

FRANCIS NEILSON, M. P.—AN APPRECIATION.

(For the Review)

By **JOHN ARCHER.**

“You have been idle since I saw you last,” a friend remarked when visiting Michael Angelo who was engaged in finishing a statue. “By no means,” replied the renowned sculptor, “I have softened this feature, and brought out that muscle; I have given more expression to this lip, and more energy to this limb.” “Well, well,” said the friend, “but all these are trifles.” “It may be so,” was the reply, “but recollect that trifles make perfection, and that perfection is no trifle.”

When we sit under the impassioned oratory, the cogent reasoning, the analytical deduction, and the genius of simplicity in the art of exposition which characterises the platform labors of Mr. Francis Neilson, M.P. for the Hyde Division of Cheshire, and this year's President of the English League for the Taxation of Land Values, how often we are tempted to imagine that he enjoys some special immunity from the ordinary methods of self-discipline, or that a kindly providence has endowed him with intuition which enables him to grasp fundamental facts without having to undergo the hard and painful labors of learning like the rest of us.

But for the comfort and encouragement of young soldiers in the holy warfare of the Single Tax movement, let it be said that this mighty evangelist has labored as hard, if not harder, at menial tasks, and under conditions better calculated to break the spirit and annihilate ambitions, than fall to the lot of most men, no matter how humble their station, or however restricted and limited the scope of their opportunities. He has attained to the fulness of his powers like Michael Angelo by attention to trifles. Not only in the material things of life does his record provide us with evidences of unflagging endeavor to live and climb upward, but also shall we find encouragement and inspiration from the knowledge that only after incredible labors in feeding his mind from a thousand sources, and only by delving into and sifting the wisdom of the ages, has he attained to the rich and full use of those gifts and graces which today make him one of the most powerful—at any rate in the sense of all-round effectiveness—of all the advocates who today are disseminating the saving and emancipating power of the Georgian philosophy.

Mr. Neilson was born in Birkenhead, Cheshire, in 1867. Early in life he went to live with his grandparents in Wellington, Shropshire. For some three or four years he attended the elementary schools there, and then returned to his parents in order that a finishing course under Dr. Finlayson at the Liverpool Institute might complete his school life. Born of parents in whom, and in whose forbears, political and democratic instincts were strong, young Neilson took to politics as a young duckling takes to the waters, and one of

his uncles, George Neilson, was never so delighted as when he was leading the young inquirer after truth through the maze of clashing and conflicting economic theories.

About this time another uncle, William Neilson, came to England on a visit from the States, and he invited his young nephew to return with him, and there try his luck. The invitation was accepted, but at New York they parted, the young man stopping to make his fortune on the seaboard, the uncle proceeding to his home in Washington. The first years of young Neilson's residence in New England were in the nature of a testing time through which few could have survived. Fruitless search for work, illness, hunger and and sleepless nights there were between casual and slave labor in which the menacing risks were often a very real danger to life and limb. In this way the very depths of human misery and wretchedness were sounded, and the horrors of the struggle for existence were such that today he oftentimes wonders how he survived the passage through the awful wreckage of human life.

Nothing, however, could quench his dauntless spirit and his rebuffs and sufferings were but spurs to his determination. From intermittent casual labor, he fought his way into a permanent job. By ceaseless vigilance in self culture he found his way out of commercial life through the press jobbers into the fields of literature. From the press to private secretarial work in order to secure more time for study was the next step, and it was while discharging such duties for the late Dion Boucicault that the latter discovered Neilson's gifts of organization, and his capacity for staging plays. Upon the death of Boucicault he joined Messrs. Charles Frohman and William Gillette, in order that he might further his aspirations of making the drama into a greater educational force. Life is doubled by the economy of time, runs an old eastern proverb, and Neilson was all the while devoting every moment he could snatch from the claims of bread-and-butter-winning to the study of Federal, State and Municipal politics. Now, also, opportunities presented themselves of hearing many eminent authorities lecture on Socialism, which led in turn to a most exhaustive enquiry into the subject, every book of recognised authority being procured and carefully read, and the authors' deductions subjected to critical examination, with results that led to very definite conclusions that the whole philosophy was based upon economic fallacies.

