

SEEING THE CAT

By John Dun (Sydney, N.S.W.)

For the benefit of those who are not aware of the reason why understanding Henry George's teaching is referred to as "seeing the cat," we preface this article by the story of the concealed picture as told by James G. Maguire, at that time a judge of the Superior Court of San Francisco and afterward a Member of Congress from California, in a speech at the Academy of Music, New York City, in 1887. In substance he said:—

"I was one day walking along Kearney Street, San Francisco, when I noticed a crowd around the show window of a store, looking at something inside. I took a glance myself, and saw only a very poor picture of a very uninteresting landscape. But as I was turning away my eye caught the words underneath the picture, 'Do you see the cat?' I looked again and more closely, but saw no cat in the picture. Then I spoke to the crowd:

"Gentlemen," I said, "I can see no cat in that picture. Is there a cat there?"

"Some one in the crowd replied:

"Naw, there ain't no cat there. Here's a crank who says he sees the cat, but nobody else can see it."

"Then the crank spoke up:

"I tell you there is a cat there too. It's all cat. What you fellows take for a landscape is just nothing more than the outlines of a cat. And you needn't call a man a crank either, because he can see more with his eyes than you can."

"Well," the Judge continued, "I looked very closely at the picture and then I said to the man they called a crank:

"Really, sir, I cannot make out a cat. I can see nothing but a poor picture of a landscape."

"Why, Judge," he exclaimed, "just look at that bird in the air. That's the cat's ear."

"I looked, but was obliged to say:

"I am sorry to be so stupid, but I can't make a cat's ear of that bird. It is a poor bird, but not a cat's ear."

"Well then," the crank urged, "look at that twig twirled around in a circle. That's the cat's eye."

"But I couldn't make an eye of it."

"Oh, then," said the crank a little impatiently, "look at those sprouts at the foot of the tree, and the grass. They make the cat's claws."

"After a rather deliberate examination, I reported that they did look a little like a claw, but I couldn't connect them with a cat."

"Once more the crank came back at me. 'Don't you see that limb off there? and that other limb under it? and that white space between? Well, that white space is the cat's tail.'

"I looked again and was just on the point of replying that there was no cat there so far as I could see, when suddenly the whole cat burst upon me. There it was sure enough, just as the crank had said; and the only reason that the rest of us couldn't see it was that we hadn't got the right point of view. But now that I saw it I could see nothing else in the picture. The landscape had disappeared and a cat had taken its place. And do you know, I was never afterward able, upon looking at that picture, to see anything in it but the cat."

From this story as told by Judge Maguire has come the 'slang' of the Single Tax agitation. To 'see the cat' is to understand the Single Tax.

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Life is a puzzle. It is more. It is a bundle of puzzles. And we are so situated and so constituted that we have to solve in some degree these puzzles or fail as progressive people and individuals. Occupying a big space in this bundle of puzzles which we call life is the problem of the distribution of wealth. To the eye that cares to see, the tragedies of life are largely due to the inequality of opportunities. And to the man or woman who desires justice and in whom the love of humanity burns it is imperative that "fair play" should characterise economic relations.

Under present conditions we can imagine the man of medium ability, born in poverty, saying to himself:—

"O life thou art a galling load,
Along a rough, a weary road,
To wretches such as I."

We insist on "fair play" in cricket, football, boxing, and other recreations, and yet in that greatest of all games, "life's battle," there is manifest unfairness. In the picture of human economic relations which confronts every youth and maiden on their entering the struggle of existence, there seems to be an awful tangle with enormous wealth and unbounded leisure on one extreme and with deep poverty and excessive work on the other. Truly it is a case of:—

"Man's inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn."

Most men and women are born with a strong desire for beauty and harmony, and from this desire arises the passion for justice which impels all thinking people to try and discover a law of equity in the complexity of business and social life.

Thus we have the picture, and thus we have the motive, which have caused good men from time immemorial to ponder and reflect in the effort to see that foundation of righteousness in society which would satisfy their craving for justice. In other words "to see the cat" as Single Taxers call it.

A large majority do not trouble to study the tangle which makes up the picture. But they satisfy their sense of right by believing in a compensation which takes place in another world beyond the grave. All the puzzles of the earth are straightened out there and the balance struck. The mysteries and inequalities of this life are equitably counter-balanced in the next. Life is called "a vale of tears" and the not understandable is called "God's mysterious way." This mental attitude blocks inquiry, stultifies progress, and enthrone injustice.

To those of us who believe that existence is capable of harmony and beauty, such ways of side-stepping the problems of life are unacceptable. And so we feel a deep debt of gratitude to the brave and undaunted souls who in the past have thought and worked in the belief that there was something crippling and warping this life of ours and if we could only detect it and eliminate it, the path would be cleared for a state of health, happiness and progress such as we have never known.

Conspicuous among these reformers stands Henry George, whose work *PROGRESS AND POVERTY* has brought light to many a baffled inquirer in the realm of economics. George "saw the cat" more clearly than any previous searcher after economic truth, and set forth his discovery more logically and more eloquently than was ever done before. His theory reconciles Socialism and Individualism and makes both not only possible, but to march hand in hand together.

One would think that the mere publication of this book would have been sufficient to convert the world. But prejudice and ignorance and indifference are hard to overcome and it seems as if everyone has to see or be helped to see the "cat" for himself.

