

J. Rupert Mason "Sees the Cat" By E. ROBERT SCROFANI (San Francisco, Calif.)

Like the movement of the '70's, when you had to assure your colleagues that "you got it", Georgists would state their awareness of the Single Tax by saying "I saw the cat!" The expression comes from the old children's game where you had to "see" the animal hidden in the background of a picture. The late great Georgist, J. Rupert Mason, former President of the International Union, related to his Bancroft Library interviewer how he "saw the cat":

"We were discussing the Hetch Hetchy project and the Raker Act (at a party with Judge Ralston and a San Francisco restaurateur by the name of Milligan in 1938), and Milligan got me in a corner. He said, 'Well now, on water and power: Supposing San Francisco got hold of the Hetch Hetchy power and had its own distributing. And supposing San Francisco reduced power rates. Or even suppose San Francisco offered to supply electricity free of cost. Who would benefit?' 'Well,' I said, 'it seems to me the users of power would benefit.' 'Yes, they would, but let's think a little further.'

"If there was free power here, industries would be more attracted to San Francisco, would they not?' I said, 'Yes, of course, and wouldn't that be a good thing?' He said, 'Yes, it would be a good thing, but let's think. If more industries located here, the industries would need workers and that would increase the population and the competition for locations for homes and businesses would increase. And what happens when the competition for locations increases?' 'Why,' I said, 'of course the price of land would go up.' He said, 'That's where the benefit would go.'

"Well, it hit me just like an alarm clock in the middle of the night. I said, 'My God, to think I've been blind all these years - that the real interests that are promoting municipal ownership are not socialists. I used to work to protect the poor users of water and power, thinking they were the ultimate beneficiaries, which they weren't!'"

How did you "see the cat"? Readers are invited to send in their Eureka experiences.