, very considerably. All the same, I felt sure something valuable lurked behind this maze of unfamiliar words, for the lecturer was so obviously infatuated with his subject. One could but admire his enthusiasm while wondering a little at his taste, and I finally went to sleep feeling that this is a hard world for a working woman seeking a reliable brand of truth. Since then I have had many an up-and-downer with *The Positive Out-*

come, during which struggles I could often have wept from self-pity, and my sympathy goes out to those comrades who are taking a first nibble at its pages. One dose of Dietzgen makes the whole world kin!

I am not trying to belittle the value and importance of Dietzgen's work, any more than I would ridicule a sublime view from a mountain top. My grievance is that, just as in these days of mechanical development we may reach the top of a mountain without risking heart failure, so, with our literary development, we ought to be able to grasp the teaching embodied in *The Positive Outcome* without running the risk of a brain storm. We must take into account that men and women actively engaged in earning a livelihood enter into this study heavily handicapped by mental and physical fatigue. There may be a scattering of rapier-like intellects able to pierce its verbal obscurity with lightning thrusts, but the average man is in the majority, and the average man wants something he can lap up with his Quaker Oats—something he can read (and understand) as he runs.

So, for a textbook on the Science of Understanding I would suggest that the substance of *The Positive Outcome of Philosophy* be re-expressed in language as simple as possible, consistent with the full text of the work. Also, that the book be a much smaller one. A small book is more encouraging to beginners, and, after all, a good deal of the matter in *The Positive Outcome* is repetition. Repetition may be "the mother of study," but when the same thing is expressed in a variety of terms, all terms being alike unfamiliar to the student, then repetition can often be more perplexing than helpful. For example, if we draw a child's attention to a house and say "That is the house that Jack built," afterwards remarking "That is the edifice erected by John," finishing up by the statement "Johnny constructed that residence," the child is more likely to be confused than enlightened. The different descriptions follow too closely to be fully grasped by one to whom all are new.

Just so, in *The Positive Outcome* we get concepts and ideas, sense-perceptible objects and phenomena, general and special, abstract and concrete, unity and multiplicity, substance and attributes, whole and its parts, sum total and manifestations, hurtling through the mental atmosphere, now and then giving one a nasty blow in the self-esteem, and necessitating a desperate offensive and defensive alliance with a dictionary.

A small textbook, such as is suggested above, might consist of twelve short chapters.

1 An introduction setting forth the need for us to acquire the method of true understanding; how ideas change with changing material conditions—different times different tactics; and how to gain the knowledge that alone will enable us to formulate a sound policy in the interests of our class.

2 A brief survey of Ancient Philosophy.

3 A brief survey of Modern Philosophy. (Just to give the sum contributed by each school of philosophy to the grand total at present expressed in the science of understanding.)

4 How thought is created. How it arrives at understanding.

5 How to ascertain the truth about things.

6 The practice of reason in physical Science.

7 Cause and Effect.

8 Mind and Matter.

9 Force and Matter.

10 The Wise and Reasonable.

11 Morality and Right.

12 The End and the Means.

It is essential to have a good working knowledge of the theory of true understanding. Such as can be applied to, and verified by, daily experience, and a fairly intimate acquaintance with its various aspects.

When the man in the workshop is puzzled about the acceptance of piece rates, bonus schemes, etc., he can ask himself in whose interest this scheme is likely to operate. He can study the relation between himself and his employer, and he will find that what is common, and, therefore, what is true of employers, as employers, is that they seek to make profit out of their workmen. From this it will be evident that any scheme presented to him by the employer of his own accord is likely to benefit the employer, either by increasing production or reducing the cost of production. When he has acquired a knowledge of the science of understanding, he will be able to ascertain his true position in the workshop and in society; why he is in that position and what steps to take to improve it.

