

The Sultan's Turret and the Shaft of Light

By RALPH S. HUNTINGTON

TO many of us who see the land and tax question clearly, it is so plain and simple that we are ever and again surprised that every one else does not see it after one hearing.



My first exposure to the philosophy of Henry George was commonplace enough, but the reaction of the gray-whiskered son of a Norwegian immigrant, (who did the exposing) is, at least, unusual.

It was in 1914 when I came in contact with this graybeard. There was unemployment and a depression in San Francisco. A crowd of unemployed men gathered daily on a lot at the corner of Fifth and Howard Streets. There had been a building on this corner before the fire of 1906, now nothing remained but a concrete vault from the top of which speakers would harangue the crowd. There was talk of forming a second "Coxey's Army" and marching on to Washington.

Idle men gathered also in the squares and parks of the city and engaged in hot arguments over unionism, socialism, wages and the I.W.W., which was an issue at that time. In those days I had occasion two or three times a week to cross Jefferson Square, an open square then with walks and benches, and I always noticed men in small groups, talking and arguing.

This little gray haired man was always trying to tell his story, but he could not hold his listeners. He no more than started before his small audience would laugh and drift away. They had heard it before. He would lose his temper when they would not listen, but he was persistent and always came back to do battle.

That name "Henry George," which he frequently used seemed to click in my memory. I may have heard my elders mention him in my childhood, but most likely it was because of the "Henry George Five Cent Cigar," on sale at that time. The posters carried the familiar portrait of George, and underneath, the slogan "I Am for Men."

One day when my man was disengaged I asked him who this "Henry George" was and what was this "Single Tax." He was delighted! At last he had a receptive ear, and in a few minutes he made it clear to me that the value of land was created by nothing else than the presence of the community, and that the rent of land was therefore a social product which should be taken for social purposes. Of course I didn't see the whole case, but that was a start. He went on then to tell me—

His Own Story

His father was a Norwegian farmer who in due time landed at Ellis Island as an immigrant. The New York country did not suit him, so he moved westward in search of a suitable place to settle. At last he found a locality that looked good, with trees, streams and a body of water not far away.

So he acquired a piece of good farm land in the vicinity of a town where he could get his supplies and have his horses shod. He set to work, and as children came, his nose was kept close to the grindstone. He had no time to ob-

serve what was going on about him, but on his periodical trips to town he did notice that the small town was growing.

One day two young men drove up the road, hitched their horse to the fence and walked out into the field where he was plowing. They complimented him on his prosperous looking farm and asked if he wanted to sell it.

"Oh no," he said, "I wouldn't sell. This is my home! My children were born here. No, I don't want to sell."

They said they could offer a certain sum for the farm.

He protested that it was just a *farm* and *couldn't* be worth that much money.

"Think it over," they said, and went away.

Some time later the two men came back to buy the farm. But no, the owner had not changed his mind.

"Well," they said, "We can offer you—." And they raised the bid.

Again the owner protested this was just a dirt farm and "his home," and he did not want to sell, and sent them away.

But, thinking it over, he began to wonder if his "dirt farm" was just a "dirt farm" after all. He was being offered a fabulous price for his property. Why? He now came to the realization that while he had been busy with his farm for years, that town up the road had been growing toward him and his property was now just *on the outskirts of the City of Seattle!*

Bountiful Increment

By this time the family of four or five children had grown up. So he didn't sell, but instead the family built houses, and built stores and put in streets and before long instead of the family living on the earnings of a farm they were all living on "ground rent"!

My friend in Jefferson Square said, "These unemployed fellows won't listen to me. I tell them I haven't done a tap of work for thirty-five years, but they won't listen"!

"For years," he said "I took my wife to San Diego to spend the winters. Once, down there I was telling a friend this story and how smart we were, as now none of us had to work. He said, 'You ought to read Henry George.' 'Who is Henry George?' I asked. He said, 'He wrote a book about this very situation, showing that ground rent should not belong to the landowner, but as it is created by the public, it should be taken into the public treasury.' This scared me! He told me the book was published some time ago and had many readers. I said, 'If that is the case and people are finding out, they will take the ground rent and I will lose my income! I've got to get back to Seattle at once and *sell my land before the people find out!*' The light had struck!"