In 1893 he was married to Catherine Eva, daughter of James O'Gorman, at the Church of Transfiguration, New York City, by the Rev. Geo. H. Houghton. What the Single Tax movement of Great Britain owes to the quiet self-sacrifice, and the silent and self-effacing devotion of this noble woman will never be told. Never was apostle or missionary more singularly blessed with truer helpmeet than is the English Land Values President, for not only is she his wisest counsellor, but what is perhaps most important of all, she supplies a never failing sympathy. To review in detail the early struggles of the young couple is impossible. Let it suffice to say that Mrs. Neilson, realizing the

potential powers of her husband, was ever urging him onwards to more ambitious endeavors, and cheerfully endured any sacrifice which tended to attainment of his great hopes. He cut himself off from old sources of income in order to collaborate with Victor Herbert in the writing of opera. The winter of 1893-4 was frightful, and the destitution of New York was painful to behold, none suffering more acutely than these brave, but ambitious young people. At length the gloom was dispelled by the acceptance of an opera. Shortly after Mr. Neilson met Anton Seidl, the great Wagnerian conductor, and the association which followed is well known to the music loving public. On Seidl accepting an invitation from Cosma Wagner to return to Bayreuth, Mr. and Mrs. Neilson decided to accompany him with the ultimate object of making their home in England. While at Bayreuth Mr. Neilson met the Marchioness of Ripon (then Lady de Grey). The meeting led to his taking up the stage directorship of the National Opera House, London, where under his direction all the works of Wagner were given on as grand a scale as at Bayreuth.

The interest of both Mr. and Mrs. Neilson in social problems continued to grow in intensity. For years a chapter of Henry George's works were read and pondered over daily, and though engaged in duties which should have taxed the full capacity of most men, he yet found time to write two novels, to read and lecture upon many topics, and to write reviews, while his home became the recognized meeting place for men and women in the world of art and letters.

Daily contact with the appalling wretchedness, overcrowding and poverty in the East End of London was constantly feeding the desires of the Neilsons to consecrate fully and without reserve some years of their lives to fighting the peoples' cause. In 1900 while in Vienna he was invited to stand as a Liberal candidate, and would have accepted but for the fact that he had made business arrangements for a stay on the Continent of some months' duration. In the spring of 1902 the shilling tax was put on corn and both felt that now the time was come when he must take a more active part in politics, and he became the candidate for the Newport division of Shropshire.

From that time onward none but Mr. and Mrs. Neilson know the mutual sacrifices of time, rest, strength and money on the one hand, and the loss of companionship and the solitude cheerfully endured on the other, which the calls of public life entailed. To devote himself without reserve he withdrew from professional life, and went to live among the people of Shropshire, fighting their battles, organizing their forces and providing them with a monthly paper in addition to being their candidate. Never was Tory-ridden Shropshire given such a shaking, but the territorial influences were too strong and the savings of years were spent in fighting two elections in the Division. Life on a smaller scale followed, and frugality and retrenchment became the order of the day. Not back to professional life, however, though the door was open, but forward into a campaign which embraced the whole of England, Wales and Scotland. Quickly Mr. Neilson became recognized as one of the

finest assets in the educational functions of the Liberal party's platform, while his unique gifts of organization made him the most sought after of all men for bye-elections. For four years his average of meetings worked out at the rate of $1\frac{1}{2}$ meetings per day for every day in the calendar. He took part in some forty bye-elections, in addition to exhausting the limitations of Bradshaw in special lecturing tours. Wherever he went, the common people—as was said of another in the long, long ago—heard him gladly, and the writer of these lines could fill columns with the testimony he has heard fall from the lips of men and women who have fallen under the spell of his magnetic personality, his unique gifts of exposition, and his moving eloquence. These allied to his transparent honesty of purpose, his devotion to the cause of the poor, his inexhaustible good temper, and his never failing tactfulness and ever ready courtesy, make him one of the greatest forces of our English political life. "Give us that man for our Candidate," cried a batch of colliers, "and call him Tory, Socialist or Liberal as you like, but we will follow him to H---." "That man," confessed a godly woman to the writer, "has lifted politics and politicians to a higher and nobler plane in my thought and ideals than ever I would have believed possible."

In the sharp antagonisms of our political warfare, which daily become more acute as the defenders of privilege and the forces which carry the white plumes of Democracy draw nearer to each other for the greatest of all struggles in modern political history, no man is likely to render more effective or more far-reaching service for the powers of righteousness than the subject of this sketch. He brings to the fight the noblest conception of enlightened Christian politics. His mission is to secure the very weakest and humblest in their unalienable birthright, the right to life and liberty under the inviolable protection of equal laws. Let a Godless philosophy say what it will, let the cold blooded and obsolete political economists of the schools dogmatize as they please, but he who brings to the fight a solemn and indestructible faith in the ultimate triumph of right over wrong, he who dares to tell you that unless all history be a delusion and all Scripture a lie, the man who boldly and uncompromisingly proclaims that what is morally wrong cannot be politically right, such an one, no matter how bitter and strenuous be the fight, is ever sure of the ultimate triumph of the principles he expounds. Today such principles are exercising a wider, deeper, and more beneficent revolution than ever this old England of ours has known, and it is no more in the power of vested wrong to stay its course, than it is in man's power to stay the sun. America, in which country his intellectual capacities were ripened and his moral and religious instincts refined, may well be proud of the part she is playing in this glorious struggle through the medium of his remarkable personality.

WE who are land reformers understand that you must have freedom of production as well as freedom of exchange.—*Douglass P. Boatman.*