A little handbook giving him this information simply and clearly would be a godsend to the man who has a thirst for knowledge, and not much time in which to quench it. For those more ambitious, who would aspire to become Senior Wranglers in this Science, there is always *The Positive Outcome of Philosophy*, which will afford them valuable practice. If ever diplomas are conferred in this department perhaps a simple explanation of the last paragraph in the book would be a good test—"Stable motion and mobile stability constitute the reconciling contradiction which enables us to reconcile all contradictions."

Alice Pratt

## ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY

### I.

**I** NOTED with interest that the London Labour College has this year included in its curriculum the subject of Economic Geography. The Scottish Labour College, working quite independently, decided last December to do the same, and a class was arranged with the present writer in charge. It is to be hoped that other districts will give some consideration to this neglected subject, which is, I am inclined to think, of almost as great importance as Economics or Industrial History.

Educational authorities appear to be gradually discarding the old form of geography teaching. No longer is the length of the rivers of India, or the height of the mountains of Western America, the first consideration. Such facts can be looked up by anyone, and it is unnecessary for a student's head to be filled with such data. What is now required is that a student shall be able to associate ideas, to relate cause and effect—in other words, be able to reason out the questions set to him.

Here are a few questions taken from a fairly advanced examination paper:—

From which countries are the following obtained:—Tin, copper, zinc, manganese, aluminium, lead, silver, platinum? In the case of any one of these, explain the uses to which the metal is put.

Show how mechanical transport has been revolutionised by the use of steam as a motor-power. Do you think there would be an equal advance if electricity were substituted universally for steam? What other sources of motor energy are now available?

Show how the interdependence of mankind has been increased (a) by the development of facilities for transport, (b) by the interchange of ideas by means of the telegraph, telephone, etc. How far do you think this will tend to increase or diminish the danger of national disputes, political or economic?

Explain what is meant by (a) isthmian canals, (b) inland canals. Name an example of each, and show what economic results may be expected to follow from their formation.

Show how, with regard to N. America, Australasia, and S. Africa, the development of each country has been affected by the occupation of large districts by races of men of higher economic efficiency than those previously in possession.

Why is the interior of Australia a desert? What kind of regions are situated on the margin of the desert? Describe the sheep-grazing country.

It will be seen that these questions are in the main the kind that only thinking students can hope to answer, and such a change is all to the good. The danger is that this subject, as now taught in the schools, may develop ardent young imperialists. In the hands of a teacher inclined that way, students may be made to regard colonies and empire, conquests and the safe-guarding of trade routes as very necessary and much to be desired.

On the other hand we need to popularise this subject because of the fact that the workers know very little about the source of so many everyday commodities, and the source of so many everyday wars. They are not alone in this respect, as witness Lloyd George's confession regarding Teschen and the general lack of geographical knowledge made obvious in almost every speech by our political leading lights.

I hope that when programmes are arranged for next winter, due regard will be paid to this most important subject.

W. MACLAINE

## II.

The Manchester Conference, as PLEBS readers will have noted, included Economic Geography among the three or four essential subjects for our classes. I must rest content with the briefest possible resumé of the reasons for such a recommendation.

First, it is obviously impossible intelligently to understand present-day politics—using that term in its widest sense, and not as merely synonymous with the trivialities and banalities of Westminster—without some knowledge of geography; since this is an age of imperialism, of world development and exploitation, and, therefore, of ever-increasing interdependence and interrelation of nations. To working-class students that knowledge is doubly essential, for a real internationalism must be based on knowledge, and not on vague sentimentality.

