

The Process of Seeing

By H. ELLENOFF

Isaac Newton, sitting under a tree, is said to have been hit by a falling apple and as a consequence to have discovered the law of gravitation. In recent years, speakers and writers on economic subjects have not been hit by falling apples but by economic watermelons, yet they have not been able to see why poverty increases with advancing progress. Why this blindness?

Because individuals see what they know. What is not known is not seen. The eyes after all are nothing but a transmitter. Unless the mind can conceive a thing, the eyes do not see it. Within the convolutions of the brain are the mental filing cabinets in which are filed away experiences, knowledge and habits. If in the mental file on economics the information is scant or erroneous, the individual vision will be limited accordingly.

At a summer hotel, prior to the present war, three men were engaged in a discussion of current events. We will call the three Professor Nomic, Professor Philos, and Mr. Plain Citizen. Both Professor Nomic and Professor Philos held that it was necessary for citizens to revamp their ideas to fit a changed world, that we must have economic planning with social control, and that private property must give way to human rights. They claimed, moreover, that we must increase the functions of government, as only government has the resources and the power to solve economic problems, and that if industry cannot provide work, government must.

Mr. Plain Citizen quoted Henry George: "Take any country as a whole, or the world as a whole. On what and from what does its whole population live? Despite our millions and our complex civilization, our extensions of exchanges and our inventions of machines, are not all living as the first man did and the last man must, by the application of labor to land."

Professor Nomic here remarked

that he could not see where Henry George's statement applied today, since we are living in a "machine age" and all cannot live on the land.

Mr. Plain Citizen quoted Henry George again: "In the simplest state of which we can conceive, each man digs his own bait and catches his own fish. The advantages of the division of labor soon became apparent, and one digs bait while the others fish. Yet evidently the one who digs bait is in reality doing as much toward the catching of fish as any of those who actually take the fish. So when the advantages of canoes are discovered, and instead of all going a-fishing, one stays behind and makes and repairs canoes, the canoe-maker is in reality devoting his labor to the taking of fish as much as the actual fishermen, and the fish which he eats at night when the fishermen come home are as truly a product of his labor as of theirs. And thus when the division of labor is fairly inaugurated, and instead of each attempting to satisfy all of his wants by direct resort to nature, one fishes, another hunts, a third picks berries, a fourth gathers fruit, a fifth makes tools, a sixth builds huts, and a seventh prepares clothing—each one is to the extent he exchanges the direct product of his own labor for the direct product of the labor of others really applying his own labor to the production of the things he uses—is in effect satisfying his particular desires by the exertion of his particular powers; that is to say, what he receives he really produces. If he digs roots and exchanges them for venison, he is in effect as truly a procurer of the venison as though he had gone in chase of the deer and left the huntsman to dig his own roots."

At this point Professor Philos asked to be enlightened further on Henry George's first mentioned quotation.

Mr. Plain Citizen replied as follows: "In spite of the 'machine age' and the 'chemical age'; in spite of

radio and airplane, in spite of all the accumulated knowledge in the arts and sciences, life today basically is the same as in Adam's day.

"The life of man may be compared to an acorn taking root; first there is a tiny seedling, then a young tree, then a mighty tree strengthened by every storm, living out its potentialities of heredity and environment, which, when its time comes, crashes to the earth and mingles again with the elements whence it came. Everything animate and inanimate on the crust of this revolving sphere resolves to earth again.

"Time passes,' is a common everyday expression. Though clocks check off the seconds, minutes, hours; and calendars the days, weeks, months and years, is it time that passes? Time is, was and ever will be."

Mr. Plain Citizen then explained that private property and human rights were synonymous. "Were we to ask ourselves the meaning of the word 'slave,'" he said, "Would not our answer be as follows? (a) A man whose body is not his own but belongs to a master; (b) A man who has no human rights; (c) A man who has no property rights.

"Now suppose we ask ourselves: What is a 'Free Man'? Would not our answer be (a) A man who has a right to his own body; (b) Having a right to his own body, he has a right to the mind in that body; (c) Having a right to his own body, and his own mind, he has a right to the results of the labor of that body and that mind—property; (d) This property being his, it is private property.

"Therefore, man, a human being, not a slave, possessing human rights, has a right to his private property. Human rights and private property rights, therefore, are one and inseparable. Without the right to private property there cannot be freedom. Without freedom there cannot be human rights."

(Concluded on page 183)