I have sometimes assisted friends to "see the cat" by showing them how fair play governs games and by declaring that Single Taxers want to see fair play introduced into the game of life. In a race, inequalities of ability are obviated by the handicapping process and thus all competitors start with equal chances. The handicapping method is the only fair one, and it exists in life's race in the form of land rent. Such rent is really a system of handicapping the occupier of superior sites or lands in order to equalise the chances of the holders of the other and inferior positions. Imagine a foot race in which the handicap consisted of a payment of money instead of a concession in yards. Where ought that money to go? Undoubtedly

to the funds of the club or association. But where do these handicap funds, that is the land-value rents, of society go? They go into the pockets of private individuals. Clearly here is a breach of right. This communal or club fund, out of which our taxation should be met is allowed to be split up and to be possessed by private individuals and used for private purposes. Whereas it ought to be applied to national and municipal uses only. What club would tolerate such procedure? How blind we have been! How blind we are!

I understand that the entire national and municipal taxation of Great Britain prior to the war was something like £270,000,000. It is also estimated that the rental value of land in Britain is somewhere in the region of £300,000,000. Thus the producers are twice taxed. The legitimate tax fund has been allowed to be parcelled out and used by a very small section of the nation, and industries and commerce have been hampered by a thousand and one devices to make up for the deficiency created by this diversion of the communal fund into private channels. No wonder the mass of the people are subject to poverty with such a burden. And this is only the taxation view of the problem. The monopoly of land and its dire effects in limiting production and choking effort have also to be taken into account. Improvements are penalised, and the dog-in-the-manger system of holding agricultural land and building sites out of use is encouraged. Thus are self-employment and employment of others discouraged and blocked. The marvel is that society manages to jog along under its present cruel and illogical laws, and therefore it is an urgent duty to help every person to "see the cat." It is only by the light of a good standard that we can judge a bad system. Henry George has given us his noble ideal of economics, and with its help we can point out "the cat" to all and sundry. The puzzle of social economics can only be solved by the people as a whole seeing the solution of the picture problem of life. Perhaps only one in ten thousand thoroughly sees it now, perhaps only one in a thousand partly sees it. But it is necessary that the great majority should see it in its entirety if we are going to have society unshackled. There is, therefore, a big task lying in front of us. The one against the nine hundred and ninety-nine. Individualists, Socialists, Protectionists and the great mass of indifferentists have all got to be brought into line with us; their hearts have to be touched and their minds illuminated.

It is very cheering to find that such a number of hard-headed, warm-hearted business men have taken and are taking a devoted interest in the movement. It appeals to their business sense. As a rule a business man is not a reformer, because so many reforms, like Socialism, are visionary. However his heart may desire it, the re-sentimented theory is not acceptable to his knowledge and experience of life. But in the Single Tax doctrine, buttressed as it is by logic and founded on hard fact, there is nothing mystical or dreamy. It is essentially the business man's reform movement. It reconciles and makes practical a dozen "isms." It satisfies both the heart and head. It is a hopeful sign when we find successful manufacturers and traders like Joseph Fels, Tom L. Johnson, L. P. Jacobs and others giving up or having given up their energies and wealth to the cause. Jews and Scotchmen are both credited with being clear, hard-headed men, very unlikely folk to be lead away by chimeras, and each race is very largely represented in this land values work.

When we are twenty life seems very simple, when we are thirty it is more complex, and with the advent of middle-age we either become pessimistic or else commit ourselves to something very practical. And in the Henry George movement there are, as I have indicated, quite a number of middle-aged men who work enthusiastically for the realisation of its ideals. Furthermore, we have a Land Values Group in the House of Commons, and it exercises

a most important influence on the policy of the Liberal Party in Great Britain. We find that influence expressed in the various utterances and pledges of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lloyd George. This prominence would have been unbelievable a few years ago.

In New York there is a very strong society, and such is its power that there is quite an heavy tax on land values in operation. In fact, in that city it does not pay to erect any but the very best buildings on valuable sites.

The movement has been gathering more momentum every year, and had it not been for this bloody and disastrous war would have been occupying quite a considerable place in men's minds and in the world's systems of taxation.

Here in Australia we have the principle of land values taxation in general operation in all the States. Certainly it is only to a slight extent, but it is a recognition, and it has been of great benefit to the communities concerned. It is the thin end of the wedge and we all look forward to this fund for taxation being more and more availed of by the Federal, State and Municipal governments of the Commonwealth.

It is difficult at a time like the present, when we are in the throes of the greatest struggle the world has ever seen, to refrain from commenting upon the tremendous amount of taxation which will inevitably be placed on this and following generations. When the methods of liquidating the huge costs and indemnities which will be part of the aftermath of the war come to be discussed, it is to be hoped that the colossal, almost untouched, fund of land values will be made full use of. The only other alternative will be to increase the already tremendous burdens which producers have now to carry. That time will be the opportunity for Single Taxers all over the world to ventilate their ideas and agitate for their application. And if they are successful in getting the warring nations to adopt the land values' principle as the chief or the sole means of paying the huge war debts, then, indeed, good shall have sprung out of evil and we will be a little nearer to:—

"The time . . . when men
Will be as free and equal as the waves
That seem to jostle, but that never jar."

The following is from a circular issued by Messrs. Garrett, White and Poland, Estate Agents, 16, Hanover Street, W.:

LONDON INVESTMENTS.

Recent events will have exposed the fallacy of investing in Foreign Securities of all kinds, and it is certain that the end of the present Crisis will witness a boom in all Home Securities (especially in property) the like of which has never previously been experienced.

Shrewd investors are now buying "Bricks and Mortar," which improve as each day draws nearer the end of the present Crisis.

Messrs. Garrett, White and Poland can offer the following investments, which besides paying a good rate of interest will remain unaffected by outside influences and steadily grow in value.

The circular then goes on to give a list of securities for sale.

After the War everyone will be discussing how to pay off the enormous cost of it and where to find employment for the returning soldiers. You know that land is the only means of employment and that all that need be done to secure sufficient revenue is to tax land values, at the same time forcing unused land into use and increasing the opportunities of making a living. But many people do not know this. Now is the time to begin circulating our literature. Read the special advertisement on page 64.