Second, it is open to question whether a student can intelligently study either Economics or Industrial History (or general history) without some background—the fuller the better—of geographical facts. At any rate, it is safe to say that his study of those subjects will be both more effective, and certainly more rapid, if he can supply that background. And, most important of all, a knowledge of geography will prove a valuable link between those other two studies, and will help him to realise their *inter-relation*. Both tend to become largely abstract studies without a geographical background. The student of Economics, for example, studies "commodities" in the abstract. But the moment he turns to the concrete world of commodities to-day, he must take geographical factors—location, accessibility, means of transport—into account. The student of History, on the other hand, must turn to those same factors when he seeks to explain the gaps and jumps in the long chain of social develop-

ment; retardation here, rapid progress there. "What is to-day a fact of geography becomes to-morrow a factor of history."\*

I would like to emphasise the point that Geography, for our purposes, is a *background study*; but it is an essential background. And the student who belittles its importance will usually be found—if he is not merely impervious to ideas—to be the possessor of a good deal of (perhaps miscellaneous) geographical knowledge, probably absorbed more or less unconsciously in the course of other studies.

But I imagine that there will be little, if any, opposition to, or belittling of, the study of geography from students of the Materialist Conception of History. It is a study which has gained ground rapidly in recent years. The war taught us, like other people, geography. W. Paul's writings in the *Socialist*; Newbold's in various journals; the publication of maps in the *Socialist* and in the *PLEBS*; a successful lecture-course by Murphy in Sheffield—all were indications of the way things were moving. And now the subject is included in the curriculum of both Scottish and London Labour Colleges.

The main point to be discussed at this time of day is not its desirability, but the precise scope of a textbook on the subject, written from our point of view and for our purposes. And here be it noted that, precisely because we take a much wider view of Economics than do the orthodox, so "Economic Geography" means for us much more than the mere Commercial Geography of the ordinary textbooks. For us, Economic Geography covers the "anthropo-geography" of Ratzel or Semple, the "human geography" of George, Herbertson, and other English writers. I suggest that the main interest of the facts of geography to us is as factors in social development; and, therefore, that our textbook should traverse much of the same ground covered by Fairgrieve in his *Geography and World Power*†—far and away the best handbook on the subject known to me. Fairgrieve's book, read alongside such a work as Gibbins' *History of Commerce in Europe*, is a historical-geographical education in itself. But we need a textbook of our own, because we need to relate geographic to economic factors; not to concentrate—as Fairgrieve does, sometimes to straining point—on the former exclusively.

I suggest therefore that our textbook deal in the main with what would ordinarily be called "Historical Geography," tracing the influence of geographical factors on each stage of social and industrial development; coming down, of course, to our own time, and touching briefly on the main "international questions" of to-day. (Compare the last three or four of McLaine's list of specimen questions.) The book should not be overloaded with figures or data. The answer to such a question as that quoted first by McLaine can be supplied from the ordinary reference books; and to quote his own words in regard to other geographical facts, "it is unnecessary for a student's head to be filled with such data." Our job, primarily, is to show him *how* geography fills in the gaps in his other studies; leaving him to fill his own head later with as much or as little statistical information as he can comfortably carry.

J. F. HERRABIN

\* And note that, as McLaine points out above, the teaching of geography in the schools to-day is undoubtedly a means for the propaganda of Imperialism. Some of the very men who have done much for the study of geography—Mackinder, for instance—are also politicians of the true Red, White and Blue, Tariff Reform, Big Business dye.

† University of London Press, 5s. net. (New revised edition, 1929).



PAPER MONEY

Our congratulations to Comrade Barr on his emergence as a pamphleteer. No one who has met him would need to inquire what subject he has written upon. For some time *Labour and The Money Problem* (Pioneer Press, Merthyr, 3d.) has been the subject of his investigations, and the one regret left by this 16pp. pamphlet is that he has restricted himself to so brief a statement of his conclusions. Perhaps, having ploughed through so many ponderous tomes, he is unwilling to add to their number.

His thesis, which is based upon a praise-worthy explanation of money as a measure of value—an aspect totally ignored by currency cranks—is that municipalities can only act as deposit banks, and that disaster from inflation will follow any attempt to issue unconvertible currency notes. The present adverse rates of exchange illustrate his contention.

There is a decided need for a plain examination of banking in everyday language, and the ideas of Marx need a modern setting. What is the bank rate, a bill of exchange, a cheque, etc? Ignorance on these matters leaves us the prey of dangerous fallacies and nostrums. Our comrade has the right grammar of the subject, and we hope to see him make further use of it.

