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Spring Refresher

by MARSHALL CRANE

THIS is the time of year when clans of crows hold noisy conventions and bock beer signs swing in the wind. It is the season when we make dentist appointments, oil up the lawn-mower and grind the hoe. It is also the season when every Georgist should give himself a refresher course, brushing up his arguments and trying to arrange them in logical order.

For at this time of year the citizen who cannot see that something is wrong with our system of taxation is a real exception. He is having to face the economic facts of life and he does not like them a bit.

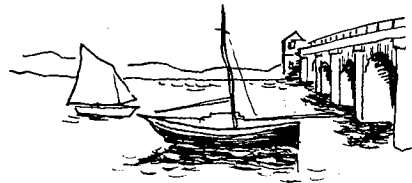
Is he a prospective convert? Probably not. But next fall he will be a voter, and if our system of taxation ever has its face lifted, it will be because he and his neighbors have done their part at the polls.

You and I may buy our puzzled citizen a beer and, while he is ingesting it, inoculate him with the idea that some change for the better is actually possible, for in a social order like ours he is a very important person. We may expect to meet the puzzled citizen everywhere we

go, and as Georgists we should have a pretty good idea of what we are going to say to him and how we are going to say it.

And what are we going to say? Do we really know what impresses him—what arguments are most likely to convince him? He is not just one person, after all, but many hundreds of thousands of people, no two of whom are quite alike yet similar in many ways. If your suit was not made for you, you will recall that it did not need much alteration. In a class of thirty students all but two or three will find the same textbook quite adequate. Any writer of advertising copy will tell you that the arguments which convince Tom are just as effective when they are presented to Dick and Harry.

Probably all of us have felt the
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urge to sow the seed of the ideas in which we believe deeply. And while everyone who speaks of social, political and economic reform approaches his subject in his own way, there is one thing which every advocate of reform is bound to notice. This is the fact that, while someone occasionally does question his proposals for social improvement on theoretical grounds, the very great majority of those he talks to are less concerned with whether reform is just and right than whether it is practical. "Common sense" of this variety may not always seem quite as sensible as it might be, but there can be no doubt that it is very common.

Careful readers of Henry George's works have known for a long time that the validity of his doctrines is not limited to the sort of social and economic system he lived in. They are much too basic and essential—too fundamental. At the same time, thoughtful students realize that the technology of the application of these principles must change.

Therapeutics of any sort may be either a barren field or a dangerous one if we are not familiar with the type of pathology closely related to it. The histories of sciences may

show instances where general theories have been propounded long after their results have been well known to investigators, but they show us no such case where the knowledge of essentials did not broaden the study of the science. Common foxglove was a well known specific for dropsy for many years before the nature of the disorder itself was even suspected by the medical profession. However, the use of this medication was instrumental in clearing up the mystery, and it was discovered that its effects should be regarded as temporary. Physicists and chemists can recall similar cases.

To the reformer this should indicate that he cannot be effective in his work unless he knows, very thoroughly and in detail, just what it is that he is trying to reform. It means also that his plan of treatment must vary whenever his patient, the social system, shows variations.

Is it not about time that we made the actual application of Henry George's economics a subject of genuine study? A textbook would certainly be needed for any course of this kind. I know many works which might be used but I doubt if there is a better one for this purpose than Gilbert Tucker's *The Self-Supporting City*.

NEW YORK ANNUAL BANQUET

On May 13th New York Georgists will gather for their one annual event outside the school headquarters to hear New York's Tax and Housing Problem discussed by such experts as Richard W. Hill, Director, Research Bureau, New York State Division of Housing; Milton Bergerman, Chairman, Citizens Union; and Philip Cornick, Municipal Consultant. George H. Royal, Dean of the Henry George School, will be toastmaster. The place: Governor Clinton Hotel.