From the same Press is to be issued shortly in book form the Industrial History Lectures given by Mr. A. P. Yates to the Merthyr I.L.P. M. S.

LORIA ON MARX

*Karl Marx*. By A. Loria. Translated by Eden and Cedar Paul. (Allen and Unwin, 2s. 6d. net.)

It says something for the standing of Marxism in these days that capitalist publishers regard it as worth consideration. There is, too, a regular school of critics of the system; and also a class of writers who appreciate the journalistic possibilities of the subject. These three types are all represented in this book. Messrs. Allen and Unwin call themselves "publishers of live books." They've no claim to such a title in the present instance, for this book contains so-called criticisms which are, or ought to be, superannuated.

Loria is an Italian holding some sort of professorship in Economics. Heaven help his students if his teaching is no clearer or deeper than his available works in English would suggest. We have had before this his *Economic Foundations* and *Economic Synthesis*, and they, like the present book, show a plentiful lack of sustained argument and sound reasoning. Of course we are promised another—and greater—work of his, some day. Adroit translators can always let fall hints about certain as yet untranslated works of the author they are exploiting in which a case—not proven in anything translated so far—is finally to be demonstrated once and for all. It's a clever trick, and leaves us ignorant folk snubbed and abashed.

This book was to prove among other things that there were two Marxs—a revolutionary and a non-revolutionary. There is nothing in it to

justify the claim. It's an old trick to tear statements out of their context to prove the opposite of the writer's general outlook, or to quote pronouncements on given situations as the writer's fixed and unalterable attitude on similar circumstances at different times and in different places. No one was ever more mercilessly self-critical than Marx, no one more ready to discard obsolete methods or programmes. That at one period he might advocate a working-class alliance with revolutionary bourgeois political parties, and at another time repudiate the idea of such an alliance—what does that prove? Simply that tactics are dependent on time and place and that you cannot reduce them to an unalterable formula. Specimens of such (apparently) contradictory advice or action were not infrequent in the busy lives of Marx and Engels.

There was a time when Marx thought it possible for a revolutionary working-class to use the governmental machinery of the State, but the Paris Commune experience proved this fallacious, and Marx promptly threw the idea overboard in favour of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat concept. Only a Loria would be capable of using this change of methods as advocacy of differing principles.

Loria falls foul of Marx on account of his strictures on Malthus and his theory of population. Both he and the translators are apparently unaware of the demonstration by Marx (Volume iv, *Capital*) of the "acquired characteristics" of this alleged Malthusian theory. Malthus simply "lifted" the developed theory from the works of Anderson (*Essays Relating to Agricultural and Rural Affairs*, 3 vols. 1777-1796) and later works, and West (*Essays on Agriculture*). Marx disliked "Parson Malthus's" attitude of scientific infallibility, and demonstrated the falseness of his borrowed theory. A fixed law of population, any more than any other fixed social law, does not exist. If Loria doesn't like Marx's manners he must not on that ground impugn Marx's theory, nor base his criticisms on what someone else says. He must produce reasons. As a matter of fact "Loria's treatment of the subject is closely akin to that of Marx." Of course it is. Loria only differs from Malthus in plagiarism in that he does not understand Marx's theories so well as Malthus did Anderson's and West's.

As regards the repetition of his "criticisms" of Marx's establishment of the determination of the general and equal rate of profit—"The Great Contradiction"—one need only refer to the Preface to Vol. iii., *Capital*. Loria (and others) are there finally answered. In this book Loria has given us fresh evidence of the truth of Engels' description of him as "a literary adventurer." He is that and nothing more. As regards E. and C. P.'s claims on behalf of Loria's new scientific language one can only say that if the language is scientific—and we are no judges of that—the Lorian theses are not. His is a clear case of "When the concept is absent, at the right time there comes a word." One can't help quoting that description of him in the aforementioned Preface—"Unlimited nerve, coupled with the

smoothness of an eel when slipping through impossible situations; a heroic imperviousness to kicks received; a hasty appropriation of the accomplishments of others; an importunate charlatantry of advertising; an organisation of

fame by the help of a clique of friends—who can equal him in all these?"

No, E. and C. P., this book honestly isn't worth the time and trouble you've spent on it.

G. S.

## THE SKELETON AT THE FEAST

**T**HIS number of the PLEBS, so I was assured by all concerned, would be a very special one; so I asked to look at the proofs—and my worst fears were realised! All the Utopians airing themselves—castles in the air wholesale! I gather that we are to launch out and publish a young library. Already various people are giving themselves sleepless nights, pondering over the concentrated wisdom that is to pour from the Plebs Press. Well, I sincerely hope it will keep fine for 'em!

True believers know that we have a stiff fight trying to "popularise" the M.C.H. They also know that we have very nearly "taken the count" on many occasions. Materialism in *theory* is popular compared with the person who has to go round with the hat (in the concrete) to emphasise the material basis of our materialism!

I am sorry to have to mention mere money at this feast of reason and flow of soul, but as Omar did not say—

One thing is certain and the rest is lies  
One thing is certain—that cash flies. . . .

We still want money to run the Magazine properly. I sympathise with the folk who think secretaries have faces of brass, thick hides, clutching hands and the brains of a rabbit. But the sad truth is that if someone does not go about shouting "MONEY!" our Utopians will run away with us.

The Manchester Conference showed us how sound our support is in the provinces, and districts and branches must realise that it is a mere matter of convenience that our G.H.Q. is in London. We exist to spread social science and not merely to support the London Labour College. We are as keen on, and we need the support of, the Scottish Labour College, and we shall work for and assist any and every real Labour College or group of classes that come along. But if anyone thinks this can be done on a bob a year he'd better consult a financial expert!

It is a privilege to be able to help to keep going part of the revolutionary press of the world—a small part no doubt, but it is true to say that no

other Socialist publication does exactly the work that the PLEBS is doing. You remember the recruiting poster—"It's your Flag—fight for it." We say, "It's your Mag.—work for it."

We want (I now join the ranks of the Ancient Order of Utopians) a big monthly with a sound financial backing; we want it big enough to allow us to publish the various text books in serial form, and big enough to give us plenty of space for local reports from the districts and branches. In spite of rumours of Bolshy gold, we get no big subsidies. We shall always have to depend on (1) selling the Magazine, and (2) the individual subscriptions of members and friends (I won't say sympathisers, it sounds as if we were ill!).

We have never had more chance of success, the movement is healthy in every way, our usefulness—the necessity for our existence—is demonstrated every day; we have never been able to call on so many people for articles; but we *must* go up to sixpence, with a larger number of pages. And we *cannot* go up to sixpence and pay our way on our present circulation. So that in order to be able to publish the books outlined in this number we must look not only for continued support, but for *extra* support as well.

There is no more important branch of work than ours. It lies at the very root of all Socialist and trade union work, and neither agitation nor organisation will avail without education; not "general education," but definite class-conscious education.

Talk PLEBS—read PLEBS—sell PLEBS—tell your friends about us and our objects. Let us advance or shut down. If a thing is worth any support at all it is worth whole-hearted support. We must get this during the next six months, or shut up shop. We must increase our circulation at once. We do not pay our way on sales, and we cannot start on extensive publishing ventures without a surplus. The old stalwarts will once again rally to this call, I don't doubt, but this time I am optimistic enough to think some new comrades will qualify for our D.S.O.

WINIFRED HORRABIN.

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1920

TIME-TABLE FOR

## LECTURE CLASSES AT THE COLLEGE

*COMMENCING TUESDAY, 13th APRIL, 1920*

ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY . . . Lecturer, J. F. HERRABIN

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